

## TO LIVE FOR A FUTURE

Anita P Craig

Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies  
University of Stellenbosch  
Matieland 7602

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In this article I want to outline a number of characteristics which together configure a certain style to our times. This is meant to draw us into a more deliberate assessment of where we are heading, given the way we think and live nowadays. Central to the article is a belief that we in this young republic with its long (indigenous) and relatively short (colonial) history need discourses marked by reasonableness and organised future directedness.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I am of the opinion that this is not often and widely enough the case in South Africa.

I thus want to highlight some of the ways we talk and live which I believe to be antithetical to living for a future which will serve us all well. I also want to assume that we are committed to living well and to harnessing the best possible future for ourselves through present beliefs and projects; moreover, that we generally believe, more or less, that to live well means to live reasonably - admitting of course a very long history of changing ideas about what "reason" and "reasonably" mean. I will briefly describe, below, two conceptions of reasonableness, one by Alfred North Whitehead and one by Stephen Toulmin, both which I find particularly attractive.

The unreasonableness of our times could be likened to a certain whiff in the air, something which is hard to grasp but which seems to demand being articulated. Outstanding aspects of this whiff are: the madness surrounding "Princess" Diana's life and death; thriving businesses aimed at: "make-overs"; personal wellbeing through carrying and wearing "crystals"; Feng Shui (interior decorating taken up here in a mystical/mysterious way); paying large amounts of money for "motivational experts" (eg. Mike Lipkin); and seeking advice from all kinds of "gurus" (eg. Deepak Chopra). I find these grounded – if that is the right word – in unreason. That is to say, they are all faiths of a strange kind, beliefs without coherence, argument, evidence or even attention to that which might make one expert/guru more effective than another. It is as if followers of these (and no doubt other) fashionable trends deliberately throw caution

<sup>1</sup> I use here the succinct formulation of one of the anonymous referees of this paper, one whose comments on an earlier version hopefully pushed me towards greater clarity.

to the wind in the name of going for that which *feels* right and good! Moreover, a particular reading of "postmodernism", that is, that view on things only distantly related to Lyotard's (1984) criticism of meta-narratives, seems somehow behind (or in front) this eruption of unreason. Postmodernism is that collection of views which are recognisable in ridiculing talk of standards and truth, and in a *feel* for "alternative" things, from hair styles to facades on buildings. Before exposing these intuitions and defending these claims in sections II and III below, I clarify concepts central to the article and the aim and broader context of it.

I mean by "our times" this decade, the Nineties, in South Africa and that part of life elsewhere which is drawn into things here through the media; and with "we" I mean all those who participate in the discourses of our times, as willing or unwilling "masters" or "slaves" (vis-à-vis any particular discourse). I define reason as a commitment to critical, public debate; and reasonableness as following the dictates of that which has been debated and is in the process justified and defended. I think of reason as that overarching project which ties people into communities where a high premium is placed on furnishing reasons for what is believed and done. These are therefore rational communities in that they are concerned with that which makes debates possible and productive. "Productive" in the sense that through standards of justification and ratification we are able to adjudicate - reasonably - between competing beliefs. These commitments and projects involve us both academically and practically; academically in terms of asking second-order questions (eg. about evidence, logical and/or rhetorical argument, narrative configurations and other ways of justifying and ratifying what we believe and do), and practically, in the ordinary sense of giving and asking for reasons for actions.<sup>2</sup>

The daily shape and content given to what we take living well and/or living reasonably to mean does, however, show an enormous variety from situation to situation - thus often suggesting irresolvable differences between epochs, cultures, or contexts of communication. I tend to think that there is a common thread to this, that is, the *future directedness* of our attempts at living reasonably. In this (and other terms) I agree with Alfred North Whitehead's conception of reason.

Whitehead (1958), in his all but forgotten little book, **The function of reason** (first published in 1929), takes us beyond the impasse between a conception of reason which excludes too many, and another view which gives up on finding common ground between different groups. He defends the function of reason in terms of the *active attack on the environment* by all higher forms of life, that which he suggests is more than adaptation or the "survival of the fittest", and *explanatory* of the fact that the trend in evolution is upwards. It is with this that I agree; that what is common in different

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Heidegger (1996) for his lectures on that notion, first mentioned and discussed by Leibniz in the seventeenth century: *nihil est sine ratione*, which for Heidegger comes to be the "principle of reason" (1996:3), the demand "that reasons be rendered" which "has insinuated itself between the thinking person and their world in order to take possession of human cognition" (*ibid*:24).

epochs, cultures, or contexts of communication, is our human tendency to be future directed.

Whitehead (1959:8) writes that "... the function of Reason (is) the promotion of the art of life (ie. to be alive, to be alive in a satisfactory way and to acquire an increase in satisfaction)". So that "reason" for Whitehead is that which gives *direction* to our beliefs, desires and projects: that which is more than mere biological adaptation. He then goes on to suggest that: "There is Reason, asserting itself as above the world, and there is Reason as one of many factors within the world. The Greeks have bequeathed to us two figures, whose real or mythical lives conform to these two notions – Plato and Ulysses. The one shares Reason with the Gods, the other shares it with the foxes." (ibid:10)

Our faith in *bios theoretikos* has waned since the demise of metaphysical thinking, in general, and totalizing thinking, in particular. On the other hand, our appreciation for the *vita activa* has grown (Habermas, 1992:32). The latter is the life exemplified by King Odysseus (or, then, Ulysses) - that mortal man loved by the gods. The one Homer characterises as a shrewd, cool and wily tactician; the master of many exploits; raider of cities; the master of craft and battle and of stories; and much more! (cf Robert Fagles' wonderful translations of Homer, *The Iliad* (1991), and *The Odyssey* (1996)).

For many feminists, multiculturalists and others who take on the reign of Plato in the west, "thinking with the foxes" is the kind of reason which will save us from exclusion and unfair institutions (cf Rorty, 1998). Are they right? By emphasising the ascent of practical reason over theoretical ambition we are, I believe, no closer to a conception of reason which could achieve more than an escape from the reign of "dead white European males" (Bloom, 1995:39). That is to say, a conception that takes on the difficult task of establishing that which is *common* to all people - over and above our shared biology.

Another view I find enticing is the "reasonable reason" Stephen Toulmin (1990) defends in *Cosmopolis*, but I am not sure that he goes far enough away from Europe and North America to overcome the consequences of the social, political and especially economic divisions which turn many billions of people into "others" - divisions that too often serve to provide the wherewithal for maintaining a certain exclusivity as far as what is understood by reason goes. Plainly, when Toulmin advocates a certain rapprochement between the modes of thought and styles of life typical of late Renaissance (eg. an emphasis on the oral, particular, local and timely), and those of high modernity (eg. and emphasis on the written, universal, general and timeless), I hear warning bells for South Africa (cf Toulmin, 1990:30-35).

Toulmin (1990:186) writes: "Since 1945, the problems that have challenged reflective thinkers on a deep philosophical level, with the same urgency that cosmology and cosmopolis had in the 17th century, are matters of practice: including matters of life and death. Three sets of problems have attracted special attention - those of nuclear war, medical technology, and the claims of the environment: none of them can be addressed without bringing to the surface questions about the value of human life, and our responsibility for protecting the world of nature, as well as that of humanity. All the 'changes of mind' that were characteristic of the 17th century's turn from humanism to

rationalism are, as a result, being reversed. The 'modern' focus on the written, the universal, the general, and the timeless - which monopolised the work of most philosophers after 1630 - is being broadened to include once again the oral, the particular, the local and the timely."

I hear warning bells at this point because I want to ask whether we can go this route if we haven't fully arrived where Toulmin and his society are? Will this not again make those who cannot but operate in oral, particular, local, and timely modes the step-children of those who can and do decide how to reason and be reasonable? I get the same sense of futility when all those previously excluded from dominant discourses - all "others" - such as women and people of colour, retreat away from dominant codes, the written, universal, general, and timeless modes of thought in this case. I am pleased in this to call on Susan Haack's agreement (cf Haack, 1998:137-148, but really this whole work).

I worry that the oral, the particular, the local and the timely seems doomed to drift off, to disappear into the mist of time - the forgotten past - unless brought to the fore, to our attention, through being written in codes and preserved in texts which reach beyond the immediate towards the universal (eg. human rights), the general (eg. the academic task), and the timeless (eg. as a resource for participants, speakers and hearers, who are called to provide evidence/argument for that which is said and done).

Moreover, a world in which we genuinely change over completely to the timely, particular, local and oral (not that Toulmin suggests this), will be a world of such simplicity and immediacy that I cannot conceive of it. Are not our eyes blind, our hands dumb and fingers numb when cut off from that which is written, universal, general, and timeless, for example, the stories and symbolic forms which informs any particular interaction?

Our tongues, for example, can be made intelligent and articulate through knowing more than 'how' to drink (which comes naturally). In other words, when we learn to *know* about the things to attend to in wine, the scents, tastes, and so on to sense in it, and to *read* the wine in its varied and rich potential. This articulate exercise of a natural function moves the tongue's dumb movements way beyond what is immediate. And surely this is the same for any aspect of our lives? My point is, the "modern" focus on the written, the universal, the general, and the timeless might indeed be *broadened* to include the oral, the particular, the local and the timely, but surely, the latter foci cannot replace the former without a certain loss of intelligence?

I therefore regard the post-modern licence as a mixed blessing for us in as much as it seems to hold out a promise for "differences" and "otherness", while leaving untouched both the causes and consequences of being different (from whom?) and other (than what?).

I nevertheless find Toulmin's description of "reasonable reason" attractive because he takes seriously those lessons - postmetaphysics - which strips Reason of its arrogance (cf. Habermas, 1992). More particularly, he attempts answers to the difficult questions about how we could be reasonable in a manner that is sensitive to the context and consequences of our actions, and the (changing) criteria and standards for evaluating

things, people and events. That is to say, in a manner which acknowledges change across times and places, and different languages, genders and colours.

I do believe that it is unreasonable nowadays to deny the evils perpetrated in the name of Western Rationality as a totalitarian project (I capitalise the words to indicate this status), as Lyotard (1984) in particular argues; one aimed at a particularly unreasonable reason (as Toulmin points out about the Scientific project since Descartes.) In this regard "blind universalism", that is, that quest for certainty or absolute standards of Truth (once again capitalised to capture the absolutism), limited by ignorance of changes across time (cf. Kuhn, 1970) and cultural differences, clearly leads to a too narrow reading of what is reasonable (cf. Toulmin, 1990). Taking these lessons seriously ought not to paralyse one; one ought not to be too wary of evaluating claims and assessing beliefs for fear of acknowledging better supporting evidence or more or less reason for acting one way rather than another. Such paralysis and fear is what might very well be behind some of our more irrational moves away from objective evidence and towards emotion and feelings.

The task of articulating a conception of reason to live by, is even more pressing in a "new-old" world like South Africa. I would, however, not want my criticisms of the way we live and talk to sound like the all too frequent "songs of loss" wailed by beneficiaries/supporters of the previous regime's allotment of privileges and withholding of rights. In order to draw some boundary between these, allow me to state that I believe things to be quite well with the New South Africa. Some died and suffered terribly to bring about change; some worked less auspiciously for this and others merely wished for change; some are peeved about the new faces in old places and others are worried about their and their children's future in this African land. "Will we (white English- and Afrikaans-speaking settlers) become a faint memory like the Portuguese in Goa?", they wonder. There are also those who appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) and who deserve much more than this; and there are those before this half holy forum who deserve much less "troos" (comfort) for the grotesque parts they played in our past.

The relationship between the social, political and economic conditions of a time and place, and people's "investment in" certain ideas and a particular discourse (ways of living and talking and associated power-relations) is a complex issue which I will not take up here (cf. Toulmin, 1990:70; and Elias, 1994). Thus apart from the many interesting comments and complex stories which can be made and told about the process of change (and various group's or individuals' ability to adapt to this) since the first democratic election (the birth of the New South Africa), it must be noted that I want to do something else.

I want to articulate patterns in our thinking and doing which spell trouble - trouble in the sense that they seem to erode the possibilities for discourses marked by reasonableness and organised future directedness. Moreover, I want to argue in what follows that both of these are crucial to the way we live now and how we will harness the future. It is because I believe that how we talk and live shows what possible future we are busy making, that I want to articulate what I earlier called a "certain whiff in the air". I want to highlight specific patterns in our talking and living by way of asking, "Is this the path we want to pursue through the present?"; and, "Are these patterns our

choices for a future?". I think the answers are negative and, in addition, that these ways of talking and living will not stand up to proper examination.

One of the characteristics of life nowadays is that events and places far apart can nonetheless influence each other - thanks to efficient technological links across the globe (cf. Giddens [1992] for a clear analysis of globalisation). In this regard, changes in South Africa (eg. the first democratic election in 1994) occur on a world stage and, similarly, events elsewhere impact on things locally (eg. ideological shifts such as the demise of Soviet Communism). This global relatedness also means that talk elsewhere (eg. intellectually fashionable ideas) is in various ways taken up locally (eg. forming "Gender Studies Units" at universities). This article too establishes a link with what goes on beyond our geographical borders if only to join those who voice some concern about North-American and European intellectual lives. The patterns I list in the second part of the article are therefore some local light on what appears to be similar trends elsewhere.

There is a body of work which calls our attention to " ... a deliberate neglect of history, the trashing of works which do not fit contemporary fads and prejudices, the loss of Biblical and poetic memory and the truly remarkable enmity to the idea of standards" (Porter, 1996:1).

This literature specifically emphasises aspects of our intellectual climate ("our" now including "us" to the degree that we can be thought to participate in global projects),<sup>3</sup> which suggest impoverishment, a trend which is also called one of "dumbing-down" (idem.). This literature suggests that instead of merely superficial changes in that which we regard as intellectually worthy, there are, in fact, deeper rifts appearing in our intellectual life - rifts which, if left unchecked will undermine the quality of our lives. Henry Porter, in reviewing the works of Bloom (1995), Hoggart (1995) and Steiner (1996) writes as follows about the general sadness expressed by these "prophets of ill tidings": "In each of their books you find the overwhelming sense of loss, almost bereavement for the death of things that averagely well read people took for granted. They are measured voices - men who have spent a lifetime reading and crucially, whose education started before World War II. What binds them is not a reactionary political instinct nor even a querulous distaste for modernity, but rather the idea that the interior lives of succeeding generations - not just scholars - will become gradually impoverished ..." (Porter, 1996:1-2).

If these authors are even half-right, their reading of the texts and other symbolic forms (ie. written documents such as newspapers; and signs, rules and norms, generally) which characterise the way we live now is indeed worrisome. Intellectual and other winds from North-America and Europe do influence life on the southern tip of Africa and I for one believe that post-modern discourse, for example, has been/still is particularly

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<sup>3</sup> Note that I mean by "our times" this decade, the Nineties, in South Africa and that part of life elsewhere which is drawn into things here through the media; and with "we" all those who participate in the discourses of our times - as willing or unwilling "masters" and "slaves" (vis-à-vis any particular discourse).

unhelpful as far as our South African problems and our education tasks go, as argued elsewhere (Craig, 1998).

If the way we live is antagonistic towards an intellectual project which aims beyond the immediate, local and contextually relevant (cf. Bloom, 1995; Hoggart, 1995); and shows a disrespect for and lack of responsibility towards textual knowledge, in particular, (cf. Steiner, 1996), how ought we to think and talk about ourselves? By way of clarifying this, consider the following more or less fashionable commitments (from Porter's review of these works on our intellectual climate):

- sensitivities/sensibilities such as anti-chauvinism, anti-elitism, anti- eurocentrism, anti-universalism and anti-phallocentrism;<sup>4</sup>
- the pursuit of "relativism", politically correct speech and behaviour, and
- a commitment to "relevant" education (i.e. the view that what is learned should be of immediate and apparent use).

On the face of it, at least from a certain angle, these all seem more or less politically acceptable, even laudable aims - or, at least, familiar enough to the South African ear. The question Porter in his review of Bloom, Hoggart and Steiner, forces on us, is: do these merely spell change, or do they spell definite impoverishment?

It seems risky to take it for granted that change inevitably leads to impoverishment. For example, it is not clear that the fragmentation of religious authority and the accompanying changes to secular learning and knowledge, or the replacement of Latin with vernacular languages, both dramatic shifts during the sixteenth century, caused a decline in the intellectual life of future generations (cf. Thompson, 1995:52-63). Similarly, we dare not assume, without further investigation, that the way we live now is (or is not) destructive of a certain quality to our intellectual life. One, such small attempt at an investigation is what we turn to below, my observations about our times and the ways in which we talk and live. It is a small attempt because many of the observations that follow do not yet have any truth status; although I have attempted to argue in a way which opens my claims to reasonable scrutiny. I intend section II as parts of a narrative on "life, in general", here in South Africa nowadays. It is obviously a perspective on things limited by my situation and, as such, this story specifically calls on being completed by the reader (Benjamin, 1969; Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988). I make some points rhetorically (where evidence is scant and the logic of the argument weak), and configure the patterns in terms of themes or plots, using coherence as some measure of reasonableness.

## II

**1. Not knowing about knowledge.** A lack of second order questioning and thus justifying - if it can be called such - and making claims in terms of notions and actions

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<sup>4</sup> Antagonisms from the following quarters, as captured by Bloom: "... Feminists, Afrocentrists, Marxists, Foucault-inspired New Historicists, or Deconstructors - all those whom I have described as members of the School of Resentment" (1995:20).

which mitigate against changing unreasonable beliefs. For example, supporting/believing in:

- the democratisation of knowledge ("now each has a turn");
- moving down to grass-roots where abstraction is not known/cannot be found;
- an approach to situations which suggests that if it is hard it is wrong/if it does not immediately reveal itself/make obvious sense, it is wrong (especially written texts); and if it is worth it, it will confront the reader/listener/thinker with an immediate, naked force - in full presence and completely revealing;
- the levelling of knowledge, for example, making out as if all things which sound the same are the same or that there is no more to say about what comes out of mouths then that they in fact do so; demonstrating that it is just not acceptable to insist - in public - on a point of view, regardless of the strength of the supporting evidence: there is always a "but" from the guts which counts; and acting as if being "well read" is a dead virtue like "piety" (eg. as the fat one said at a conference: "no more 'book learning' we want food on our tables!").

These notions, actions and standards related to knowing and knowledge are destructive of reasonable conversation and enquiry because they refuse recourse to standards of justification and evidencing (as well as debates about these) by way of accrediting some claims (and not others) with some truth value. This refusal is given legitimacy in light of particularly "thin" readings of the point of post-modern discourse, ones which resist second-order questioning in general, and abiding by (or taking seriously) standards of justification and ratification.

Genuine debates about the difficulties related to justifying some claims as truth and others as not, do not constitute grounds for irrationality, that is, moves against demands to justify (furnish reasons for) claims. This irrationality or, then a "thin" reading of the problem of the impossibility of creating a neutral place from which to adjudicate rival claims is what I call here "postmodernism". When such moves are socially sanctioned, or vice versa, when postmodernism finds its support from ordinary patterns of acting, we drown in murky waters - as I argue here and in the article as a whole.

How liberating the realisation (or, more often hearsay) - for some - that there is no one, universal, timeless Truth about any one thing (cf. Kuhn, 1970; Lyotard, 1984). This news indeed travelled fast and led many to the conclusion that now "anything goes" - now, each of us can come forward with our own dearly held beliefs. Further, related news is that each group/culture is enclosed (if not trapped) in standards of truth, goodness, beauty and so on which makes finding "neutral" grounds untainted by any one particular set of (contextually relevant) beliefs about beliefs and justification a lost hope. This signals, for some, the end of the possibility of commensurability and thus seemingly the slide into "anything goes". Thanks are due to Susan Haack (1995) for questioning this extreme form of relativism. However, her story has not had the impact it deserves. In academic circles there is still too much vitality in beliefs about the "democratisation of knowledge", that is, the view that knowledge can be made and unmade by all alike - just like casting a ballot in the election of candidates for government office.

In the absence of concerning ourselves with the rules of formalised (western?) logic or standards by which to judge the soundness of an argument; and without recourse to shared standards for judging the validity or truth of assertions, each can only say his/her bit and hope for the best (which usually has something to do with "likeness, to be liked and other nasties", as discussed below) - unless of course you take the bull(shit) by the horns and make a case (or cases) for ways in which to judge some claims as knowledge and others not (cf. Haack, 1995 to whose work I have already referred).

On a more mundane level, the problems with knowing and knowledge come to the fore in the actual attempts by "researchers" (in various guises - often calling themselves "action researchers") to produce some kind of data or information on some or other aspects of our lives. In this regard, asking people about all kinds of things through an "interview", and dressing this up as a "kinder cut" in human affairs because it is "qualitative" (rather than quantitative) is worth a story or two. I tell one little one only, below.

Long ago, Jerry Fodor had the wonderful idea about the "infinite sets of hypotheticals" the questioner strikes when asking the actor, on different occasions, about things, requesting her opinion, as it were, on aspects of our lives.<sup>5</sup> On the same note La Pierre (in the USA during the World War II era) showed that what people say (when questioned about their attitudes to things) elicited) and what they, in fact, do (in this case, actually eating with a visiting Japanese couple), are very different.

In addition, the status of our own access to our own "inner" thoughts has suffered so many criticisms that one wonders about the need to still dig around there. For example, the various fatal attacks on Descartes' view of the subject, introspection and the limits of our own access to our conscious/rational motives for actions (cf. Rorty, 1983; Freud, 1984; Ryle, 1990) clearly question the use to which what we say we think and feel can be put. Yet, every Tom, Dick and Harriet persists in building policies (if not Rome) on the personal, open, unthought or, as officially designated "unstructured, open-ended" interview.

The interview clearly has a role when investigating those aspects of reality which the actor has some unique perspective on, the "subjective world" with its "sincerity claims", as Habermas (1992:ix) calls this in opposition to the "objective" and "social" worlds with their truth and rightness claims respectively. It is, however, my contention that interviews are used way beyond projects aimed at information about the subjective world and that, in fact, their use obscures distinctions such as those between "the cognitive, the regulative and the expressive uses of language" (idem.). More to the point, interviews are used inappropriately as techniques of data production because of "not knowing about knowledge".

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<sup>5</sup> He said this so long ago that I cannot find a reference to it, it must be in something Fodor wrote during the early seventies.

**2. Drowning in sympathies and sensibilities.** Licence for the excessive display of emotions and feelings about each other and our worlds that prevent reasonable conduct. This is shown in the following:

- "snot & trane" (the public display of an excess of emotion) is "in" (ie. fashionable);
- confessions are in: the TRC (and Oprah Winfrey: what an alliance! - see below) setting the tone;
- those who have been or are bleeding (the various ways people are capable of suffering) have all it takes, that is, no additional evidence or argument is required to be heard: cripples, women, blacks, fools, even multiple murderers - but the latter only after confession;
- the face (name, person, the identifying details of someone particular) is insistently called back from behind the role (institutional position constrained by rules and conventions);
- primitive (simple) is in (the so-thought "richness" of the obvious, the "wisdom" of the idiot); sophistication is out; and
- we are all the same, everything counts equally, all products are worthwhile and no one should be made to feel less clever/competent/talented than anyone does else does.

These sympathies and sensibilities prevent reasonableness because they prevent further inquiry, and scrutiny of that which is *behind* the expressed feelings and emotions: that which the sympathies and sensibilities are posed *in lieu* of, so to speak. My case against the sympathies and sensibilities listed above turns on the intuition that too much *schmaltz* (cloying sentimentality) is bad for thinking.

What I attempt to capture with this category is a move away from cognition towards feeling, something more reminiscent of soap operas and films deliberately playing on emotions than the depiction of the seemingly unending suffering of the poor and wretched. A cloying sentimentality which seems to prevent reasonableness because the sympathies and sensibilities included prevent further inquiry into that which is *behind* the expressed feelings and emotions - the reasons for the emotions.

If we agree that thinking is reasonable to the degree that we feel compelled to furnish reasons for our claims, insights and projects; reasons and reasoning in the forms of supporting (empirical) evidence and (logical) argument - then the next move seems relatively clear-cut. That is to say, *schmaltz* serves as a block to the demands for reasons, because our responses to (deliberate) plays on our emotions makes distanciation, that is, a critical attitude to that which evoked the response, difficult. Rather, one's attitude becomes one of belonging, that is, sympathy. So, it is *humanly* (as an expression of fellowship, which recognises somethings/displays as prohibitive of further inquiry) difficult to press beyond displays of emotion, it makes the questioner seem so inhuman, and so like an interrogator.

**3. Unholy (new) alliances.** Partnerships forged for suspect reasons, ones that demand lies and turning a blind eye to things. Some of these alliances are:

- newcomers and dicey-ones: opening the doors closed by apartheid now also let the wrong ones in (eg. underprepared students - clever students who were denied adequate education opportunities - now keep the company of the stupid and lazy

who too are admitted through the lowered entrance criteria to institutions of learning);

- dinosaurs, that is, left-overs from the past clinging onto the last of their privilege, and fresh others (eg. people of colour and women) needing old experience; together they make strange bedfellows; and
- anti-elitists and their henchmen: a small group who just do not know, a huge clump of inert humanity in the middle and some who know is a configuration which allows the "best of the worst" (the spokes persons of the middle clump) to rise into secure positions of power, while the "worst of the best" are out in the cold (the bottom of the top group) and the top of the top are elsewhere grazing on greener grass. Yet, the "best of the worst", is a great deal worse than the "worst of the best" - when using the normal distribution curve as a guide of some kind.<sup>6</sup>

Unholy (new) alliances promote unreasonableness to the degree that they deliberately or unwittingly obscure that which sustains the relationship - conditions which require uncritical, even hypocritical interactions to remain out of sight and mind. These alliances place participants in a "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil" pact of silence.

The recent changes in South Africa have literally reshuffled things, people, meanings and so on. We read this in the old stories, now retold with the prefix "new", as in "new elite" and "New South Africa". Also, the new has pushed the old (as in the "old regime") far away from our self-understanding - except for those who cannot escape the TRC. All of this is clearly just part and parcel of change. New alliances become pathological when these require uncritical and even hypocritical interactions because reasonableness demands self- and other-scrutiny in terms of motives, reasons and justifications for our claims, insights and projects. If the new alliances cannot be maintained in the face of such scrutiny, the price is reasonableness. If the new alliances are seemingly more important - in the name of the (presumed) "greater good" of socio-political transformation - then reasonableness is sold down the river. I do not think it serves anyone well to place unholy alliances and reasonableness in such a dangerous balance.

The point of this category is to highlight alliances, perhaps brought together by holy projects. Ending apartheid, such as has been achieved up to now, is as close to blessed as our projects on earth can be. But, and this is the unholy part, it has thrown together strange partners: "evaluators" and "consultants" propping up new faces and their projects, and the new elite propping up old interests around dinner tables. We need to be reminded however of the wisdom in the realisation that not all people should agree in the name of saving reasonableness. This wisdom is most admirably captured

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hacking (1995:105-114) on the career of the normal distribution curve which he defines in terms of two quantities: "... the mean, and some measure of dispersion. Dispersion is important to the measurer: If all the measurements cluster about the mean, we think of the average as reliable. If they are spread out, we think it is not. A Normal distribution is defined by its mean and standard deviation" (106-7); and the invention of *homme type*, "the average man".

in the following epithet: "as jy nou weer eenkeer met my saamstem dan donner ek jou" (if you agree with me one more time I'll thrash you), that is to say, sometimes consensus is a signal that something is amiss (the lion and the lamb cannot agree/reach an accord on the food to eat).

All this newness has also given Johnny-come-latelies and reborn non-racists, reborn non-sexists, etc, new prominence. They have of late discovered that any or all of the following are all right: women, people of colour, homosexuals, and other "others"; that these labels do not, in fact, define all there is to say about "others", that is, "homo's" do not have sex all the time, women can do the same things people do, and people of colour can run the country. These latecomers are nowadays busying themselves with convincing others about their (new) insights, but they ignore the chances that Johnnies will always come too long after the meal. The re-born vigour of those who, of late, love all, is however popular for all kinds of new parlour games because they are so guilty and demand so little from new power: such is the life of new alliances.

All sympathies and politically correct sensibilities notwithstanding, life is not a piece of cake. The difficult task is to acknowledge differences while also acknowledging human (ie. universal) rights, duties and tasks vis-à-vis the future of ourselves and our planet (cf. Jonas, 1984 for a fine analysis of this responsibility). This demands reasonable conduct, which is, therefore, worth defending. For example, we must recognise talent, and support excellence while also giving more people a fair chance to be excellent.

If the New South Africa with its old legacies is to prosper, vast numbers of illiterate, under-educated and ill-educated people, the poor and workless millions, and so on must be helped along the way, and here talent and excellence is needed to do so. In other words, we should be wary of the "best of the worst" - they who talk the talk (because they cannot otherwise) and walk the walk because all paths lead to the majority government of the day (and I dare say the next few days too). We need the 'best of the best' but if they have left for greener pastures, at least the "worst of the best" - at least not much separates the latter two, once again in terms of a normal distribution curve.

**4. Likeness, to be liked and other nasties.** An emphasis on superficially pleasant dispositions by way of getting by without change. For example,

- attachment to a clear showing of the "right" (politically correct) words, postures, commitments and identifications;
- networking as a substitute for products which speak for themselves: a world of "stomme dinge" (things which do not speak for themselves) - which demands niceness to others before and after all else;
- workshopping/talkshopping to push decisions out from amongst equals - an unutterably vulgar experience when accompanied by participants talking of "wearing different hats", that is, deliberately taking on different roles/positions from which to speak;

<sup>7</sup> Said, in the heady days of the National Democratic Movement, by a journalist to one of Wynand Malan's ardent supporters.

- saying "in my experience, the *importance* of this cannot be underestimated" counts as an assurance of fact, that this mouth utters knowledge;
- looking like an academic, for example, is taken to mean that you are one: money to the dress-for-success, voice-training, image-making shops!; and
- believing that things (people too) are *all* good or not at all (eg. if Allan Boesak served "the struggle" well his other actions are beyond reproach too).

An emphasis on superficially pleasant dispositions, also as a basis on which to make important judgements of the "whole" (eg. person or situation), is worrisome because I believe that the really important things do *not* lie scattered on the surface, easily accessible to anyone without much effort (to change one characteristic of common sense, according to Clifford Geertz [1983], around).<sup>8</sup> In these terms this emphasis prevents adequate scrutiny of "life which is hard".<sup>9</sup>

This category is about the people who look right and seem all right - strangers who hug others in public and on formal stages with apparent conviction, and those who make a good impression on all they meet and do not know. My fear is that they might have had "advice" from the "professionals" on the way to talk, walk, look right and appear all right. "And", you may want to ask, "why is this a problem?"

My intuition is that an emphasis on appearances and superficially pleasant dispositions is pathological because such a disposition cannot grasp the complexity of life. Moreover, grasping this seems crucial to those intent on doing more than what common sense or the taken-for-granted allow. Allow me to defend this.

We say, "if you can't beat them; join them" and perhaps this is what is happening with this thing called "image consultancy", something which is certainly in line with Rorty (1983), for one's, view of the endless possibilities for self-creation. Image-makers adjust the hair style, voice and clothing of what we call the "persona" of someone, according to the requirements of a specific platform, audience or set of purposes, and all of this for a bit of money. (I take on the implications of the fragmented, post-modern conception of the person elsewhere, cf. Craig, 1997.) The "consultant" must interpret and work within the given norms of how a business person or politician or public relations officer, "looks", "sounds" and, in general, comes across to create the image required by a specific career and its constituencies or audiences.

<sup>8</sup> Geertz (1983) lists the following characteristic: naturalness, an "air of, of-courseness" (p85), that is, that things are simply as they are; practicalness in the sense of sagacity, to be "prudent, level-headed (and to) keep (your) eye on the ball" (p87); thinness, that is, "the world is what the wide-awake, uncomplicated person takes it to be" (p89); immethodicalness which caters for both "the pleasures of inconsistency" and "the intractable diversity of experience" (p90); and accessibility, that is, "the insistence that any person with faculties reasonably intact can grasp common-sense conclusions ... (and) will not only grasp them but embrace them" (p91).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Caputo (1987) for a discussion of projects which either betray or grasp this complexity.

One question this suggests is: if self-creation is done primarily with a particular audience/purpose in mind, then this merely confirms rather than disconfirms the power of old vocabularies and normal (as opposed to abnormal or transforming/transformative) discourse. The image-makers in this regard are then nothing more than handmaidens of the *status quo* rather than voices announcing a new set of games and standards (cf. the typical hairstyles of black female TV continuity announcers). And this is the problem with talking, walking, looking right and appearing all right: these are all safeguards against change because they confirm old vocabularies and existing power-relations. They thus epitomise that which reason must save us from: false-consciousness, unconscious desires and other hidden irrationalities (cf. Nietzsche, Marx and Freud's projects - those Ricoeur [1974:148] calls the "masters of suspicion").

**5. Dicks and jokes.** Distinctions which are not made and which as such obscure those which must be made. For example, what does it mean (and does it matter) when:

- a presidency is placed on the balance; and
- humour is knocked out as a way of coping with each other, or replaced with politically correct speech between us?

Does it matter when a president says (among other things): "Kiss it!" Is this funny? Is it the same as Charles (the future King) who wants to be a tampon? That is to say, are either just silly - "human, all too human" - vulgarities, or deserving of moral and political outrage? Must "men" and "women", "blacks and whites", etc. be opposed and jokes about "others" banned as sexist, racist, etc?

Reasonableness would seem to depend on making distinctions (eg. between what is tasteless, harmful, bad, evil) in ways that also opens these distinctions (and our reasons for them) for further examination. So, not making important distinctions and/or obscuring ones, which must be made, weakens crucial stands against morally outrageous conduct. I defend this as follows: reasonableness can only come forward when that for which reasons are to be given is clearly articulated. In other words, a vague and ill-defined "thing" does not elicit the full force of either scrutiny in terms of reasons for it or the standards to apply to evaluate the reasons given. To take this further, one could ask: Do silly human vulgarities matter?! In other words, will the world be worse off if this "kind of thing" (eg. an ashtray in the shape of a vagina, a Bible in the company of a penis, a President and a future King's sexual desires) is not brought to trial? What must these trials deliver in the name of goodness? In other words, should we not attempt to distinguish between good and bad, and bad taste? Is such a distinction not reasonable?

Moreover, is it justifiable to group these concerns with politically correct speech and respect for each other and especially "the other"? I want to argue that it is crucial to do so because we do not in fact make life safe by fudging distinctions. Making a sexist joke is (perhaps) in bad taste, but this does not usually or inevitably leads to or causes morally reprehensible actions between men and women. In similar vein, the evil we perpetrate against each other (eg. "final solutions", "ethnic cleansing", genocide, rape) do not seem to live in humorous worlds, if anything, these seem more clearly part of deadly serious polarisation, conflicts of interests and battles for control of power and resources.

**6. First come first served?** Are mere connections to particular historical grounds for positions and beliefs acceptable?

- looking for roots by way of defining an identity and thus beliefs and projects: why look for "roots"? Is it to fix oneself/your tribe/your claims in the imagined, "glorious" past which, as such, is presumed to give you inalienable rights - in the present?; and
- because old Verwoerd is regarded as "the father of apartheid" the grandson's very ordinary life-story is published and his opinion on matters related to change, Afrikaner guilt and the New South Africa counts. "Kan jy nou meer!?" (or, how ridiculous can we get!?).

These attachments to historical grounds for positions and projects make furnishing reasons superfluous; rather, the task becomes searching for or claiming a particular (especially an auspicious) beginning.<sup>10</sup> Operating on a "first come, first served" basis depends on faith in a linear structure with its first (uncaused) cause or origin, and final, event or judgement. This view of things gives judgement, in its terms, the power to wipe the slate clean - like entering Heaven/Hell, the End of History or Utopia - as a way to establish, with certainty, who to blame and punish, or to demand guilt and self-castigation/ flagellation from.

Moreover, what does searching and finding your "roots" mean? An attempt to escape having to convince fellow participants in the here and now that you have a case? How can this work? Roots - also when used metaphorically - do not have an evidential structure! At best roots are accidental anchors, and what they anchor - here and now - can be uprooted. In addition, to be of a clan, tribe, ethnic group, race or nation-state are such arbitrary placements in lives constrained/enabled by the post-geographical meta-country made possible in cyberspace, through teletechnology (cf. Craig, 1997).

So, emphasising "who got where first" (country-wise or in terms of having fathered a system of ideas) is really of passing interest only as far as these serving as reasons for a claim or project goes. I say this because what comes before something else - causally perhaps - hardly serves as *justification* for that something as it is (or is taken-up) in the present. Also, "who got where first" is such an odd way of thinking about time, history - the millennia that we have been around in one way or another - and that which led to migrations and changes all over the place.

Similarly, the end of Time, our destination as a species or the Tradition we (as individuals, or groups or inhabitants of a globe) are moving towards is shrouded in that which we do not have access to: the future. This alone makes dabbling in "futurology" (ie. the business of attempting to harness the future by way of discerning possible scenarios from the trends which seemingly connect past to present and present to future) so tempting. The point of mentioning this here is that life outside of a messianic

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<sup>10</sup> I do not here deny the right of owners to reclaim land taken away under the "forced removals" of Apartheid, District Six in Cape Town, for example. Rather, I want to show a specific set of moves that attempt to wipe the slate clean, very much like the architects of apartheid tried by removing people of colour from "white South Africa".

structure, that is, when we do *not* wait for the final judgement to wipe the slate clean, demands that we make sense of the present and that which we do have access to. So, to defend reasonableness is to defend that by which we are able to make sense of a world and social institutions which are always older than each one of us but which demand that each one of us engage things as best we can so as to change them when necessary.

### III

There is always something opaque about one's present engagements. We (humans) are unable to scrutinise ourselves and our lives in the act(s) of composition. Phrased differently, we are unable to find an objective or, better still, omniscient perspective on that which is in the process of being constituted, the present as lived-for-the-future. Yet, if and when we do discern a directionality to our lives, we are also placed in a better position to choose how to live now and for the future. For example, once we became alerted to our destruction of the planet, we could plan remedial moves to restore, or at least prevent further depletion of, important natural balances.

The point is that self-understanding is always (and perhaps mercifully so), one step behind our present engagements. This does, however, not define the academic task that is, to my mind, at best focused on making explicit distortions in thinking and living. In other words, it is to continually turn towards that undertaking defined by the injunction: "an unexamined life is a life not worth living". This is a demanding task; it is however one that is open to all who will follow the dictates of reasonable conduct, that is, furnishing reasons for actions, and then subjecting the reasons given to ongoing public debate.

Implicit in what I propose above is the suspicion that post-modern thinking in its worst form, that which I defined as "postmodernism" above, has a destructive role to play when searching after ways in which to live reasonably. It does this by sanctioning particular forms of life or modes of thought, ones described above, as follows: the anti-epistemic stance of Richard Rorty, for example, has its ordinary equivalent in what I called "not knowing about knowledge" in section II; the post-modern applause of the oral, particular, local, and timely, again, finds its shadow in "drowning in sympathies and sensibilities"; and "first come, first served?" described above. Furthermore, the desire to blur distinctions and wipe out disciplinary boundaries welcomes that way of thinking emphasised under "dicks and jokes"; and our own particular response to talk of ends seems captured by a desire to be "relevant".

It is common cause nowadays to talk about "ends", the end of Philosophy - or, then, in particular the end of second-order questions and meta-theory - and a whole host of other things besides (eg. God, authorship, the individual, the nation-state, western civilisation). And of course these declarations signal the demise of ways of living and talking rather than deaths in more conventional terms, that is, as indicating the cessation of life in sentient beings. The worst "end" signalled nowadays by those who sometimes fly the post-modern flag, is talk of the end of goals such as truth and knowledge (Rorty, 1998).

I see the goals of truth and knowledge as ends we cannot afford to denigrate in this young republic with its long (indigenous) and relatively short (colonial) history. We

need these regulative ideals if only to get rid of the legacy of differences so deeply entrenched under apartheid. Goals such as shared standards for truth, rightness and goodness seem to bind us into a community, one where we will furnish reasons for our actions, and use standards to judge these, which reach beyond the immediate interests of the interlocutors. If we give up on what is common to the human task, our grounds for "relevance" too will shrink until only one 'I' can stand firm on her/his views on things - the unreason of the dictator. Saying this does however not close the matter of relevance.

I guess that some of the patterns listed above are attempts to be appropriate for here and now (eg. "unholy (new) alliances"; and "likeness, to be liked and other nasties"). I am unclear on the importance of talk about being "appropriate" for our *locale*, but find debates about being Africanist rather than Eurocentric, eco- rather than egocentric, gender sensitive and, generally, inclusive of all others, important enough not to have these foreclosed. When these discussions come with their own brand of exclusivity, then they are foreclosed. For example, even citing Harold Bloom (**The western canon**) rather than, say, Franz Fanon (**The wretched of the earth**) might mean nowadays that one places yourself (or is placed by others) either on the "right" (high) or "wrong" moral ground. A high moral ground might ensure "a warrant for voice" as they say in discourse analysis, that is, with the right to be heard (cf. Parker, 1992 for a more detailed analysis of the person-positions with a certain currency), but I do not think it secures reasonable debate.

As far as relevance goes, I regard the call for a particularly (South) African academic tradition to be one which cannot be "answered" - without further ado - in the sense of us, then, deliberately busying ourselves with the creation of a Tradition. My point is: it seems as odd to wake ourselves up from day to day with the call, "let's make History", as to call on us to "have a Tradition". It seems to me that a tradition is most clearly a way of doing things, of understanding and living, which comes about over time as people pursue the variety of goals that define a life and our lives. Moreover, that unless this variety is deliberately unified into a story (with a beginning, middle and end), a Tradition thus "rescued" from the events and actors, beliefs, desires and projects involved, carrying on the business of life, remains just carrying on acting. Phrased more elegantly, "life does not narrate itself, it is lived" (quoted in Ricoeur, 1985:78). Such an emplotment and thus the rescue of a Tradition are illustrated in the work of Andrew Nash (1997) on the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition.

In this regard the patterns described above are, at best, a sketch of the way we live now on our way towards creating a particular tradition. These patterns are therefore about the flotsam and jetsam, as it were, of carrying on the business of living for a future - that which may very well come to close off options further down the line - unless attended to.

Caputo starts his work, **Radical hermeneutics**, as follows: "We have it from Aristotle himself that life is hard" (1987:1) which means that we have to stick with this difficulty and not betray it in our projects. Betrayal inevitably leads to less and not more sense, more distortions and not fewer. For Caputo metaphysics was one such attempt at betrayal. In this article I have tried to articulate local, ordinary ways, in which we betray the complexity of life and limit our possibilities for the future.

To live well - in the face of the many uncertainties about things which define our human situation (here, now and anywhere), for example, how to be able to judge the facts and values which come our way, as well as what to do and belief from case to case - demands that we ask about reason. Living reasonably - in the face of the long and changing history of ideas in this regard - means at least asking for and giving reasons for our actions, and continuing to scrutinise our beliefs about our beliefs in this regard. This does not make our judgements and choices safe, only open to criticism and thus justification or change.

My view on living for a future that will serve us all well therefore turns on the realisation that life is complex. Moreover, that to be human means to have a limited perspective on things<sup>11</sup> (we are not omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent), so that we can only do as well as reasonableness permits. We can, of course, do much worse.

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<sup>11</sup> Van Peursem (1967) shows in fine detail how a world without a horizon structure to it would neither be richer or poorer in content, but would be totally different. Furthermore, he explains how this forces us to acknowledge the inevitability of a certain perspective on the world and ourselves (which also brings to the fore the problem of evaluating truth). He writes about perspectivism as follows: "Maar het woord 'gezichtspunt' houdt al een lokalisering in en dus een werkelijkheidsgebied dat door een horizon afgebaken is. De mens blijft aan de wereld gebonden zelfs al zou hij wegtrekken naar een ver sterrenstelsel. De mens kan zich niet aan omgrenzing, aan een horizon, onttrekken. De menselijke verbintenis en verplichting aan een concreet, echt, d.w.z. ingeperkt werkelijkheidsgebied wordt hem voor ogen gehouden in de horizon. De horizon is zijn rappel, hij wordt er tot de oriëntatie binnen de werkelijkheid, tot het duiden van haar zin, teruggeroepen. Dat alles kan ook in de term 'perspectief' samengevat worden" (p219).

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Website: <http://www.sar.bolton.ac.uk/psych/>  
Email: [I.A.Parker@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:I.A.Parker@bolton.ac.uk)

Tel: +44 (1204) 903150  
Fax: +44 (1204) 399074