

# Reflexivity in a just Morphogenic society: a sociological contribution to political philosophy

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*It is posted on ORCA a bit prematurely. That is because Cardiff University requires research to be posted within three months of acceptance.*

*I nonetheless hope that you, my dear anonymous reader, will find it interesting. If you wish to quote or cite it, please refer to the published version (forthcoming in 2017 with Springer).*

## 1. Introduction: reflexivity, side-lined in public debates and political philosophy?

Late Modernity's morphogenic tendencies bear on people's ability to flourish in various, and ambiguous, ways. In particular, morphogenesis unbound presents agents with contextual incongruities, that is, novel configurations and associated problems for which tried and tested solutions are of little avail (Archer 2012). Whenever exemplars and traditional sources of normativity are of limited help to solve novel problems, the onus for solving the latter is placed on agents' personal powers of reflexivity. Late modernity thus entered the scene with a threat: individuals can either be reflexive and stand a chance to flourish, or they must accept they will not thrive.

This reflexive imperative comes in various guises. As a case in point, citizens of 21<sup>st</sup> Century liberal democracies – especially young adults – face a treble injunction if they wish to fit in as mature members of society. Firstly, they ought to take personal responsibility for their 'employability', though in terms defined by employers. Secondly, they ought to participate in democratic political processes, though mainly by voting through established channels. And thirdly they ought to look up to those who display 'leadership' in various spheres of life, though especially so in lucrative activities. All three injunctions seem, on the surface, to value autonomy and reflexivity. But their *ad nauseam* repetition also indicates that those enjoined are not automatically able to exercise adequately those reflexive powers needed to sustain a satisfactory social trajectory or to participate in their communities' governance.

Yet, there is scant philosophic, or even public, discussion of the distribution of effective reflexive powers or of the organisations and institutions that may ensure these reflexive powers are fairly distributed<sup>1</sup>. Instead, public discussions of 'employability' focus on the curricula of educational institutions that should provide training valued by for-profit organisations whereas discussions of 'democratic participation' usually evoke either the opacity of political

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<sup>1</sup> I base my argument on the assumption that powers of reflexivity can vary between persons, according to their dominant modes. By doing so, I do not imply that there exist uniform or perhaps even precise ways of measuring differences in reflexivity.

institutions or the deficiencies of electoral marketing strategies that ignore groups deemed to be politically disengaged. In all cases, the disengagement from professional and political life is explained as lack of professional skills, information and interest. And the proposed remedies include a combination of enhanced marketing communication (identifying and manipulating citizens' desires efficiently) and inspirational leadership (enthusing electors with a sense of purpose to achieve pre-defined ends). By focusing attention on professional skills, information and 'leadership', these discussions obscure, however, the distribution of effective human reflexive powers that are nonetheless essential to the organisation of just societies and to the flourishing of those humans who live in them. I borrow Archer's (2012) typology of modes of reflexivity (fractured, communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity)<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, my argument relies on the significant assumption (developed in section 4.5 below) that intensified morphogenesis bears on the effectiveness of these modes of social reflexivity.

While a satisfactory discussion of the omission, or downplaying, of how unequally effective modes and powers of reflexivity are distributed<sup>3</sup> in the public debate would require more resources than I have, it might nonetheless be instructive, and achievable, to examine their omission in influential works of political philosophy. Firstly, because such works do influence the conceptions of policy-makers, journalists and educated citizens. But secondly, and more fundamentally, because a discussion anchored in political philosophy can clarify which (missing or inadequately supported) institutions and organisations should be mandated by the state, and publicly funded, to help foster and attenuate unequal distributions of, citizens' reflexive powers.

The following chapter undertakes this task by taking a lead from the influential theories of justice developed first by John Rawls and then by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum<sup>4</sup>. It attempts to trace to what extent, why and how two types of human reflexive powers that are nonetheless essential to the organisation of just societies and to the flourishing of those humans who live in them have not been considered in political philosophy.

While reflexivity can broadly be defined as '*the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa*' (Archer 2007: 4, italics in original), I concentrate in this paper on two types of reflexive powers. The first type is *social reflexivity* which can broadly be defined as each person's capacity to formulate, respond and act on the question: 'how should I make my way through the social world?' This is the form of reflexivity which Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) has studied over more than a decade and discussed over 1,000 pages.

The second reflexive power I discuss could be termed *political reflexivity*. It can broadly be defined as each person's capacity to formulate, respond and act on the question: 'how can we steer society together?' To my knowledge, this type of power has not been as

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, other modes of reflexivity may be forthcoming (see Carrigan in this volume).

<sup>3</sup> In section 4.5 below, I discuss the unequal effectiveness, in a morphogenic society, of fractured, communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity. Note that the discussion leaves open the question of the relation between various forms of reflexivity and the conditions for a given mode becoming dominant for particular persons.

<sup>4</sup> Note that an intermediary draft attempted to discuss the absence of social and political reflexivity in the works of Alasdair MacIntyre (1999). While the analysis was ultimately side-lined to preserve the chapter's consistency, two considerations might be worth salvaging. First, MacIntyre makes a contribution to moral rather than political philosophy in the sense that he does not intend to establish which institutions ought to be mandated by law in a just, or otherwise good, society. Second, how social and political reflexivity map into the Aristotelian and Thomist virtues is not straightforward, though we might venture that reflexivity holds much in common with phronesis and prudence.

fully addressed as social reflexivity by realist social theory. We find, however, important and relevant ideas in the writings of Donati on relational steering (Donati 2013) and in Donati & Archer (2015) on relational subjects.

For each of these powers, I discuss why they matter all the more in the context of a morphogenic society. To what extent do they seem to be missing from key theories of justice? What other personal powers are required for the realisation of these forms of reflexivity? And what (currently missing) institutions and organisations might be conducive to fostering these powers?

Before engaging with these themes, some conceptual clarification is required first on the contribution of sociology to political philosophy. And second on the nature and currency of morphogenic society as well as its significance for citizens endowed with differing abilities and propensities to engage in communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity.

## **2. The contribution of sociological theory to political philosophy**

This chapter establishes a discussion between two academic domains defined by distinct objects of study. On the one hand, sociological theory investigates the nature and basic mechanisms through which social relations are sustained and transformed. On the other, theories of justice (and, more generally, political philosophy) examine the principles according to which one set of social relations ought to be preferred over another. Since ‘political power is always coercive’ (Rawls 1993: 68), political philosophy contributes to clarifying which institutions should be enforced by the state’s coercive powers and/or publicly funded in a just society.

These two domains are, at least in principle, complementary. Indeed, sociological theory remains largely uncritical if it lacks an implicit or explicit political philosophy (Callinicos 2006, esp. pp. 217-43, see also Gorski 2013, Sayer 2011, Smith 2015). Conversely, political philosophy provides shallow, uninformed and ultimately misleading critiques if it is not informed by sociological theory (Bhaskar 1998, Collins 1988).

In practice, social theory and political philosophy intertwine with varying degrees of felicity. Chernilo (2014) reminds us for instance of a tradition of philosophical sociology, that is, of sociology that draws from philosophy’s reflection on the good, the just and the human. Unfortunately, positivist currents of sociology seem to be dominating many an academic department, not least in the hegemonic USA. In the worse cases, sociology distances itself not only from political philosophy but also from social theory as it retreats into quantification and computation, two practices that provide illusory safeguards against normative commitment. In slightly better cases, sociology recognises the value, and some of the findings, of social theory but relies only implicitly and cursorily on normative considerations whose systematic study it leaves to political theory.

The present paper is located in the tradition of philosophical sociology. But with a twist, as its main contributions are addressed directly to political philosophy and rather indirectly to social theory. Although I base my arguments on a social ontology that would arguably displease Randall Collins, we could perhaps borrow his expression *sociological philosophy* to describe my intended contribution (Collins 1988). Yet, Collins’ position deserves to be nuanced when he claims that

philosophy has not made the transition from the social to the sociological. Philosophers invoke the social in a general and taken-for-granted way, while

their use of actual sociology is meagre and often uninformed. (Collins 1988: 669).

Indeed, I would like to argue briefly that political philosophy's 'meagre and often uninformed' use of sociology constitutes a conscious and to some extent justified, accomplishment. My point is not that sociological theory should have no input into political philosophy, including theories of justice. It is rather that we need to be careful to avoid restricting the commendably universal scope of political philosophy when we add considerations drawn from sociological theory.

Political philosophers rely, usually implicitly or cursorily, on assumptions about the nature and functioning of societies that are systematically studied by social theory. However, they also go at great length to rely on as meagre a use of sociology as they can. I believe this stance is justified by political philosophers' willingness to extend the validity of their argument to the widest possible, ideally universal, range of possible social configurations.

John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* provides a useful lead. I find it admirable in many respects but the one that fascinates me most is the care with which Rawls draws the boundaries of his discussion: the basic structure of society is the sole focus of enquiry; the discussion is limited to drawing realistic utopias under the assumption that people comply with principles of justice and with arrangements agreed according to these principles; the discussion is restricted to the level of a single nation in a pluri-national world (Rawls 2001: 14-5). Rawls's parsimony is pursued in his minimalist anthropology as he bases his theory of justice on only two moral powers: people's sense of justice and their ability to form a conception of the good (Ibid.: 18-9).

I view this parsimony of specific moral and empirical facts as a great strength for a theory that claims relevance in any social or cultural context. In other words, through careful delimitation of scope, Rawls achieves pan-historical relevance. In this chapter, however, I will introduce two additional sociological considerations with a view to develop, without disfiguring or undermining, liberal egalitarian theories of justice.

The first concerns human reflexivity. I believe we can enrich Rawls's theory of justice without restricting its ahistorical relevance by adding social theoretical considerations on *social reflexivity*, (Archer 2003, 2007, 2012). I further add a (tentative) conception of *political reflexivity* understood as humans' reflexive capacity to engage in collective action to steer society together. These additions are analogous to Sen's well-known argument (Sen 1992: 73-87) that primary goods are not automatically converted into satisfactory human functioning, and that such conversion is necessarily mediated through human capabilities that may themselves be unequally distributed in terms of their efficacy. I argue in this chapter that the powers of human reflexivity do matter for achieved fairness. I also argue that they are not included in Rawls's list of primary goods. Finally, I argue that, while reflexivity is ontologically a power of the same sort as the capabilities discussed by Sen and Nussbaum, the latter have not taken into account its central importance for matters of social justice. Note that the claims I will make about human reflexivity are themselves generically ahistorical. Therefore my introducing human reflexivity does not restrict the ahistorical validity of the normative discussion of justice. I might be wrong about human reflexivity and my overall argument should then be rejected. However, if I am right, the resulting claims do not restrict the scope of validity of the theories of justice of Rawls, Sen and Nussbaum.

The second sociological consideration I introduce to theories of justice concerns morphogenic society. And this consideration is certainly historical in nature as we should distinguish between the philosophical theory of social morphogenesis and the substantive theory of morphogenic society. The explanatory framework of social morphogenesis is philosophical and claims universal validity across societies: every human society is deemed to comprise human agents, social structures and cultural systems, and these are deemed to evolve through processes that can usefully be traced as morphogenic/morphostatic cycles, and so on (Archer 1995). However, the concept of *morphogenic society* (which I discuss further below) refers to one particular, or rather potential social configuration. Whether a society is morphogenic or not is an empirical, historical, fact. It follows that by introducing the concept of morphogenic society into a philosophical discussion of the just society I am restricting my claims' scope of validity to include societies that exhibit social morphogenic features while excluding those that do not.

Before examining the implications of refined conceptions of human reflexivity for just morphogenic societies, I unpack the nature and significance of morphogenic society in light of reflections held in the Centre for Social Ontology over the past seven years or so.

### **3. Morphogenic society: what it is and why it matters**

This section examines the nature of morphogenic society. It discusses the dimensions of social morphogenesis, examines to what extent we can say we are currently living in a morphogenic society and signals contemporary normative problems attributable to morphogenesis unbound.

#### ***3.1. What morphogenic society is and what it is not***

Archer (2013) refers to morphogenic society, as opposed to morphostatic society, as a form of society in which mechanisms generating social transformation overwhelm mechanisms maintaining social stability. However, abrupt social change is NOT sufficient to characterise morphogenic society. Indeed, morphostatic societies may, and actually did, change abruptly because of foreign invasion or because of biological disasters such as plagues or famine. What is characteristic of morphostatic society is rather the fact that transformational mechanisms are exogenous rather than endogenous. Change results from another nation entering in war or an exceptional innovation or natural disaster. On the other hand, morphogenic society is defined by the endogeneity of change when morphostatic mechanisms are weaker than morphogenetic ones. Change in a morphogenic society results from people performing the practices and respecting the rights and duties associated with their roles. They do so, however in changing ways conducive to the elaboration of new roles.

Not only is morphogenic change endogenous rather than exogenous; but it is also tendential rather than actual or phenomenal. Indeed, if we view societies as open systems (Bhaskar 1998), it should not surprise us that the existence of morphogenic mechanisms may be disconnected from their actual realisation. Think for instance of the role of public and private debt in maintaining wealthy lifestyles in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Actually, a whole generation of workers in First World countries lived in relative opulence. They also lived under an illusory impression of economic and political stability when relations of power were actually shifting in favour of large private corporations and to the detriment of workers and states.

There is, finally, the question of the use of the singular or the plural. I may have, in my own writings, oscillated between referring to 'morphogenic societies' and 'morphogenic society'. The use of the singular can be interpreted in two ways. First as referring to a species of society. Second, and more significantly, as signalling the advent of a single global society. Mentioning

plural ‘societies’ signals, however, that human culture entails remarkable diversity. It may also express a political will of the author to refrain from contributing to excessive homogenisation and destruction of cultural specificity. In the fourth volume of the *Social Morphogenesis* series I examined the globalisation of norms and suggested that while simple, straightforward cultural and normative arrangements (e.g. using a toothbrush regularly) were increasingly homogeneous, complex norms were, on the contrary increasingly fragmented (e.g. hackers contesting intellectual property). Overall, the use of singular or plural should not be problematic as long as the above distinctions are held in mind.

### **3.2. *The dimensions of social morphogenesis***

Morphogenesis is not synonymous with perception of acceleration (Lawson 2014). And neither is it synonymous with actual acceleration. But is it reducible to a tendency to acceleration? In other words, is the intensification of morphogenetic mechanisms equivalent to tendential acceleration?

I examined this question in Al-Amoudi (2014) and developed it further in Al-Amoudi & Latsis (2015) and Al-Amoudi (2016). My argument was that morphogenesis entails several dimensions. Acceleration of social change is one of these dimensions, which I termed, for want of a better expression, *sequential morphogenesis*. There is, however, another dimension to morphogenesis: the production of coexisting institutional variety which may also be referred to as *concurrent morphogenesis*. Technological acceleration provides an example of sequential morphogenesis while diversification of normatively acceptable familial arrangements provides an example of concurrent morphogenesis.

The intensification of sequential morphogenesis produces a significant emergent mechanism examined in Al-Amoudi & Latsis (2015). We argued that intensified morphogenesis does not only create novel social forms but, in many circumstances, it is also conducive to the obsolescence or death of social forms.

### **3.3. *Are we currently living in a morphogenic society?***

To say that society is morphogenic certainly does not entail that morphogenic mechanisms overwhelm morphostatic ones ‘everywhere’. As I argued in the second volume of the *Social Morphogenesis* series (Al-Amoudi 2014), morphogenic society differs from Liquid Modernity (Bauman 2012). Some, though by no means all social institutions incur intensified morphogenesis. Crucially, those institutions that resist morphogenesis are endowed with exceptional normative influence. Think for example of the growing importance of the very resilient principle of private property of means of production (Al-Amoudi 2014). Another example of a mechanism deeply entrenched and resisting significant morphogenic pressures is provided by Graeber’s remark that the principle according to which ‘one ought to pay back debts’ overwhelms humanitarian considerations (Graeber 2013), often with disastrous consequences for human flourishing.

But social morphogenesis is also unequally distributed as morphogenic societies are characterised by heterogenous social and institutional landscapes. As Maccarini puts it, morphogenic societies entail enclaves and vortices (Maccarini 2015). That is, zones of relative institutional stability that coexist with zones of intense and even turbulent social change.

On these bases, I believe we can reasonably affirm that we are currently living in a morphogenic society. But is this configuration likely to last? Realist theorising has always been wary of future prediction, and rightly so (Bhaskar 1998, Lawson 1997, 2003). We have reasons to say, however, that, in our current state of knowledge, we have no reason to expect a reversal

to morphostatic societies in the foreseeable future (for a full argument, see Archer 2014 on the stabilisation of morphogenic societies).

### **3.4. Normative problems in morphogenic societies**

If the analyses I proposed in the second volume of the *Morphogenic Society* series (Al-Amoudi 2014) are not too mistaken, normativity appears to be fragmented along a number of dimensions. The effects of this fragmentation are not always negative for human flourishing. For instance, many previously unproblematized ethical questions have been brought to light precisely because of the multiple memberships enabled by a morphogenic society. These categorical ambiguities have led in turn to struggles for recognition and have arguably resulted in the increased awareness of most members of society about the specific needs of the least favoured members of society.

On the other hand, scrutiny of normativity in contemporary morphogenic society points to a worrying dilution of norms relative to solidarity. This dilution is observable both at the level of the nation-state - the withering of the Welfare-State - and at the level of the private sphere with the increasing commodification of relations of care. Moreover, the fragmentation of normativity is manifested in the appearance of novel mundane problems for which past wisdom is of little help and which require, therefore, the discussion and the (typically emergent) establishment of novel norms. These discussions are also complexified by the fact that those arguments accepted without question in one group can be seen as problematic in another group with which discussion is nonetheless necessary in order to reach a collective *modus vivendi*. The elaboration of mutually acceptable norms is further complicated by the fact that those traditional institutions in charge of settling disagreements are themselves increasingly contested. This contestation has not (yet?) led to violent outbursts but has generated a proliferation of anormative regulation (Archer 2016) and increased reliance on novel arbitrators operating in parallel with the more conventional ones. In the juridical domain, an increasing number of cases are being treated in the margins of the juridical system and, while the confidentiality of arbitration makes it impossible to measure these numbers precisely, strong indications are provided by the proliferation of training courses for arbiters and the establishment of arbitration associations that set their own standards at the margins of national or international juridical systems. In the familial sphere, the right to judge and decide, traditionally attributed to parents, seems to be increasingly shared with a number of others, including professional parenting advisors, mass media and, more recently, parental networks.

Moreover, it is significant for the present paper that intensified morphonecrosis (Al-Amoudi & Latsis 2015) presents people both with contextual discontinuity (a consequence already noted in Archer 2003) but also with contexts that encourage power struggles whose stake is institutions' death or survival (morphonecrosis' *agonies*). Contexts of morphonecrosis and social agony affect people's ability to engage in social and political reflexivity in ways that sections 4 and 5 below will attempt to clarify.

Finally, morphogenesis unbound encourages novel forms of social inequality stemming from differential powers to interpret and act upon codified rules (Al-Amoudi 2016). These arguments provide a background for the present paper. Not only because they characterise Modernity, late or otherwise, as a form of inegalitarian liberalism (a characterisation that is rather common knowledge for anyone familiar with Marxist scholarship). But, more importantly, because these investigations highlight the centrality of interpretive powers and examine the social and economic inequalities resulting from unequal powers of interpretation.

In sum, the problems of normativity in morphogenic society matter if we are interested in contemporary obstacles to Eudaimonia and intend to re-examine reflexivity in relation to normative questions of political philosophy.

#### **4. Social reflexivity: how should I make my way through the world?**

Recent realist social theory has explored the human powers of social reflexivity to some depth. I build on the works of Archer (2003, 2007, 2012), Donati (2013) and Donati & Archer (2015) to offer a contribution to theories of justice. I argue in particular that in a morphogenic society, social reflexivity becomes necessary to people's satisfactory functioning and flourishing. Social reflexivity should therefore be listed among the central human capabilities that Nussbaum (2003) uses as a standard to assess a given society's level of fairness or to compare across different social models. Moreover, realising the moral importance of social reflexivity indicates new directions for egalitarian philosophers interested in discussing realistic utopias (Rawls 2001: 4-5). If my argument that social reflexivity should be considered as a central human capability is accepted, then future political philosophical reflection should also consider which institutions are most capable of fostering social reflexivity for equal citizens.

##### ***4.1 Modes of social reflexivity: a very brief refresher***

The conception of social reflexivity on which I base my argument has been developed to some length in Archer (2003, 2007, 2012). I now present only those aspects which are vital to this chapter's intelligibility. Social reflexivity is conceived as a personal emergent power through which people conduct internal conversations in which they attempt to relate their concerns with their social context and vice versa, with a view to taking appropriate courses of action.

Of direct relevance to this chapter's argument, powers of social reflexivity are not evenly distributed among persons. Different persons are differently equipped with the capability to ask and act upon the question: 'how should I make my way through the world?' and its corollaries: 'what matters to me?' and 'what should I do about it?' Indeed, by collecting first-person accounts of life-stories, Archer identifies four distinct modes of reflexivity.

*Meta-reflexivity* consists in being capable of critical reflexion about one's own internal conversations and about effective action in society. This mode of reflexivity attends particularly to the question 'what matters to me and my view of the good society?'<sup>5</sup>

*Autonomous reflexivity* consists in being capable of sustaining self-contained internal conversations leading directly to action. This mode of reflexivity attends particularly to the question 'what should I do about it?'

*Communicative reflexivity* consists in being able to initiate an internal conversation but not to conclude it and take appropriate action without help from other interlocutors who complete and confirm initial thoughts.

*Fractured reflexivity* consists in being incapable of attempting to use one's reflexive powers without incurring intensified distress and disorientation, to the point of interrupting the internal conversation before a course of action is elaborated.

Of particular importance for my overall argument, powers of reflexivity can, to some extent and as any other personal emergent power, be nurtured or destroyed. Archer's interviews

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<sup>5</sup> My own understanding is that meta-reflexivity and autonomous reflexivity are not necessarily exclusive of one another.



indicate, for instance, that communicative reflexivity can be fractured following severe contextual discontinuity. But they indicate too that fractured reflexivity can also mend in an appropriate social context. And I can think of no reason why autonomous and meta-reflexivity could not be developed through appropriate social relations and practices.

#### ***4.2 The morphostatic assumptions of theories of justice***

Why do Rawls, Sen and Nussbaum ignore unequally effective powers of social reflexivity? It does not suffice to say that Archer's works were not written by that time as other authors did investigate, though in different terms, similar phenomena. For instance, Bandura's studies of self-efficacy point (in their own terms) to differently shared capacities of autonomous reflexivity. And Kohlberg's works on moral development point (also in their own terms) to differently shared capacities of meta-reflexivity. I would suggest, rather, that the downplaying of unequally distributed powers of social reflexivity is in great part explainable by the fact that John Rawls, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum *reason in the implicit context of a morphostatic society*. In such a society, mechanisms of stabilisation are sufficiently powerful to grant contextual continuity. As a result, social reflexivity is not essential to people's satisfactory functioning.

Similarly, human reflexivity is not listed among the primary goods to be secured by an adequately designed basic structure of society (Rawls). These primary goods are: basic rights and liberties; freedom of movement and occupation; powers and prerogatives linked to positions; income and wealth; social bases of self-respect. Reflexivity is not reducible to any combination of primary goods, yet it is an essential capability for their acquisition and production in a morphogenic society. Indeed, in a morphostatic society agents are not significantly penalised, and are quite often rewarded, if they follow the advice of well-defined figures of authority for their important choices. There are therefore premiums, or at least no significant penalties, associated with communicative reflexivity in morphostatic societies. This is why, for instance, communicative reflexives who seem functional and happy in morphostatic societies often suffer from reflexive fracture in the ever-changing contexts of Late Modernity (Archer 2012: pp. 125-65).

Moreover, in a morphostatic society, the premiums and penalties associated with autonomous reflexivity seem to depend on the person's social position. In a society where social relations and hierarchies are stable, where social trajectories are limited and where normative frameworks are both homogeneous and compelling, the opportunities for bargain hunting and calculative innovation are necessarily limited and the premiums associated with them are limited too. Note however how, in inegalitarian morphostatic societies, autonomous reflexivity is encouraged and developed in the education of ruling classes but not in the education of commoners. Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Louis XIV's *Le Metier de Roi* contain advice for rulers that encourage autonomous reflexivity. Meta-reflexivity seems notably absent, however, from these treatises<sup>6</sup>.

#### ***4.3. The meagre assumptions of theories of justice on social reflexivity***

Social reflexivity is only very partially addressed by Rawls's minimalist philosophical anthropology. It is covered by the second moral power, that is, people's capacity to formulate

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<sup>6</sup> I leave open the question of whether the use made of the works of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas encouraged meta-reflexivity or whether it encouraged lucid self-examination while shielding pre-defined values from critical assessment.

a comprehensive conception of the good. This capacity is taken for granted and operates as a boundary for political philosophy as Rawls conceives it. Basically, people are capable of formulating conceptions of what a good life worth living is. They are also capable of engaging in actions through which their conception of the good is realised. However, the discussion of these powers belongs to the domain of moral and ethical philosophy and not to political philosophy as Rawls envisages it. As a result, Rawls attempts to outline his theory of justice while remaining uncommitted to any specific conception of the good. The only restriction imposed on conceptions of the good is that they should be 'reasonable' in the sense of being compatible with other people's comprehensive conceptions of the good.

Rawls's theory of moral development draws on Kohlberg and Flavell (1968), himself heavily indebted to Mead. Although Rawls's *Theory of Justice* only mentions Kohlberg in a couple of footnotes, the whole Chapter VIII (The Sense of Justice) mirrors very closely Kohlberg's three-step development of moral consciousness<sup>7</sup>. However, Rawls emphasises the acquisition of a sense of justice over the acquisition of the power to examine, criticise, and subsequently adopt, reject or refine possible courses of action by comparing them with ultimate concerns. The resulting conception is, on the one hand, one that goes beyond the *morality of association*<sup>8</sup> and that could perhaps be described as meta-reflexivity. But on the other, it is also a conception that downplays the role of social structures and of socio-cultural interaction in the formation of human moral powers.

At this point, we might note an ontological slipping that operates within *Theory of Justice* and that might partly explain Rawls's inattentiveness to the formation of moral powers qua powers and the resulting lack of interrogation of the social conditions of possibility of their development. Indeed, while Rawls mentions the two moral *powers* of citizens in a well ordered society, the section of *Theory of Justice* that exposes his conception of moral development focuses on the development of moral sentiments. Moral sentiments are understood there as entrenched dispositions rather than mere feelings. I believe that Rawls is right to avoid identifying moral sentiments as feelings, but by relying on the category of disposition or sentiment he also ends up losing sight of moral powers being in essence reflexive *powers*. I wonder if, had Rawls consistently evoked moral powers, whether Sen and Nussbaum might have investigated more thoroughly the social injustices resulting from, or indicated by, the unequal distribution of moral powers and, more generally, of efficient human reflexivity?

#### **4.4. Should Social reflexivity be listed as a central human capability?**

When Martha Nussbaum (2003) draws a list of 'central human capabilities' that are deemed to be fundamental entitlements in the context of a just society, human reflexivity appears on the list in a fragmented and partial way. Nussbaum's list features: life; bodily health; sense imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; concern for other species; play and control over one's environment. Reflexivity, social or political, does not appear as a capability in its own right. Yet, it is not entirely absent from the list as it is partially covered by practical reason.

Nussbaum defines 'Practical reason' in the following succinct terms: 'Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.' Nussbaum adds, between brackets: '(This entails protection of the liberty of conscience and religious observance).' I take it that she envisages 'practical reason' as synonymous, or at least

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<sup>7</sup> Habermas's philosophical anthropology too is heavily influenced by Kohlberg (c.f. Habermas 2007: 116-94).

<sup>8</sup> The morality of association is defined as a relatively early moral stage in which moral standards are impressed by the dis/approval of those in authority. The dependence of Ego's reflection on Alter's validation draws this power close to communicative reflexivity.

very close to the second moral power Rawls attributes to people, i.e. ‘a capacity for a conception of the good: it is the capacity to have, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good.’ (Rawls 2001: 19) Rawls further specifies that ‘such a conception is an ordered family of final ends and aims which specifies a person’s conception of what is of value in human life or, alternatively, of what is a fully worthwhile life.’

While both Nussbaum and Rawls view ‘practical reason’ (Nussbaum’s terminology) as a power or capability, they differ about the question of its prevalence. Rawls recognises the existence of people who are less capable of practical reason than others. Their case is treated as a sub-case of those citizens who are not capable of acting as ‘fully cooperative members of society’ for some reason. The case of these persons is not viewed as a significant central feature of every society, however, but rather as a ‘difficult complication’ that can be studied at a later stage of reflection. That is, after we first develop a theory of fairness populated exclusively with fully cooperative, and assumedly morally reflexive, agents. As Rawls has it: ‘it is sensible to lay aside certain difficult complications. If we can work out a theory that covers the fundamental case, we can try to extend it to other cases later.’ (Rawls 1980: 546, cited in Nussbaum 2003: 53).

Nussbaum, however, attempts to include persons who are not fully cooperative members of society into her philosophical reflexions on the just society. She refuses to treat persons who are less, or insufficiently, endowed with practical reasoning abilities as marginal cases. She reminds us rightly that in every society people are incapable of such powers for the first 10 or perhaps 20 years of their lives. And those lucky enough to live into old age can expect periods, sometime extending to 20 years, during which their moral capabilities might be limited.

Nussbaum draws several conclusions from the above observation. First, care during periods of extreme and asymmetrical dependency deserves to figure as a ‘primary good’ (Rawls) or, more precisely, as a ‘central human capability’ (Nussbaum). Second, the contractualist Kantian justification of care is less coherent than an Aristotelian/Marxist justification based on an understanding of the human as a being in need of a rich plurality of life activities to be shaped by affiliation and practical reason.

What strikes me, however, is that neither Rawls nor Sen nor Nussbaum seem to care for the position of those agents who are relatively less equipped than others with effective reflexive powers even though they are not in vital need of constant care. Yet, I believe that this inequality is very significant. First, because it concerns a large number of persons and can’t be treated as an exceptional ‘difficult complication’, second because it affects significantly the life chances of people, third because reflexivity (as most powers) can be trained or, when fractured, repaired to some extent (cf. Archer on fractured reflexives on the mend). Fourth because distribution of dominant modes of reflexivity bears structural effects and contributes to reproducing inegalitarian social structures.

#### ***4.5. Injustice resulting from unequal social reflexivity in morphogenic society***

I have argued so far that the theories of justice of Rawls, Sen and Nussbaum presupposed morphostatic contexts and that they downplayed powers of social reflexivity. I now argue why social reflexivity matters in a morphogenic society. None of the arguments I present below is novel. Most are drawn from Archer’s trilogy, especially Archer (2012). Some are additions or refinements I made in the context of the *Social Morphogenesis* series.

Social morphogenesis generates both novel opportunities and novel threats. Since agents are not automata moved by hydraulic forces, the way they reflect on their circumstances and the way they take action matters both for their own social trajectories and for the elaboration of subsequent social structure.

Archer (2012) identifies judiciously that social morphogenesis is particularly harmful for communicative and fractured reflexives. On one hand, morphogenesis is conducive to a decline (Archer 2012) or a fragmentation (Al-Amoudi 2014) of authoritative sources of normativity. On the other hand, intensified morphogenesis implies significant contextual discontinuity or incongruity over a lifetime. The result is not only a world that looks odd to the older generation (Halbwachs 1992, 1997), but also a world that may and does change significantly over a decade (Archer 2012). Two consequences follow for communicative reflexives. First, the networks of advisors on which they rely can disperse. Think for instance of the banality of parents remarrying or of friends moving into another city for familial or professional reasons. Second, the experience of persons constituting these advisory networks is rapidly obsolete in a morphogenic society. This fact has been thoroughly investigated in Archer (2007) and Archer (2012). Think, for instance, of the career advice and example provided by miners to their children in post-Thatcher Britain. Archer (2012) ventures a plausible hypothesis: many communicative reflexives who could have lived reasonably good lives are so distressed by morphogenetic contextual discontinuity that their communicative reflexive powers are fractured as a result<sup>9</sup>.

At a general level, those same unbound morphogenetic processes that fracture communicative reflexivity also impede fractured reflexivity from mending into communicative reflexivity (Archer 2012: 249-91). We can specify further this abstract and general consideration by tracing the deleterious effects on fractured reflexives of the current lib-lab version of morphogenic society (Donati 2015). My point here is not only that Late Modernity impedes fractured reflexivity from mending, but also that Late Modernity is conducive to heightened suffering for those who fall-through 'the system'. First, many of the Welfare State institutions that developed post-WWII are declining. And while I have defended elsewhere the idea that workplace participation could, from a Rawlsian perspective, compensate for this decline (Blanc & Al-Amoudi 2013), we see scant signs of this happening. Second, as Dean's Foucauldian analyses (Dean 2007, 2010) rightly points out, contemporary neo-liberal societies tolerate and even encourage violence upon those persons who are deemed to lack autonomy. Third, while I remain extremely sympathetic to the forms of third sector associations called for by Donati (2015), the emergence of such associations is limited in current morphogenic society based on relative stability of the mechanisms most fundamental to capitalism (i.e. Rights of private property and obligation to pay financial debts, see section 3.3 above). My impression is that these associations remain parasitic on the public sector to the extent that they depend on grants. And, in the absence of public funding, they also depend on the private sector to the extent that benevolent participants rely on salaries obtained from for-profit organisations.

That autonomous reflexivity is rewarded in a liberal inegalitarian morphogenic society should not be surprising. In terms of social trajectories, social morphogenesis produces a continuous array of novel opportunities and threats, and autonomous reflexives are particularly well equipped to analyse these unprecedented situations and engage in unconventional courses of action that best match their specific situation. In terms of norms, morphogenic society sends mixed messages that autonomous reflexives are particularly well equipped to pick and mix.

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<sup>9</sup> . I am still hesitant about the nature and worth of communicative reflexivity. On one hand, it is construed by Archer as incomplete or lacking autonomous and meta-reflexivity. But on the other, it could perhaps be symptomatic of a beautiful democratic imaginary. A reflexive yet humble person might appreciate the value and diversity of others' points of view and thus refrain from taking action without thorough consultation. In this regard, it might be a sign of humility, open-mindedness and ultimately superior reflexivity to consult Alter and offer her a significant role in the conversation.

Archer seems therefore justified to conclude that ‘the autonomous reflexives find a ready home and feel thoroughly at home in these institutions of late modernity.’ (Archer 2012: 205)<sup>10</sup>.

Meta-reflexives are perhaps those who correspond most closely to the minimalist anthropology on which Rawls, Sen and Nussbaum base their theories of Justice. They are indeed the only group capable of forming, rather than merely adopting, a comprehensive conception of the good. And they realise that contemporary society does not allow them to live this life adequately and that perhaps no society, even a just one, will ever allow them to live up fully to their ideals.

Whether the development of meta-reflexivity is worthy depends on our conception of worth. In contemporary society, meta-reflexives seem to have trajectories that are more volatile than autonomous reflexives. However, I can think of no reason why in a more just society their social trajectories should become less changeable. At most, it could be argued that contemporary society causes particularly acute suffering to meta-reflexives as those individuals who do not follow a career in the private sector or who do not set up their own business are particularly penalised by unbridled capitalism in comparison with those who do. Yet, even in a well-ordered society, I would expect autonomous reflexives to obtain more primary goods than meta-reflexives – if anything because the former spend their energy pursuing goods recognised by the ambient ideology while the latter also evaluate them.

In other words, if the situations of autonomous and meta-reflexives were compared either through Rawlsian primary goods or through Nussbaum’s list of Central Human Capabilities, I could expect fractured reflexives to score less than communicative reflexives who would themselves score less than autonomous reflexives. And I am not sure where meta-reflexives would score, though my expectation would be that their group should display the highest variance.

There are, however, two very important reasons for encouraging or facilitating the development of meta-reflexivity in a just society. The first is that meta-reflexivity is a good in itself. That its exercise may not be conducive to maximisation of material and social goods enjoyed by the individual does not make it less of a good<sup>11</sup>. Agreed, meta-reflexives are likely to follow zig-zag rather than ascending social trajectories, and agreed they are exposed to feeling continuously disappointed with themselves as much as with the people and institutions they encounter who fail their moral ideals. But whether meta-reflexivity brings happiness depends precisely on our conception of happiness. Under a conception of happiness-as-feeling-

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<sup>10</sup> This conclusion should come, however, with reservations. First, while Archer’s investigations study the effects of modes of reflexivity on social trajectories, these effects are also encountering other countervailing mechanisms. In inegalitarian liberal morphogenic society, social class defined in terms of the economic capital possessed by parents might matter more than reflexivity. Moreover, if Picketty (2014) is correct, then contemporary Western societies witnesses levels of economic inequality unseen since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and current tendencies point to widening gaps. Second, while Late Modernity is certainly beneficial to large corporations and particularly wealthy individuals (the infamous 1%) it is not necessarily so for small entrepreneurs (see Al-Amoudi 2016) or even middle-class individuals. In this context, it might be expected that growing numbers of autonomous reflexives might become disillusioned with the promises of inegalitarian liberalism as they realise they will not benefit from inequalities. Third, reflection in terms of social trajectories obscures the importance of goods that are irreducible to wealth or social status. Yet, the rising sales of self-help books and of expensive coaching for middle-class professionals provides anecdotal evidence of the malaise produced by consumer society (for a critique of the materialistic wellness ideology, see Cederstrom and Spicer 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Acknowledging the goodness of meta-reflexivity does not disturb the liberal separation of just and good dear to Rawls. I do not specify which values meta-reflexivity should uphold, I just propose that being able to criticise values is good in itself. Again, there is a homology with the second moral power.

happy, meta-reflexivity is certainly a recipe for unhappiness. However, under either an Aristotelian conception of happiness as eudaimonic cultivation of powers (*arete*), meta-reflexivity is constitutive of true happiness.

The second reason why meta-reflexivity is important, and perhaps even crucial, in a just society is that of all forms of reflexivity, meta-reflexivity is the only one that can both challenge the status quo efficiently and at the same time proceed out of a sense of justice rather than following self-serving interests. In other words, it covers both Rawlsian principles. Its development is thus called for as a necessary condition of possibility for a liberal egalitarian society that corresponds to the theories of justice put forward by Rawls and after him Sen and Nussbaum.

#### ***4.6. Organisations fostering social reflexivity in a just morphogenic society***

Neither social theory nor political philosophy can design in detail the institutions needed in a just society. Political philosophy's primary role is to draw realistic utopias (Rawls 2003: 4) and offer criteria for comparing different possible societies. It can help us, however, identify institutions that are currently missing and it can also help us draw justifications for these institutions.

I have argued so far that unevenly distributed and effective modes of social reflexivity matter in a morphogenic society. It follows that a just morphogenic society should comprise institutions and organisations that help fostering social reflexivity. What I have not done is to propose concrete institutional arrangements that can contribute to a less inequalitarian distribution of effective reflexivity across society. In what follows I provide just a few directions.

Archer's investigations among University students indicates the importance of the family in the cultivation of social reflexivity (2012). Families generating relational evils seem either to impede the full development of reflexivity, resulting in fractured reflexive children, or they seem to 'enforce' instrumental rationality at the expense of moral considerations. On the other hand, families generating relational goods tend, according to Archer, to generate either communicative reflexivity or meta-reflexivity – depending on the normative dissonance children had to face.

What this means is that the familial context matters as it provides conditions of possibility for the growth of social reflexivity. And indeed, social reflexivity is to an extent one of the many relational goods generated by families.

However, what Archer's study does *not* mean is that family should be the sole point of action of public policy aiming to favour the development of reflexivity. First, because social inequality precisely affects families, since families can fail and children cannot be held accountable for their family's ills. Second, because families are never sufficient. Archer's study of reflexivity indicates indeed that strong familial consensus is not necessarily conducive to the development of powers of moral reflexivity. This result might be surprising for the most conservative members of society as it breaks a number of right-wing myths: first that the ability to make autonomous ascending career choices are best fostered in happy families and second, that moral powers are best fostered in homogeneous normative environments.

Very fortunately, the family is not the only organisation through which children develop their powers of social reflexivity. Schools, sport clubs, religious communities and informal

groups of friends matter too. These organisations might be subsidiary to family and might help fostering social reflexivity.

How can they do so? Well, I can only be very brief and tentative here. One possibility could be to provide children with opportunities to converse with people from a broad range of horizons in a context that encourages civility. Another could be to provide efficacious counter-discourses to the largely anormative messages conveyed by the market (have you thought of your employability?) and by the State (have you voted and have you followed the procedures?) A third direction is to consider people all of ages and not only children. If reflexive powers evolve during a person's life, then organisations fostering reflexive powers should also be accessible to adults. In particular, the workplace seems particularly anormative, in spite of calls for the creation of moral spaces in corporations (Blanc 2014). A fourth direction might be to replace 'couselling' and 'coaching' with groups akin to the associations studied by Donati (2015: 229-62).

## **5. Political reflexivity: steering society together**

I use the expression *political reflexivity* to refer to the human powers involved in judging society's worth and, equally importantly, in initiating collective action to govern and transform society. To my knowledge, realist social theory has dedicated more energy to studying social reflexivity than political reflexivity. Rawls examines, as we have seen in section 4.3 above, the formation of moral sentiments. He does not study, however, the capacities needed to steer a just society by equal participants. This omission is problematic as liberal egalitarian philosophy thus supposes implicitly either that political reflexivity is equally distributed or that its unequal distribution is unproblematic. In this paper, I attempt to argue exactly the reverse: a) political reflexivity is unequally distributed; b) this is problematic in a morphostatic society and even more so in a morphogenic society; c) this unequal distribution can somewhat be remedied; and d) finding such remedies is a project that should matter both to realist relational theorists and to liberal egalitarian philosophers.

### **5.1. What is *political reflexivity*?**

Political reflexivity can broadly be defined as the personal emergent power through which people reflect and act on the question 'how can we steer society together?' The metaphor of steering connotes both the idea of governing society and the idea of changing its trajectory purposefully, that is, towards a destination that is preferable to where the ship would go without its crew's continuous efforts. It should immediately be noted that, while in principle the whole global society might perhaps be steered, the expression 'steering society' also and mainly refers to the steering of parts of global society: coalitions of states, states, as well as large and small organisations and human groups. That is, the object of steering is constituted by sets of social relations constitutive of society.

The nautical metaphor reaches a significant limit, however, when we consider that, while steering a ship transforms or purposefully maintains its trajectory, steering society is about transforming or maintaining society itself. Thus, steering society is at once a matter of maintaining the relations and activities necessary for society's continuous reproduction and it is a matter of transforming social relations and activities with a sense of direction. I now compare and contrast political reflexivity with two notions resembling it, first with social reflexivity and then with leadership.

### **5.1.1. Political reflexivity vs social reflexivity**

Political reflexivity has in common with social reflexivity that both are personal emergent powers. Indeed, it is never society that steers itself (a structural deterministic fantasy), nor is it ever culture that steers it (a cultural deterministic fantasy), but people who do the steering, albeit through processes that presuppose the existence of social structures and cultural systems.

Moreover, political reflexivity is, like social reflexivity, a *reflexive* power. Firstly because the action of steering - be it a ship or a social organisation - is open to unintended consequences. And second because there are always multiple directions in which a social organisation can be steered.

Like social reflexivity, political reflexivity does not operate in the absence of internal conversations held by participants. Indeed, subjects of political reflexivity have to consider their own concerns, their understanding of their social context and the likely responses of other persons. I would like to venture, however, that *the structure of the reflexion at play in political reflexivity is different from the structure of the reflexion at play in social reflexivity*. Especially, whereas social reflexivity considers the subject's social position as its point of departure and as its point of destination, i.e. the subject's social position, political reflexivity takes the social relations in which the subject (may) engage as its point of departure and destination.

Several significant implications follow from this difference between social and political reflexivity. Firstly, steering a set of social relations is by nature a collective action. A single subject may decide to abandon or ignore a set of social relations, but she can only steer them in collaboration with other subjects. Thus, the 'together' clause is not tautological in the question 'how can we steer society together?'

Secondly, political reflexivity supposes a certain degree of maturity on part of the subject. Since steering implies collective action it presupposes that the subject has already entered some form of corporate agency and that a realistic sense of 'We' has formed through anterior cycles of socialisation. The expressions 'how can we steer society together?' and 'how can I contribute to steering society?' are not interchangeable, and a moment's thought indicates the latter is open to uncoordinated actions (actions that are neither understandable nor held desirable by others) unless it is reformulated in the plural. Moreover, since steering social relations implies transforming the rights and obligations of those entering these relations, political reflexivity necessitates some (realistic) sense of current roles and how they may be transformed for the greater good. Finally, since steering social relations implies anticipating (even by guessing) how the steering will affect the distribution of resources, the subjects of political reflexion must orient their reflexions towards some (fallible though founded) understanding of the positions of primary agents affected by the relational steering under consideration.

Thirdly, because political reflexivity attempts to mobilise a collectivity of agents, it must be justifiable in conventional terms, understandable by those whose collaboration is required. There is in political reflexivity an external or public moment that is not necessary to social reflexivity. Private rumination may help to a point but it fails without the ability to publicise ideas convincingly.

### **5.1.2. Political reflexivity vs leadership**

The discourse of 'leadership' marks one of the ugliest cultural evolutions at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This trend affects middle classes grooming their children into 'leadership' as well as would-be corporate managers and, more recently, professionals and civil servants. Leadership precludes however, both meta-reflexivity and a democratic imaginary. The contemporary discourse of leadership insists very heavily on the 'values' and 'norms' of leaders. However,



these values and norms are meant to be taken for granted rather than continuously questioned as meta-reflexivity would. Moreover, the expression 'leadership' presupposes an asymmetry between the leader and the led. It presupposes that the leader knows better what is good and how it can be achieved. Her role is therefore to manipulate the led into following her plan. The manipulative dimension of leadership is mystified by the open rejection of coercion: leaders are expected to mentor, inspire, explain, show, convince, and so on. As an enthusiastic commentator has it:

'After crafting an image of what the leaders want the organization to achieve, they [the leaders] charismatically communicate their vision to their followers... Moreover, transformational leaders connect followers' self-concepts to the organization's mission and vision through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.' (Hartnell and Walumba, 2011: 232, cited in Alvesson 2013: 173).

Behind its enthusing rhetorics, the relation leader/led is unidirectional to the extent that the led are not expected to reflect critically, let alone answer back, to the vision formulated by the leader. I surmise, however, that a relationship based on political reflexivity rather than leadership would instead be at best symmetrical and at worst asymmetrical, though it would never be unidirectional. Even when the balance of power is skewed, each participant in the relation is ready to revise her concerns and her beliefs in light of the other's arguments.

### **5.1.3. Some of the capabilities needed for political reflexivity**

My interest in alternative forms of governance and in political reflexivity developed when I started contributing to a social movement. I discovered, not only that effective participation into public life requires a broad set of skills or powers but also that these powers are unequally distributed in society. While some of these inequalities might be attributable to natural differences, and while some of these natural differences might only be compensated for up to a point, it also appeared that through the formation of propitious human relations and through adequate experiences, most people, including myself, could improve these skills.

The difficulties faced by such movements as *Indignados* and *Occupy* (and many others before them) are particularly revealing about the political powers required for militancy in particular and from participation to public life in general. It is especially when these powers were missing, or when they were progressively and painfully acquired after initial mistakes, that their importance became salient. Among these powers, we could list:

a. *Developing a sense of the common good*: participants to a political movement are prompted to justify their claims, and they have to do so by referring to a conception of the greater good rather than to egoistic interests. Many incidents occurred (from conversations breaking down to participants engaging in physical intimidation) whenever claims were made with reference to too narrow interests.

Moreover, while in some political movements the common good may be restricted to its members' common good, claims are more influential when they address a common good that extends beyond the relatively narrow circle of participants. I understand the theories of justice developed by Rawls, Nussbaum and Sen as attempts to formulate universal conceptions of the common good that extend across generations and across social positions.

b. *Developing a democratic imaginary*: not bossing people around, refraining from imposing one's views, seeking consensus, etc. While the ethics of discussion constitute

a crucial topic and have been substantially theorised by writers such as Habermas, it is noteworthy that the full exercise of political reflexivity encompasses activities that suppose powers ranging beyond those covered in theories of justice or in discourse ethics.

*c. Turn taking in conversations:* avoiding monopolising the conversation or interrupting others but also, and equally importantly, knowing when to jump in and speak. Since there are no formal rules in conversation turn-taking, this capability is largely based on tacit knowledge acquired through practice rather than on explicit knowledge of the sort that can be conveyed by ethical, moral or political philosophy.

*d. Speaking in public:* public speaking with clarity and eloquence, but also knowing how to stop, seemed difficult to some participants, especially those for whom the activity was new and those who felt these occasions were the sole ones they had been offered to voice their concerns.

*e. Interpreting the news:* several participants felt suspicious about the mainstream press. Their suspicion was not so much directed towards the authenticity of released information as much as towards the selection of news publicised and the (neo-liberal) interpretations provided by journalists.

*f. Discipline in honouring commitments:* the movement went through disappointments when deadlines were missed and commitments were not honoured. More generally, many members were not used to organise their time or workload.

*g. Ability to engage in a meaningful discussion with existing authorities.* In particular, some members wrote letters to the local authority that were qualified by the head of the municipality as ‘delirious’.

*h. Developing a sense of compromise:* in group discussions, members were using hand signals to express agreement or disagreement. Yet the most important signal was neither ‘I agree’ nor ‘I disagree and veto’ but rather ‘I do not fully agree but am ready to live with this proposed amendment’.

The above powers constitute a non-exhaustive list. But we can note from it that political reflexivity’s constitutive powers do not overlap exactly with the powers constitutive of social reflexivity. The skills allowing people to make their way through the world are not exactly the same that allow them to steer society. But why do these skills matter? Why are they essential to a just society? To this question I now turn.

## **5.2. Why political reflexivity matters**

Why does the ability to participate in the governance of the organisations with which one is involved matter for justice? Rawls’s identification of self-respect provides an important argument for self-governance, not only at the level of the state, but also in the context of various organisations which bear on our lives, including work places in contexts of weak welfare-States (Blanc and Al-Amoudi 2013). There is, however, much more to participating in governance than acquiring the bases of respect and self-respect. Similarly, Nussbaum’s notion of affiliation provides but a limited approximation. It is also striking that, while Tocqueville identifies political associations as a fundamental mechanism of democracy in America<sup>12</sup>, he has very little to say about the powers necessary for participating actively into such associations.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘The most natural privilege of man, next to the right of acting for himself, is that of combining his exertions with those of his fellow-creatures, and of acting in common with them. I am therefore led to conclude that the

At heart is the question of the realisation, or negation, of real freedom and of positive liberties (Berlin). Indeed, the Aristotelian principle (Rawls 1971: 424-33) and the view of wo/man as a 'political animal' (Aristotle) suggest that wo/man flourishes by participating actively to the governance of the city. Thus, political reflexivity is at once a human power or virtue and it is a good in itself whether in a morphostatic or in a morphogenic society.

Moreover, in light of my activist experiences, I am tempted to reinterpret Jo Freeman's (1972) classic short text on the tyranny of structurelessness as indicative of a lack in contemporary democracies. Indeed, a realist approach to social structure reveals that the tyranny lamented by Freeman does not result from the absence of structure but rather from the presence of informal yet real and inegalitarian structures. The inequalities she discerns are not due to an absence of structures but rather to their very presence and asymmetry. Some agents are better equipped with social and political powers than others. Her account mixes two forms of inequalities. Those that result from unequal power and those that result from wide social prejudice against certain social positions. Yet, even the solution she proposes, which consists in maintaining some formal structure in social movements, also presupposes that members are capable of political reflexive powers such as those listed above.

### ***5.3. Why political reflexivity matters all the more in morphogenic society?***

Why is the uneven distribution of powers necessary to political reflexivity particularly problematic in the context of a morphogenic society? Firstly, in a morphogenic society, human organisations are prone to face heavier environmental changes and to go, themselves, through particularly intense transformations to thrive or, at least, survive. Yet, in the absence of adequate checks and balances and in situations of concentration of power, each organisational change provides those governing the organisation with opportunities to accentuate inequalities in their favour. Moreover, the formal systems of checks and balances are, as the History of 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century suggests, insufficient to keep accumulation in check. Keeping decisions in check necessitates more than formal procedures, it also necessitates powers of political reflexivity. These powers need not be exercised by everyone at every time. But they must exist as real capabilities that might be exercised should doubts arise. Yet, today, how many can read a balance sheet? Or speak at a public assembly? Or start a petition? And equally important, how many know when to 'let go' and to prioritise those battles worthy of citizens' time over those that are secondary?

Secondly, the temptation in a complex and seemingly perilous environment is to entrust the helm to those who know or pretend to know how to govern. The effect is the rise of technocratic management that is increasingly disconnected from the ethos and local knowledge of those affected by decisions. The contemporary distrust of elites provides a historically contingent, yet all the more urgent, reason to consider political reflexivity and its real structural bases. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century rise of populism, both under its authoritarian and its direct-democratic forms, indicates growing distrust of elites and the severe dysfunctions of indirect democracy. On one hand, we witness a willingness to follow leaders that do not seem to have been corrupted by the temptations of public life (the Fascist *Front National* party's slogan was for a

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right of association is almost as inalienable as the right of personal liberty. No legislator can attack it without impairing the very foundations of society. Nevertheless, if the liberty of association is a fruitful source of advantages and prosperity to some nations, it may be perverted or carried to excess by others, and the element of life may be changed into an element of destruction. A comparison of the different methods which associations pursue in those countries in which they are managed with discretion, as well as in those where liberty degenerates into license, may perhaps be thought useful both to governments and to parties.' (Tocqueville 2013: Chap. XII)

long time: ‘la tête haute et les mains propres’) and whose character and understanding of everyday affairs has not been blunted by bureaucratic or technocratic mentality (cf. M. Le Pen and N. Farrage’s crusades against European bureaucracy). On the other, we witness relatively large, though ephemeral, political formations that display an appetite for direct democracy as well as unequal individual abilities to contribute to the movement’s governance or to furthering its causes.

#### ***5.4. What organisations may help fostering political reflexivity?***

Just as social reflexivity, political reflexivity is fostered through myriad organisations. We can identify, however, some organisations that play a particularly important role:

a. *The family* certainly plays an important part and is arguably the principle setting where the child learns the basic skills constitutive of political reflexivity. Yet, we must go beyond the imagery of the family as a microcosm of society and acknowledge that, while the first rudiments of political reflexivity might be acquired in familial settings, the maturation and full development of political reflexivity necessitates relations and interactions with members of other families. That is, political reflexivity can fully flourish only by crossing the family’s boundaries.

b. *The school* constitutes another crucial institution for the development of political reflexivity and associated skills. It is so whenever it offsets the potential deficiencies of the least politically reflexive families to some degree. But equally importantly, the school is also a place where the child is confronted with members belonging to the same community but to different families. Through discussion with peers, she can learn to confront views and understand differences of appreciation with members of different families that may hold different concerns and differing visions of the world (including society). Moreover, teachers offer important counter-points to the authority of the parents as they provide the child with authority figures whose values and world-views, while compatible with those of the wider community may also differ from the specific values and world-views of the child’s parents.

In this light, the school is (or at least can be) a site where children are prepared for democratic political life. Note, however, how this conception of the school is different from those aspirations, held for instance by extreme right group *Collectif Racine*, which purports to restrict the school’s activities to ‘instruction’ while claiming that ‘education’ is the exclusive prerogative of the family. It is not surprising that movements such as *Collectif Racine* and others also propose to ban the League of Human Rights from performing activities in and with members of (high) schools.

c. *Societies and clubs* also provide propitious organisational spaces in which subjects can exercise their powers of political reflexivity. These societies and clubs may encompass a wide range of activities ranging from sports to boy scouts and from chess clubs to drinking societies. However, because such institutions are rarely financially self-sufficient (unless they treat their members as customers and thus pervert their relationality), they are unfortunately prevalently accessible to middle and upper class agents. This elitism is all the more damaging as it contributes in turn to the unequal distribution of powers of political reflexivity among members of society. Indeed student societies are particularly prevalent in elite institutions such as Ivy League universities, Oxbridge or French Grandes Ecoles. In French Grandes Ecoles, there is a common understanding that these societies equip future ‘elites’ with basic social and political skills. Yet, in spite of their current elitism, these organisations might serve as exemplars for more accessible ones that would benefit from public subsidies and be allocated in less privileged areas.

d. *Work organisations* are perhaps the most significant organisations where adults can exercise their political reflexivity for the greatest part of their life. Yet, most work organisations, especially lucrative ones, are structured as nepotistic or autocratic rather than democratic organisations. In spite of philosophic arguments calling for considering a wider range of corporate institutions in the basic structure of society in the context of the Welfare State's decline (Blanc and Al-Amoudi 2013) and calls for the creation of moral spaces in private corporations (Blanc 2014), there is to date, little political interest in considering the democratic potential of well-ordered work organisations in a just society.

e. *Social networks* such as Facebook thematic pages have the potential to contribute to the flourishing of human political reflexivity just as they also hold the potential of intensifying narcissistic individualism. In Italy, for instance, Internet pages dedicated to a street or neighbourhood are reported to have enhanced the social link among its users<sup>13</sup>. The latter meet online but also offline and engage in discussions relative to their common relational good (their neighbourhood) that mobilise and exercise political reflexivity (New York Times: 2015).

Moreover, while social media can and often are used as passively as television or reading the *Sun*, I have personally found they provided interesting fora to exchange views on significant news and social and political developments. Particularly beneficial were the views of distant 'friends' whom I could not meet regularly and who would interpret the same piece of news from a very different perspective. The structure of FB allows for responses and responses to the responses, that is, a dialogue. Indeed, FB can provide a public agora that is severely missing from contemporary society. Contrary to a political club, however, it gathers 'friends' and 'friends' of 'friends' with differing political sensitivities. In many cases heterogeneous political views are conducive to unsocial behaviour (aka flaming), however, when the capabilities necessary to political reflexivity are properly employed (see section 5.1.3. supra) the resulting discussion can enrich, rather than narrow or frustrate, the views of all participants.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted a sociological contribution to political philosophy. It took stock of the normative problems arising from intensified social morphogenesis and addressed their political implications on the effective functioning of two human powers of reflexivity, social reflexivity and political reflexivity, that have been side-lined in the theories of justice of Rawls, Sen and Nussbaum, largely because these philosophical works presuppose morphostatic rather than morphogenic societies.

I have argued that both effective social and political reflexivity are unevenly distributed in contemporary societies. This uneven distribution matters all the more in the context of intensified morphogenesis, to the point of prompting the inclusion of social and political reflexivity, as well as the powers essential to their functioning, among other basic human capabilities.

Social reflexivity can be conceived as people's ability to reflect and act on the question: 'how should I make my way through the world?', a question that can be subdivided into 'what matters for me?' and 'how do I get it?' In times of intensified social morphogenesis, people able to reflect autonomously on the question 'how do I get it?' are at a competitive advantage,

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<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Pierpaolo Donati who pointed this important example to me.

though with a catch as this (sub) question alone does not guarantee that the concerns they pursued are really those that matter most for them.

People able to reflect (meta-reflexively) on the (sub) question ‘what matters most for me?’ are, on their side, penalised if their ultimate concerns are not compatible with the values implicit in careers within large corporations or starting a for-profit enterprise. This penalty stems less from morphogenesis unbound than from capitalism unbound. It is, however, all the more damaging to the prospects of a just society if we consider that meta-reflexivity is a good in itself and that meta-reflexives are those most inclined to challenge the status quo and proceed out of a refined sense of justice rather than self-serving interest. It is, however, those unable to initiate (fractured reflexivity) or conclude their social reflexions without the help of others (communicative reflexivity) who suffer most from the contextual discontinuity and increased variety brought by intensified morphogenesis.

Political reflexivity can be conceived of as people’s ability to reflect and act on the question: ‘how can we steer society together?’ This form of reflexivity does not operate without individual subjects holding internal conversations. The latter are oriented, however, towards the set of social relations to be steered rather than towards participants’ personal social trajectories. They must take into account the roles and resources of both Ego and the many Alters whose collaboration is sought. They thus suppose a certain maturity of the subject and, equally importantly, her ability to justify her projects vis-à-vis Alter. Contrary to ‘leadership’, political reflexivity is democratic as all participants are expected to be ready to revise their concerns and their beliefs in light of others’ arguments.

Social and political reflexivity are both personal emergent powers, and they can only be operational if subjects possess a range of distinct personal emergent powers. Although they are arguably subject to natural variations, these powers can be fostered through a number of organisations including families, schools, societies, work organisations and even social media.

If the theses above are accepted, it follows that in well-ordered societies, the state should encourage, transform, and when appropriate subsidise organisations that can foster social and political reflexivity rather than encourage, and sometimes fund, organisations that enjoin people to improve their employability, cast voting bulletins or respect leadership under its various guises.

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