



## Freedom and the Collective

by Ingerid S. Straume

### Problems of collectivity

The politically interested intellectual of today, who wishes to speak of social mobilization and political change in terms of collective agency, may soon find herself in a tight position. Terms of collective agency, like the people, the community or simply the collective, seem to imply that one is – at least in principle – willing to sacrifice individuals on the altar of collectivism. The ground figure, in short, has it that when the social subject is a collective, this must mean that the freedom of individuals is limited. Collectivity is set against individual freedom. This zero-sum game is of the essence within political liberalism, but also exists within postmodernist and poststructuralist thought, albeit rarely focused as such. Its most poignant expression is, however, found in Isaiah Berlin's classical essay *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958), and, in an earlier version of the same argument, in Benjamin Constant's analysis of classical and modern freedom: *The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns* (1816). Berlin's and Constant's joint achievement is to argue that collectivity is, per definition, a threat to individual freedom or liberty. Since Berlin's epitomizing Cold War-essay, thinkers who emphasize collective concepts of social life have carried the burden of proof against charges of totalitarian tendencies. This, of course, robs political thought of both its classical and revolutionary connotations, leaving only individual initiatives like lobbying and voting.

Some charges are more warranted than others. Since the 1980's, the dichotomy of collectivity versus individual freedom is invoked against various forms of *communitarianism*; especially in the form of nationalism. In this case, the theoretical fire is fuelled by very real experiences like genocide, fascism and totalitarianism; regimes under which individual freedom was indeed sacrificed, or rather, extinguished. However, the real existence of fascism and totalitarianism can never justify the one-sidedness and false dichotomies that sometimes characterize these debates. Alas, when Stalin and Hitler are used as cases of demonstration for collectivity, the argumentative circle is closed for good.

But even in more nuanced literature, which recognizes political liberalism's tendency to one-sidedness, one still sees the notions of individual and collective freedom posed as a "dilemma," a matter of portioning or balancing between two "poles," i.e. the individual and society. In his recent book, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*, sociologist Peter Wagner claims that "... a comprehensive interpretation of political modernity will need to devise a *balance between* the commitments to individual and to collective self-determination" (Wagner 2008, p.16, emphasis added).<sup>[1]</sup> It would seem that experiences of fascism, Nazism and political



terrorism on the political left and right have made the choice between collective and individual freedom unavoidable. But, as I will try to show, it is less than clear how collective freedom, or in Wagner's words, self-determination, could be a coherent idea *without* free individuals. Hence, we need to take a closer look at the basic premises of the dichotomy in question. Then we might also be able to transcend some of the impasses established by the discussions between liberalism and communitarianism, which have been so overwhelmingly dominant over the past two to three decades. As a possible way around, then, I will present a political thinker who conceives of individual and collective freedom as *one and the same phenomenon*: the Greco-French philosopher and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997). My intention here is not to exhaust these questions in any way, but merely open up some new ways to think of collectivity *alongside* the concept of freedom. I thereby hope to demonstrate the promise of a concept of collective freedom that neither eliminates individual freedom, nor lets freedom collapse into (apolitical) individualism.

## A free society

In contrast to much political and sociological thought, Cornelius Castoriadis does not posit the relationship between individuals and society in terms of a zero-sum game that sees *either* individualism *or* collectivism; either individual *or* collective freedom – nor, in more nuanced versions, a balancing between these “extremes”. His point of exit is rather that individuals can only be thought of as free to the extent that they live in a free society – and vice versa. This means that the question of freedom for the individual must be considered *via* its social conditions, or in other words, freedom for the individual self is conditioned by something which is prior to the individual, independent of her own doing or making.<sup>[2]</sup> This “something” means different things to different thinkers: For Castoriadis it signifies the social contents of our psychic representations, conceived of as “social imaginary significations” (Castoriadis 1987). These significations, which will be described shortly, provide *meaning* to a given society. This is a key to why Castoriadis does not find the mentioned dichotomy meaningful.

To Castoriadis, history and every existing social formation are first and foremost products of the “radical imaginary” (*l'imaginaire radicale*) (Castoriadis 1987, 1991, 1997a). Every society is created as a unique form. His political philosophy, in brief, consists in making proper use of this insight. Through conscious creation of society's laws, norms and institutions, individuals as well as societies become manifestations of freedom – politically and philosophically. But now I am getting ahead of the argument. To investigate these ideas, let us first return for a moment to the apparent dilemma; the often-invoked conflict of interests between the community and the individual. The question of how to define or understand the concept of freedom is essential. A proper place to start will be the classical republican idea saying that individuals can only be free in a free society. This could mean several things; for instance that my acts will always be restricted by the social framework (an obvious point), or that, for my freedom to be *real*, others who are affected by my acts must also be equally free, since a “freedom” which implies that I am stomping on the backs



of others can hardly be said to be liberating, even to myself. One aspect of this argument is that only a society of free peers allows me to develop the best in me – invoking an association between freedom and human flourishing. Some thinkers would object to this (formal) substantialization, arguing that freedom can be sufficiently defined in negative terms – free and unhindered movement, independence, the right to choose freely, etc. But freedom merely as lack of interference is begging the question of why such freedom would be desirable. To push the point further: Why would anyone want to be the only free person in a world of slaves or human automata? And is the position of the hermit, or the last person on earth, first and foremost an embodiment of freedom? Another aspect of the same classical argument is the Hegelian-sociological notion that it is impossible to lead a worthwhile life without others who are also free subjects in a real, efficient, realized sense. It is through the intercourse with others, in social life, that the twin concepts of freedom and subjectivity are developed. At the very least, it seems clear that “freedom” attains a more desirable content, for oneself as well as others, when it is commonly shared. Furthermore, if freedom means the cohabitation of free subjects who are co-creating a common, social world, the concept is elevated to a higher – socio-political – level. And in fact, unless freedom should be something purely egotistical, the definition must involve societal and political dimensions in some form or other. Concerning this dimension, the liberal political tradition has concentrated upon liberal-juridical *principles*, such as rights. Efforts to enlarge the political scope of the picture often seem to stumble against yet another dichotomy, *freedom against equality*, most famously posed by John Rawls (1971). I will not go into these problems here, but merely suggest that this philosophical impasse might be addressed in much the same way as the present argumentation.

Marxists, too, talk of individual freedom in terms of a free society. Their point of view is structural: Before individuals can become free, the societal structures, especially the economy and the relations of production, must be liberating. Any talk of freedom *within* repressive and unfair social conditions, then, becomes nothing more than expressions of low political consciousness or bourgeoisie ideology. Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* that: “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”<sup>[3]</sup> Here, Marxism is trying to ride two horses, according to Isaiah Berlin: “Doctrines divide into those which idealise liberty and those which idealise equality. The pro-liberty school wishes to leave the State as little power as possible, the equality school as much as possible. Marxism tries to have it both ways by asserting that the class struggle alone makes them incompatible.”<sup>[4]</sup>

But now we are approaching a more difficult point, as historical experiments with Marxism has shown us. Berlin was right in pointing out that the very idea that society can be more or less free also opens for the idea of society as a collective subject, like the nation or, in the Marxist case, class. And from there, the road is not very long to political theories that prioritize the whole (society) over the parts (individuals). In the next move, then, individuals’ interests could be defined as subordinate to those of the



collective; and one may even expect the individual to sacrifice itself for the “common good” – whether it be in defensive wars, which we tend to consider as a tragic, but worthy purpose; or totalitarian “cleansing” processes (e.g. the victims of Mao and Soviet Gulags), which is just tragic. It may seem that freedom of the collective easily leads to terrible results for individuals. But the proper question to be raised here is: What do these collectivist scenarios have to do with collective *freedom*?

If we can talk of freedom at all in this connection – which I do not think plausible – it is important to notice that the postulated “freedom” of collectivism is of a postponed nature: “Freedom” becomes a goal to be realized later; through revolution, freedom fights, class struggle, etc. – so that a *future* harmony can be realized. The contemporary freedom of individuals is, at best, weighed and balanced against a collective happiness to come. As a defence against this inhumane calculus, liberals and human rights activists have posed the individual as a value in its own right, against collectivism. Thus, we are left with the situation where terms indicating collective agency automatically – and unreflectedly – invoke the suspicion that one is prepared to sacrifice individuals and human rights somewhere along the line. The choice of political theories is narrowed down to the following: Either we are concerned with the one pole of the equation, i.e. the freedom of individuals; or we prioritize the common will, if necessary at the cost of individuals’ rights and liberties. In my view, this is not political thought as much as a question of mathematics and book-keeping; costs and benefits, gain, sacrifice and profit. A better path would be a properly political approach, one that values political activity as desirable in itself, as argued by Hannah Arendt; or, with a more socialist accent, Castoriadis, who emphasizes “individual and collective autonomy”. I now turn the latter in somewhat more detail.

## The psyche and the social

Naturally, not all talk of collectivity means collectivism; there are ways of conceptualizing individuals’ relation to society that do not even raise the question of balancing one against the other. As already mentioned, Castoriadis sees the freedom of individuals and the freedom of society as one and the same phenomenon; but not in the sense that individuals are credited with less normative weight; nor are those individuals who disagree with the dominant ideas and norms in their community “disposable” in any sense. To see his position more clearly, we need to look at his special, psychoanalytically inspired concepts of the individual and society. The first (and decisive) step is a distinction between the *individual* and the *psyche*. According to Castoriadis, the other pole or counterpart of society is not the individual, but the psyche. Individuals are, on their part, social products all the way: “The polarity is not that between individual and society, since the individual *is* society, a fragment at the same time as a miniature – or, better, a sort of hologram – of the social world” (Castoriadis 1997:2). The individual psyche needs, in each instance, not only to accept society’s restrictions, but also to take on society’s meaning contents – the social imaginary significations – as its own. This takes place in the process of socialization, where the individual psyche develops into a social self through sublimation (*cathexis*)



– the psyche’s emotional investment in social significations. Socialization means, in other words, to *adopt* a given society’s central imaginary significations. These significations make up the individual psyche’s contents as well as its specific form. Hence, the development of an individual self is inseparable from the socialization of the psyche. Yet, this process is always only partial, as there is always an unsocialized remnant in the psyche: the unconscious and the radical imagination of the psyche. I will not develop this point, but concentrate on the social individual. Castoriadis insists that society is primary:

There is no such thing as an extrasocial human being, nor is there, either as a reality or as coherent fiction, any human ‘individual’ as an a-, extra-, or presocial ‘substance’. We cannot conceive of an individual that does not have language, for example, and there is language only as creation and social institution. Unless one wants to look ridiculous, one cannot see this creation and this institution as resulting from some deliberate cooperation between ‘individuals’ – or from an addition of ‘intersubjective networks’: for there to be intersubjectivity, there must be human subjects as well as the possibility for these subjects to communicate – in other words, there must be already socialized human beings and a language that they could not produce themselves qua individuals [...] since they must receive language through their socialization. The same considerations hold for a thousand other facets of what we call the individual (Castoriadis 1997:1-2).

The psyche is “the other” of “the social”; individuals, on the other hand, can have no existence outside of the social. It therefore makes no sense, as scholars sometimes do, to talk of individuals *versus* society; for society and individuals are – in this specific sense – one and the same, at least for Castoriadis. Society is not “something other” than the individuals who make it up, whereas individuals cannot be anything but products of the very society in and through which they exist. Moreover, the foremost product of every society is individuals who are the way they are because they live in *this* very society: We are formed in this society as capitalist or proletarian, Castoriadis wrote in 1975; not as feudal lord, patrician or Amon-Ra priest.<sup>[5]</sup> Thus it makes no sense for him to talk of individuals as the opposite pole of society: Individuals *are* society; walking fragments of the social institution; little holograms. But – a crucial point – this does *not* mean that we are determined by the social institution in any sense. To the contrary, Castoriadis’ foremost adversaries, especially in his main *oeuvre*, the *Imaginary Institution of Society*, are determinist theories of all kinds (most noteworthy, structuralism, Marxism and Hegelianism). The idea I have just outlined, where the psyche is seen as society’s other pole, is in fact central in his efforts to counter determinism and epistemological “closure” with an ontology of social creativity.

While the “individual” is a product of society, the psyche can never be produced by anything social. The psyche and society are ontological opposites; theoretical poles that can never be reduced to one another – but they should nevertheless not be



treated separately.<sup>[6]</sup>

The social imaginary significations are, as already mentioned, the very material that the psyche has at its disposal for creating its reality. They are the source of all representations: of reality and rationality, of meaning and sense. This is why, if we follow Castoriadis, the question of freedom of the individual should be seen as a question of social imaginary significations. To Castoriadis, “freedom” is itself a social imaginary signification: a product of the collective imaginary, created at a certain point in history. It is neither a natural given, nor a transcendental idea. Still, the *source of freedom itself* lies not with the social imaginary significations, but in the “radical imaginary” of the collective and the individual psyche (the “social imaginary” and the “radical imagination”), which precedes and escapes socialization and self-formation. These are formless cauldrons of creativity from which radically new, hitherto unseen significations and forms (*eide*) emerge. The freeing, and active use of the radical imaginary is what he calls individual and collective autonomy – a concept we will look at shortly. But first, a few words about social imaginary significations. What are they, and what is their ontological basis? Social imaginary significations have no real or rational “ground”; rather, they are the very source of all ideas about reality and rationality. They are neither social things, representations, nor ideal forms, but they are nevertheless manifested in institutions, since society creates itself as institutions invested with meaning.

That which holds a society together is, of course, its institution, the whole complex of its particular institutions, what I call ‘the institution of a society as a whole’ – the word ‘institution’ being taken here in the broadest and most radical sense: norms, values, language, tools, procedures and methods of dealing with things and doing things, and, of course, the individual itself both in general and in the particular type and form ... given to it by the society considered (Castoriadis 1997a:6).

According to Castoriadis, a given society is always perceived as *one* society, a unit, even if it consists of different, particular institutions. This shows that society is held together by *meaning*:

[T]his unity is in the last resort the unity and internal cohesion of the immensely complex web of meanings that permeate, orient, and direct the whole life of the society considered, as well as the concrete individuals that bodily constitute society. This web of meanings is what I call the ‘magma’ of *social imaginary significations* that are carried by and embodied in the institutions of the given society and that, so to speak, animate it (Castoriadis 1997a:7).

Examples of such significations are: “[...] spirits, gods, God; polis, citizen, nation, state, party; commodity, money, capital, interest rate; taboo, virtue, sin, and so forth.” (*ibid.*). Castoriadis asks himself what is the source, root, origin of the magma of imaginary significations:



We have to recognize that the social-historical field is irreducible to the traditional types of being, that we observe here the works, the creation of what I call the *social imaginary*, or the *instituting society* (as opposed to the instituted society) – being careful not to make of it another ‘thing,’ another ‘subject,’ or another ‘idea’ (Castoriadis 1997a:8).

The account of social imaginary significations in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* is mostly negative, and more poetically suggestive than analytically applicable. This is probably not a philosophical weakness; rather, any attempt to pin down the concept in positive terms is bound to reduce its phenomenological significance. An example might still be helpful. *Music* can illustrate the irreducibility of a social imaginary signification. It makes no sense to describe music in terms of its “components”, since any such description will not let us grasp the “music-ness” of music, hence, it is irreducible. Nor can it be understood in terms of its many “functions”, hence its meaning rests wholly in itself – yet it is immensely laden with meaning and productive of many representations, some of which can be argued to be entirely new. But only playing and doing music can demonstrate what music is, and means.

## Freedom as individual and collective autonomy

Freedom and truth cannot be objects of investment if they have not already emerged as social imaginary significations. Individuals aiming at autonomy cannot appear unless the social-historical field has altered itself in such a way that it opens a space of interrogation without bounds [...] But the concrete embodiment of the institution are those very same individuals who walk, talk, and act. It is therefore essentially with the same stroke that a new type of society and a new type of individual, each presupposing the other, must emerge, and do emerge, in Greece from the eighth century B.C. onward and in Western Europe from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onward (Castoriadis 1991:166-67).

I now want to turn to the practical-political aspects of the foregoing discussion, and hopefully clarify what the psychoanalytical detour above can tell us about collective and individual freedom. A point often stressed by Castoriadis is that “history” should not be seen as mere development according to reason, social progress, etc. History is first and foremost creation – a multiplicity of social-historical associations that create, recreate and elaborate upon their own conditions. Society thus consists of two instances: that which creates itself – the *instituting society* – and that which is created – the *instituted society*. Society creates itself as a human world of meaning, consisting of “things”, “reality”, language, norms, values, reasons to live for and others to die for – and first and foremost, human individuals in whom the social institution is fully embodied.<sup>[7]</sup> But as already suggested, the latter has nothing to do with freedom/determinism – the problem of freedom arises, for Castoriadis, when the relationship between the instituted and the instituting is reversed: When the members of a given society consider its laws, its political culture, economical



arrangements etc. to be “servants” of the instituted (the existing institutions), rather than the other way around. The latter state is, however, widespread in history:

The collectivity can only exist as instituted. Its institutions are always its own creation, but usually, once created, they appear to the collectivity as given (by ancestors, gods, God, nature, reason, the laws of history, the workings of competition, etc.); they become fixed, rigid and are worshipped (Castoriadis 1997a:131).

To become autonomous means to consciously create one’s own institutions. This is both an individual and collective movement.

I call autonomous a society that not only knows explicitly that it has created its own laws but has instituted itself so as to free its radical imaginary and enable itself to alter its institutions through collective, self-reflective, and deliberate activity (Castoriadis 1997a:132).<sup>[8]</sup>

And the “lucid activity” to bring forth the institution of an autonomous society and collective decisions, is politics. To Castoriadis, it is “immediately obvious” that the project of an autonomous society becomes meaningless if it does not at the same time mean to bring forth autonomous individuals, and vice versa (*ibid*). We should now be able to discern what a free society means to Castoriadis. With a metaphor, it means a “psychological and social room” in which we can think and theorize the insight that our laws, according to which we conduct our lives, are of our own creation. To put it differently: The collective realization that the political community has created, and is capable of changing, its own conditions; the laws to which it binds itself *and* their normative foundation (i.e. in the final instance, the social imaginary significations). When these insights are commonly accessible – not only in principle, but more importantly, psychologically thinkable as meaningful instituted cultural consciousness – we may say that this society is free or “autonomous”. This culture can for Castoriadis only be properly embodied in a democracy.

The opposite of autonomy (democracy) is of course heteronomy, which signifies that the collective does *not* possess this insight. Heteronomous societies maintain that society’s laws are *not* a product of its own making, but rather spring from some extra-social source, like nature, reason, tradition, gods, a holy scripture or, more relevant today, the “laws” of the market.<sup>[9]</sup> Here, the term “politics” refers merely to a “state of things” – an incarnated reason, given procedures, etc. – or law-like states which appears senseless or even blasphemous to question, let alone change. Under heteronomy, “politicians” can merely observe and follow the laws, implement, execute etc. It should be fairly easy to recognize certain aspects of the politics of globalization as representing heteronomy.

Heteronomous societies are marked by *routine*, repetition and limited thought figures (closure). Autonomous societies, on the other hand, are marked by *reflexivity* in terms of politics, philosophy, thinking and art. It is not only allowed, but it makes

good *sense* in these societies to criticize and problematize the established truths and norms, both concerning their desirability and validity. Autonomy thus defined signifies a constant preoccupation with troublesome and difficult questions, a permanent interrogation of the validity of norms, laws, institutions and significations – and above all, the creation of new ones. This state of autonomy as reflexivity, critique and social creation is instituted “freedom”, in the thought universe of Castoriadis.

### Conclusion – and some further questions

The question that now remains to be addressed, turning back to the opening sections, is whether Castoriadis’ thought also offers an adequate, theoretical defence of the moral status of the individual vis-à-vis the collective. Or is his postulate of the individual as a miniature of the instituted society, just another ideology that enables abuse of individuals in the name of the collective? After all, Castoriadis was a self-declared revolutionary all his life; does this not indicate that his political thought allows the breaking of some individual eggs, to bake the autonomous omelette? The question is not treated directly in Castoriadis’ theory of the social/individual nexus, but we may approach it indirectly, through the principle of permanent questioning, interrogation and creation. As we have seen, the project of autonomy means to facilitate, theoretically and politically, a critical and reflexive attitude towards all truths and principles to which a given society is committed. His sociological programme was, in short, to demonstrate that no society is subordinate to status quo, nor to any kind of social laws. Reflection and questioning must, by necessity, be performed by individuals, even though cultural preconditions for critique – the social imaginary significations – must be socially instituted. The only logical viewpoint is that freedom of this kind must apply to individuals and the collective alike. What would be the alternative? A free collective (radical democracy) which sacrifices its members – for what? The individual who opposes autonomy is the individual who refuses to think, reflect and criticize; i.e. the person who does not take part in the political life of her society. However, to claim that autonomous society would want to *rid itself* of individuals who do not want to reflect and create seems fairly far-fetched. It seems fair to say, then, that Castoriadis’ thought is one example of political thought that does not force us to favour *either* the freedom of the individual *or* that of the collective.

Castoriadis’ later works underlined a depoliticizing tendency, a “mounting tide of insignificance,”<sup>[10]</sup> marked by lack of belief in political change. An adequate illustration is the well-known doom over political culture voiced by Maggie Thatcher: “*There Is No Alternative*” (to market capitalism and status quo) – the so-called TINA-thesis, which partly paralyzed politics over the 1980s and ‘90s. When it comes to belief in the potentiality of politics and change – one of the central elements of individual and collective autonomy – I think intellectuals may play an important part. One possible road is to question the wide-spread academic reflex that says: “either individuals or collectives”. Undifferentiated suspicion against collectivity can – whether intended or not – be an efficient hindrance against social creativity and the



demos' will to organize itself. As I have tried to show, the opposition of individuals and collectives is not a theoretical necessity, but a contingent idea which has served very well as a defence against totalitarianism. However, it also serves very well to weaken other, socio-political initiatives. A movement for democracy and social creativity might therefore have much to gain in exploring ideas about freedom that are equally valid for individuals *and* collectives.

*Thanks to participants in Nordic Summer University's winter symposia for valuable comments to a previous version of this text, and the Ethics programme at the University of Oslo, where these thoughts have also been presented.*

---

## References

- Berlin, Isaiah (1959): *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford University Press
- Berlin, Isaiah: *Democracy, Communism and the Individual*. Retrieved online at: <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/demcomind.pdf> (last accessed: October 1st 2008).
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (2005): *Une société à la dérive. Entretiens et débats*. Paris, Seuil
- Castoriadis (2004): *Post-scriptum sur l'insignifiance. Entretiens avec Daniel Mermet*. Paris, Éditions de l'aube
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1999): *Dialogue*. Paris, Éditions de l'aube
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1997): "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime." In: *Constellations* Vol. 4 (1), Oxford, Blackwell
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1997a): *World in Fragments. Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*. Translated by David Ames Curtis. Stanford, Stanford University Press
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1996): *La montée de l'insignifiance, Les Carrefours du labyrinthe IV*. Paris, Seuil
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1991): *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy. Essays in Political Philosophy*. Translated by David Ames Curtis. New York, Oxford University Press
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1987): *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Cambridge, MIT Press
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1975): *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris, Seuil
- Constant, Benjamin [French orig. 1816]: *The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns*. Retrieved online at <http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/ancients.html> (last accessed October 1st 2008)
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels ([1848]1888): *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Retrieved online at <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html#Proletarian> (last accessed October 1st 2008)
- Rawls, John (1971): *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press
- Wagner, Peter (2008): *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation. A New Sociology of Modernity*. Cambridge, Polity

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Still, Wagner's point is to argue against the eradication of terms for collective freedom, or in his preferred term: autonomy, as the following sentence shows: "No emphasis on individual freedom, as understandable as it may be, can make the question of collective autonomy disappear, as a historical-sociological overview of modernity's changing political forms will show." (Wagner 2008:16).

<sup>[2]</sup> In this perspective, theories where individuals and society are said to influence each equally,



according to the formula “Individual ↔ Society,” are extremely naïve.

<sup>[53]</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, retrieved online at <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html#Proletarian> (last accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008).

<sup>[54]</sup> Isaiah Berlin: *Democracy, Communism and the Individual*, retrieved online at: <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/demcomind.pdf> (last accessed: 1st October 2008).

<sup>[55]</sup> Castoriadis 1987:318. Today he might have said “consumers.”

<sup>[56]</sup> Castoriadis 1987:332

<sup>[57]</sup> Castoriadis 1987:42.

<sup>[58]</sup> Castoriadis 1997a.

<sup>[59]</sup> For Castoriadis, heteronomous conceptions are not only politically undesirable, but false. They conceal the true state of things: that a given society’s laws are always of its own creation.

<sup>[60]</sup> See for instance Castoriadis 1996, 1999, 2004 and 2005.

---

*Ingerid S. Straume defended her doctoral thesis in philosophy of education in 2008. The thesis discusses the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis in relation to central pedagogical concepts such as Bildung, paideia and citizenship education. She has written extensively on diverse issues, including democracy, political theory, environmental politics and moral education. Straume is presently a coordinator of the Nordic Summer University ([www.nsuweb.no](http://www.nsuweb.no)) and teaches at Hedmark University College ([www.hihm.no](http://www.hihm.no)).*