

Introduction to Roberto Mangabeira Unger's "Politics: The Central Text"

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Roberto Mangabeira Unger's project of developing a "constructive social theory" is breathtaking.

He defends the "radical democratic project." But his definition of "radical project" is much broader and more inclusive than most other currently available definitions: "John Stuart Mill, Alexander Herzen, Karl Marx, P.J. Proudhon and Virginia Woolf were all champions of the cause."

He is influenced by Marxism, especially those Marxist theories which emphasized the autonomy of politics. But he is not a Marxist, because he refuses to entangle transformative aspirations in determinist assumptions.

He argues for "disentrenchment," "destabilization rights" and "negative capability." But he does not belong to the school of "deconstruction," because his own "constructive" theory recognizes that the degree of our freedom with regard to social structure is itself a variable up for grabs in history.

He is not an antiliberal, but he calls his theory "superliberal", in the sense of realizing the highest inspirations of liberalism by transforming its conventional institutional commitments.

How does he reach such an unusual intellectual standpoint? What is the practical relevance of his "constructive social theory"?

Without trying to do full justice to this most ambitious social-theoretical work of the late 20th century, my introduction seeks to highlight some salient features of Unger's social theory in the hope that it will motivate readers to study the text on their own.

Society as Artifact

Unger's social theory can be understood as an effort to carry the idea of "society as artifact" to the extreme. It means that "society is made and imagined, that it is a human artifact rather than the expression of an underlying natural order."

The idea of "society as artifact" has its origin in the European Enlightenment. But its full implication has only been worked out half-way. The road of taking the idea of "society as artifact" to the end has been blocked by the countertendency within modern social theories to develop a "science of history."

The intellectual reason for this countertendency is too complicated to be dealt with fully here. For now, we only need to remember that modern social thought was born in the background of the secularization of Christianity. The idea of "society as artifact" implies, at the minimum, that human history is not subject to divine providence. Rather, people can make and remake society at their will. There are many expressions of this idea of human agency in early modern social thought. One prominent example is the argument by Hobbes that "natural right" is not derived from "natural law." In this way, modern natural rights and social contract theories started to strip away the theological content of the medieval conception of natural law and sought to develop social theory based on the idea of "society as artifact." Another famous example is

Vico's argument that amid the "immense ocean of doubt" there is a "single tiny piece of earth" on which we can stand on firmly: this world of civil society has been made by man.

However, modern social thought failed to take the idea of "society as artifact" to the hilt. Some people believe the reason for this failure has to do with modern thinkers' overreaction to the demise of Christian eschatology. When modern thinkers abandoned the Christian eschatology, they still wanted to develop a "philosophy or science of history" as if they desired to show that modern thought can answer any question raised by Christianity. In a sense, modern social thought entered a pathway of "reoccupying" the positions of the medieval Christian schema of creation and eschatology. In this light, Tocqueville's view on democracy's irresistible march as a divine decree may be more than a simple metaphor.

Whether this explanation is historically true is a controversial topic which goes beyond the reach of this introduction. However, we can be sure that the search for the "law of history" had led modern social theory astray. What Unger calls "deep-structure social theory" is the star example of the effort of modern social thought to develop a "science of history", rich in lawlike explanations. Though Unger chose Marxism to exemplify "deep-structure social theory", he made it clear that Durkheim and Weber could also serve as good illustration. According to Unger, deep-structure social analysis is defined by its devotion to three recurrent theoretical moves. The first move is the attempt to distinguish in every historical circumstance a formative context, structure, or framework from the routine activities this context helps reproduce; The second move is the effort to represent the framework identified in a particular circumstance as an example of a repeatable and indivisible type of social organization such as capitalism; The third one is the appeal to the deep-seated constraints and the developmental laws that can generate a closed list or a compulsive sequence of repeatable and indivisible frameworks.

According to Unger, deep-structure social theory is in an advanced state of disintegration. Its commitment to the above-mentioned three moves is becoming increasingly discredited by historical and contemporary practical experience. One response to this discredited deep-structure social theory is "positivist social science", which denies all together the distinction between "formative context" and "routine activities" within the context. But Unger argues that positivist social science is no way out. For the rejection of the context--routine distinction leads social scientists to study routines of conflict and compromise within the existing institutional and imaginative context only. As long as this formative context is stable, its influence upon routine activities can be forgotten. The study of voting behavior of different groups in a stable social framework is an example in case. Thus, positivist social scientists miss the conflict over the formative context--the fundamental institutional and imaginative structure of social life. They end up taking the existing formative context for granted, seeing society through the eyes of a "resigned insider".

Caught between the pretense of "deep-structure social theory" to be "the science of history" on the one hand and the positivist social science on the other, modern social thought worked out both "partial dissolutions and partial reinstatements of the naturalistic view of society". Unger's theoretical work, in a nutshell, is an effort to carry the idea of "society as artifact" all the way through, to develop a radically antinaturalist, antinecessitarian social theory. In this sense, Unger's social theory is a double rebellion against classical social theory, with its functionalist and determinist heritage, as well as positivist social sciences.

Against Structure Fetishism and Institutional Fetishism

Unger rejects "deep-structure social theory" and "positivist social science", but he is not a nihilist. He preserves the first move of deep-structure theory -- the distinction between "formative contexts" and "formed routines" -- while rejecting its two other moves, i.e., the subsumption of the formative context under an indivisible and repeatable type and the search for general laws governing such types. This selective approach distinguishes Unger different not only from the conventional Marxists who wholeheartedly embrace deep-structure social theory as well as from the positivist social scientists who denies the context-routine distinction. It also distances him from some nihilist practice of postmodern "deconstruction"¹.

The distinctive conceptual instrument for Unger's theoretical innovation is his insight into "formative contexts" and the *degree* of their revisability or disentanglement vis-à-vis human freedom. As Perry Anderson well observed, the notion of "formative context" is "presented expressly as an alternative to the mode of production in the Marxist tradition, rejected as too rigid and replicable. A formative context is something looser and more singular--an accidental institutional and ideological cluster that regulates both normal expectations and routine conflicts over the distribution of key resources"². Though we can never escape completely the constraints of "formative context," the social formative context itself may be changed by human will to become more open to challenge and revision. Unger argues that this degree is itself a variable up for grabs. For example, hereditary castes in ancient India, corporately organized estates in feudal Europe, social classes today and "parties of opinions" tomorrow mark the presence of increasingly open or "plastic" forms of formative contexts. Unger develops the notion of "negative capability" to signify the relative degree of openness and disentanglement of formative context.

The term "negative capability" originally comes from a letter of John Keats, dated December 28, 1817. Unger's usage generalizes and transforms the poet's meaning. It denotes the active human will and capacity to transcend every given formative context by negating it in thought and deed. To increase "negative capability" amounts to creating institutional contexts more open to their own revision--so diminishing the gap between structure and routine, revolution and piecemeal reform, and social movement and institutionalization. Unger values the strengthening of negative capability both as an end in itself--a dimension of human freedom--and as a means to the achievement of other goals. For he holds there to be a significant causal connection between the disentanglement of formative contexts as their success at advancing along the path of possible overlap between the conditions of material progress and the conditions of individual emancipation.

Therefore, Unger's distinctive theoretical standpoint is characterized by two-sided view of

¹ Richard Rorty nicely captures Unger's theoretical position in his discussion of Castoriadis and Unger: "Castoriadis and Unger are willing to work with, rather than deconstruct, the notions that already mean something to people presently alive-while nonetheless not giving the last word to the historical world they inhabit." See Richard Rorty, "Unger, Castoriadis, and the Romance of a National Future," *Critique and Construction: A Symposium on Roberto Unger's Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

² Perry Anderson, "Roberto Unger and the Politics of Empowerment", in his *A Zone of Engagement*, p.135, Verso, 1992.

formative contexts: while recognizing the reality of constraints of formative context, he deprives these contexts of their aura of higher necessity or authority. He emphasizes that "to understand society deeply" requires us to "see the settled from the angle of the unsettled". This perspective gives rise to the critique of structure fetishism and institutional fetishism.

According to Unger, structure fetishism denies that we can change the quality of formative context. Here, the quality of a formative context is characterized by its degree of openness to its own revision. Structure fetishism remains committed to the mistaken thesis that "a structure is a structure". A structure fetishist may be a skeptical postmodern relativist, who gives up on universal standards of value and insight. Alternatively, a structure fetishist may be a nihilist, who's only task is to deconstruct everything all the time. However, both theoretical positions are pseudo-radical, because they end up subscribing to the view that since everything is relative, all we can do is to choose a social context and play by its rules, rather than changing its quality and character. Unger's thesis about the relative degree of revisability or disentanglement of formative contexts provides a solution to this dilemma of postmodernism-turned conservatism. The way out here is to recognize that when we lose faith in an absolute standard of value, we do not have to surrender to the existing institutional and imaginative order. We can still struggle to make institutional and discursive contexts that better respect an spiritual nature, that is to say our nature as context-transcending agent.

You may wonder about the metric of this "degree of openness and revisability". It is measured by the distance between structure-reproducing routine activities and structure-challenging transformative activities. The less this distance, the more open and revisable a formative context is. When "empowered democracy"--Unger's preferred name for his radical project-- enters into more and more spheres of social life, our sense of relative "degree" of openness and revisability of the social context will be formed and reformed.

Here, we touch upon a crucial point of Unger's social theory. Unlike most other contemporary social theorists and liberal political philosophers, Unger does not have the obsession of searching for "neutrality". For him, the mirage of neutrality gets in the way of the more important objective of searching for arrangements that are friendly to a practical experimentalism of initiatives and a real diversity of experiences. We cannot distinguish within human nature attributes that are permanent and universal from others that vary with social circumstance. Therefore, it will be futile to try to present an institutional order as if it is the expression of a system of rights supposedly neutral among clashing interests and conflicting visions of the good³. What really matters is to enlarge our capabilities of diminishing the distance between the reproductions and revisions of our practice and arrangements. We thus help fulfill the requirements for those forms of material progress that can coexist with the liberation of individuals from rigid social divisions and hierarchies.

If by overcoming "structure fetishism" Unger urges us to look for more open social context in an abstract level, then, his critique of "institutional fetishism" works in the same direction in a

³ In his comparative study of Rawls, Habermas and Unger, Geoffrey Hawthorn points out that the search for neutrality looms large in both Rawls and Habermas. See Geoffrey Hawthorn, "Practical Reason and Social Democracy: reflections on Unger's Passion and Politics", in Robin Lovin and Michael Perry, ed., Critique and Construction: A Symposium on Roberto Unger's Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

more concrete way. Institutional fetishism, for Unger, is "the imagined identification of highly detailed and largely accidental institutional arrangements with abstract institutional concepts like the concept of a representative democracy, a market economy, or a free civil society. The institutional fetishist may be the classical liberal who identifies representative democracy and the market economy with a makeshift set of governmental and economic arrangements that happen to have triumphed in the course of modern European history. He may also be the hard-core Marxist who treats these same arrangements as an indispensable stage toward a future, regenerate order whose content he sees as both preestablished and resistant to credible description. He may even be the positivist social scientist or the hard-nosed political or economic manager who accepts current practices as an uncontroversial framework for interest accommodation and problem solving"⁴.

One prominent example of institutional fetishism is what Unger describes as "the mythical history of democracy": according to this mythical viewpoint, "the trials and errors of modern political experience, and the undoubted failure of many proposed alternatives, have confirmed that the emergent institutional solutions were much more than flukes."⁵

Contrary to this "mythical history", Unger insists that we see how accidental are the institutional arrangements of contemporary representative democracies and industrial economies. For example, the liberal constitutionalism of the 18th century sought to grant rule to a cadre of politically educated and financially secure notables, fully able to safeguard the politics they governed against mob rule and seduction by demagogues. Thus, this early liberal constitutionalism by no means should be viewed as the unique embodiment of the real meaning of democracy. Rather, it represented a historical legacy in the modern constitutionalism that favors deadlock and fragmented power. Both the American presidential regime of "checks and balances" and the need to base political power upon broad consensus within the political class in parliamentary regimes exemplify this legacy. In contrast, Unger propose a new constitutional program, i.e., a constitutional style that accelerates democratic experimentalism and breaks away from eighteenth-century constitutionalism by combining a strong plebiscitarian element with a broad channels for the political representation of society. In fact, the "dualistic constitutions" in the interwar period(1918-1939) and the Portuguese Constitution of 1978, already hinted at the possibility of constitutional arrangement more open to democratic participation.

Another prominent example of institutional fetishism is what Unger described as "the mythical history of private rights". According to this mythical history, the current Western legal system of property and contract embodies the built-in logic of market economy. Contrary to this view, Unger insists that a market economy has no unique set of built-in legal-institutional arrangements. The current Western system of property and contract is less a reflection of deep logic of social and economic necessity than a contingent outcome of political struggles. It could have assumed other institutional forms. The deviant cases and tendencies within the current law of property and contract, such as "reliance interests" not dependent on fully articulated will of contracting partners, already suggest elements of an alternative legal-institutional ordering of the

⁴ Roberto Mangaberira Unger, *Social Theory: Its Situation and its Task*, pp. 200-201., Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁵ Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False Necessity*, p.211, cambridge University Press, 1987.

market economy. A major part of Unger's constructive social theory is devoted to develop alternative systems of property and contract by redirecting and restructuring the deviant tendencies within the current private rights system.

We should notice that Unger's critique of "mythical history of democracy" and "mythical history of private rights" is only a part of his analysis of institutional genealogy--"the genesis of formative contexts", which includes genesis of the work-organization complex,private-rights complex and governmental-organization complex, as well as the genesis of communist formative contexts in the Soviet Union and China. In each case, Unger "makes familiar strange" , that is, he shows how accidental these institutions were historically generated and evolved, and they looks "natural" in retrospect only to the uncritical mind will .

The overall theme of Unger's genealogy is the falsehood of institutional fetishism: to show that existing institutional arrangement is only a subset of much larger possibilities. Unger emphasizes this in his treatment of "petty commodity production": the economy of small-scale, relatively equal producers, operating through a mix of cooperative organization and independent activity. Both the positive social sciences and Marxism consider "petty commodity production" doomed to failure, because it precludes the economies of scale in production and exchange vital to technological dynamism. Unger sees "petty commodity production" differently. He neither accepts nor rejects it in its unreconstructed form. Rather, he tries to "rescue" petty commodity production by inventing new economic and political institutions. For example, we can satisfy the imperative of economies of scale by finding a "method of market organization that makes it possible to pool capital, technologies and manpower without distributing permanent and unqualified rights to their use". This solution amounts to the new regime of property rights in Unger's programmatic proposal, discussed below. We can invent new institutions rescuing from the old dream of yeoman democracy and small scale independent property the kernel of a practical alternative, open to economic and technological dynamics as well as to democratic ideals. Indeed, one of the most fascinating thing about Unger's discussion of the new forms of a market economy is connections he establishes between these institutional problems and the emerging advanced practices of vangardist production today. Here again, Unger helps us realize that an inherited and established arrangements do not reflect the higher order of "natural law of human history". We can transform them if we want to. By doing so, we can remain faithful to the progressive impulse of democratic experimentalism.

Programmatic Alternatives Today

Unger's critique of structure fetishism and institutional fetishism is closely related to his programmatic arguments, a strong bond unites the explanatory and the programmatic sides of Unger's "constructive social theory". As Unger puts it, the programmatic arguments of his social theory reinterpret and generalize the liberal and leftist endeavor by freeing it from unjustifiably restrictive assumptions about the practical institutional forms that representative democracies, market economies, and the social control of economic accumulation can and should assume.

In today's world, Unger's programmatic arguments are urgently needed. We are witnessing the pseudoscientific thesis of convergence gaining intellectual respectability worldwide. This convergence thesis stipulates that market economies and representative democracies in the world are converging to the single best set of institutions--some variation on

the established arrangements of the North-Atlantic democracies. The convergence thesis takes the form of "neoliberalism" in the third world and the former Soviet-bloc countries. It is sometimes also called the "Washington consensus." Carried to the hilt, this convergence thesis is "institutional fetishist" to its core. It even downplays the diversity of institutional arrangements in the West. As it hails, for example, the fading of differences among the American, German, and Japanese styles of corporate governance, it fails to identify, or to sympathize with, other differences that are in the process of appearing.

In its most abstract and universal form, neoliberalism or "the Washington consensus" is the program committed to orthodox macroeconomic stabilization, especially through fiscal balance, achieved by containment of public spending and increases in the tax take; to liberalization by integrating into the world trading system and its established rules; to privatization, understood both more narrowly as the withdrawal of government from production and more generally as the adoption of standard Western private law; and to the deployment of "social safety-nets" designed to counteract the unequalizing effects of the other planks in the orthodox platform.

What is striking about this dominant version of neoliberalism is that it incorporates the conventional social-democratic program of social insurance as its integral part. This fact shows clearly that the social-democratic ideal has long lost its radical transformative inspiration. Instead of challenging and reforming the institutions of the existing forms of market economy and representative democracy, the social-democratic program merely seeks to moderate the social consequences of structural divisions and hierarchies it has come to accept. Conservative social democracy defends the relative privileged position of laborforce in the capital-intensive, mass-production industries, at the social cost of exclusion of large amount of outsiders in the disfavored, disorganized "second economy". If the division between insiders and outsiders is already a formidable problem in European social democracies, its proportions and effects became far more daunting in countries like Brazil and Mexico. Compensatory social policy is unable to make up for extreme inequalities, rooted in stark divisions between economic vanguard and economic rearguard.

Because neoliberalism incorporates the social-democratic program, Unger's programmatic alternative to neoliberalism is at the same time an institutional alternative to social democracy. It seeks to overcome economic and social dualism in both rich and poor countries by making access to capital more open and decentralized and by creating political institutions favorable to the repeated practice of structural reform.

The main reason for the existence of economic and social dualism--the division between insiders and outsiders of the advanced industrial sectors in both rich and poor countries--is the privilege current arrangements affords to the insiders. However substantial the interests that pit the workers in advanced sector against their bosses may be, they nevertheless share common interests against the interest of the disorganized working people(outsiders) at large. Conservative social democracy defines itself today largely by contrast to a managerial program of industrial renovation. This program wants to strengthen the freedom of capital to move where it will and to encourage cooperation at the workplace. It manages the tensions between these two commitments by devices such as the segmentation of the laborforce. Conservative social democracy responds by seeking to restrain the hypermobility of capital through something close to job tenure and to multiply the recognition of stakes and stakeholders(workers, consumers, and local communities as well as shareholders) in productive enterprises. The result, however, is to aggravate the

complaints of paralysis and conflict that helped inspire managerial program while accepting and reinforcing the established divisions between insiders and outsiders. The intuitive core of Unger's program of economic reconstruction lies in the attempt to replace the demand for job tenure by an enhancement of the resources and capabilities of the individual workers-citizen and to substitute a radical diversification of forms of decentralized access to productive opportunity for the stakeholder democracy of the conservative social democracy. The first plank in this platform leads to the generalization of social inheritance through social-endowment accounts available to everyone. The second, to the disaggregation of traditional private property and the recombination and reallocation of its constitutive elements. Both planks, in turn, need sustenance from institutions and practices favoring the acceleration of democratic politics and the independent self-organizations of civil society. The traditional devices of liberal constitutionalism are inadequate to the former just as the familiar repertory of contract and corporate law is insufficient to the latter.

Unger draws out the affirmative democratizing potential in that most characteristic theme of modern legal analysis: the understanding of property as a "bundle of rights". He proposes to dismember the traditional property right and to vesting its component faculties in different kinds of rightholders. Among these successors to the traditional owner will be firms, workers, national and local government, intermediate organization, and social funds". He opposes the simple reversion of conventional private ownership to state ownership and workers cooperative, because this reversion merely redefines the identity of the owner without changing the nature of "consolidated" property. He argues for a three-tier property structure: the central capital fund, established by the central democratic government for ultimate decision about social control of economic accumulation; the various investment funds, established by the central capital fund for capital allotment on competitive basis; and the primary capital takers, made up of the teams of workers, engineers and entrepreneurs. Underlying this scheme is a vision of the conditions of economic growth and of the terms on which economic growth can be reconciled with democratic experimentalism. In this vision, the central problem of material progress is the relation between cooperation and innovation. Each needs the other. Each threatens the other. Our work is to diminish their mutual interference.

We can appreciate Unger's ideas about "disintegrated property" from the standpoints of both the radical-leftist tradition and the liberal tradition. From the perspective of radical-leftist, Unger's program is related to Proudhon's petit--bourgeois radicalism. Proudhon was a forerunner of the theory of property as a "bundle of rights" and his classic work *What is Property?* provides a thorough critique of "consolidated property." It is important to realize that, in its economic aspects, Unger's program amounts, in a sense, to a synthesis of Proudhonian, Lassallean and Marxist thinking. From the petit bourgeois radicalism of Proudhon and Lassalle, he absorbs the importance of the idea of economic decentralization both for economic efficiency and political democracy; from the Marxist critique of petit bourgeois socialism, he comes to realize the inherent dilemmas and instability of petty commodity production. This realization stimulates Unger to reverse the petit bourgeois radicalism's traditional aversion to national politics. He develops proposals for decentralized cooperation between government and business. he connects these proposals with reforms designed to accelerate democratic politics through the rapid resolution of impasse among branches of governments to heighten and sustain the level of institutionalized political mobilization and to deepen and generalize the independent self-

organization of civil society.

From the perspective of liberal tradition, Unger's program represents an effort to take both economic decentralization and individual freedom one step further. In today's organized, corporatist "capitalist" economies, economic decentralization and innovation has been sacrificed to the protection of the vested interests of capital and labor in advanced industrial sectors. Unger's program remains more true to the liberal spirit of decentralized coordination and innovation than does the current practice of neoliberalism and social democracy. Conventional institutionally conservative liberalism takes absolute, unified property right as the model for all other rights. By replacing absolute, consolidated property rights with a scheme for reallocation of the disintegrated elements of property among different types of rightholders,, Unger both rejects and enriches the liberal tradition. He argues that the Left should reinterpret rather than abandon the language of rights. He goes beyond both Proudhon-Lassall- Marx and the liberal tradition by reconstructing a system of rights, which includes four types of rights: immunity rights, market rights, destabilization rights and solidarity rights. In this sense, we can understand why Unger sometimes names his program "superliberal" rather than antiliberal. Any reader of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography would recognize that "superliberalism"--realizing liberal aspirations by changing liberal institutional forms--recalls Mill's new thinking after his mental crisis. Unger forces us to confront the difference between a liberalism that, through its emphasis upon cumulative and motivated institutional tinkering, keeps democratic experimentalism, and one that remains satisfied with tax-and-transfer style redistribution within an order it leaves unchallenged.

Thus, we can view Unger's programmatic alternative as a synthesis of the radical-leftist tradition and the liberal tradition. This synthesis bears in at least three ways on the future of democratic project.

First, the synthesis of Proudhon-Lazily-Marx and the liberal tradition gives promise for developing a theory of "empowered democracy"⁶. It represents an economic and political alternative to neoliberalism and social democracy, with great appeal for a wide range of liberals, leftists and modernist visionaries. In our post-Cold War era, it reopens the horizon of alternative futures. It forcefully rescues us from the depressing sense that the history is ended.

Second, this synthesis promises a reorientation of the strategy of social transformation of the Left in the West and the Third World. One embarrassment of the Marxist-inspired Left is the historical fact that the working class has never become a majority of the population. Fear of the left and resentment at the organized working class have often divided the "middle classes" from industrial and agrarian workers and turned them toward the right. Unger's synthesis of Proudhon-Lazily-Marx and the liberal tradition may prove to be a useful mobilizational tool for a more inclusive alliance for radical democratic transformation.

Third, this synthesis gives a new meaning to the idea "society as artifact". Unger's social theory represents an effort to theorize "jumbled experience". He draws upon, and attempts to encourage, forms of practical and passionate human connection that recombine activities traditionally associated with different nations, classes, communities and roles. Through this worldwide recombination and innovation, our collective sense of the possible has broadened.

⁶ Unger's forthcoming book Democratic Experimentalism develops the theory of empowered democracy in detail.

This enlarged sensibility in turn helps sustain the institutional arrangement in Unger's program of empowered democracy. Thus, Unger's institutional program and personalist program reinforce each other.

This book is a selection from Unger's three-volume Politics, a Work in Constructive Social Theory. The first part of the selection draws from the first volume of Politics, which spells out the basics of Unger's "radically antinaturalist social theory" and shows how the criticism of classical social theories and contemporary social sciences generates materials for an alternative practice of social understanding. The second part of the selection is from the second and the third volumes of Politics, which work out, through wide-ranging historical examples, the major explanatory themes of Politics: the relation between the openness and flexibility of social formative contexts and the development of our collective capacity to produce or to destroy. The third part of the selection takes material from the second volume of Politics, which presents Unger's programmatic proposals to reconstruct our economic and political institutions. The last part of the selection is from the first and the second volumes, which means to illustrate how Unger's institutional program and "cultural-revolutionary" personalist program reinforce with each other.

Several reviewers of Unger's work, Richard Rorty among them, have emphasized that Unger is a Brazilian citizen. In Rorty's words, "Remember that Unger -- though he has put in many years of hard work here in North America, changing the curricula of many of our law schools and the self-image of many of our lawyers-- is a man whose mind is elsewhere. For him, none of the rich North Atlantic democracies are home. Rather, they are places where he has gathered some lessons, warnings, and encouragements." Reading this sentence, I cannot help recalling Max Weber's remark that inspiration for many great cultural accomplishments has often come from the periphery of a civilization.

In Unger's description of Brazil of 1985, we find him saying "Indefinition was the common denominator of all these features of the life of the state... All this indefinition could be taken as both the voice of transformative opportunity and the sign of a paralyzing confusion." These words could equally describe today's world as a whole. I see today's China as Unger does Brazil. Is Perry Anderson right in seeing in Unger a "philosophical mind out of the Third World turning the tables, to become synoptist and seer of the First"?⁷ May the hope of empowered democracy for mankind reside in the large, but marginalized, countries like Brazil, China, India and Russia? We all are living in a time when a great chance of democratic transformation of all aspects of social life coexists with great confusion in our explanatory and programmatic ideas. It was in this condition of need, confusion and hope that I first came to read Unger's work three years ago. I find his social theory so inspiring that I feel as though it were for me he had written. It is my hope that my feeling will be shared by you, the reader, after you put down this volume of selections from Unger's Politics.

⁷ Perry Anderson, op.cit, p.148.