Theories of Community in Habermas, Nancy and Agamben: A Critical Evaluation

Brian Elliott*
University College Dublin

Abstract

Continental philosophy over the past two decades has increasingly turned its attention to social and political matters. Two key figures involved in this move, Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben, have advanced a position centering on the idea of singular community. This article sets out the basic features of this idea and contrasts it with Habermas' theory of communicative or dialogical community. Habermas is open to the criticism that his theory of community is constructed according to an unduly narrow construal of legitimate argumentation and democratic participation. The idea of community advanced by Nancy and Agamben, in contrast, appears to lack any credible criteria of community inclusion or identity. In conclusion, it is suggested that both theories of community fall short by neglecting the task of constructing and preserving actual sites of collective democratic action and resistance.

The past two decades have witnessed a renewed engagement of continental philosophy with social and political issues. While it could be argued that this concern was intrinsic to the post-structuralist paradigm that began to predominate in the 1960s, developments in the mid- to late 1980s brought with them a manifest and pronounced political treatment of themes. The timing is far from coincidental, as this marks the period of the definitive breakdown of Soviet communism. In contrast to Anglo-American philosophy, which has generally allied itself with varieties of liberalism, the major European figures of recent continental philosophy have been predominantly left-leaning thinkers. The example of Sartre was key, however, in bringing about an ingrained sense of scepticism with respect to forms of party and state communism. Nevertheless, at the moment when Soviet communism collapsed, continental philosophy was not slow in rejecting strident proclamations of the final victory of laissez-faire liberal democracy. In Specters of Marx, for example, Derrida made a passionate case for keeping alive a certain spirit of Marx. However, the difficulty of Derrida's salvage operation is readily apparent. This is largely because of the fact that, in the course of the preceding two decades, such central features of Marxian thought as humanism, rational teleology and class struggle had fallen victim to post-structuralist critique. In fact, Derrida's Marxian spirit appears to save little more than a rather vague appeal to indeterminate messianism from the original programme of universal emancipation through revolutionary collective action.

A central task of this article is to show how this effort to maintain Marx's concern for social justice has been worked out in detail by two contemporary continental philosophers who owe much to Derrida, namely Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben. In order to broaden and enliven the discussion I will contrast their work with that of Jürgen Habermas. In particular I will consider Habermas' theory of communicative action as this has developed since the early 1980s. To provide an effective focus my discussion will centre on distinct theories of community: dialogical community in the case of Habermas and singular community within the work of Nancy and Agamben. After sketching the main
features of each theory I will conclude by considering certain problems prominent within recent critical literature. I begin with Habermas’ theory of dialogical community.

1. Communicative Action

Although the work of Habermas has its roots in the Critical Theory of Adorno, Horkheimer, and above all Marcuse, its mature development involves extensive reception of American pragmatism, hermeneutics and Anglo-American ordinary language philosophy. What Habermas fixes upon as common to these philosophical traditions is a notion of language or discourse as the basic medium of situated intersubjective knowledge. Towards the end of the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas offers a useful summary of his basic position:

> [Communicative reason] refers … to a symbolically structured lifeworld that is constituted in the interpretive accomplishments of its members and only reproduced through communication. Thus communicative reason does not simply encounter ready-made subjects and systems; rather, it takes part in structuring what is to be preserved. The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is ingrained in the conditions for the communicative sociation of individuals; it is built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species. (398)

Here Habermas makes clear that he grasps communicative reason as a domain of prior discursive competence that first constitutes the social environment. At the same time, he indicates that concern for social justice is immediately involved in such communicative constitution. In this way Habermas is intent on offering a model of communication that will be robust enough to withstand the critiques of instrumental rationality found within Critical Theory and, more recently, in the work of such post-structuralist thinkers as Foucault.

Habermas’ intent to offer a model of communicative rationality that precedes any radical split between fact and value (i.e. his recognition of a ‘utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom’ as integral to all linguistic socialization) leads him to introduce a strong concept of rationally motivated consensus. Such consensus involves those engaging in discussion in good faith to presuppose what he calls an ‘ideal speech situation’. In fact, Habermas reserves the term ‘discourse’ for dialogue that takes place according to such a presupposition. In basic terms, the ideal speech situation is one in which decisions are purely rationally motivated. As he explains:

> A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents. Agreement can indeed be objectively attained by force; but what comes to pass manifestly through outside influence or the use of violence cannot count subjectively as agreement. Agreement rests on common convictions. (*Communicative Action*, vol. 1, 287)

Employing a modified version of the idea of the lifeworld (in German, *Lebenswelt*) first developed in the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, Habermas postulates an immediate social context of communicative action. This context is regulated above all by the production of uncoerced argumentative consensus that is potentially unlimited in scope. Such a sphere of mutual agreement indicates both an underlying tendency of all human communication and a utopian image of a perfectly rational society. At the same time, Habermas wishes to integrate an essential element of openness and revisability into the process of consensus formation. Such a characterization of communicative action has
the advantage of bringing together what Habermas takes to be common ground between modern scientific method and democratic political ideals:

... participants in communication encounter one another in a horizon of unrestricted possibilities of mutual understanding [...] This does not exclude a fallibilistic consciousness. Members know that they can err, but even a consensus that subsequently proves to be deceptive rests to start with on uncoerced recognition of criticizable validity claims. From the internal perspective of participants of a sociocultural lifeworld, there can be no pseudoconsensus in the sense of convictions brought about by force; in a basically transparent process of reaching understanding – which is transparent for the participants themselves – no force can gain a footing. (Communica-
tive Action, vol. 2, 149–50)

It is important to note that Habermas develops his theory under the presupposition of a basic tension between communicative and strategic action. According to his analysis, success and understanding are two materially different and mutually exclusive goals of human action.² Strategic, success-oriented action is traced back to what are called the ‘steering media’ of money and power. In the second volume of The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas analyses in detail the tension between strategic and communicative action, each understood to be a basic determinant of social conditions within modern liberal democracies. It is through this analysis that both Habermas’ theory of community and his particular inheritance of Critical Theory come most clearly to light.

2. Dialogical Community

Habermas leaves no room for doubt that he considers communicative action to be the basic cement holding society together and so constituting a viable sense of community. As he notes:

... what binds sociated individuals to one another and secures the integration of society is a web of communicative actions that thrives only in the light of cultural conditions, and not systemic mechanisms that are out of the reach of a member’s intuitive knowledge. The lifeworld that members construct from common cultural conditions is coextensive with society. It draws all societal processes into a searchlight of cooperative processes of interpretation. It lends to everything that happens in society the transparency of something about which one can speak – even if one does not (yet) understand it. (Communicative Action, vol. 2, 148–9)

Although Habermas recognizes the fact that steering media bring about what he calls ‘system integration’, he insists that ‘the integration of society can take place only on the premises of communicative action’ (Communicative Action, vol. 2, 150). Retaining something of the spirit of earlier Critical Theory Habermas speaks of the social pathologies that arise when the scope of communicative action is severely impaired through the strategic action of power and money. The models of community defended by proponents of laissez-faire capitalism and of the social-welfare state alike lead to the erosion of communicative community. In qualified opposition to both, Habermas sees communicative action as the essential source of any viable and credible social democracy. In basic terms his model of democratic community comes down to a robust defense of civil society in opposition to both governmental bureaucracy and market forces. In this light, Habermas’ idea of the communicative or dialogical community involves a definite element of resistance to countervailing societal powers. He remarks:

The point is to protect areas of life that are functionally dependent on social integration through values, norms, and consensus formation, to preserve them from falling prey to the systemic
imperatives of economic and administrative subsystems growing with dynamics of their own, and to defend them from becoming converted over, through the steering medium of the law, to a principle of sociation that is, for them, dysfunctional. (Communicative Action, vol. 2, 372–3)

While his defense of civil society against the rationalizing interventions of state bureaucracy and markets might suggest a political model of localized social self-organization, Habermas places severe restrictions on this possibility. In The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, Habermas insists that citizens operating within the context of mature liberal democracies can ‘participate in the formation of collective consciousness, but they cannot act collectively’ (360). Defending something resembling a classic liberal conception of the balance of powers, Habermas cautions against any claims to social autonomy made at the level of civil society:

Forms of self-organization strengthen the collective capacity for action. Grassroots organizations, however, may not cross the threshold to the formal organization of independent systems. Otherwise they will pay for the indisputable gain in complexity by having organizational goals detached from the orientations and attitudes of their members and dependent instead upon imperatives of maintaining and expanding organizational power. (Philosophical Discourse 364)

In his later major study Between Facts and Norms Habermas’ thinking becomes more explicitly political in tone and intent. In part responding to the criticism that his early discourse-theoretical work was excessively idealized, Habermas now strives to show how the model of communicative action provides adequate theoretical foundations to account for the actual functioning of any healthy social democracy. Here, Habermas offers important clarifications on how he sees dialogical community working together with democratic governmental institutions and legal frameworks in a mutually reinforcing manner. As with his earlier work he stresses how civil society must operate as a milieu of critical mediation between the communicative lifeworld and mechanisms of institutional rationalization. Habermas also insists that it would be a mistake to view his idea of the lifeworld as anything akin to a specific social grouping. He thereby underscores his earlier warning not to confuse the notion of dialogical community with localized social autonomy:

… the lifeworld is not a large organization to which members belong, it is not an association or a union in which individuals band together, nor is it a collectivity made up of members. Socialized individuals could not maintain themselves as subjects at all if they did not find support in the relationships of reciprocal recognition articulated in cultural traditions and stabilized in legitimate orders – and vice versa. (Facts 80)

Habermas’ move to embed dialogical community within the deep structure of the lifeworld points to a basic affinity with the model of singular community to be examined next. For Nancy and Agamben too ‘community’ must be understood to refer to a fundamental level of social relatedness that precedes and makes possible any concrete formation or organization. A further point of agreement relates to the critique of communitarian conceptions of community. In general terms such conceptions turn on commonly held notions of the good life. Habermas, in agreement with Rawls’ version of liberalism, views such a conception of community as inevitably productive of exclusion and intolerance. For Habermas dialogical community is characterized by common procedures of rational deliberation rather than common convictions, worldviews or lifestyles. By restricting the domain of social consensus in this way, Habermas contends, the social plurality of liberal democracies can be maintained and protected from the threat of domination by materially or symbolically powerful groups.
In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young builds on Habermas’ work and attempts to draw out its concrete consequences with respect to the defense of social and cultural pluralism. Following Habermas’ lead she argues that any model of community predicated on a shared vision of the good life brings about the suppression or exclusion of social difference:

[The communitarian ideal of community] expresses a desire for the fusion of subjects with one another which in practice operates to exclude those with whom the group does not identify. The ideal of community denies and represses social difference, the fact that the polity cannot be thought of as a unity in which all participants share a common experience and common values. (227)

Young contends that it is important to be aware of the dangers of what she calls the communitarian ‘Rousseauist dream’, according to which the only viable alternative to unbridled individualism is tightly organized, locally autonomous political communities. Drawing explicitly on the critique of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ common to much recent continental thought, Young remarks: ‘The ideal of the immediate copresence of subjects … is a metaphysical illusion. Even a face-to-face relation between two people is mediated by voice and gesture, spacing and temporality’ (*Justice* 233). Young’s main target here is what she calls ‘a model of the good society as composed of decentralized, economically self-sufficient face-to-face communities functioning as autonomous political entities’ (*Justice* 233). Broadly committed to what Habermas calls an ‘unlimited community of communication’, Young insists that the model of locally autonomous community is utopian and exclusionary. In more positive terms, Young appeals to a certain vision of urban life where unplanned encounters between strangers constitute a loosely organized, highly mediated network society. In this way she cashes out Habermas’ often highly abstract theory of dialogical community with a more concrete image of cultural pluralism under contemporary urban conditions.

3. Nancy and Inoperative Community

Rejection of the communitarian sense of community constitutes the point of departure for Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy begins this work with the dramatic assertion that ‘the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community’ represents the ‘gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world’ (*Nancy, Community* I). Such an opening move could be readily misunderstood as indicative of nostalgic mourning for the loss of community, but Nancy is quick to counter this possible interpretation. For Nancy the political catastrophes of modernity bear witness not to the disappearance of genuine community but rather to an ultimately salutary disenchantment with a certain understanding of community. This understanding is essentially the modern humanistic notion that socially just political community can be constructed through rational collective action. By deconstructing what remains of this ‘myth of community’ Nancy’s work strives to clear the way for the emergence of quite another manner of grasping the social.

In 1980 Nancy, together with his colleague Philip Lacoue-Labarthe, founded the Center for Philosophical Research on the Political in Paris. Nancy’s work during the existence of the Center between 1980 and 1984 amply demonstrates his debt to Derrida. In the same period Nancy is clearly attempting, by means of Derrida’s reception, to work out a satisfying and credible leftist interpretation of Heidegger. Nancy’s analysis of community thus shows many affinities with Heidegger’s critique of essentialist metaphysics,
and his positive account of community echoes Heidegger’s earlier analysis of human existence: it is relational rather than substantive, situated rather than ideal, and holistic rather than atomistic. But whereas Heidegger’s *Being and Time* offered a general criticism of traditional western metaphysics, Nancy’s concern is to develop a political and social ontology on Heideggerian foundations. In a parallel move to that made by Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* Nancy advances his notion of the ‘inoperative’ community in opposition to a perceived productivist bias common to both *laissez-faire* liberalism and forms of state socialism and communism. Both ends of the political spectrum, he insists, understand community as a production of human society through collective rational activity. Nancy takes this broad paradigm of social self-construction to have given rise to the various political catastrophes ascribed to modern nation states. He remarks:

> Essence is set to work in [economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion]. This is what we have called “totalitarianism,” but it might be better named “immanentism,” as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets. (Community 3)

Nancy goes on to tackle in more detail what he considers to be the inadequacies of liberal and communitarian notions of community. Liberalism he understands as engaged in the fruitless attempt to derive community from the starting point of isolated individuals. Drawing on Heidegger’s critique of the Cartesian model of the conscious subject and extending it to include later idealist conceptions of the self and the nation state, Nancy contends:

> An inconsequential atomism, individualism tends to forget that the atom is a world. This is why the question of community is so markedly absent from the metaphysics of the subject, that is to say, from the absolute for-itself – be it in the form of the individual or the total State – which means also the metaphysics of the absolute in general, of being as ab-solute, as perfectly detached, distinct, and closed: being without relation. (Community 4)

It is important to notice here how Nancy extends the Heideggerian criticism to the modern nation state, more specifically to the state understood as ‘ab-solute’, that is, as historically exceptional. Such a move is characteristic of Nancy’s effort to employ Heideggerian motifs in such a way that Heidegger’s actual complicity with German National Socialism is shown to be at odds with the underlying direction and resources of his thinking.

While Nancy’s rejection of the liberal conception of community turns largely on the critique of the model of subjectivity as isolated consciousness, his parallel opposition to the communitarian alternative hinges on the notion of labour or work. Critiquing the communitarian model of community from this perspective presents more difficulty to Nancy for two principal reasons. First, it implies criticism of Heidegger’s conception of existence as *project* or *projection* (in German, *Entwurf*), and second, Nancy is obviously more concerned to salvage something positive from this side of the political spectrum. In many ways Nancy’s insistence that work cannot account for community builds on a previously well-established deconstruction of the Marxian concept of labour. In Nancy’s version, however, a certain appeal to the ontological priority of community is added to the mix:

> … community cannot arise from the domain of *work*. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude. Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and
producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects). (Community 31)

In order to express positively the fact that community exists prior to individuals and acts of production Nancy coins the neologism ‘compearance’ (in French, comparution).\(^7\) Akin both to Heidegger’s concept of existence as always pre-situated or ‘thrown’ and to Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of the appeal of the Other as an unconditional sense of ethical responsibility, Nancy’s idea of compearance entails that community is primordial and irreducible.\(^8\)

4. Agamben and Singularity

In *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben offers a social ontology that, he says, frees us from ‘the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal’ (1). His account of the social has recourse to the medieval notion of *quodlibet ens*, literally ‘whatever being you like’. According to Agamben:

In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) – and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-such, for belonging itself. (Community 1–2)

This idea of ‘whatever being’ or singular existence as distinct from the traditional western concept of the subject as a predicable substance again shows a basic debt to Heidegger’s thinking. In common with Nancy, Agamben insists that rethinking the social requires the acknowledgement that ‘there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize’ (Community 43). This rejection of essentialist conceptions of human existence is understood to remove the foundation for any reconstruction or reaffirmation of identity politics. This gives rise to a basic problem, however, insofar as the notion of singularity becomes subject to indeterminacy. Agamben counters that the absence of identity does not consign singular existence to total indeterminacy, ‘rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities’ (Agamben, Community 67).

In his later and most celebrated work, *Homo Sacer*, Agamben is more explicit about the need to think human existence together with the idea of possibility.\(^9\) He remarks: ‘Until a new and coherent ontology of possibility … has replaced the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality and its relation to potentiality, a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty remains unthinkable’ (Homo Sacer 44). The first part of *Homo Sacer*, from which the last citation is taken, is concerned with the notion of sovereign power as this has developed in western thought. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s early work on the connection between law and state violence,\(^10\) Agamben’s appeal to rethink the nature of political power is part of a more general effort to overcome what he considers the predominant political paradigm of sacrifice. Agamben’s argument is complex and can only be touched upon here as it is immediately relevant to the idea of singular community. A useful connection can be made with a certain reception of early 20th-century anthropology, for example, that found in Georges Bataille’s work from the mid-1930s. In his essay, ‘The Notion of Expenditure’, Bataille contends that social formation must be understood to entail an essential element of what he calls ‘useless expenditure’. Drawing on Marcel Mauss’ famous studies of social exchange or *potlatch* among American Indian tribes of the American Northwest,\(^11\) Bataille connects unrequited exchange with an array
of sacrificial practices. He notes: ‘Cults require a bloody wasting of men and animals in sacrifice. In the etymological sense of the word, sacrifice is nothing other than the production of sacred things’ (‘Expenditure’ 119).  

As the title indicates, Homo Sacer is also concerned with the model of social formation that centres on the production of the sacred. For Agamben, the notion of the sacred refers in the first instance to the power of the sovereign to dispose over the life and death of subjects with impunity. Taking up Benjamin’s idea that the state of emergency or exception invoked by fascist regimes betrays an underlying tendency of all modern politics, Agamben insists that the power of contemporary democratic states continues to be regulated by a logic of sacrifice. The key instance cited as evidence for this is the plight of refugees. He remarks:

> If refugees … represent such a disquietening element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain – bare life – to appear for an instant within that domain. (Homo Sacer 131)

Drawing inspiration from Hannah Arendt’s analysis of the massive European population displacements caused by the wars of the 20th century, Agamben makes clear that contemporary migration and displacement represent the greatest challenge for any credible theory of community. More specifically, Agamben insists that the project of community connected to the emergence and development of modern nation states must be confronted and overcome. As he notes:

> The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization (Community 85).

In Agamben’s most terse formulation, singular community constitutes ‘the principal enemy of the State’ (Community 87).

In the culminating sections of Homo Sacer, Agamben focuses on what he calls ‘the camp’ as the paradigm of modern politics. From the beginning of his study Agamben highlights the idea that the constitution of the sacred involves separating out a certain community subject to the unconditional exercise of sovereign power. This act of segregation essentially produces a visible form of social stigmatization. After analysing in some detail the definitive historical instance of the Nazi death camps, Agamben goes on to insist that the camp as a production of political power has come to represent a generalized social configuration. He concludes:

> The growing dissociation of birth (bare life) and the nation-state is the new fact of politics in our day, and what we call camp is this disjunction […] The camp as dislocating localization is the hidden matrix of the politics in which we are still living, and it is this structure of the camp that we must learn to recognize in all its metamorphoses into the zones d’attentes of our airports and certain outskirts of our cities. The camp is the fourth, inseparable element that has now added itself to – and so broken – the old trinity composed of the state, the nation (birth), and land. (175)

Agamben offers no solutions or counter-models as such to this bleak vision of contemporary political reality. Given that his argument posits the all-pervasive extension of the camp as a political paradigm, any attempt to propose a positive alternative would invite the accusation of inconsistency. Nevertheless, the notion of singular community shared by Nancy and Agamben does hold out, albeit in a conceptually underdetermined form,
the possibility of a reconfiguration of the social beyond the limits of nationalist and essentialist identity politics. Having analysed the basic features of dialogical and singular community, the following short section will touch on some key problems.

5. Community and Democratic Resistance

As discussed, Habermas offers a model of community designed to show how a discursively vibrant civil society is a crucial element of any genuine democratic political culture. Much criticism of the theory of communicative action has claimed that the Habermasian account of legitimate dialogue is unduly narrow. The point is made that other modes of address, for example, those that are rhetorical and emotive in character, are legitimate and in fact essential within contexts of democratic discussion. Failure to extend the bounds of discursive legitimacy beyond the confines of what Habermas considers true argumentation, it is contended, gives an impoverished and unrealistic account of how debate actually works in modern democracies. While Iris Marion Young advances such a criticism, she stops short of the much more radical objection that Habermas simply fails to recognize the basically agonistic nature of democratic politics. In The Democratic Paradox and elsewhere, Chantall Mouffe castigates Habermas for assuming that progressive democratic politics can proceed through non-confrontational discussion alone. An earlier version of this critique is formulated by Jean-François Lyotard, who insists: ‘Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus’ (66).

Among the as yet scant critical literature on Agamben and Nancy, one of the most direct and fundamental critiques of their model of the social has come from a contemporary fellow leftist, Antonio Negri. Negri takes issue in particular with Agamben’s analysis of the Nazi death camps in terms of what modern state violence shows us about the potential for popular resistance. In essence, Negri argues that Agamben’s notion of the camp risks actually promoting a sense of powerlessness in the face of state oppression. He remarks: ‘Agamben, in effect, is saying that such is the nature of power: in the final instance, power reduces each and every human being to such a state of powerlessness’ (‘Powerful Life’ 174). As a further point of contention, the tendency of both Agamben and Nancy to reduce the political theory of Marx to a merely residual sense of potential future change is open to the criticism that they thereby mystify the concrete task of furthering social justice.

In summary, it can be said that Habermas’ theory of community fails insofar as it excludes too much (i.e. extra-rational forms of democratic action), whereas the model of singular community fails on account of its including everything (i.e. ‘whatever being’ or singularity entails an indeterminate extension of community). In contrast, the recent history of liberal democracy shows that significant advances in social justice are achieved neither through rational discussion alone, nor through some generalized mass opposition to state power. Instead, progress has been made through identifying specific instances of injustice and situating practices of resistance. Any contemporary theory of community that wishes to aid social justice must therefore give a credible and positive account of concrete means and sites of democratic resistance.

Short Biography

Brian Elliott has been a lecturer in philosophy at University College Dublin since 2000. His research is concerned with social and political thought, aesthetics, architectural theory...
and critical urbanism from the perspective of contemporary continental philosophy. He has published numerous articles and two books: one on Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle under the title Anfang und Ende in der Philosophie (Duncker & Humblot, 2002) and another on classical phenomenology titled Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger (Routledge, 2005). He currently holds a research fellowship granted by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. For the present academic year he is resident in Portland, Oregon and completing two further book projects: Constructing Community: Configurations of the Social in Twentieth-Century Philosophy, Art, and Architecture (forthcoming with Rowman & Littlefield), and Walter Benjamin for Architects (forthcoming in the ‘Thinkers for Architects’ series with Routledge). Brian Elliott holds an MA in philosophy from the University of Edinburgh and a PhD in philosophy from the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg-im-Breisgau.

Notes

* Correspondence address: Newman House, Belfield, Dublin D4, Ireland. Email: brian.elliott@ucd.ie; sjbelliott@gmail.com.

1 For a lucid and penetrating overview of Habermas’ notion of communicative action see M. Cooke, Re-presenting 47–51.
2 See Communicative Action (vol. 1), 286.
3 See ‘Discourse Ethics, Law and Sittlichkeit’, Autonomy and Solidarity 252.
4 Young further develops her analysis of social justice and urban conditions in chapter 6 of Inclusion. For a detailed account and practical application of the Habermas inspired notion of ‘deliberative democracy’, see Gutmann and Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement.
5 For the collaborative work of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy from this period, see Retreating. References to Derrida abound in the texts of this collection and his contributions to certain discussions at the Center are recorded.
6 For further details of Nancy’s critique of political sovereignty understood as the absolute power of the nation state see two essays in the collection The Birth to Presence: ‘The Hegelian Monarch’ (110–42) and ‘Finite Existence’ (143–66). Taken together these essays demonstrate how Nancy seeks to draw out a political theory on the basis of Heidegger’s critique of the traditional notion of the autarchic subject. For a complementary criticism of absolute sovereignty in terms of Carl Schmitt’s theory of exceptionalism see the first two chapters of Agamben’s Homo Sacer (15–38).
7 See Nancy’s article ‘Compearance’.
8 Limitations of space do not permit discussion of the development of Nancy’s thinking of community in his more recent major study, Being Singular. Nancy’s more explicitly political thinking is sketched in Sense 88–117. For a more extensive examination of Nancy and Agamben on community see my article, ‘Community and Resistance in Heidegger, Nancy and Agamben’, forthcoming in Philosophy and Social Criticism.
9 On Agamben’s ‘repetition’ of Heidegger’s effort to retrieve a more radical understanding of potentiality from Aristotle, see ‘On Potentiality’.
10 See Benjamin, ‘Critique’.
11 See Mauss 42–59.
12 For Bataille’s more mature expression of the idea of useless expenditure within the context of a ‘general economy’, see the first volume of Accursed Share.
13 See ‘Concept’ 392.
14 See Origins 267–90.
15 A highly critical appraisal of Agamben’s use of this notion is offered by Mesnard.
16 For an excellent discussion of the model of community common to Nancy and Agamben and its potential to contest opposed models of ‘constitutional patriotism’ supported by Habermas and others, see Balibar 51–77.
17 See Inclusion 63–70.
18 See also Political 83–9.
19 Although he claims that his approach is distinct from that of Lyotard, Jacques Rancière’s work in Disagreement has many obvious affinities with Lyotard’s position as advanced in The Postmodern Condition and The Differend. The third chapter of Disagreement offers a sustained critique of the consensus model of politics. Flyvbjerg puts forward powerful contentions against Habermasian communications theory from the perspective of local politics and decision-making.
20 See Sheppard, Sparks and Thomas; Calarco and DeCaroli; and Hutchens.
21 Negri and Hardt further criticize Agamben’s use of the idea of ‘bare life’ in Empire (366).
Works Cited


学霸图书馆
www.xuebalib.com

本文献由“学霸图书馆-文献云下载”收集自网络，仅供学习交流使用。

学霸图书馆（www.xuebalib.com）是一个“整合众多图书馆数据库资源，提供一站式文献检索和下载服务”的24小时在线不限IP的图书馆。
图书馆致力于便利、促进学习与科研，提供最强文献下载服务。

图书馆导航：
图书馆首页 文献云下载 图书馆入口 外文数据库大全 疑难文献辅助工具