SALVATORE’S *The Public Sphere* offers one of the most ambitious and original attempts at social-theoretical reconstruction which I have read in a long time. Its aim is nothing less than the theoretical-practical rehabilitation of “tradition” as the foundation of public reason in the public sphere. But the purpose of this rehabilitation is neither traditionalist nor conservative. It offers a highly critical and revisionist genealogical account of the modern liberal public sphere, in its main Habermasian conception, in order to reveal some of its forgotten ancestry in the Axial Renaissance of Medieval Christian and Muslim societies. Salvatore understands genealogy in its basic metaphorical sense “that in order to know somebody one has to know his ancestors, an idea that applies to human practices and institutions as well” (p. 25). But he wants to rescue genealogy from its post-modern deconstructionist aim of unveiling bastard lineages and denying false universalist claims, giving it the more “charitable” purpose of discovering the chains of continuities and discontinuities through which modernity, despite its striving to free itself and overcome all traditions, constitutes itself as a tradition *sui generis*.

Indeed, Salvatore claims that only through the recognition of its inevitable dependence on tradition and of its entanglement with particular historical traditions can Western modernity and its reflexive social theory free itself from its false illusions of self-generated birth and radical rupture, while opening itself up to more pluralistic and cross-civilizational conceptions which are less ethnocentric, more hermeneutically situated, and therefore more translatable and universalizable for a global age. This recognition of “the complexity of traditions’ entangling within modernity” is what allows for a more realistic, comparative-historical research project of multiple modernities.

More than any other modern social science, sociology as a discipline is grounded in the problematic dichotomous distinction of “tradition” and “modernity” as polar opposites. Salvatore offers the first sophisticated and largely successful attempt I know to develop a comparative historical sociology of “tradition” which is theoretically informed by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and, to a lesser extent, Talal Asad. Salvatore is a prominent scholar of Islam and he uses his deep hermeneutic

understanding of the Muslim tradition in order to advance a highly original comparative historical analysis of the Muslim and Latin Christian traditions, tracing their common genealogical lineages to the Greek-Roman and Jewish axial traditions. This in itself makes the work unique and remarkable. But, in addition, the book makes relevant contributions to ongoing debates about the Axial Age, bringing highly original interventions into definitions of axially, reconstructing its prehistory back into pre-axial "archaic" traditions, particularly Ancient Rome, and its hermeneutic historical reconstructions forward into the Axial Renaissance and the Axial Enlightenment. As he indicates, "throughout this work, the adjective 'axial' is a qualification of 'traditional'" (p. 15).

Throughout, the book offers highly insightful and original contributions to social theory as well as to comparative historical analysis. Chapter I offers a genealogically informed and less reified sociological theory of religion which reopens both the Durkheimian socio-theoretical question of the "origins" of the human social bond, as well as the historical-hermeneutic question ever present in the reflexive self-definitions of Western civilization how to match "Jerusalem and Athens" or theological and philosophical transcendence. For Salvatore, "Axial transformations are sociologically relevant as the momentums of constitution of the reflexive social bond" (p. 55). Salvatore interprets the basic contribution of the axial breakthrough as a reorientation from the primacy of an I-it to an I-Thou relationship, expanded into an ego-alter-Alter/God triadic relationship supported by transcendence. From this basically sociological perspective "transcendence is a potential to transcend social and even cultural boundaries, and integrate new groups and social arrangements (and institutions)" (p. 54). Indeed, the fundamental limitation of the Greek poleis rested in its communitarian self-enclosure. The Greek axial counterpart to Hebrew theological transcendence was "the discovery of an exclusive truth set apart against falseness" (p. 66). Its greatest achievement was "to yoke practical rationality to public reasoning". Salvatore shows in a convincing way how this was incorporated into the Abrahamic traditions so that they developed "within a field of tension between scriptural narratives and Greek philosophemes" (p. 67).

Salvatore argues successfully for the need to reincorporate the praxic concepts of phronesis, telos and poiesis into a revised theory of "communicative action" embedded in a sociological concept of tradition. Against Habermas' implication that tradition is by definition non-reflexive and not subject to an inherent process of revision, Salvatore
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wants to rehabilitate a "consistent, nonreticent, nonresidualist definition of tradition (that) stresses reflexivity, change, and constant revision" and avoids "a too rigid dichotomization between 'modern' and 'traditional', 'formal' and 'substantive' types of rationality" (pp. 74-75).

Besides the persuasive socio-historical reconstruction of the discursive-practical components of the Latin Christian and Muslim traditions as indispensable foundations of any modern conception of the public sphere, the most important contribution of Salvatore is in my view his ability to weave synthetically together in a highly original way three strands of social theory which are assumed to be in antagonistic competition, namely, Habermasian "theory", Nietzschean-Foucauldian "genealogy", and MacIntyre "tradition". In this context, Salvatore offers a highly original and revisionist reading of Giambatista Vico as a crucial though mostly forgotten link in his genealogical reconstruction before the implosion of traditions and the redefinition of common sense effected by the Scottish Enlightenment which will usher in liberal conceptions of the public sphere and civil society.

Salvatore interprets Vico as the "architect of a cleverly though cautiously subversive, proto-genealogical approach to modernity... (who) attempted to unveil latent continuities – looking backwards – between the essentially secular character of political modernity, the axial heritage and the role of prophetic religion therein, and the pre-axial, pagan institutions of divination and sacrifice" (p. 185). The most important programmatic aim of Vico's New Science was to match the axial idea of phronesis with the modern idea of freedom. Salvatore's own work proves the relevance of Vico's approach in its dual genealogical-historical and practical-theoretical dimension for a comparative historical sociology of multiple modernities in a global no longer Western-centric age.

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