

# SOCIOLOGY IN SWITZERLAND

## Political Correctness: mental disorder, childish fad or advance of human civilization?

**Hans Geser**

January 2008, Release 1.0

*"In the present age - which has been described as "destitute of faith, but terrified at scepticism - in which people feel sure, not so much that their opinions are true, as that they should not know what to do without them—the claims of an opinion to be protected from public attack are rested not so much on its truth, as on its importance to society." (John Stuart Mill 1869).*

### **Content:**

1. An oxymoronic concept? .....	2
2. The longing for moral community .....	4
3. The normative regulation of speech .....	9
4. The relapse to simplistic binary categorizations.....	15
5. The paradoxes and pitfalls of "paternalistic cultural relativism".....	20
6. From rights of action to rights of protection .....	23
7. The intropunitive "psychological warfare" against White Males and Western culture .....	25
8. The ianus-faced implications of informality: extended courtesy or "soft totalitarianism"? ..	30
9. Conclusions.....	33
References .....	39

---

### *Bibliographic Citation:*

**Geser Hans:** Political Correctness: mental disorder, childish fad or advance of human civilization? In: Sociology in Switzerland. Online Publikationen. Zuerich, Jan. 2008 .<http://geser.net/pc.pdf>

---

Prof. Dr. Hans Geser  
[h@geser.net](mailto:h@geser.net)  
<http://geser.net>

Soziologisches Institut der Universität Zürich  
Andreasstrasse 15, 8050 Zürich (Schweiz)  
Tel: ++41 44 635 2310

## 1. An oxymoronic concept?

Nobody will doubt that the term "legal correctness" is an intrinsically logical, self-explaining expression, because the law provides precise consensual standards against which the conformity or deviance of any concrete behavior can be unambiguously assessed.

By contrast, "political correctness" sounds like an oxymoron insofar as political issues have the intrinsic quality of being a topic of controversial discussion. This controversy only ends when authoritative decisions have been taken which then are fixed on the level of binding laws.

In fact, "political correctness" implies the existence of a level of (meta-)political standards which are (or should be) exempt from controversy and power play without being formalized on the legal level: informal moral standards which are thought to be so basic, consensual and enduring that they effectively limit not only the space of political law-making, but even the more fundamental space of political discourse that is allowed to take place, the topics permitted or prohibited to be addressed - and especially: the wordings that should and should not be used.

Thus, PC fits into the tradition of antiliberal collectivistic political thinking which assumes that the most fundamental aim of politics is to conform to unchangeable highest principles which can only be *cognized as objective, invariant entities*, not *created* by arbitrary decision and *manipulated* at free human will.

This is the certainly the view in Plato's republic where the philosopher kings have the duty to enforce the realization of the overarching, objectively given "Summum Bonum" against all particularistic interests; and it is inherent in Marxist communism where the role of party elites consists in following a policy that conforms to "historical necessities" to be assessed by scientific analysis, not by power struggles within pluralistic systems of competing interest groups and political parties. Leninists and Stalinists have used the term to denote conformity to the party line, and in Maoism, it meant conformity with the ideas propagated in the "Little Red Book".

These examples show that the term "correctness" implies a strong role for educated elites because highly developed cognitive faculties are the prerequisite for recognizing what is right or wrong. While Plato proposed an elite of "Philosopher Kings" who base their outstanding status on a special regime of socialization, Leninism gave room for high-standing experts in communist ideology. In a similar vein, PC provides a *raison d'être* for academic elites eager to expand their status beyond their narrow scientific specialties: by becoming authoritative experts in knowing how societal minorities shall be treated, particularly on the linguistic level (where their own academic competences are (presumably) most pronounced).

In Western countries, such elitist-collectivistic views occupy a much legitimate and highly informal status, because they are always contested by democratic values stressing individual freedom of expression and bottom up decision making without antecedent legal restrictions. At best, it can be applied to the most basic and consensual constitutional premises on which a political order is erected.

There is wide agreement that the term "political correctness" originated already in 1793 when a U.S. Supreme Court justice wrote in an opinion statement, referring to the case *Chisholm v. Georgia*:

*"The states, rather than the People, for whose sakes the States exist, are frequently the objects which attract and arrest our principal attention....Sentiments and expressions of this inaccurate kind*

*prevail in our common, even in our convivial, language. Is a toast asked? 'The United States,' instead of the 'People of the United States,' is the toast given. This is not politically correct."*

In this formulation the notion that Government has power over the citizens is rejected as a misconception, because it is in fact the power of the citizenry which constitutes the Government, so that raising a toast "to The United States" is in contradiction to the most fundamental premises of the American constitution.

The word was then used in the 1960ies to describe people who altered their manners and beliefs to fit the prevailing (leftist) political movements.

*"Politically correct" described the self-righteous, non-smoking, ecologically sensitive, vegetarian, feminist, non-racist, multicultural, Birkenstock-wearing, anti-capitalist beneficiaries of capitalism--faculty as well as students--who paraded their outworn 1960s radicalism in the classroom and in their social life." (Kimball 2003)*

In its present form PC emerged on American campuses during the eighties and has begun to penetrate nonacademic society since the early nineties.

From the beginning, it became sociologically relevant on informal levels of interpersonal behavior as well as on formal levels of organizational regulations: e. g. in rules of educational institutions aiming to protect minorities by policing interpersonal conduct and "offensive" language, enacting programs of affirmative action or by opening curricula to other texts than those written by Dead White European Men (DWEM).

The most widespread feature of PC is the regulation of speech, a "persistent resource to euphemism and circumlocution" (Fankboner 2004) by banning presumably "offensive" words and verbal expressions in the public media as well as public institutions like schools, clinics or administrative agencies.

*"Doubters who thought PC was a camp phenomenon or a passing fad need only read the New Yorker review of the movie What's Eating Gilbert Grape, in which the mentally retarded brother is described as 'mentally challenged.' Evasive, patronizing and inelegant, tortured circumlocutions like this have crept into the writing of discriminating writers who would have considered them ludicrous a few years ago." (Fankboner 2004).*

Besides that, the term refers to many leftist initiatives

*"concerning changes to the literary canon taught at universities, the teaching of postmodern and critical literary theory and cultural studies, affirmative action for racial and ethnic minorities as well as women, sexual assault and harassment and regulations regarding campus 'hate speech'" (Sparrow 2002).*

Since the 80ies, the term has been increasingly used by conservatives as a hate word to denounce certain politics of the left aiming to protect women, nonwhite races, homosexuals and other minorities from "offensive" speech and from various practices of social discrimination.

Every sociological treatment of the subject has to start from the fact that the term PC is central to a controversial discourse of "cultural politics" *"focused upon representation, values and identities"* (Fairclough 2003:17).

In particular, it has to be asked whether it really refers to a an objectively homogeneous norm system or ideology, or just to a homogenizing label constructed by conservatives to characterize "leftists" with rather diversified views (Fairclough 2003: 17)

Unquestionably, PC causes whole spheres of political and societal problems to be withdrawn from public discourse and political deliberation. Thus, uncontrolled immigration from exotic countries can go on almost unnoticed, the criminal behavior within protected minorities remains under cover, and climate change is discussed without reference to one of its outstanding causes: the explosive growth of human population.

As most politics is local and national, it is evident that the substantive content of "political correctness" differs between countries and geographic regions.

In the *United States*, the emphasis is certainly on the notion that there are a number of neglected, discriminated and oppressed groups in society (women, blacks, homosexuals, Moslems etc) which should be protected from offensive language and action exerted by the reigning majority (= White Heterosexual Christian Males).

In *Germany*, for comparison, it is deeply shaped by considerations of "historical correctness": extremely rigid norms related to the interpretation of the Hitler Area, the Holocaust and the Second World War. For instance, the Teutonic brand of PC demands that the German people is still obliged to feel a collective guilt for wrongdoings of the past, that Wehrmacht officers and soldiers are only seen as culprits, never as victims, while to exact opposite applies to Jews, Gypsies and other minorities subject to systematic persecution.

More than that: historical correctness demands that the misdeeds of Nazis are considered as so singular and outstanding in their severity, that they cannot be compared with any other organized crimes in human history: not even with the even more extensive mass murders organized by Stalin or Mao Tse-tung.

Ironically, PC thus helps to perpetuate the self-attribution that Germans are singular and incomparable to any other national population. As they have seen themselves as a distinct military power under Prussian rule or as the "chosen people" destined for pan European rule under the Nazis, they derive their special particularity now from the amount and quality of collective guilt they have accumulated.

## 2. The longing for moral community

Since its beginnings in the 19eighties, PC aims to permeate all sectors of society with a homogeneous and consensual set of moral norms and behavioral standards.

Even economic behavior should no longer be governed by self-interested utilitarian considerations, but subordinated to strict moral prescriptions

*"I remember the phrase 'politically correct' from about 1983, specifically in reference to shopping at a particular coffee shop rather than another near the campus of Yale University. At the time, 'politically correct' was used to indicate that our actions, sometimes insignificant ones, can have an impact on people's lives. Although the coffee was the same, one coffee shop treated its employees better than the other, and so arose the notion that spending money in that shop was healthier for the community." (Hellman 2003).*

In everything they do, PC zealots are convinced to be "right", even if their attitude is not shared by a majority of others.

Without relying explicitly on any religious authority, they maintain a belief in unconditional truth that goes along with intolerance and disdain against dissidents:

*"The Politically Correct are self-righteous in a quasi-religious spirit. A sort of vanguard of enlightenment, they do not accept the judgment of voters (unenlightened) or consumers (selfish) and are prepared to impose reforms against the public will" (Coleman 2000),*

As a consequence, they cannot accept principles of democratic voting or consumer autonomy, because this would imply that also immoral (or politically incorrect) decisions and choices have to be accepted.

In most cases, PC adherents cannot (or are not willing to) see that their views are highly dependent on specific "Zeitgeist" factors that are only affecting specific regions and population segments, have emerged quite recently and may soon pass away. Instead, they claim to "be right" in an absolute sense, irrespective of specific historical periods or other human cultures.

This lack of a relativizing historical perspective is vividly manifested in the endeavor of feminists to accomplish a new translation of the bible in "just language" - thus invalidating all prior translations as flawed products of unenlightened patriarchal stages (Leicht 2006). The success of such translations depends on the institutional context of the churches. While the Catholic Church is certainly able to exert sufficient resistance, some protestant churches seem to be quite "soft targets" that are easily subverted by crusading "antisexist" or "antiracist" groups.

Apart from the Bible, there is a widespread tendency to rewrite classical literature, especially books dedicated to children. For instance, the widely read books of Enid Blyton have been cleaned from words that have become discredited as "sexist" or "racist" since the date of their publication.

PC can evidently be seen as a regressive movement aiming to retransform modern human society into a consensual community based on a homogeneous norm culture enforced by informal collective controls. It is an endeavor to counteract the trend toward functional differentiation by embedding all roles and institution into an overarching system of homogeneous norms:

*"It wants political direction of all departments from, say, children's fiction to judicial judgments. No profession is exempt. All must meet a political test - of correct thinking and progress. Lawyers, accountants, doctors, scientists, novelists, journalists and businessmen must all pass it." (Coleman 2000).*

It may even be interpreted as a more sophisticated soft version of the Islamist "Talibanization" affecting some backward Middle East countries: aiming to fill the moral vacuum of a secularized society too much dedicated to economic and scientific values that do not provide ethical guidance.

From the perspective of most current macrosociological theories of modernization and societal evolution, such developments seem to be strange, atypical aberrations: backward regressions into former epochs rather than the foreshadowing of a promising future.

From Adam Smith and Herbert Spencer to Durkheim, Toennies, Parsons/Smelser, Lenski and Luhmann, there is a consistent line of theorizing that emphasizes the contrast between communalistic preindustrial society based homogeneity and mechanical solidarity, and modern societies integrated by complex interdependencies between specialized roles, organizations and institutional orders. Niklas Luhmann is certainly extreme in viewing modern society completely under the perspective of "functional differentiation": as an acentric system in which the different institutional spheres maintain their solipsistic system-related value systems and concepts of progress, justice, perfection and truth. As a consequence, human individuals also become internally fragmented because they are forced to maintain different system-related personal roles and identities - and to coordinate them without being able to integrate them in an overarching whole.

It has been argued with good theoretical and empirical reasons that such views not only neglect the invariant needs of individuals for personal unity and integral social belongingness, but also ignore that modern societies are not only exceptional in their structural complexities, but also historically unique in their potentials for (and endeavors toward) widespread (political, legal, cultural and moral) homogenization.

As natural science (emerging since the 16<sup>th</sup> century) was heavily dogmatic from its beginning by propagating to possess the single absolute truth (or at least the single valid method to produce secure knowledge), the enlightenment was the breeding ground for militantly implemented conformism in the sphere of political values and ethical norms. Based on a non-historical concept of "human nature" and "human reason", such standards of "virtue" were propagated to be universally valid across all human cultures and future epochs: thus legitimizing the exercise of authoritarian power for resocializing citizens and securing their extensive geographical implementation.

A kind of "liberal totalitarianism" was implicit in the French revolution: exemplified by Robespierre and St. Just who saw the enlightenment as a project for enforcing homogeneous ethical standards on society in totalitarian ways: based on a dogmatic belief in a universal "human reason" that supersedes and neutralizes all traditional cultural values and norms. The same spirit has later given rise to later authoritarian governmental regimes (Napoleonism, Kemalism etc.) as well as to informal manifestations of "democratic despotism" (diagnosed by Tocqueville in the United States).

Since the French revolution, such conformity rules have shifted to highly impersonalized constructs like the "constitution" or the "nation": as well as to various collectivist ideologies (like, Fascism, Bolshevism, Maoism) that tried to reconstruct a far-reaching societal unity by means of governmental coercion.

As a genuinely endogenous product of Western societies, Marxism was particularly successful in mobilizing the participation of educational elites for developing ideologies that aimed at changing the existing societal order.

While the major thrust of Marxism was "extraverted" in the sense of striving for political power in order to overthrow the reigning economic and political structures, a small, but consistent subbranch followed more "introverted" efforts to effect changes on the cultural plane or the individual level. Thus, *Georg Lukacs* argued that a revolutionary change of society presupposes a cultural revolution: a worldwide overturn of existing value structures. And *Antonio Gramsci* maintained that the proletariat can only reach dominance by first gaining a "cultural hegemony" based on a newly created "communist man". The role of intellectuals was to work for this far-reaching goal by means of a "long march through society's institutions": including the government and judiciary as well as the military, media and schools.

Doris Lessing was among the first to note the intrinsic similarities between PC zealots and Marxists in their tendency to impose their views in an authoritarian fashion

*"Political correctness is the natural continuum from the party line. What we are seeing once again is a self-appointed group of vigilantes imposing their views on others. It is a heritage of communism, but they don't seem to see this."*<sup>1</sup>

In fact, there are good reasons to see Political Correctness as the correlate of an "introverted turn" leftist Western elites have taken for various reasons in the course of the last forty years.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quote source: About.com Women's History  
[http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/doris\\_lessing.htm](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/doris_lessing.htm)

When realizing the impossibility of fundamental political and economic overturns, the New Left movements arising in the late 60ies have soon lost their revolutionary impetus and become integrated into societal institutions - without basically changing their basic values and goals. As a consequence, they substituted subversive revolutionary action by a more peaceful strategy of long-term "undercover subversion": by taking formal positions which provided them with the option to change the existing institutions very gradually from within.

*"To an extent, the current interest in the politics of language and culture is the result of the retreat of the left into the academy and bureaucracy, where it has been unable to exercise much influence over more traditional political matters. Unable or unwilling to participate in any mass based movement which might transform the political and economic structure of society, the left has been concerned with new speech codes or (more creditably) legislation outlawing discrimination. The irrelevance of these initiatives to the problems of low wages, unemployment, the rising cost of living and homelessness facing members of the very groups they are intended to serve goes a long way towards explaining the strength of the backlash against political correctness even amongst members of these groups." (Sparrow 2002).*

More recently, the end of the Cold War as well as the rise of Neoliberalism have reinforced such tendencies to shift emphasis from class politics and political struggles to more subtle, longer-term endeavors directed toward change on the level of moral values, cultural patterns, institutional structures and individual behavior.

*"...the Politically Correct are less interested in business and the economy than in the culture and the guiding ideas of a society. They know that they will never win the economic argument in open debate. Indeed they have lost it. The Market has triumphed over the Plan. So they will leave the economy to business provided they control the culture, the guiding ideas of the society."*

*"You create the wealth, they said to business, we will change the national identity. You can have economic rationalism. We will re-brand society. You deliver prosperity. Political Correctness will be the official ideology....." (Coleman 2000).*

Thus, schools, churches, public administrations, enterprises and even military organizations have become impregnated with liberal values and have been set under constant pressures of liberal reform. For instance, they all had to assimilate new norms related to gender equality, environmental protection and minority-related affirmative action.

*"Instead of complaining about institutions and denouncing government, they decided to infiltrate institutions and work with government. ... Whereas student demonstrators of the sixties threw their bodies against the bureaucratic structures of modern life, women activists later created their own bureaucracies." (Diggins 1992: 25).*

Evidently, PC is a logical correlate of basic changes in the supporter base of the political left: the demise of unionized industrial workers on the one hand and the growing share of highly educated population on the other. It illustrates that nowadays, societal culture is more and more defined by academic strata who emphasize values, culture and language much more than aspects of political-economic organization and traditional social class. (Hughes 1993: 76); Trenton 1997: 420).

*"An invention of the educated elite, political correctness is essentially a class phenomenon, i.e. designer morals for yuppies of uneasy conscience." (Fankboner 2004).*

In this perspective, Political Correctness may be seen as a revival of 18<sup>th</sup> century value patterns that have been prominent among progressives before leftism has become "kidnapped" by socialist working class ideology.

After strategies aiming at the planned revolutionary transformation of human societies have failed, early utopian ideas about "progress" are again centering more on the improvement of individuals - not on institutional development or macrosocietal change. In terms of Rousseau and other protagonists of the enlightenment, a "perfect society" is again seen as a society in which all individuals keep up to high moral standards - not as a system in which common welfare emerges from the sum of individual vices.

In this "reductionist" model of society, this moral evolution has to begin on the level of inner thoughts and individual verbal expressions, so that it can then spill over into microsocial behavior, mesosocial collectivities and macrosocial institutions.

*"Mankind is still young and the universe unfinished. All that is necessary for him to ascend to the next level of his spiritual evolution is to cleanse his mind of inappropriate thoughts. Language rules thought, they claim, and thought rules destiny. If we establish a program of linguistic hygiene, purging speech of all the verbal correlates that predispose us to undesirable behaviour, we will remove the precursors of immoral conduct. In removing man's unconscious biases with corrective speech, we delimit his capacity for inhumanity. Do not evil actions invariably follow from incorrect thoughts?" (Fankboner 2004).*

PC is a revival of the relentless moralism of Robespierre and Saint Just who aimed to improve mankind by legislating virtue. It is a revolutionary concept inherent in enlightenment: an attempt to examine all overcome traditions whether they conform to the highest morality standards that are thought to have timeless validity because they derive directly from "human reason", not from any ideas subject to cultural variation and historical change (Kimball 2003).

In a secular society, PC continues the long tradition of religious movements in urging individuals to abstain from "sinful" thoughts and behavior - similar to the prophets of the old testaments who preached that individual immorality was the cause of collective disaster. In contrast to these religious traditions and modern Islamism, however, PC conforms to standards of the Enlightenment by engendering a progressive evolutionary view. The goals is not to return to any state of primordial conformity with God's revelation, but to create a new perfect society based on higher moral norms than have ever been realized in the past.

By reinforcing moral standards at the expense of performances in other realms (e. g. sports, science, medicine, politics etc.) a highest council is installed in which every individual (regardless of his qualifications) can have an effective voice. Thus, an important function of the PC norm structure is to provide an easy upward control tool for everybody to delegitimize and displace current elite members, to keep elites disciplined, or even to blackmail them when they possess dangerous compromising information. For instance, norms sanctioning "sexual harassment" provide subordinate women with a powerful tool for sanctioning deviant superior males. Whoever enjoys a high social status based on popularity, professional excellence, family background, stupendous productivity or voting results can easily acquire a bad reputation by behaving in politically incorrect ways.

Even the most productive managers and scientists can quickly lose all their status if they sin against political correctness. e. g. by uttering "sexist" or "racist" remarks - as even the most outstanding performances of cyclists are no longer honored when they are involved in doping scandals. Of course, these empowerments can also be instrumentalized by elites in their fight against other elites. Thus, the impeachment process evoked against President Clinton was certainly not inspired by the eagerness to preserve the rights of Monica Lewinsky, but by the ambition of the Republicans to take over the presidency.

In a wider perspective, we see many court actions initiated by skillful lawyers eager to gain money by achieving high punitive damages and compensations, or by powerful NGO's driven by the chance to enhance their public reputation.



### 3. The normative regulation of speech

*"The dearth of women in science professorships may, at least partially, be explained by innate differences in aptitude between the sexes."<sup>2</sup>*

*"Population growth should be diminished in order to decrease global warming."*

*"Attracting Jewish scientists is a university's most efficient way to increase Excellency."*

*"The number of mothers who sexually abuse their children is heavily underestimated."*

*"Air passenger control should be specifically targeted to young Muslim males."*

If you find any (or all) of these sentences somewhat unusual or surprising, you are at least cognitively aware that the range of legitimate verbal expression in our society has recently been restricted by certain (informal) rules. If you find them unfitting or objectionable, you evidently identify with these rules and prohibitions: they have become part of your moral conscience even if they never have been explicitly taught.

In our liberal Western democracies, we usually maintain the premise that there is a fundamental difference between word and deed: so that freedom of speech can be maintained without fears that unacceptable speech would soon be followed by unacceptable action. The freedom of verbal expression is only limited in cases where words and actions are intrinsically connected: e. g. when somebody calls up for terrorist attacks, riots, or genocide.

PC is fundamentally antiliberal in asserting that "deeds follow words". so that it is necessary (or even sufficient) to regulate speech in order to eradicate bad behavioral habits and to realize a better societal future. Based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that wordings influence (or even determine) human thoughts and actions, PC aims to change deeply ingrained habits of verbal expression by stigmatizing hitherto used terms as "offensive", "racist" or "sexist", and by introducing alternative terms that imply (or are supposed to imply) more respect for the group in consideration.

*"PC zealots hold that if we attend to minutiae, larger issues will take care of themselves, that if (say) you proscribe ethnic humor, genocide will become, literally, unthinkable." (Fankboner 2004)*

Feminist authors have been particularly prominent in stressing the indirect and longer-term empowerment effects emerging from less discriminatory terms:

*'Renaming gives women a sense of control of their own identity and raises consciousness within their group and that of those in power.' Eitzen and Zinn 1989: 369f.).*

Following Andrea Dworkin In her book "Only Words" (1993), Catharine McKinnon maintains that pornography is not words or pictures, but oppressive and exploitive action of men against women, thus violating basic human rights.

Such endeavors seem justified by scientific studies which show that even non prejudiced individuals can easily perpetuate racial stereotypes because conventionalized language provides them with a "default option" on which they tend to base their judgments in any unguarded moments (Devine 1989).

---

<sup>2</sup> Larry Summers, President of Harvard University, January 2007.

In this view, PC efforts could be effective in fighting against widespread stereotypes held by average citizens in unreflected everyday situations. By eradicating the respective verbal expressions, the stereotypical "default option" can no longer be evoked because it is no longer available (Waldron Neumann 1996).

Seen from a macrocultural point of view, Political Correctness appears as the logical correlate of recent ideological, philosophical and scientific movements that all emphasize the significant role of language for the constitution of personal and social identities on the one hand and our concepts of empirical reality on the other,.

In a wider perspective, PC is certainly akin to constructivist epistemologies which state that there is no scientific truth outside artificially conceived (and permanently revisable) verbalized premises, propositions and theoretical schemes,

Similarly, it is inspired by the poststructuralist endeavors to undermine "naturally given" classifications and common sense truths by revealing that they are the product of historically contingent discourses and authoritatively imposed verbal regulations (Hughes 1993: 76).

Finally, PC joins social interactionism by stressing the capacity of actors to influence the definition of individual and collective identities, social expectations, norms, roles and environmental situations, and conforms particularly with the "labeling approach" which emphasizes the relevance of verbal definitions and categorizations for the self-definitions of (especially: delinquent) human actors.

Certainly, most PC adherents will agree with Anselm Strauss when he emphasizes the paramount importance of language in general, and names in particular, for shaping identity and marking its changes (Strauss 1997: pp. 17 - 19), and with Erving Goffman's assertion that abusive terms can spoil personal identities in a similar way as physical stigmas (Goffman 1968: 11ff.).

Similarly, they may converge with Pierre Bourdieu who saw naming processes as forces that not only reflect, but constitute societal inequality on a symbolical level.

*"The imposition of a recognized name is an act of recognition of full social existence which transmutes the thing named... The fate of groups is bound up with the words that designate them: the power to impose recognition depends on the capacity to mobilize around a name" (Bourdieu 1986: 480f.).*

However, renaming procedures are futile insofar as the new terms hint to unchanged underlying significates: so that they tend to assimilate the same meanings as the older terms which have been banned.

As a consequence, continuous terminological shifts are caused by the fact that every new term is soon connotated with the old negative attributions (that may well be fictitious stereotypes, but also based on observable behavior), so that it has again to be replaced a virgin, still untainted designation (Zimmer 1996).

Thus, original Australian populations have changed from "Natives" to "Aborigines" to "Indigenous", and dark-skinned Americans have mutated from "negroes" to "Negroes" to "blacks" to "nonwhites" to "colored" to "African-Americans".

*"Euphemistic references to people periodically need upgrading as they take on derogatory connotations that reveal discriminatory attitudes. Old people became elderly and have now become older. As euphemisms grow in currency, either amongst experts concerned about linguistic probity, or through extension into everyday language, the veneer wears thin through use and the disdainful preconceptions show through. New coating must be applied, yet covering up the problem means that... terms again become pejorative once they gain general usage" (Valentine 1998).*

In analogy to Gresham's law about bad money replacing good money, words can be subject to a process of irreversible pejoration: so that a never stopping "euphemism treadmill" (Steven Pinker) has to be activated in order to replace words with bad connotations constantly by "virgin", less discrediting terms.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, one of the more flattering interpretations of PC is to see it as continuing the historical project of Enlightenment by bringing hitherto unconscious verbal habits into the light of conscious reflection: so that they can be subject to critical evaluation and intentional change in the light of a wider perspective which includes the sensitivities of other categories of the population.

Evidently, this reflexivity is particularly needed in multicultural contexts where the continuation of traditional verbal habits generates frictions and irritations that have not existed in more homogenous contexts of social interaction. In terms of Piaget's and Kohlberg's typologies of moral behavior, PC certainly represents a "post conventional" stage because it reinforces a critical distance toward conventional habitualizations (Piaget 1932, Kohlberg/Lickona 1976).

However, such a widening of perspectives should also include Bourdieu's notion that control over verbalization is asymmetrically distributed, because it follows the power relationships existing between nations, social classes or ethnic groups. Thus, social interactionist studies have sufficiently demonstrated that identity-constituting namings often occur in a top down fashion: by dominant majorities labelling subordinate minorities (without labelling themselves):

*"In definitions of self, the other is at least implicitly identified, just as defining the other implicitly characterises self. The often implicit nature of this opposition means that self can be left unspecified, can go unnamed, even while basking in the reflection of a negatively constituted other. Thus dominant representations of black people, disabled people and homosexuals do not require the explicit specification of the dominant white, able-bodied heterosexual self for that self to gain status and distinction. Those who distinguish have the distinction of not being explicitly distinguished." Valentine 1998).*

The dominance of the majority populations is reflected in the fact that they themselves remain unlabelled and undefined: so that their core position is not affected by any linguistic changes.

*"If explicitly labelled at all, retains its appellation through a whole series of terms for carefully subdivided and categorised others: the sane remain sane through the various reformulations of mental illness, whites stay white whether opposed to coloured, black or ethnic minorities, and the normal preside over a succession of names for the subnormal and perverted." (Valentine 1998).*

Thus, sociological studies discussing the social construction of whiteness have appeared just recently and remained very rare (e. g. Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997).

On the other hand, PC can certainly contribute to a basic societal inclusion of minorities that have been completely marginalized or even criminalized in the past.

For instance, uncontrolled Mexican immigrants in the U. S. are no longer called "illegal aliens", but "undocumented residents". This terminological change implies a basic shift in the way these immigrants are labeled on the political plane as well as in the legal system. While the word "illegal" connotes that the police should become active to send them back, the term "undocumented" sends a signal to immigration agencies to provide them with valid

---

<sup>3</sup> see: wikipedia "Euphemism treadmill" (retrieved Aug 30<sup>th</sup> 2007).  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphemism\\_treadmill#The\\_.E2.80.9CEuphemism\\_Treadmill.E2.80.9D](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphemism_treadmill#The_.E2.80.9CEuphemism_Treadmill.E2.80.9D)

papers. And while the term "alien" suggests an unbridgeable distance (like that toward extraterrestrial intruders), the concept of "resident" facilitates associations of nearness, neighborhood and mutual understanding.

Like all other cultural developments that emphasize the Real World implications of linguistic conventions and verbal behavior, Political Correctness may well be explained as the correlate of complex modern societies characterized by a large tertiary sector and a growing scope of cultural mediatization.

On the most basic level, it is evident that economic development goes along with a shift from object-related to people-related work role structures. Even in the secondary sector, the number of workers dedicated to the and manipulation of physical raw materials and products have declined, while "indirect labor" associated with administration, consultations and social team interaction has sharply increased - particular under conditions of Postfordist models of "lean production" (see Geser 2000).

More than that: most people nowadays work in the constantly enlarging tertiary sector where tasks center on activities of buying or selling, education, consultation, resocialization, medical treatment or individual care.

In all these expanding areas, work roles become heavily shaped by social norms relating to customers, clients, pupils or patients. In fact, these new work structures grow within societies in which traditional interpretations, values and rules relating to different population segments have evolved and are still in action - cognitive and normative standards that have not been created for these new purposes and which may easily clash with the new objective exigencies and subjective demands.

For instance, traditional views of children as immature entities that need punishment may clash with the need for motivating them to learn complex matters in school; traditional concepts of gender roles may become incompatible with the need to draw on highly sophisticated female qualifications; and assumptions relating to innate differences between races and ethnicities may collide with the imperative to treat all of them alike in schools, hospitals or social welfare systems.

Under such new conditions, trends toward multicultural urban populations become more problematic than in Fordist areas where immigrants from 50 nations could quickly be integrated even without learning a common language (because Taylorized work role structures and assembly lines made production possible almost without any interpersonal communication).

Nowadays, not only the coexistence, but the smooth efficient cooperation between different races and ethnicities has to be secured: by socializing all of them into highly universalistic norm structures reinforcing standards of tolerance, considerateness, tactfulness and nondiscrimination. Thus, we could certainly not continue derogatory practices as they have reigned in many traditional societies: e. g. in pre-Meiji Japan, where members of the lowest societal strata were named "eta" (literally: "filth or great pollution" or even "hinin" (=nonhumans)).(Valentine 1998).

The shift from industrial to tertiary production, from materialist to post materialist values and from direct face-to-face to technically mediated communication - these are all facets of a long-term fundamental change that goes along with a growing impact of culture and language on human personality and social reality as a whole (Fairclough 2003).

Lehmann's saying "*what we know about society, even the world in which we are living, we know from the mass media*" (Luhmann 1996:3) implies that the reality we take for granted is a product of selection and interpretation in which highly organized collectivities and institutions have a major part - entities that have not been conceived for these purposes and whose legitimacy for this job is not beyond doubts.

To take an example: it may be highly consequential whether the national and ethnic background of delinquents is reported in the newspapers, because this will co-determine which minorities are seen in which light by the general public as well as the elites - and what kind of political and actions and administrative measures may be taken (e. g. particular surveillance or resocialization programs for "marginal ethnic groups").

Compared with the epoch of conventional mass media, the Internet has again sharply expanded the cultural sphere, because anybody has now the same technical means for addressing the global public.

Do we want to live in a society in which all these selecting and interpreting cultural activities happen without any regulation? This would imply that not only cultural productions, but the very core of social reality itself would be subject to uncontrolled and unpredictable developments. For instance, it could well be that newly immigrated groups of considerable size are completely neglected by the media, so that they don't become part of societal discourse and political-administrative actions; or that there is an undifferentiated discourse about "homosexuals" which neglects that gays and Lesbians maintain very divergent collective identities they want to be acknowledged in the public sphere.

While a need for at least some regulation seems self-evident, liberal democracies are certainly not disposed to react with any authoritarian governmental measures. In fact, classical liberalism relies on the premise that "speech shall remain free" - implying that cultural processes of any kind shall not be formally restrained.

It may be asked whether this premise was well in order for early modern societies where most cultural production was rather limited - and factually regulated anyway because it was under the control of dominating elites.

Today, cultural productions are not only richer in volume and variety, but more fundamental in impacting on social realities - and elite control has mostly evaporated as a consequence of elite pluralization on the one hand and decentralized Net communication on the other.

Following this argumentative line, we may postulate that such cultural expansions have created a "control deficit" which calls for non-governmental regulations: either by formal meso-social institutions (like universities or NGO's) or by informal collective norms as they may emerge among students, gays, feminist women or other networks of dense interpersonal interaction.

In fact, it can be observed that PC has emerged within such organizations, communities and networks, particularly in the academic sphere. From this intermediate level, it then has diffused to the macro level on the one hand (e. g. giving rise to legislation about sexual harassment, affirmative action etc.) and to the micro social level (of speech control within even very private gatherings) on the other.

Apart from PC, the growing significance of language in constructing social reality has also been vividly manifested in the widespread neoliberal efforts to spread economic terms like "customer", "consumer" "profit center" or "product" to spheres where they have not been applied before. e. g. in education, medicine or social welfare (Fairclough 2003: 21).

Such "economistic" renamings have been designed to pave the way for introducing business models of organizational structuring and behavioral control: at the cost of traditional noneconomic values and goals. Such neoliberal "neologisms" share with Political Correctness the tendency to eradicate traditional linguistic habits, in order to substitute them with radically new terminologies inspired by a single one-sided perspective.

These "economisms" share with PC a highly simplified, atomistic conception of human language and human culture: based on the premise that meaning resides in single words and expressions, so that it is necessary and sufficient to ban specific wordings in order to change inner thoughts as well as overt behavior.

Such conceptions evidently ignore that meaning is often inherent in more encompassing verbal structures: sentences or whole texts, so that offensive talk and writing is not eliminated by simply eradicating specific terms (Morris 1988).

The whole notion of dialectical discourse is foreign to PC because it implies that truth arises from the process of verbal exchanges, not from a single statement.

For example, controversial assertions like "negroes are less intelligent" could well have place within a heated discourse where they are exposed to a process of interpersonal evaluation and correction, but they are banned even in such contexts because they are judged as intrinsically "racist", irrespective of the context in which they are formulated.

In a way, PC implies that all verbal controversies have already come to a final conclusion, so that the time has come for pure expressive talk in which these truths are just ritualistically repeated, not basically questioned. Particularly in Germany, it can be seen that to call somebody a "controversial person" has become a pejorative attribution, while in the past, it was rather a reason to include him or her in debates (FOCUS 1995: 76ff.).

A major reason why open discussion is destroyed lies in the primitive assumption that anything said is just an expression of what the talker himself is thinking - not taking into account that in many cases, he or she may be ironic, just adopts temporarily an *advocatus diaboli* role for dialectical reasons, or reports what *others* are thinking about a certain matter (Loury 1994).

Even more; PC doesn't allow to express any empathy with people accused of racist or sexist behavior and to engage in any psychological endeavors for trying to understand why they think and talk the way they do. Instead, such deviants are stigmatized as irreparably "evil" characters which have to be ostracized from social life (and step down if they occupy public offices). Of course, this tabooing of empathy is stultifying historical analysis where empathy with past human actors can be crucial for understanding and explaining why they acted the way they did. Thus, the president of German parliament *Philip Jenninger* had to step down immediately from his office in Nov 1988, after he has held a memorial speech for the "Deutsche Kristallnacht" where he tried to explain why many German hated Jews in 1938:

*"And as for the Jews: hadn't they in the past arrogated a role unto themselves that they did not deserve? Wasn't there a need for them to finally start accepting restrictions? Hadn't they even perhaps merited being put in their place? And, above all, didn't the propaganda--aside from wild exaggerations not to be taken seriously-- correspond...to people's own suspicions and convictions?" (reported from Loury 1994).*

Under such conditions, the role of historians shrinks to just express ritualistically their utter disgust and repudiation for what happened in the Hitler era in order to preempt any suspicion that they may "sympathize" with any of Hitlers political actions. In fact, PC makes no difference between personality and role: everything said within in specific role is attributed in a short-circuited fashion "ad hominem": to the character of the person as a whole (Loury 1994).

Such frightening losses of intellectual discrimination may well stifle the functioning of highly crucial societal institutions. In courts, for instance, criminal defense attorneys face difficulties because whenever they take sides with a defendant accused of racist behavior, they may be accused of being racist themselves.

Exactly because PC aims at monolithic internal coherence by eliminating dialectical exchanges, it may itself become part of a higher order dialectics: by evoking vigorous counter-PC voices and movements. As a top-down movement, it constantly evokes a countervailing "bottom-up conservatism" dedicated to the defence of the linguistic status quo on the basis of established usage sanctified by deeply anchored historical tradition and widely shared "common sense" (Valentine .1998).

*"For example, 'chairman' is argued to be preferable to the inelegant 'chair' or 'chairperson' because 'historically' the term 'man' includes 'woman'. When language reformers point out*

*that this view of an immutable historical determination for meaning cannot be supported by linguistic research, conservatives argue instead that 'everyone knows' that 'man' includes 'woman'-' (Peterson 1994).*

All explicit social rules have in common that they not only define new forms of deviance, but that they invite transgressions by evoking the critical question: why is A forbidden while B is allowed? Additionally, they create opportunities for engaging in "risky behavior" that may be exploited by people who seeking a cheap and secure way to gain flamboyant visibility in the public sphere. Thus, the president of the politically incorrect "Swiss People's Party" (Ueli Maurer) is quoted of saying: *"As long as I spell the word "Negroe", the cameras are directed at me."*

By banning "offensive" words and sentences, PC carves out precisely defined patterns of deviance that can be practiced by everybody without special skills and efforts: just by pronouncing the prohibited words. This explains why "political incorrectness" is following PC like a shadow: by constantly creating and propagating similarly precise "negative copies" of its newest regulations.

In many cases, it is exactly the groups protected by PC which begin to make use of banned terms as a component of self-identity: Thus it was in the same year (1985) when Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" was banned (because of heavy usage of "Nigger") when the Rap group "Nigga with attitude" initiated its spectacular career.

Likewise, PC is indirectly responsible for a rich culture of satirical writings and performances thriving on jokes about PC: jokes with the rare characteristic that they are consensually comprehended by everybody in the audience. In fact, PC has given rise to an entire industry thriving on the never ending self-escalating quarrels between pro-PC and con-PC individuals, groups and organizations.

*"In schools, the industry is ticking over nicely. For example, big grants are awarded to developers of "Afro centric curriculums" for schools. That in turn boosts the fund-raising power of conservative organizations set up to lobby against such manifestations of 'multiculturalism' (Economist 1993).*

Evidently, such antagonisms are more likely to satisfy entertainment needs than to contribute to more precise knowledge and deeper understanding. Nevertheless, they may have a self-correcting function by keeping the damaging consequences of fundamentalist PC endeavours under control (Economist 1993).

## **4. The relapse to simplistic binary categorizations**

PC shares many characteristics attributed to "dogmatic belief systems" as described by Adorno, Rokeach others: especially in its tendency to reduce empirical reality to binary polarities rather than to continuous scales.

In particular, its proponents have a very low "tolerance of ambiguity": clinging to elementary binary schematisms as they are known from ancient fairy-tales, simple comics or James Bond movies where all actors are either fundamentally good or evil.

In this view, every individual can be neatly categorized as being a member or nonmember of such an exclusive collectivity (e. g. gender, race, ethnicity etc.), and the whole gamut of human social relationships is reduced to such asymmetric binary relations.

Thus, PC is evidently most adequate to deal with neatly defined and mutually exclusive categories (like gender), and certainly not with socio-economic status system where most incumbents occupy finely graded intermediate positions.

By providing a very limited number of "identity boxes" for categorizing human populations, PC assumes that everybody's personal identity is fully defined by this single membership status which is considered unchangeably ascribed. Consequently, the rich empirical varieties of finely graded and crosscutting group and subgroup identities are ignored. There is no room for intermediate positions like partial memberships, transitory membership or even simultaneous membership in both opposite categories at the same time.

*"The identity 'boxes' imposed by **political correctness** are often wide of the mark. Afro-Caribbeans and West Africans are routinely lumped together as 'black', their radically different experiences crudely tossed aside by white do-gooders. 'Anti-racist' campaigners are horrified when Hindus and Sikhs refuse to be lumped together with Muslims as 'Asian', or when well-educated Muslim women passionately defend arranged marriages." (Rankin 2004)*

Another illustration for authoritarian PC simplifications is found in Germany where the overall term "Zigeuner" was replaced by the dual concept "Sinti and Roma" - creating difficulties for those groups still defining themselves as "Zigeuner", especially when they neither belong to the Sinti nor to the Roma branch of the errant population (Zimmer 1996). Similarly, the term "African American" is only covering colored people and is highly misleading in the case of people of Maghreb origin born in the United States (Williams 1999). Thus, PC politics is not able to include more than a small range of highly simplified issue positions: neglecting most social interests that are not mediated by PC organizations for ideological reasons.

This simplistic taxonomic classification leads to particularly strange results when it is applied to sexual orientations. You may be a Black or a Muslim wherever you go and whatever you do, but are you similarly a homosexual in all aspects of your personal life? Unquestionably, there is a tendency of PC to see sexual orientation as the major criterion for division among males and for social association among males (Rankin 2004). Homosexuality is seen as a very deep identity-defining trait: so that "coming outs" have a resemblance to religious conversions in the degree they affect the whole personality and all aspects of individual behavior.

*"An interesting feature of political correctness is its resemblance to evangelicalism. This is especially apparent in its emphasis on politicizing the personal, on 'consciousness raising' and using the state and the law to regulate free association. The similarities between 'coming out', as urged by gay activities, and being 'born again' as an evangelical tub-thumper are palpable." (Ranking 2004).*

The problems arising from binary classifications are aggravated by the tendency to amalgamate such exclusive status attributions with equally exclusive social roles. Without further reflections, it is assumed that everybody is either a victimizer or a victim, an oppressor or an oppressed, an exploiter or an exploited.

As a rule, women and ethnic minorities tend to be unconditionally seen in the role of victims, while males and whites are always identified as oppressors.

*"Developed partially out of discredited Freudian thought, the New Establishment thrives on the theory of "victimization," in which everyone deserves special treatment, except for the "white male." In their lexicon, America is seen as the home of "exploitation." Whites always exploit blacks and hispanics. Men exploit women. Adults exploit children. Teachers exploit students. The judicial system exploits criminals and prisoners. Citizens exploit legal immigrants and everyone exploits the illegals. Even the thin subjugate the fat, the tall the short." (Gross 1997)*



There is a strong tendency to think that victims are inherently good, and much is done to keep such idealized pictures untainted: by suppressing or deemphasizing information which hints to the contrary: that part of the slave trade was organized by Africans, or that Native Americans were heavily involved in exterminating wildlife of the prairies (Miller 2000).

In addition, it is assumed that all this "victims" are fundamentally unable to help themselves: so that they need the support by the whole surrounding society (especially governmental legislation) to assure sufficient (governmental) protection.

PC shares with Marxism the tendency to see society as an arena of antagonistic manichaeic struggles: not between economic classes arising from the economic means of productions, but between categorical collectivities based on ascribed characteristics like gender and race (Lind 2004).

This evidently excludes the existence of ambivalent middle positions, where both roles are simultaneously played (e. g. middle level bureaucratic officials following orders but implementing them according to their discretion).

In a general sense, there is no chance for modeling more differentiated human relations: e. g.:

- conflictive binary relations where each partner is actor and victim at the same time or subsequently in different aspects of phases of the mutual interaction;
- more differentiated multi-level relations (e. g. within status orders), where each member who is victimized by superiors is itself a victimizer of lower ranking incumbents..

In intersexual relations, for instance, males are modeled as "bad actors" who need punishment, while the women are the "good victims" in need of protection. Such childish stereotypes do not allow to understand even the most elementary models of social interaction theory where conflict is seen as a joint product of mutually reacting and reciprocating partners.

Human personality is likewise reduced to an undifferentiated entity dominated either by good or bad habits or intentions. For instance, human beings can be discredited fully and unconditionally by labeling them as "racist" or "sexist": an attribution that is not attached to particular behavioral acts, but to the personality as a whole.

Thus, there is no place for ambivalences (e. g. mixtures of love and hate) as they are taken into account in psychoanalysis as well as in any other more sophisticated theories in the psychological and socio-psychological sphere.

While such views evidently satisfy infantile needs for order and consistency, they of course collide constantly with empirical reality where women and minority members are also criminals and white males may also become victims of aggression. PC tends to downplay or even neglect all such "incongruences" because they don't "fit" into the infantile theoretical model. This is illustrated by the many cases where violations of human rights are not sufficiently acknowledged and pursued when they are committed by members of social minorities: because such interferences collide with the naive view of such minorities are always victims, not victimizers, and that they should have the right to practice their own religion and culture.

Thus, Necla Kelek's book on forced marriage practices among Turkish Muslims has been torpedoed by 60 German "migration researchers" who claimed (without offering evidence) that such practices were only occurring as "isolated cases". (Kelek 2006). For similar reasons, the BBC was very resistant to broadcast reports about pedophilic crimes committed by males of Asian origin (Krönig 2004).

Another consequence of PC is that there is no capacity to modify models of reality smoothly according to continuous processes of empirical change. Instead, changes have to occur abruptly: by shifting from one conception to its polar opposite. For several decades, Israel was considered widely to be a "victim" of Arabic aggression: thus needing unconditional Western sympathy and support. Since the 1990s, however, Israel is mostly seen as an "aggressor", while Palestinians have succeeded in being acknowledged as "victims": thus qualifying for extensive international support.

Finally, PC is stultifying because it refers to various population categories in terms of homogeneous groups that deserve homogeneous treatment. For instance, when terms like "nigger" or "negroe" are avoided, it is implicitly assumed that all individuals to which such terms refer would feel hurt. This certainly neglects that such terms are often used among blacks themselves without negative connotations.

In fact, PC is a correlate of widespread endeavors dedicated to "collective identity politics": e. g. exemplified by the shift from "Negroe" to "Black" in the course of the American Civil Rights movement:

*"The movement from "Negro" to "Black" symbolized a rejection of the ideal of assimilation, represented by the middle-class "Negro" striving to be assimilated into the White mainstream, in favour of the indigenous ghetto culture of the street, which was affirmatively separatist and "Black" (Martin, 1991:3). Black Power was a nation-building movement that stressed Black pride and militancy: it was an identity-building movement that sought to promote a "Black is beautiful" self-image among Black Americans." (Spencer 1994: 554).*

A further step toward an autonomous identity of nonwhite -Americans was initiated by Jesse Jackson's movement aiming at redefining black Americans as "Afro-Americans" (Martin 1991: 102/103; Spencer 1994: 548).

When gender-related affirmative action is implemented, it is supposed that women in general represent a hitherto discriminated societal segment - without taking into account that such discrimination varies between ethnicities and social strata; and when "sexist language" is outlawed, it is supposed that all women are alike in feeling offended by specific pictures, remarks or jokes.

*"In political correctness, the individual does not exist except as part of a group, to which he or she has no choice but to belong." (Rankin 2003)*

Such misplaced deindividualization leaves much room for conservative Anti-PC politics which addresses exactly these neglected agendas:

*"How infuriating it would be for the left (and how refreshing for British politics) if the Tories were to appeal to ethnic minority voters who wish to be judged by the content of their character, instead of imprisoned in racial boxes by an activist elite. The Tories should be a natural refuge for women seeking refuge from gender feminism--or, for that matter, homosexuals who just wish to be chaps who like chaps." (Rankin 2004).*

PC has notorious difficulty in dealing with "inconsistent" groups": e. g. with women preferring traditional role patterns instead of feminist gender struggles, or Afro Americans not identifying with the liberal creed that they are the victim of oppression.

As Stephen Goode has convincingly shown, conservative Afro Americans are often the targets of hideous attacks (especially by leftists of the same race), being accused of having a "false consciousness, while liberal blacks are given all opportunities in media and educational institutions because they are seen as possessing the "right" way of thinking (Goode 1997).

Adherents of Political Correctness assume without further reflection that the fat, the ugly, the stupid, the cripples and the nonwhites all share the wish of not being reminded of their "handicaps", so that all wordings referring to such negative characteristics are "offensive" and should be consistently avoided.

They cannot imagine that some fat men can humorously accept their unusual bodily format - or even become proud of it in some ways.

In all these cases, PC zealots take sides of those minority members (or subgroups) who emphasize and aggravate (rather than downplay) the differences between minority and majority: thus advocating the propagation of a separate identity based on group-specific values, traditions, habits and goals. By allying with these "separatists", they may clash with the "integrationist" minority members who relativize such differences or who even follow an agenda of strict assimilation.

For example, Lesbians and gays are encouraged to present themselves publicly as "queer" and to accentuate their differences to heterosexuals, instead of integrating themselves into the mainstream by keeping a lower profile. Similarly, Black Americans are expected to identify with Afrocentric culture, or even to convert to Islam.

In all these cases, PC zealots maintain the premise that all minority members are subscribing to a collective "identity politics": thus ignoring that there is more than one option of defining such identity, and that many members may prefer countervailing strategies of assimilation.

A major simplification of PC is to disaggregate populations only in first-order categories: e. g. by talking about "women" or the "disabled", but not about "disabled women". As Diane Driedger has shown in the case of Canada, such extreme deficits of terminological specification can imply that the special needs of such groups are not sufficiently recognized and taken into account on the policy level. (Driedger 1991: 7).

In many cases, such an overemphasis on rather high-order identities contradicts the more particularized subgroup identities to which minority members themselves are committed. For instance, it is assumed that gay man and Lesbian women can easily be aggregated under the heading of "homosexuals": thus suggesting a feeling of community and a congruence of values and interests that simply doesn't exist. The same problem is vividly seen in the propagation of an overall "Native American" identity that clashes with the lower tribal self-identifications /such as Mohawks, Cree, Oneids) still maintained by most indigenous descendants (Spencer 1994: 557).

Evidently, PC concepts have never been introduced to be of any analytical value to social science. To the degree that they colonize scientific discourses, such discourses are degenerating into fruitless ideological exchanges where only moral, not cognitive interests are at stake. Thus, PC terms like "racism" or "sexism" show an inflation of meaning because they have to cover an ever widening scope of applications; so they can no longer be used for scientific purposes (Miles 1989: 41).

While all these appalling conceptual degradations have catastrophic effects for scientific analysis as well as more sophisticated procedures in legislation and administration, they may be functional on the political level where clear binary options are often the prerequisite for defining power relations and for effective, speedy decisions. Thus, it is evident that political processes in modern societies cannot take place without strong intermediary actors that simplify the arena by pretending to speak on behalf of broad population groups and that define their interests in rather stable, simplified and homogeneous ways.

*"The complexity of modern politics and the increasing centralization of power have aided the rise of pressure groups and special interests, whose claims to be representative are doubtful at best. It is easier for the political class to assume that self-styled 'community leaders' speak*

*for all 'ethnic minorities', that gay activists speak for all homosexuals and that feminists speak for all women." (Rankin 2003).*

By providing a small number of "identity boxes", PC generates a political scenery that consists of a limited number of neatly circumscribed collectivities endowed with straightforward homogeneous values and interests. For instance, feminists pretend to represent "all women" by advocating a highly leftist agenda including free daycare facilities and all kind of female quotas - thus ignoring all the less active women that may not agree. Such "deviants" (like housewives not willing to make careers) are often disqualified by attributing to them a "false consciousness" that may eventually vanish in the course of further propaganda campaigns.

By creating and institutionalizing opportunities and procedures for complaint, PC encourages minorities to develop structures of self-organization in order to articulate their sensitivities and needs.

As the whole minority is naively conceived as a homogeneous collectivity, inclusive overall organizations are promoted, while smaller splinter organizations (including only subfractions of a minority) are not encouraged because they are not seen having cultural habits and interests of their own.

In fact, the power to define the group's demands is usually accruing to very few elite members who pretend to talk in the name of all members (e. g. by declaring which terms are so discriminating, and derogatory that they have to be banned).(Zimmer 1996).

On the mesolevel of formal organizations, PC norms may also be useful because they simplify hiring and firing procedures. Thus, filling job vacancies facilitated because it is less necessary than in the past to make complex assessment of personal skills. Instead, selections can be based on ascriptive criteria like sex or ethnicity - criteria that can be easily verified without efforts.

The success of affirmative action programs may be partially explained by their high compatibility with formalized bureaucratic routines: because they provide very simple and extremely verifiable criteria for personal recruitment. As a consequence, recruitment decisions can easily be made at very high levels, because the discretion of lower level evaluators (whose role is to assess personal competences, not collective memberships) is less needed.

## **5. The paradoxes and pitfalls of "paternalistic cultural relativism"**

Like Classical Marxism, Political Correctness has a collectivistic bias by assuming that the identities, roles, activities and performances of individuals are primarily associated with their membership in social categories, not by any personal factors. PC does not share the liberalist premise of modern Western societies: that all basic human rights should be attached to the individual, disregarding all his or her ascriptive affiliations (of gender, ethnicity, religion etc.). Instead, PC joins sexists and racists by emphasizing such ascriptive group memberships in a most fundamental way: e. g. by favoring affirmative discrimination schemes where such criteria are decisive for the allocation of money, jobs or educational promotions.

In a way, PC is shifting the attention from the future to the past. Instead of encouraging people to anchor their identity in future projects and status aspirations, it inspires them to reflect on their background and to identify with their roots (Mansfield 1991).

PC adherents are "socialists" in the sense that they are not satisfied with the liberalist conception of egalitarianism as "equality of opportunity." Instead, they are committed to a redistribution of status positions so that minorities are at least represented in proportion to their absolute numbers - even if this implies the temporary violation of principles of non-discrimination - until this proportionality is realized. Thus, they are usually in favor of "affirmative action": advocating the lowering of admission standards for members of minorities that are supposed to have been the victims of collective discrimination in the past. (Spencer 1994: 554ff.).

The same dominant majorities who insist that negative discriminations are not longer accepted turn now to positive discrimination: assuming that such authoritative labeling will now be accepted as long as it entails profits rather than disadvantages. Nothing has changed on the fundamental power level: insofar as the majority groups are still dominant enough to define what kind of minorities exist, who belongs to them and what kind of protective rights they should receive. What has changed is that this power system may be more likely to be accepted as legitimate because it is no longer committed to oppression and exploitation, but to positive, benevolent forms of discrimination.

By placing values of justice in front of values of individual and achievement and pride, feelings of embarrassment and inferiority are generated among the very beneficiaries of these well-meaning policies:

*"As to the justice of affirmative action, I think that to most people it's gradually sinking in that two wrongs don't make a right. And as to the matter of pride, affirmative action is the only government program that's ashamed of itself and that cannot identify its beneficiaries: "Here is the new affirmative action candidate we've just found." That cannot be said, of course, without hurting the candidate's pride." (Mansfield 1991).*

Therefore, measures of affirmative action will always be resisted by very ambitious and gifted members of the "protected" minorities: because they have so much to lose when their careers are attributed to their ascribed characteristics, not to their personal talents and achievements. An academic woman, for instance, may be eager to profit from affirmative gender discrimination for promoting her career; but she has to pay also a high price: by getting no opportunity to be judged just on her professional merits, independent of gender.

Every time a euphemistic expression prescribed by PC is used, a very small indication is given in favor of a better societal inclusion of marginal groups: thus signaling a basic commitment to liberal democratic society and fundamental human rights. At the same time, however, a second signal is emitted: that the referenced minority still exists and is still in need of "special protection".

*"Euphemisms are a way of referring to the unfitting in a way that preserves the modernist promise of liberalism and egalitarianism, of universalism and homogeneity, while continuing to ensure the discrimination of the marginal. Thus in independent India, caste is outlawed, while at the same time specified in the designation of 'scheduled castes' that include the untouchables that are no longer supposed to exist." (Valentine 1998).*

Such patronizing behavior (e. g. by calling toilet cleaners "cleaning ladies" does not contribute to a diminishment of vertical status differentiations; to the contrary, it is an additional effective way for expressing explicitly its existence (Valentine 1998).

Paradoxical contradictions arise especially from two conflictive norms referring to the treatment of minorities:

- 1) Their discrimination vis-à-vis the majority and other minorities should be eliminated
- 2) Their particular cultural thinking, habits and behavior should be respected.

As a consequence, political correctness is self-refuting because it states that other belief systems which contradict PC should be given the same status of truth. (Pasamonik 2004).

In contrast to Marxism which always wanted to promote extensive collective unity by strengthening unitary ideologies and identity constructions, PC is promoting societal fragmentation by stressing the fundamental differences between minorities, their behavioral styles, emotional life, historical fates and particular cultures. In extreme cases, it is assumed that Whites will never be able to fully empathize with the ideas and feelings of Blacks, and what men will never be capable of fully understanding women. Consequently, we have no choice than to let other group cultures flourish without intervention: including of course also cultures which don't accept exactly these principles of hyper tolerance: because they set their own standards as absolute. Given the fundamental intercollective divergences that also affect the meaning associated with the same words and sentences, no dialogue between groups is possible because this would presuppose at minimum of common grounds (and the hope that such communalities can be increased). Also, attempts to bridge the gaps by psychological empathy must remain fruitless because divergences are constituted on collective levels that cannot be manipulated by individual feelings and thoughts.

Thus, PC advocates that minorities should decide autonomously about their identity as well as about the way they represent themselves in society (Waldron Neumann 1996). On the other hand, PC zealots are very paternalistic in the way they defend the minorities interests as they appear from their own point of view - without asking the minority members themselves whether they agree. Thus, intrinsic contradictions emerge when minority members make use of their granted autonomy by spelling out exactly the words prohibited by PC: for instance when blacks name themselves "Niggers", or girls call themselves "chicks", when Jews make jokes about Jewish greed or when women castigate the irrational behavior of their sisters.

Usually, violations of this sort are accepted because the autonomy norm is ranking higher than the norms of nondiscrimination.

In other words: you are allowed to criticize blacks, but only when your own skin is dark; you are only entitled to criticize women when you are a woman yourself.

*"A white is taken to be a racist if he says "nigger," but blacks use the term all the time. Used by blacks, its meaning ranges from an endearment to an epithet, but for whites, whatever their intent, it can only be an epithet. Thus blacks, but not whites, can make movies or report news stories on the problem of skin color prejudice which continues to affect African American society. Women, but not men, can publicly question whether in a given case the crime of date rape has been manufactured on the morning after by a "victim" who wishes she had made a different decision about sexual intimacy the previous night. The censorship in these cases is partial; those who have "cover" express themselves freely; those who lack it must be silent." (Loury 1994).*

In short: the arguments derives its validity exclusively from biological characteristics of their authors, not from any of their intrinsic qualities (e. g. their logical or empirical merits). For instance, the deputy editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer is quoted of saying that *"in practice ... we won't write anything on race that doesn't have the support of the board's three black members."* (Quoted from Seligman 1993).

A sore point is when on minority is criticizing another: e. g. when Muslims oppress women or rail against the Jews. In such cases, it becomes visible that PC only defines vertical relationships between majority and minorities, while relationships between minorities are not clearly defined. At the University of Leeds, for example a German political scientist could not

hold an announced lecture on "Islamic antisemitism" because of strong opposition by Islamist students (Krönig 2007).

This example shows that it is not possible to grant PC protection to all minorities if some of these minorities are not tolerant against each other. In such cases, it is to be expected that priority will be given to the minority which is more powerful or threatening than the other. Paradoxically, highly principled PC zealots suddenly change into extra-soft opportunists following the way of least resistance. Nowadays, this usually means: giving way to Islamist threats, concealing mere cowardice behind "serious security reasons".

On the other hand, it is evident that the "all cultures are equal" principle clashes with increasing tendencies to implement a unitary legal and moral culture. The same leftists who advocate an equal standing of nonwestern cultures are most eager to implement norms that are only found within Western culture: e. g. neutrality against religion, acceptance of homosexuality and equality of genders. In Western mainstream politics, there is unquestionably a tendency in penal law to interfere more and more into private family matters: e. g. in cases where husbands exercise violence against their wife, or parents against their children. As a consequence, immigrants from patriarchalistic nonwestern cultures run an increasing risk of being criminalized even if they just continue to practice what they have been taught during their previous life.

## 6. From rights of action to rights of protection

The legal system of Liberal democratic societies focuses primarily on the rights of individuals to *act*: on the freedom to do business, to speak out, to associate with others or to go to the courts. Each citizen should be granted such freedoms of action as long as they do not interfere with the freedom of others.

Political Correctness shares with Marxism the basic view that such freedoms are the source of evil, because they are inevitably abused by dominating majorities to oppress and exploit lower ranking populations.

As a consequence, the classical liberal rank order of human rights is turned on its head: the highest-ranking right now is the right not to be offended or violated by actions of others.

While the *freedoms of actions* are about the same for all people irrespective of cultural background and historical time, the *rights not to be offended* are highly variable because they are a correlate of specific sensitivities that always correlate of a particular group culture and a specific historical situation. Only the victimized groups themselves can define what they find offensive and what not: so that they are entitled to define the rules according to which the reigning majorities should behave.

While freedom-of-action rights are basically addressed to mature skilled mainstream individuals physically and psychologically capable of making use of them, such protection rights are addressed to the weak, the poor, the sick and the unskilled: all those not able to "help themselves" (e. g. to retaliate when they are personally offended).

Therefore, PC ideologies transport

- a negative image of average minority members as being helpless and in need of collective protection;
- a negative image of the average majority member: as being permanently prone to engage in offensive action.

While majority members are fully responsible for their own deeds, successes and failures, the self-responsibility of minority members is attenuated or even eliminated by the fact that they are powerless victims of discrimination. Whenever a misfortune is happening to a member of a "protected minority", the causes are neither sought in accidental circumstances ("fate") nor in any individual factors (lack of skill, self-control, personal etc.), but in collective discriminations and oppressions. When they become delinquent, it is said that the causes lie in their disadvantaged social situation providing them no perspective of education and occupational careers, and when they develop psychiatric symptoms, this may be interpreted as a failure to adapt to a repressive environment, not as a problem with intrapersonal causes.

*As a consequence, PC "tends to encourage self-pity and the manufacture of sensitivities without end, promoting an autonomous culture of victims and empowering sanctimonious minorities and PC carpetbaggers with unearned moral authority" (Fankboner 2004).*

Thus, terms that connote personal self-responsibility are eliminated in favor of "neutral" terms which suggest a problem situation to be dealt with by bureaucratic welfare programs or antidiscrimination measures:

*"Years ago, there were bums, vagabonds, tramps and hobos. They, too, have disappeared. Now we have "homeless people" That causes temporary confusion. When a person asks me, "Will you help the homeless?" I don't know whether I'm being asked to assist someone whose home was lost in a tornado, flood or hurricane, or a shiftless bum. Use of the term "homeless" is part of the leftist agenda to establish moral equivalency between tragedy that's an act of God and self-inflicted tragedy." (Williams 1999).*

As a consequence, minority members are relieved from the need for learning and changing their own behavior. PC is a "machinery of politicization" which may have disastrous consequences for the protected minorities: encouraging them to define their collective identity in terms of a perennial victim status and to seek constantly for external help instead of taking life in their own hands. Thus, affirmative action strategies often maintain or even amplify the social asymmetries they want to eliminate:

*"Elaborate stratagems to compensate penalized minorities and avoid giving pain to others, e.g. quotas, affirmative action, preferential treatment, euphemistic speech, censorship, and other palliatives, often achieve the very opposite. By drawing attention to, and stigmatizing the victim's disability, they serve only to confirm that he hasn't enough self-esteem, dignity and imagination to deal responsibly with his own problems.*

As Sally Satel argues in her reputable book about PC in medicine, such extrapunitive attributions can have disastrous consequences in psychiatry because they block conventional ways of therapy - which are necessarily based on the premise that healing has to be based on intrapersonal change.

*"One aspect of this is "multicultural counseling," a practice strongly supported by the American Counseling Association. Multicultural counselors presume that nonwhite patients' personal difficulties largely stem from their efforts to adjust to a racist society. By urging patients to find only external sources for their discontent, multicultural counseling makes a mockery of self-exploration - the true purpose of therapy - and self-determination. (Satel 2001).*

Similar to Marxism, PC teaches that the "real" causes of any problems are to be found on very high levels of macrosocietal structure, not on the lower levels of individual



malfunctioning or microsocial relationships. As a consequence, specific individual problems here and now cannot be really solved - but just treated superficially by manipulating "symptoms". For example, many exponents of American Public Medicine have adopted the idea that the major thrust of their discipline is not to diminish current problems of ill health, but to fight against societal inequality of oppression in order to eradicate the roots from which all these health problems finally emerge. (Satel 2001).

By shifting problems to such higher levels of causation, they become factually untrackable, because their solution would imply unrealistic strategies of long-range political action aiming at basic societal change.

*"The tragedy of black power in America today" is that black power is conceived 'primarily as a victims power, grounded too deeply in the entitlement derived from past injustice....'. Since the social victim has been oppressed by society, he comes to feel that his individual life will be improved more by changes in society than by his own initiative.... He makes society rather than himself the agent of change. He doesn't realize that his accounting is not to a group but to himself on 'strictly personal terms'". (Steele 1990).*

## **7. The intropunitive "psychological warfare" against White Males and Western culture**

In the view of PC ideology, the Marxist conception of society as a struggle field between an oppressing and an oppressed economic class is generalized insofar as the role of the discriminated can also be filled by women, homosexuals, Blacks, foreign immigrants, disabled or aged people, while the discriminator is always the same: the Eurocentric, phallogocratic white male.

As the unconditional oppressor who is seen as dominating at least within the last 2000 years (Spencer 1994: 559ff.), HE is this common enemy that creates a basic "common objective interest" among all victimized groups - irrespective of their unbridgeable fundamental differences that divide them in all other respects.

Thus, all affirmative action policies share the characteristic that the chances of white males to get employed or promoted are diminished. Similar "reverse discriminations" become manifest in the rule that Blacks can easily criticize or ridicule blacks and women are free to criticize other women or even all specimens of their gender, white men must abstain from any "offensive" expressions about nonwhite and non-male populations.

The dichotomy "powerful vs. powerless" is equalized with the dichotomy "oppressor vs. victim", which is again identified with the dichotomy "evil" and good, or "guilty and innocent".

*"Political correctness then produces a politics of moral drama, involving the oppressed and the oppressor, in which the oppressed demand recognition of their suffering. This pervasive sense of victimization has led to an emphasis on the sufferings of the group that have been inflicted by evil powers. This is rhetorically captured in the use of the politically potent epithets "racism" and "sexism," which are unanswerable indictments of blame, levelled by innocent victims against malevolent ruling elites." (Spencer 2004: 559).*

Following the theological concept of "original sin", members of the dominating category are loaded with an impersonal collective guilt they cannot eliminate by any personal deeds: mere to born male and white is sufficient to be intrinsically racist and sexist and to be co-responsible for all the misdeeds committed by any other members of their category anytime in the past (Weisberg 1991:23).

*"In this moral dialogue the victims are morally superior to their oppressors, who are generally White, and often particularly White males, depending on the group levelling the charge. This is seen in the definition of "racism" according to the lexicon of political correctness. Only Whites can be racist, and are intrinsically so, whether they are prepared to acknowledge this fact or not:" (Spencer 2004: 560).*

By self-attributing feelings of collective guilt for past discriminatory behavior, majority members are driven to potentially endless measures of self-discrimination in order to do repentance for the unforgivable sins committed by their own kind:

*"It is rather that of racial preference in a society in which African Americans constitute a group that is morally entitled to superior privilege. This is justified in historical terms by the experience of slavery, which therefore merits morally legitimate demands for reparations. The African-American summit meeting in New Orleans in 1989 called for reparations from Whites for slavery, recalling earlier demands of SNCC's James Forman for billions of dollars of reparations from White churches, In April 1989 the Detroit city council called upon Congress to establish a \$40 billion dollar educational fund for the descendants of slaves,. Thus, in this version, the demand for affirmative action transcends the demand for group equality with a claim to special preference based on past suffering, rather than of present inequality." (Spencer 1994: 555/556).*

Very often, such moral evaluations are affecting judgments of empirical fact: e. g. in the sense that Western constructions of history are considered to be defective and ideological, while the "counterhistories" generated by the oppressed minorities are seen to conform better to standards of truth (Spencer 2004: 561). Also in this respect, PC is inspired by Marxism where the cognitive constructions of the capitalists are seen as ideologically distorted while the proletariat is always on the side of "historical truth".

Like Marxism and most other dissident ideologies and social movements that have arisen within European and North American countries, Political Correctness illustrates the tendency of Western intellectual elites to take distance to their own surrounding society and culture in which they have been born and raised: by denouncing reigning traditions and by taking sides with marginalized groups.

In a long-range historical perspective, such capacities for "self-distancing" appear to correlate with the level of societal evolution.

In early pre-agrarian societies, we usually find tightly knit ethnocentric cultures that leave no room for dissidence or revolution. Each local band, tribe, chiefdom or kingdom shares the notion that its people were superior to others: possessing the only true law and morality, enjoying the protection of stronger gods, and being superior in terms of knowledge, bodily force and military power.

On the cultural level, the reigning religion and ideology offered no ground for criticizing the societal status quo, and on the structural level, society offered no niches for dissidents with enough education and resources to propagate countervailing views or even to organize dissident social movements. Thus, there is no legitimate protest against a theocratic God-King who defines what is right or wrong by his personal decisions (as in many historical African regimes) or against a caste of priest who exercise a collective monopoly over e reigning religion (e. g. in Mesopotamian regions). As a consequence, such societies regularly became monolithic and dominated by ossified traditions, because they lacked any mechanism for self-generated internal change (Bellah 1991: 20ff; Lenski/Nolan/Lenski 1995).

The rise of advanced agrarian societies has gone along with far-reaching changes in cultural systems. In middle Eastern regions as well as in the Far East, particularistic folk religions gave way to "universal religions" which promoted the notion of a supreme God common to all

countries and ethnicities on earth, and the concept of an autonomous individual guided by inner ethical principles not dependent on caste, ethnicity or any other ascribed collective memberships.

Such universalized systems of religion, ethics and law could no longer be monopolized by any reigning monarchs or elites, because they created room for critique and alternative interpretations. In Sunni Islam, for instance, we see a perennial destabilization of political authority because it is always legitimate to criticize current rulers in the name of the ideal norms stated by the Qur'an and the Hadith transmissions, and in Christian environments, there is always a basis for pacifists who denounce war, oppression and discrimination as contradictions to the love-guided teachings of Jesus Christ.

*"Religion, then, provided the ideology and social cohesion for many rebellions and reform movements in the historic civilizations, and consequently played a more dynamic and especially a more purposive role in social change than had previously been possible." (Bellah 1991:35/36).*

As Mordecai Kaplan has convincingly demonstrated in his historical analysis, the Jews were pioneers in developing mechanisms of collective self-critique: despite the fact that they first conformed well to ethnocentric folk religion by defining themselves as the "chosen people". In contrast to other ethnicities however, they began to redefine their God as a transcendent entity whose will and intentions remained hidden from human knowledge. As a consequence, much room was created for any kind of "prophets" who criticized existing regimes and conventions by propagating alternative interpretations and visions of "Gods Will" (Kaplan 1949).

Thus, the Jewish people was the first to institutionalize collective self-critique on an institutional level: by granting dissenting prophets a high reputation and influence within their own population: side by side with established elites who then came under constant pressure. Understandably, such mechanisms of self-distancing provide much potential for societal and cultural self-transformation: so that in modern societies, much historical change is self-generated rather than imposed by external forces.

In more recent times, the Reformation and - even more - the Enlightenment were social movements that have amplified such internal societal conflicts by giving rise to empowered dissident elites who enjoy high legitimation because they base their action on the most central norms and values of Western culture.

On the basis of exactly these values, Rousseau concluded that modern man has been corrupted by private property and other products of civilization, so that he should look up humbly to the "Noble Savage" who has remained nearer to the virgin initial conditions. By framing national constitutions, modern Western democracies have institutionalized a never-ending intrasocietal dynamics stemming from the inevitable discrepancies between societal realities and the universalistic idealism of these highest of all legal norms. Thus, the Civil Rights Movement was successful because nobody could deny that its demands for racial equality were could be derived from the basic norms laid down in the Constitution and its various Amendments.. On the same grounds of legitimacy, the rights of women, gays and various handicapped minorities, have been successfully promoted, and nobody can predict whether the process will end by returning all stolen land to Native Americans or by paying heavy compensations to Afro Americans whose ancestors have been kept in slavery.

While established institutional elites (particularly in religion) have suffered a loss of status and influence, more reputation is granted to "intellectuals" who stand out as self-selected individuals with highly idiosyncratic views, styles and behavioral habits, and try to win profile by articulating highly unusual and one-sided positions. Thus, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been full of missionary "fellow-travelers" taking sides with the "enemy" by showing sympathy for Stalin or Mao Tse-tung, or by defining the United States as the source of all Evil from which the World should be freed.

As a result of the two World Wars, the rise of fascism and the Holocaust, even more vigorous and fundamentalist self-distancing efforts have appeared on elite levels: some of them being strong enough to shape the ideological views and action strategies of influential NGO's as well as powerful leftist and liberal political parties.

A major source of inspiration has been the "Frankfurt School" which designed a cultural revolution that cannot be resisted by force: by destroying the innermost fundamentals of conventional personality systems in order to get rid of an oppressive macrosociological order. This aim is well formulated in Adorno's book "The authoritarian Personality" (Adorno 1950), where it is argued that the predominant model of male socialization has to be deconstructed completely because it lies at the root of war and all its excesses - thus promoting barbarism instead of civilization (Raehn 1996).

A major achievement of PC is certainly its contribution to an increased critical awareness of hitherto unnoticed premises, conventions and limitations implicit in our Eurocentrist, masculinist and "heterosexist" culture. This fight against "implicit autocentrism" is particularly visible in the endeavors to include many works written by nonwhite nonwestern persons (especially women) into academic curricula, in order to end the very long predominance of Dead White European Males (DWEMS). By setting Western culture into a setting of richer alternatives, we are all forced to reflect more about the reasons why Goethe or Plato should be preferred to less reputed poets or philosophers of African or East Asian origin. The result may well be that we prefer to cling to the traditional "canon" - but with better reasons than in the past where no alternatives have been taken into consideration.

On the other hand, the multiculturalization of educational canons is a highly problematic endeavour insofar it risks to destroy the cultural consensus among highly crucial societal elites. Thus, Western science itself may appear as just another case of systematic human thinking - and may easily ground in favor of other cultures which offer cognitive systems that go longer ways in satisfying traditional religious beliefs or various psycho-social needs.

The paradox is that such "dewesternizations" are themselves based heavily on premises specific for Western culture, because

*"Only in the West does one find such a term as "ethnocentric," such a science as anthropology, or such a philosophy as relativism. Those who accuse the great books of being Western forget that their very accusation is Western." (Mansfield 1991).*

In a way, PC only perpetuates the cultural conflicts inherent in Western cultures at least since the Enlightenment: conflicts between universalistic and relativistic ideologies clashing with particularistic ethnotraditional cultures.

As exemplified by Rousseau, these ideas also included the option of devaluing Western civilization in favor of primitive cultures that were thought to be nearer to the state of "original truth".

*"Rousseau was represented in the figure of the noble savage. The noble savage is not civilized, obviously, but he's noble; or, rather, he's not civilized, and therefore he's noble. Rousseau represents modern Western civilization in criticism of itself. Rousseau's noble savage could remind you of the multiculturalism today, which says that we in the West shouldn't be so proud of our mechanical, material civilization." (Mansfield 1991).*

PC can well be understood as the most recent phase of a much longer tradition of Western self-relativization which also includes the Romantic veneration for the Middle Ages and the deep admiration of 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars for oriental cultures (Safranski 2007: passim), as well as all the efforts of reducing the scope and influence of Christian beliefs and practices in the course of secularization.

While religious secularization has proceeded very far without forceful governmental intervention in European countries, PC is accelerating this process by banning any rituals wordings in which Christian tradition is still present in public life. Especially in the United Kingdom, serious efforts have been made by city councils to replace the term "Christmas" by "Winterval" and "Christmas lights" by "celebrity lights", and to ban Christmas trees and carol singing from public places. In a similar vein, some museums have felt obliged to cancel abbreviations like AD (Anno Domini) and BC (Before Christ) in order to respect the sensitivities of nonchristian visitors. In all these cases, such actions have been taken without pressures from the respective minorities, and without verifying empirically whether and to what extent such sensitivities really exist. (Krönig 2005).

On an even more fundamental level, Political Correctness undermines highly crucial societal value systems by invalidating traditional standards of scalar evaluation.

For instance, people with physical handicapped are no longer called "disabled", but "differently abled", and children with low school performance are no longer classified as "unintelligent" or even "stupid", but "intellectually challenged".

Similarly, no rankings between ethnicities or linguistic groups are tolerated, and no traditional moral views disqualifying homosexuality are accepted; institutional procedures qualifying people according to their skills are disqualified as "ableism", and conventional beauty standards are ruled out by labeling them "lookism".

At least implicitly, PC adherents are committed to a model of society in which such fundamental evaluative rankings are weakened or even destroyed: so that the ugly enjoy the same status as the beautiful, and the weak and unskilled the same standing as the talented and the strong. In this view, vertical rankings should all be replaced by horizontal categorical scales: defining society as a coexistence of groupings each entitled to articulate its particular (mutually incommensurable) values and norms.

Historically, this shift has been made possible by the erosion of class identities as they were salient in the early and middle era of industrialization - leaving people free to identify (again) with ascribed characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age cohorts or sexual orientations (Faircough 2003: 19f.). As a consequence, unified working class or lower class movements have given way to a manifold of minority movements centering around the particularistic interests of women, gays, immigrants and the like - always assuming that all members of such categories have enough in common for cultivating a deep solidarity - irrespective of their income, wealth, educational level, prestige or other class and status related resources.

From this point of view, PC is very propitious for economic elites because it helps to draw away public protest from class-related inequalities of income, wealth and power.

*"Meanwhile, left politics, unable to respond to the ideological assault of the New Right and neo-liberalism with an effective counter-hegemonic strategy....has become fragmented. They are no longer centred upon the political parties and social classes but oriented to 'single issues' and to a politics of recognition, identity and difference as much as to a politics of re-distributive social justice." (Furlough 2003: 20).*

Following this view, Harvard historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. condemns the new orthodoxy of Political Correctness as a balkanizing force destroying the cultural unity of the United States by replacing it by a manifold of radically autonomized (and mutually separated) minority cultures (Schlesinger 1998).

By promoting the inclusion of hitherto neglected population categories, cultural perspectives and collective identities in all spheres of society, PC evidently contributes to a growing diversity in the composition of all kinds of social groups, so that

- a wider spectrum of alternative views and options will be articulated;
- a richer pool of individual knowledge and experience may be available;
- more dissensus, conflict and risks of disintegration are likely to ensue.

Thus, the fashionable movement called "Diversity Management" is a direct offspring of affirmative action policies: now amplified by the ideological assertion that diversity in itself is not only inevitable and morally good, but results in higher effectiveness and efficiency of economic organizations.

*"Diversity management leaves behind the bad press of a backward-looking, shrill affirmative action, and looks forward to an impending majority-minority America. It helps business harness this demographic destiny by exercising the invisible demons of institutional racism/sexism and by cleansing white-male culture. Thus restructured, multicultural employers will retain and promote more minorities and women, gaining "the diversity advantage" in matching workforce ethnicity with an increasingly diverse customer base." (Lynch 1994).*

By asserting that diversity in itself is a productive factor, it draws attention away from the politically incorrect notion that different population categories may differ in productive skills and motivations.

However, the diversity aspired by PC adherents does only cover ascribed characteristics like gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, not diversity on the level of ideology and ideas. In fact, this PC diversity can be seen as a camouflage for ideological homogeneity: because everybody admitted is likely to share the liberal and leftist premises of PC. There is never a claim that beside minority quota, also political and ideological quota should be maintained. (Williams 1999).

In addition, any enlargement of group diversity is likely to narrow the boundaries of legitimate discourse, because more different group sensitivities have to be respected, and more risks of denunciation have to be feared. Thus, the presence of a single woman (or "Afro-American") may suffice that language switches and whole range of topics are avoided for fear of producing offenses. On the other hand, PC may indirectly promote the freedom of speech, because individuals can express almost anything as long as they are members of protected minorities, not members of the vilified category of straight white males.

## **8. The ianus-faced implications of informality: extended courtesy or "soft totalitarianism"?**

The judgements made on the banning of words or the elimination of "offensive" behavior are not the outcome of formal decisions that can be attributed to specific actors and submitted to precise procedural rules, but the product of uncontrollable informal processes within anonymous groups and networks: a kind of "academic mob". (Atkinson 2006).

In many ways, therefore, PC norms can be compared with informal conventional traditions:

- they are often practiced without conscious reflection: so that special efforts have to be made to realize to what degree PC has changed our behavior (compared to pre PC periods);

- they are accepted as given conventions for which nobody is responsible and which have been arisen without conscious control; similarly, it cannot be predicted and influenced how they will change in the future.

This informality has many different implications and consequences: so that supporters of PC are as successful as adversaries to find good arguments for their position.

In a positive perspective, Political Correctness may be seen as an extension for "courtesy" as it has evolved in the course of higher human civilization as a means to counteract tensions and conflicts arising among coexisting social actors, particularly under conditions of asymmetric power. Courtesy consists of rituals that can be practiced by everybody without special effort and skills, so that even very busy people are readily able to make a good impression and acquire an excellent reputation by simply "following the rules".

As analyzed by Norbert Elias in his famous habilitation work, the origin of today's courtesy rules lies in the French Royal court of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century: where they emerged for regulating the daily interaction among nobles who lived permanently together in Versailles castle. Similarly, the courtesy of males toward females is a correlate of a traditional patriarchal society: giving males constantly opportunities to show favors to women who are in a fundamentally inferior societal position (and to sell themselves as protectors who shield them from less friendly other males).

Analogous courtesies have evolved in the interrelationship between social collectivities long before the term "political correctness" has been invented. In Switzerland, for instance, norms of courtesy have always been necessary to smooth the peaceful coexistence between German- French- and Italian speaking regions which are very unequal in size. Thus, many German speaking Swiss feel obliged to speak French whenever compatriots from the Romandie are present: in order to de-emphasize on the microlevel their dominant macro-level position.

As the Australian writer Anne Waldron Neumann argues, multicultural modern societies develop even stronger needs to extend norms of courtesy in order to avoid conflicts stemming from hurted sensitivities of all kinds, so that PC has the function of meeting such additional needs. (Waldron Neumann 1996).

We may extend this argument by observing that contemporary people live fast complicated lives: changing locations frequently, engaging in new roles and organizational memberships and interacting with ever new partners they hardly know. All this creates a pressure for highly routinized and ritualized forms of "good behavior" that can be practiced by everybody without spending much time and effort in finding out what conduct is adequate where and when under which situational conditions.

PC is highly efficient in providing such guidance: by simply proscribing and prescribing specific euphemistic terms as well as highly standardized, simplified reality models and ideological views. By keeping to PC conventions, everybody can easily appear as morally impeccable because the mere ritualistic invocation of correct words:

*"it costs nothing yet nonetheless imparts a warm glow of superior virtue" (Kimball 1992).*

However, the general problem with courtesy in complex modern societies is that not everybody may agree about the proper standards of civil behavior - or that such standards depend too much on variable situational conditions.

*"What constitutes genuine courtesy is sometimes difficult to determine. Some women enjoy compliments on a youthful appearance; others are offended to think that looks and youth are women's only value in society. Political correctness is admittedly prescriptive (ideally, I would*

*argue, self-prescriptive), but what it prescribes is moot. What is "correct" in a given situation: complimenting women, or not complimenting them; pitying minorities, or not pitying them?" (Waldron Neumann 1996).*

Again, it becomes evident to what degree PC is based on a regressive simplistic model of contemporary society by assuming universal consensus about appropriate words and behavior - a premise constantly undermined by PC itself insofar as it is successful in making minorities more autonomous in defining and articulating their own values and behavioral standards.

Like all other courtesies, PC is "preventive" (or even "preemptive") because the measures are taken before they are explicitly demanded by the recipient - and of course: before somebody is remarking that any violation has occurred. Thus preemptiveness implies that many courteous acts are taken without knowing empirically whether they are welcomed by the addressees. Instead, it is just *assumed a priori* that they are welcomed: because all receivers are hypothetically constructed as "typical representatives" of their group who all maintain the same typical sensitivities and social expectations. Here again, it becomes evident how incompatible PC is with any current tendencies toward individualization. The term "courtesy" also implies that honest self-expression of EGO is not a high ranking value, but completely subordinated to the right of ALTER not to be offended. Thus, PC provides an unlimited free ticket for being insincere - always inspired by the noble motive to avoid "harm".

From the perspective of its opponents, PC represents a particularly pernicious brand of "Newspeak" not implemented by any Big Brother that could eventually be displaced, but by anonymous, unaccountable collectivities (e. g. "academic mobs") and uncontrollable processes of conventionalization. According to Fankboner (2004), *"a coercive atmosphere of guilt, fear and intimidation"* is penetrating all microlevels of interpersonal talk, and is ultimately poisoning the innermost thinking of individuals.

A sphere of "informalized law" is created: whoever violates PC norms is sanctioned by the community, not by formal agencies: so that there are no trials, no rights of defense, no acquittals and no appeals - and nobody who sets limits to the punitive sanctions.

In a broader historical perspective, the PC movement may be compared with the epoch of the Roman philosopher kings (96-180 A. D.), when

*"An impalpable censorship, inspired by the atmosphere of the social environment more effectively than it could ever have been imposed by imperial fiat, was eliminating intellectual and artistic vitality." (Arnold Toynbee, The Study of History).<sup>4</sup>*

As most other "New Social Movements" that have arisen since the late 1960ies, PC has a decentralized structure that is quite inimical to the emergence of prominent individual figures. Thus, no decision making bodies are instituted for taking decisions about the banning of offensive words or the enactment of other PC norms - all these processes are the outcome of anonymous decentralized processes that cannot be attributed to any specific persons. This antiindividualist bias has many sociological implications. In particular, the PC movement remains in a semi-hidden sphere of diffuse informality - so that even its existence can be denied - because no visible formalized structures are crystallized, and no leaders are emerging that would effectively represent and symbolize the whole movement and articulate explicitly its values and goals.

As a consequence, resistance against PC also takes the form of diffuse undirected outbreaks that cannot be directed to specific power centers. It's a rather "soft" kind of totalitarianism (Coleman 2000) that cannot be eliminated by any possible kind of political action, because it

---

<sup>4</sup> quoted from Fankboner 2004.



is not primarily maintained by formalized law-making and law enforcement agencies, but by broadly distributed fads and fashions, behavioral habitualizations and internalized norms.

But exactly this diffuseness and unpredictability of controls creates ubiquitous fears of sanctions: leading to widespread self-censorship and fears of denunciation.

*"For every act of aberrant speech seen to be punished by "thought police," there are countless other critical arguments, dissents from received truth, unpleasant factual reports, or non-conformist deviations of thought which go unexpressed, or whose expression is distorted, because potential speakers rightly fear the consequences of a candid exposition of their views. As a result, the public discussion of vital issues can become dangerously impoverished." (Loury 1994)*

Like moral imperatives derived from the Ten Commandments or the "Sermon of the Mount", very concrete behavioral PC rules are presented as being directly deduced from highly abstract values, so that any violator can be stigmatized as being deviant on a very fundamental level. For instance, whoever uses the word "Negroe" may be bluntly stigmatized as a "racist", and whoever deviates from rules of gender-neutral language may be seen as somebody still subscribing to archaic concepts of 19<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal culture.

As long as such direct deductive relationships are accepted, norms are very stable because whoever criticizes them faces the reproach that he doesn't conform to the basic norms from which they have been derived. As Loury concludes,

*"Conventions of tacit restraint in public expression are made more durable by the fact that they do not themselves easily become objects of criticism, since it is often the "truly deviant" who have the greatest interest in criticizing them." (Loury 1994).*

Thus, critics of PC have a difficult job because they have to explain why they refute the norms while still clinging to the basic values behind (Loury 1994).

## 9. Conclusions

In the Swiss national election campaign of 2007, the right-wing "Swiss Popular Party" (SVP) propagated a street poster showing three white sheeps kicking a fourth black sheep over the fence. The words "Sicherheit schaffen" (creating security) referred to the party's strict law enforcement programs which aimed at sending criminal foreign residents back home. This poster evoked a firm diplomatic intervention by the UN deputy for racist problems (Doudou Diène, a Senegalese) who claimed that this poster would promote racist hatred because it depicted a white minority discriminating against colored immigrant minorities. As a response, the defendant party asserted that the poster just wanted to visualize the proverbial "black sheep": any group member who is ostracized collectively because he does not conform to ruling norms and expectations. This response got support by many contributions to web fora and blogs which claimed that with Diène's argument could as well be used for incriminating any usage of the word "black" with negative connotations (e. g. "blackmail" or "black magic" or "a black spot in his biography").

This very short story illustrates several major elements present when endeavours to implement "political correctness" take place.

- 1) The main point is that members of a reigning majority (in this case: endogenous Swiss citizens) are accused of maintaining discriminatory attitudes toward a vulnerable minority which is expressed in their verbal utterances or other kinds of derogatory behavior.
- 2) The common notion that the same utterances can have different meanings for different speakers and recipients is not accepted. Instead, it is asserted that certain expressions are intrinsically offensive (e. g. racist or sexist), and that they are tightly coupled with bad thoughts and intentions by which they have been caused. Consequently, the elimination of such utterances is not only a necessary, but a sufficient condition for eradicating evil.
- 3) PC norms are usually propagated and implemented in a top down fashion. Typically, a collectivity just clinging to its traditional idiosyncratic terminologies is suddenly blamed to be offensive against minorities. These incriminations are based on the claim that such particularistic norms should be replaced by more universalistic standards. While minorities based on race, sex, religion etc. are meticulously protected, there is usually much less respect for traditional ways of local cultures. The higher ethical standing of such universalistic norms is used for justifying such interventions - even when they clash with group internal legitimation standards. Evidently, PC is particularly incompatible with Swiss political culture because it relies so much "bottom up" legitimation based on democratic votes.
- 4) Controversies usually take place within elites, without asking minority members whether and to what degree they really feel to be offended. Thus, complaints about offensiveness are just based on abstract assumptions and decontextualized interpretations, not on demonstrated empirical facts.
- 5) To conclude; the real fight in PC is not about facts, but about symbolic interpretations. In the example described above, the real issue is the attempt of an international institution to seize control over the meaning of verbal and pictorial expressions enacted by national or subnational populations. Given the assumption that there is a tight coupling between expressions and underlying intentions, control over expressions is seen to open the way for controlling feelings and thoughts.

Using a functionalist approach, the rise of Political Correctness can be explained either as a correlate of struggles among elites or as an outcome of societal developments on macrosociological and macrocultural levels.

From a *mesosociological* perspective, it seems fruitful to consider PC as a strategy of academics and other cultural elites for securing status and generating political legitimation and support.

- 1) Western intellectuals find new ways to reassert their hegemonic dominance by articulating international universalistic moral standards against local traditional cultures which are morally discredited as "ethnocentric" "sexist", "xenophobic" (or in any other disqualifying terms). Their benevolent multiculturalism is "paternalistic" in the sense that it goes along with an accentuation of Western superiority: by propagating self-distancing forms of tolerance and legal equality that are not all shared by the minorities under protection vis-à-vis their own culture.
- 2) As modern societies become patchworks of minorities as a result of immigration, PC may become a rational strategy for gaining voter support by siding with minorities rather than by articulating the views of the majority.  
*"If the "victims" become more dependent on the liberals, so much the better, liberals need dependent groups of "victims" to feed big government. These "dependents" vote, and they vote for those who call them victims." (LomaAlta 2007).*
- 3) PC is an engine for generating new professional roles and attractive public careers. It is unleashing an additional avalanche of governmental expansion by defining an additional new role for government: as a nanny dedicated to control the behavior of its citizens - down to the level of verbal expressions, the style of advertising and the like. Thus, affirmative action

programs directed at the inclusion of minorities can easily be instrumentalized for justifying more governmental jurisdiction (by creating new laws) and by expanding public administration (by creating new positions dedicated to tasks of rule elaboration, campaigning, court litigation, counseling, supervision and sanctioning controls). While the grip of government on the economy has diminished in the course of neoliberalist deregulation and privatization, its hold on cultural and moral matters is increased: thus providing many new jobs for academicians majoring in the Humanities or the Social Sciences - exactly the branches where there is so much support for PC. Such new fields of job expansion seem urgent because the stagnating welfare state is not disposed to create many additional jobs in the fields of education, health and social welfare in the near future.

4) PC is a "Newspeak" of elites who use it as a tool for taking distance from less educated outsiders who disqualify themselves when they use a politically incorrect language because they are not sufficiently informed about the most recent terminological fads.

*"In my Australian Studies tutorials, for instance, I found that some students would not engage with issues relating to Aboriginal rights because they felt that their lack of knowledge about the right terminology would immediately identify them as "racist" (the fact that my Aboriginal students themselves often used different terms did not lessen the problem). These students worried that as soon as they opened their mouths and used the "incorrect" term, they would be jumped on by the ideologically pure. And they had a point; there are such zealots around." (McMahon 2003).*

In a *macrosociological* view, the emergence of Political Correctness may be explained as a first, still highly tentative way to cope with globalization and multiculturalization. In the course of globalization and multicultural immigration, most countries have to take leave from simple traditional conceptions of national identity which have been erected on the premise of unicultural dominance. For instance, the USA is fundamentally shaped by the concept that it is a nation of white immigrants accepting English as their language, sharing puritan drives for economic success and consenting on basic constitutional value and norms. However, the increasing self-assertion by the Blacks since the 1960ies as well as the growing immigration rates of Hispanics, Asians and Africans necessitates more complex conceptions in which multicultural realities are fundamentally taken into account, especially in universities where multiethnic coexistence has to be practiced on a daily basis and where intellectual implications of cultural divergences become very visible (especially in the human sciences).

Under this perspective; PC may be seen as a very preliminary "first draft" of such a new model which responds to the question how national consensus can still be maintained on the basis of high (and increasing) racial and ethnic diversity.

Such a response is certainly too simple insofar as PC goes too far in respecting these new minorities in highly generalized ways: while burdening the majority with all tasks of adaptation and redistribution. By overprivileging minorities at the cost of hitherto dominant population segments (white males), good preconditions are created for these minority cultures to articulate themselves and to participate in the shaping of an overarching national culture.

However, this model of "affirmative discrimination" is itself built on values and norms that cannot be taken for granted among the whole population. While it may create more unity among the minorities (by conceiving them as homogeneous collectivities), it has a highly divisive impact on the acting majority itself: promoting never-ending heated conflicts between liberal PC zealots on the one hand and defiant conservatives on the other.

It might be argued that PC becomes ever more indispensable in the time of the Internet, because more informal speech regulation norms are necessary when everybody has the

technical means to address (and attack) everybody else in full public - especially because no formalized legal order of a global scale is hitherto in place.

However, it is also evident that PC is based on some premises that are undermined or even washed away by the new media of global digital communication. Thus, PC implicitly presupposes that in contemporary society, opportunities for linguistic self-expression are highly restricted and socially controlled. Only under such preconditions, it makes sense to say that dominant majorities are able to maintain a cultural hegemony by imposing their own discourses on all population, while the discourses of minorities are silenced and "their stories remain untold" (e.g. Hartman 1991).

This view may well describe the conventional mass media society as it has existed through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a society based on public top-down communication controlled by political and economic elites. The Internet, however, has changed this situation fundamentally by providing even tiniest groupings with the full technical potential to make themselves heard in a globalized public sphere (Geser 1997).

Under these new conditions, there is no room for paternalistic majorities observing benevolent rules of courtesy in respect to disadvantaged minorities, because the minorities themselves are well able to articulate their own needs and to fight whenever they feel badly treated.

The Internet also undermines all efforts to treat minorities as undifferentiated wholes (e. g. all women as having the same needs for linguistic protection), because it makes visible that collectivities are usually composed of many subgroups that differ highly in their sensitivities as well as in the meaning they attribute to the same verbal expressions.

As the Internet goes along with a gigantic plethora of verbalizations, it becomes less and less adequate to restrict free speech by asserting that "words are action". In fact, we see that the long-term cultural evolution in which words and deeds have become dissociated has now reached another culminating stage.

In other words: more tolerance than ever is needed to survive in a society where an uncontrollable variety of assertions and opinions about me (and the groups to which I belong) are propagated on websites, blogs, chat forums and so many other digital media. This historical epoch is particularly ill suited to cultivate personal and collective hypersensitivities and to mobilize court action whenever something "offensive" is said or written anywhere in the digital sphere.

The whole postmodernist notion that "word create worlds" (Hartman 1991) and that discourses are in a recursive relationship to societal power relations (Foucault) has to be questioned at a time when so many different discourses are concurrently taking place in a public sphere that is ever more fragmented into a multitude of "micro publics". Under postmodernist assumptions, one dominant discourse would be the precondition for the maintenance of a consolidated societal power structure - but what we observe is that the realm of discourses is rapidly diversifying, while the societal structures remain more or less the same.

While Political Correctness may contribute to an advance of human civilization by promoting the inclusion of hitherto neglected minorities, cultural patterns and points of view, it reduces sharply the options to behave rationally toward our social environment: on the level of ideology as well as in the sphere of everyday action and in the realm of scientific research.

On the ideological level, PC can be seen as a conceptual revival of premodern "estate systems" consisting of neatly defined collectivities in which all individuals are fully integrated (Spencer 2004: 563). In fact, PC reinforces a highly traditional model of social relations where each individual is just seen as an exponent of a single collective group to which he or she fully belongs without possibility of escape: e. g. based on gender, race, religion or ethnic background. While the membership in such group is fixed by ascribed characteristics, the

societal standing of such collectivities is equally unchanging because it is determined by historical factors (e. g. centuries of past suffering by oppression and discrimination).

This view is diametrically opposed to Georg Simmels conception of modern man as a "crossing point of social circles": a view which strongly negates the predominance of a single ascribed status in a collectivity that defines fully individual identity and permeates all other social roles and all aspects of individual thinking and behavior. Instead, human beings are seen as possessing multiple partial identities that can be changed at will: highly individualized entities for the simple reason that there are not two humans who share exactly the same configuration of membership and roles (Simmel 2008: 305ff.).

In the *sphere of social practice*, many official norms directed at social control are not fully enforced on some social minorities, because special cultural and religious cautions have to be respected. In UK, for instance, Muslim women in Burkhas are sometimes exempt from body controls. This rule has been ruthlessly exploited by a bank robber who succeeded in passing the frontier uncontrolled by wearing a Niqab. (Krönig 2006).

Given the evident fact that most terrorist are young Moslem males stemming from Middle East or North African countries, it would be highly efficient to focus antiterrorist activities on these ethnic groups: e. g. by submitting them to particularly thorough surveillance and investigations. Instead, norms of political correctness such forbid methods of "ethnic profiling": so that for instance all passengers are subject to the same controls on airports, even elderly Caucasian women who are extremely unlikely to have any harmful intentions.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, more resources have to be committed for such investigations, passengers have to wait longer for checking in, and lives may be endangered because there are not enough resources for subjecting everybody to the same systematic controls.

For *social science*, a most disastrous consequence of PC is that knowledge about society is reduced because many topics of research are considered to be "too sensitive" because it is assumed that minorities may be negatively affected.

For instance, it has become inappropriate to collect and publish crime data based on the race and ethnicity of the offenders, because it is argued that results could generate new or fortify already existing negative stereotypes against immigrant minorities (Gabor 1994).

Such arguments negate the basic premise of an open liberal society that more information is always better than less because it increases knowledge and therefore also the alternatives available for rational decisions and action. For instance, minorities with high rates of deviance could be targeted for focused educational programs aiming at a reduction of aggressive behavior. And most minority members may have an intense interest to be informed about delinquent behavior within their own grouping, so that they are better able to enforce group-internal measures of socialization and social control.

Under present conditions of a PC culture that is pervasive in academic spheres, social science is not capable of fulfilling its critical function in society, because most social scientists have internalized PC norms so fully that they have difficult of becoming conscious how much their own thinking and behavior (as well of the behavior of their colleagues, universities, journals etc.) is affected. Most of them literally "swim" in a PC culture like fish in water: unable to acquire enough distance for critical reflection or even for making PC the object of systematic research.

---

<sup>5</sup> In New York, Mayor Bloomberg has ordered the police to extend their controls (at the entrance of tube stations) in a nondiscriminatory way to all population segments - instead of focussing on young Moslem males with large backpacks who are obviously a billion times more probable to be terrorists than Japanese teenagers, orthodox Rabbis or aged grannies from Ohio.

PC causes many debates to be carried from scientific realm to the sphere of political fights where the goal is to persuade public opinion, not to further objective truth:

*"Some areas of social science inquiry are so closely linked in the public mind to sensitive issues of policy that an objective, scholarly discussion of them is now impossible. Instead of open debate--where participants are prepared to be persuaded by arguments and evidence contrary to their initial presumptions, we have become accustomed to rhetorical contests--where competing camps fire volleys of data and tendentious analyses back and forth at each other, in an effort to win the battle of public opinion for their side. Sometimes the press is an active participant in these struggles, selectively reporting the findings which confirm the "politically correct" point of view. Issues of race, gender and sexual preference are particularly susceptible to this process of politicization." (Loury 1994).*

The notion of "objective truth" itself gives way to a concept of "partisan science": similar to classical Marxism which defined true science as taking sides with the proletariat,

*"Investigators identifying with certain groups advocate approaches to their disciplines said to reflect their particular perspective--a feminist, or a black, or a gay approach to history, sociology, economics, anthropology, etc." (Loury 1994).*

Responding to the question asked in the title of this paper, it might be concluded that Political Correctness is certainly a very ianus-faced thing: an advance in human civilization as well as a childish fad - and that some considerable efforts of self-clarification and self-criticism may be necessary to make sure that it does not become an almost incurable (because almost unnoticed) kind of collective mental disorder.

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W. 1950** The Authoritarian personality. New York: Harper.
- Atkinson, Gerald L. 2005** Radical Feminism and Political Correctness. Free Congress Foundation. [http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005\\_docs/PC5.pdf](http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005_docs/PC5.pdf)
- Atkinson, Philip 2006** What is Political Correctness? <http://www.users.bigpond.com/smartboard/pc.htm>
- Bellah, Robert N. 1991** Religious Evolution. (in: Bellah, Robert N. Beyond Belief, University of California Press, Berkeley, 20-50).
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1986** Distinction. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Coleman, Peter 2000** What is Political Correctness? The Pros and Cons. Quadrant March 1, <http://www.liberalsindia.com/relevance/PoliticalCorrectness.php>
- Devine, P. G. 1989** Automatic and controlled processes in prejudice: The role of stereotypes and personal beliefs. In A. R. Pratkanis, S. J. Breckler, & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), Attitude structure and function, pp. 181-211). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Diggins, John Patrick 1992** The Rise and Fall of the American Left. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Driedger, Diane 1991** Women with disabilities: naming oppression- In: Resources for Feminist Research 20(1/2): 5-9.
- Dyer, Richard 1997** White. London: Routledge.
- ECONOMIST 1993** An all-American industry (December 25th 1993-January 7th 1994), 61-62.
- Eitzen, D. Stanley, and Zinn, Maxine Baca 1989** The de-athleticization of women: the naming and gender marking of collegiate sport teams, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 6(4): 362 - 370.
- Faircough, Norman 2003** "Political Correctness" : the politics of culture and language. In: Discourse and Society, Vol. 14 (1), 17-28.
- Fankboner, Wm. B. 2004** America in Crisis: The Triumph of Political Correctness. Indio, California <http://members.aol.com/williefank/pc-essay.htm>
- Fekete, John 1995** Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising. Montreal: Robert Davies Publishing..
- FOCUS Magazin 1995** Die Guten auf dem Kriegspfad. Nr. 16; 15. April, pp 76-84.
- Foucault, Michel 1981** The history of sexuality, vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Frankenberg, Ruth 1993** White women, race matters. London: Routledge.
- Gabor, Thomas 1994** The suppression of crime statistics on race and ethnicity: the price of political correctness. Canadian Journal of Criminology, 36 (2): 153-163.
- Geser, Hans 1997** Wiederbelebung vergessener Traditionen oder Aufbruch ins Dritte Jahrtausend? Neue Chancen politischer und regionaler Identität im Internetzeitalter In: Sociology in Switzerland: Towards Cybersociety and Virtual social relations. Online Publications. Zuerich, [http://socio.ch/intcom/t\\_hgeser04.htm](http://socio.ch/intcom/t_hgeser04.htm)

**Geser, Hans 2000** Job Skills at the Flashpoint of economic, technical and organizational change. In: Sociology in Switzerland: Wandel der Arbeitswelt. Online Publications. Zuerich, March 2000. <http://socio.ch/work/geser/04e.htm>

**Geser, Hans 2001** On the Functions and Consequences of the Internet for Social Movements and Voluntary Associations, Zürich [http://socio.ch/movpar/t\\_hgeser3.htm](http://socio.ch/movpar/t_hgeser3.htm)

**Goffman, Erving 1968** Stigma. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

**Goode, Stephen 1997** Political correctness attacks black right wing. In: Insight on the News, January 20.

**Gross, Martin L. 1997** At war with the new establishment. Insight on the News, Oct. 27.

**Hartman, Ann 1991** Words Create Worlds. In: Social Work Vol. 36, Nr 34, July 1991:

**Hellman, Olof, 2003** "Politically correct in 1793", posted Oct 3, Big Box of paints. (blog) <http://homepage.mac.com/olof/iblog/Big%20Box%20of%20Paints/Language/-265637714/index.html>

**Hollinger, Robert 1994** Postmodernism and the Social Sciences: A Thematic Approach. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

**Hughes, Robert 1993** Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1949** The Contribution of Judaism to World Ethics. In: Finkelstein L. (ed.) The Jews; their History, Culture and Religion. New York, 680-712).

**Kelek, Necla 2006** Sie haben das Leid anderer zugelassen! (DIE ZEIT Nr. 7, 09.02.2006)

**Kimball, Roger 1992.** The periphery v. the center: The MLA in Chicago. In P. Berman (ed.), Debating PC: The controversy over political correctness on college campuses (pp. 61-84). New York: Dell.

**Kimball, Roger 2003** Political correctness or the perils of benevolence. In: The National Interest, Dec. 22. 2003).

**Kohlberg, Lawrence / Lickona, T. ed. 1976.** Moral stages and moralization: The cognitive-developmental approach. In: Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research and Social Issues. Rinehart and Winston.

**Krönig Jürgen, 2004** Absurde Blüten Gegen die "Political Correctness" hat der gesunde Menschenverstand einen schweren Stand In: DIE ZEIT Nr. 36, 27.08.)

**Krönig, Jürgen 2005** Der Kampf um Weihnachten In: DIE ZEIT Nr. 51. 16.12.

**Krönig, Jürgen 2006** Verschleierte Flucht In: DIE ZEIT online 21.12.

**Krönig, Jürgen 2007** Ein deutscher Wissenschaftler sollte einen Vortrag an einer britischen Universität über Antisemitismus im Islam halten. Auf Druck muslimischer Studenten durfte er nicht. In: DIE ZEIT Nr. 12, 24.03.

**Leicht, Robert 2006** Kein wort si wollen lassen stahn. In: DIE ZEIT Nr.15, 06. 04.

**Lenski, Gerhard / Nolan, Patrick / Lenski Jean. 1995:** Human Societies. An Introduction to Macrosociology. McGraw-Hill, New York, (7<sup>th</sup> ed.).

**Lind, William S. 2004** "Political Correctness:" A Short History of an Ideology. Free Congress Foundation. [http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005\\_docs/PC1.pdf](http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005_docs/PC1.pdf)



- LomaAlta: 2007** Political Correctness – A Marxist Threat to Western Civilization, LinknZona July 19<sup>th</sup>  
<http://linknzona.blogspot.com/2007/07/political-correctness-marxist-threat-to.html>
- Loury, Glenn C. 1994** Self-Censorship in Public Discourse A Theory of "Political Correctness" and Related Phenomena Rationality and Society, Vol. 6, No. 4, 428-461.
- Luhmann, Niklas 1996** Die Realität der Massenmedien. Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden.
- Lynch Frederick R. 1994** Workforce Diversity: PC's Final Frontier? In: National Review, Febr. 21.
- MacKinnon, Catharine 1993** Only Words. Harvard University Press, 1993.J
- Mansfield Harvey C. Jr. 1991** Political Correctness and the Suicide of the Intellect. In: The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.heritage.org/Research/PoliticalPhilosophy/HL337.cfm>
- McMahon, Peter 2003** The strengths and weaknesses of 'Political Correctness'. In: debate, 22. July  
<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=565>
- Martin, Ben L. 1991** From Negro to Black to African America. In: Political Science Quarterly 106, 102-103.
- Miles, Robert 1989** Racism. Routledge: London.
- Mill, John Stuart 1869** On Liberty. Longman, Roberts & Green, London.
- Miller, John J. 2000** Buffaloed: Fighting the truth about American Indians. National Review Oct 9<sup>th</sup>
- Morris, M. 1988** The pirate's fiancée: Feminism, reading, postmodernism. London: Verso.
- Partington, Geoffrey 2000** Political correctness Reconsidered. Quadrant Vol. 44, June 1.
- Pasamonik, Barbara 2004** The paradoxes of tolerance (developing tolerant attitudes in students). Social Studies, Vol. 95 Nr. 5 pp. 206ff.
- Peterson, Eric E. 1994** Nonsexist language reform and "political correctness". Women and Language, Sept. 22).
- Piaget, Jean 1932** The Moral Judgment of the Child. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co.
- Raehn, Raymond V. 1996** The Historical Roots of "Political Correctness". Free Congress Foundation  
[http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005\\_docs/PC2.pdf](http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005_docs/PC2.pdf)
- Rankin, Aidan 2003** The repressive openness of political correctness. Contemporary Review Vol 282, Jan.
- Satel, Sally 2001** How Political correctness is Corrupting Medicine. Basic Books.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. 1998** The Disuniting of America. Reflections on a Multicultural Society. W. W. Norton & Co. Inc. New York.
- Seligman, Daniel 1993** PC Comes to the Newsroom. In: National Review, June 21, p. 30.
- Simmel, Georg 1908** Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung. Kapitel VI: Die Kreuzung sozialer Kreise (S.305-344). Duncker & Humblot, Berlin (1. Auflage).
- Sparrow, Robert. 2002** Talking Sense about Political correctness. Journal of Australian Studies Vol. 73, pp. 119-133.
- Spencer, Martin E. 1994** Multiculturalism, "Political Correctness" and the Politics of Identity. In: Sociological Forum, Vol. 9, Nr. 4, Special Issue: Multiculturalism and Diversity, pp. 547-567.

**Steele Shelby 1990** The Content of our Character. A New Vision of Race in America. Harper Collins

**Strauss, Anselm 1997** Mirrors and masks: the search for identity. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

**Trenton, Thomas Norman, 1997** Generation X and Political Correctness: Ideological and Religious Transformation among Students. In: Canadian Journal of Sociology Vol. 22, No. 4., pp. 417-436.

**Valentine James 1998** Naming the Other: Power, Politeness and the Inflation of Euphemisms. In: Sociological Research Online, vol. 3, no. 4, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/4/7.html>

**Waldron Neumann Anne 1996** In Praise of Political Correctness. Melbourne University. [http://www.libertyvictoria.org.au/documents/1996-01-01\\_waldron-neumann.pdf](http://www.libertyvictoria.org.au/documents/1996-01-01_waldron-neumann.pdf)

**Walzer, Michael 1969** Puritanism as a revolutionary ideology. In: Barry McLaughlin (ed.). Studies in Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective. New York: The Free Press.

**Weisberg, Jacob 1991** "Thin skins." The New Republic (Feb. 18).

**Wikipedia:** "Political correctness" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_correctness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_correctness) (retrieved on Aug 30th 2007).

**Williams, Walter 1999** Language Cops Ride Herd on Degraded Discourse. In: Insight on the News July 19.

**Zimmer, Dieter E. 1996** Leuchtbojen auf einem Ozean der Gutwilligkeit. In: DIE ZEIT Nr. 9. 04. 03).