

The Line of No Return: a Study of Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*.

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Hovedoppgave; allmenn litteraturvitenskap
Institutt for nordistikk og litteratur
UiO - 2002

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Preface

The object of this study, Thomas Pynchon's most recent novel *Mason & Dixon*, tells the story of English astronomer Charles Mason and his friend, colleague and compatriot - the land-surveyor Jeremiah Dixon. First as they observe the 1761 Transit of Venus from colonial Cape Town as contract work for the Royal Society in London, and later when we follow their meanderings (for they were not always moving in a straight line) during a five-year span in America (1763-1768) whose main objective was to settle the boundary dispute between the Baltimores of Maryland and the Penns of Pennsylvania. The remedy was the now famous Mason-Dixon line, and the novel chronicles their work on the line as well as their measuring a Degree of Latitude for the Royal Society. Upon their return to England, Dixon goes back to his native County Durham, whereas Mason goes back to his work for the Greenwich Observatory, before ultimately deciding to return to America. They observe the 1769 Transit from different locations, Dixon from Norway and Mason from Ireland, but do meet again, in Dixon's home where Mason visits him on his way to Scotland on his final expedition for the Society.

Part one of the novel *-Latitudes and Departures-* deals with their meeting in London and their voyage to and observations at the Cape; part two *-America-* treats their escapades in the new world and part three *-Last Transit-* revolves mainly around their last meeting before Dixon's death, ending with Mason's decision to return to America. The main events of the novel and the framework sketched above correspond with the explorers' biographies and the timeline fits recorded history. But the space they travel in the novel, is a magical, mysterious one with fantastical creatures and more inexplicable events and phenomena than we may hope to cover in this work.

Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, a wholly fictional character, is our main narrator as he relates the story of the two protagonists upon a request for a "Tale about America" (*M&D*, p. 7) from his

sister's children. He tells them he met Mason and Dixon on the ship bound for the Cape. A voyage, we are told, ascribed to him by the British government after he had lost his sanity in jail following his arrest for insurrectionary printing. His tale is comprised by first, second and third-hand information, his own diary and sometimes even pure speculations as to what might have happened in blind-spots he does not have any information at all about. He himself would be the first to admit he is not the most reliable narrator on either side of the equator. And other stories mix with his, often without clear demarcation. Even when we can be fairly sure he *is* holding the floor, it is not always clear whether he is recounting from memory, reading from his diary or simply letting inspiration get the better of him. He tells the story about Mason and Dixon in a recreational room in his sister's residence to members of her family and "what Friends old and young may find their way" (*M&D*, p. 6), after having come to Philadelphia for Mason's burial in 1786. The extra-diegetic narrator leaves most of the recounting to Cherrycoke, while at points inserting extracts from the fictional poet Timothy Tox' *Pennsylvaniad* and the writings of Cherrycoke himself as epigraphs. He also speaks in the text, but it is very hard to tell at various points whether his words serve focalization to reflect the characters' patterns of thought or if he is opining in his own rights and speaking directly to us. This obfuscation of voices, unreliability of accounts, blurred distinctions between voices and sources, problematic focalization, black holes etc. makes it hard to determine the ontological structure of the whole at any given time, but as we shall see, the novel on all levels relishes in such indeterminacy. As readers we are expected to write a little, we too - Barthes-style.

The circumstances surrounding Cherrycoke's tale are not without precedent. He is, in fact, something of a Scheherazade, allowed to stay as long as he can amuse the children, "too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage at the wrong moment, however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door" (*M&D*, p. 7). Also, it is a story in the ancient oral tradition, the tribe gathering around the fire-place. However, here, in the America of 1786 and its "seething Pot of Politics" (*M&D*, p. 6), approaching

the *comble of aufklärung* the cosmos is becoming tolerably comprehensible and it is rather that never less than troubling entity *America* the audience needs a history to explain. And in that story, as we shall see, lies as well more than one innuendo of analogy to our own times. It is not the major ambition of this work to connect as many points as possible in such an analogy, but some connections will be made. Nor is it to perform a complete structural analysis of the novel, whose intricacies and sheer complexity in that manner certainly deserve such attention. Rather, this work, if sleep shall ever be reclaimed on my part after its conclusion, rare as it has been in its writing, will in some small measure serve to heighten the stakes of that very attention. Because more than a detailed account of how fiction is constituted and its relation to other modes of artistic manifestations, it is a look at what fiction can *do*. As an element in identity, a keeper of sanity, a constituent of empathy and numerous other qualities and functions that it is trusted with as our readings of the novel get underway.

But before I undertake to present my efforts to read in *Mason & Dixon*, I would be remiss not to thank those to whose kindness, patience and love I owe any awareness of inspiration: my beloved family and my precious friends. I am also heavily indebted to professor H.H Skei who found time in a busy schedule to secure for my efforts a unity and adherence to its objectives that they would otherwise have lacked.

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Oslo, February 28th, 2002.

Introduction

At a time when increasingly many felt their hopes of literary recluse Thomas Pynchon ever again to show signs of life, actual or literary, rapidly diminish, the enigmatic author conjured a 773-page mammoth: *Mason & Dixon*. Thus providing me with my subject, and the world of literature with another dynamic duo. As quixotic at times as the knight of La Mancha and his famed squire, frequently as incoherent as Vladimir and Estragon – even, on occasions, able to match their staggering level of doubt as to the purposes of their endeavours – and for the most part equal in bickery and charm of Bouvard and Pécuchet.

The novel is quintessentially Pynchonesque in many ways, still, in others I see it as a deviance of sorts - its tone more upbeat and optimistic perhaps, when contrasted with that of the bulk of its author's oeuvre. And characters, mainly the two protagonists, are actually allowed to emerge, in flesh and blood as it were, out of the rambunctious blend of complexities and chaotic forces which in much of his previous work has swept away any opportunity of asserting personal identity in a meaningful way. Where earlier a great number of rather hollow characters were cast as mere erosion-victims of various *forces majeurs*, the playing field is far leveller this time.

Elsewhere, Pynchon devotees will be able to register consistency, and we are hardly surprised to find the narrative with one foot on each side of the famous C.P Snow divide between the sciences and the arts. In fact, their dual relationship is presented much as that of the ambition and conscience of a society. The tension between the two is seen as highly determinative of which direction a society is moving, and which values it adopts. And Pynchon is ever the acute observer of the effects that trickle down into the collective and individual psyches as a result of this tension, and how these in their turn come back to affect and alter the balance between science and art anew - as its sum

dangles somewhere between the extremes of logical positivism on the one side and that of nihilism on the other.

Also present: global conspiracies, a talking - articulate at that- Learned English Dog, philosophical paradoxes, cunning word plays, an extrovert polyphony, a variety of literary genres, competing ontologies, allusions aplenty, cameos from among others George Washington and Benjamin Franklin and a supporting cast for Mason and Dixon including a French chef running from a jealous, automated-duck-turned-animated-being. A patient approach, though, to this literary Circus Maximus will show one of the most distinct voices and important messages in contemporary American fiction. And concerning America herself most directly; her soul, plight, dreams, hopes, history, idea and children. For Pynchon's America is a poetic space – metaphor as much as geographic reality.

I hope to find ways of sounding convincing when conveying my conviction that, like much great literature, *Mason & Dixon* is, among other things, a stunning tale in and of itself and an eloquent comment upon long-standing epistemologic, ontologic and literary topics of interest and discussion. Conceptual strata running through the novel will be traced and the structures they form described. The narrative's *modus operandi* will be seen to conform to the consequences of the epistemology and ontology it inclines to.

Before I continue, perhaps I would do well to elaborate upon some of the implications inherent in these two last claims. It follows from them that chaos is not the dominant of the novel, that intelligible structures exist, and that I read it as opening for some sort of analysis of causation. And that since “Acts have consequences, Dixon, they must” (*M&D*, p. 346), an ethics is possible. I would even venture to say that the question of whether or not grounding an ethics is possible is the ultimate stake of this novel, and that a justification of a reading where it answers in the affirmative is the deepest ambition of my own enterprise. This might not go in the direction of the milieus of

literary and philosophical convictions with which Thomas Pynchon traditionally is most readily associated. Accordingly, the need to reiterate that in some aspects this novel must be seen as a deviance is obvious.

Chief among the strata I vow to pursue: the problem of individual freedom and forces of control and restraint; the elites' degree of control over the masses; the fear of the monoculture; the ambiguity of any concept of progress; the silencing of dissent; the death of fantasy and fiction to an overly rational and disenchanting science; ego- and ethno-centrism; the evisceration of feelings by the machine and *techne* over *oiknos* and the constant threats to the sense of purpose, meaning and perspective in individual lives. A sense -whose absence is detrimental to the hopes of ethics- that fiction and fictionalising is heavily relied upon, in *Mason & Dixon*, to restore.

Chief among the epistemologic issues:

How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is?

(Rushdie 1997, p. 8)

That is, if we permit the narrator of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* to formulate for us, and we make the quote yield to one accommodation, substituting the word "world" with "mind" in its first sentence: *How does newness come into the mind?* Many other epistemologic issues are raised: which explanatory model of the universe is allowed supremacy? How are such models architected? How does the preservation in a culture take place - of the old, of its precious insights and lessons? Which mechanisms of remembrance and suppression are there, and when do they become operative? Furthermore, the novel deliberates whether man has a destiny accessible to his mind, and if he can act meaningfully towards it.

Chief among the ontologic questions: does a plan for the creation and its creatures exist, and is it being followed? Is there meaning to history? Do divine forces manifest themselves in otherwise innate surroundings?

From the tenor of Jeremiah Dixon, the bass of Charles Mason and the choir of all creatures great and small who follow in their trail or whom they meet - sometimes in cacophony and sometimes in unison - flow page upon page comments and contemplations; symbols and metaphors; parables of and allusions to these and a variety of other topics. Their story is a testimony to the powers, and dangers if led astray, of fiction and reason alike. To the beauty of immediacy and the perils of a rigidity of mind and matters, a Brughelian homage to the common and to the wisdom and imperfection of the people. Of how every man must be a poet lest he be a character in someone else's scheme, and how dangerous it is to impose systems of rigidity and hierarchy on an organism that by design incessantly mutates. And how, ultimately, we must learn to treat that flux of changes as the only constant, and build our institutions and morals upon that very realisation.

Some would say that I am now doing exactly what I warn against. Forcing a pattern upon something that by design, by the very nature of language, resists any such attempt. That is merely to say that I am reading. Other approaches are possible, these are my readings, and whenever I hear such allegations of exegetic brutality I feel the urge to point out that writing a 773-page novel is to embrace the novel as a means of communication and as a cultural unit with possibilities. Besides, what renders the quotidian prating of the married couple in Ionesco's *La cantatrice chauve* absurd - and allows the audience to be entertained by them tonight, as the *Theatre de la Huchette* in Paris puts it on like they have done every day for over thirty years - is precisely the fact that those very same sentences are uttered every day in *other* circumstances, to unassailable avail. And the machinations of Breton owe at least part of their impact to the fact that randomness is not usually what words are used for.

So, whether a text is negating a genre or a mode of expression, like Adamov's and Ionesco's were doing at times, or seems to hold an almost infinite of possible meanings, which seems to be the case here with *Mason & Dixon*, there is no need for an apology to communicate those who are produced in your own particular readings. As long as you remember what they are, and that once you claim for them any kind of priority, you are on your own and the text must abandon you ("Who claims Truth, Truth abandons." [M&D, p. 350]). There is also another, very significant, difference – I am content to be judged by the extent to which those patterns contribute to the illumination of the text I am studying. Primarily, I wish to see if I can wrest from the novel, chaotic and unstable as it is, a possibility of speaking meaningfully about ethics. The result of that search will depend heavily upon finding ways to establish the possibility of free will and of conscious social progress in the novel.

The first step in that direction I intend to take, is to situate the problems of the novel inside a long debate concerning the possibility of establishing, rationally, a foundation for better organising man's attention towards securing for himself a habitus of safety, prosperity and freedom. I will identify three major traditions: Deconstruction, Classical Liberalism and Evolutionary Epistemology. This identification is of course to a certain extent arbitrary and does not suggest they are homogenous movements or that there may not be other traditions, it is simply to serve as an angle from which it can be seen what the fictional text must labour to achieve if it is to live up to one of the pretenses to which, by our reading, *Mason & Dixon* restores fiction – preventing a loss of meaning and wholeness in the individual (without which ethics will make little sense). Pairing the conclusions of the first tradition with the demands of the second, *Mason & Dixon* arrives at the third from a different angle than its own proponents. Especially close in spirit, we shall see throughout, the novel is to the work of Austrian economist and evolutionary theorist Friedrich Hayek. The reason I have for allotting an economist such a dominant position in this work, is not a disdain for

theories within my own field, and they certainly have their place in it as well, but again an attempt to heighten their status. Because what Hayek's theories most of all is set up to combat is the totalitarian system –which nobody like when they see it- and fiction as a means of producing alternative worlds and truths , as a means of communicating something which lies beyond mere definition, as a way of understanding suffering, accessing the thinking and vision of others, as an element in empathy etc. is a powerful instrument in relativising the pretenses of power which in a totalitarian system must naturally always strive to remain absolute.

Part I will contain the brief outline of our three traditions, and it will begin to emerge which relationship the novel stands in with regards to them. Part II is be devoted to the connection between the classical liberalist tradition and our text, after which Part III will commence with an appropriation of certain concepts in Jürgen Habermas' theories on *Knowledge and Human Interest*, (with references also to Charles S. Peirce). These will be used in connection with Hayek's theories of society in order to show that *Mason & Dixon* is able to maintain its liberalist demands even while not depending on a Supreme Guarantee, a Supreme Being or an all-explaining Scientism. In the latter half of that part of our work, we will proceed to look at the carnivalesque as described by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and His World*, to see how it corresponds with *Mason & Dixon*'s ideal of scepticism to any creation of earthly power which has as its base any kind of claim to a special connection to, or representation of, such a guarantee, being or science. In part IV we will sum up the ethical implications of our findings. In the same, there will also be found some speculations as to the relationship of the times of the novel (The Age of Reason as presented by our author) to our own times, before in a short conclusion we try to convey the impression *Mason & Dixon* leaves as a species of the genus text when read with a regard to such facets as we herein emphasise.

Part I - Three Traditions

1.1 Antithesis

We hear sometimes, from good authority, that man cannot have conceptions transcending the actual material state of his world, and cannot ever hope to make conscious, successful contributions to the amelioration of society. Labouring towards this goal is the mere perspiration from an exercise in futility consisting of combining two demonstrably ill-informed notions:

- 1) That making any reliable predictions as to the effects of actions is possible.
- 2) That there is such a thing as an objective value.

There is no foundation for secure knowledge, they go on, so even if predictions could be made, there would be no improvement as such to direct our actions towards because there is no such thing as a good society *per se*. Any construction would end up suppressing and outlawing actions which are equal in value to those which are allowed and accepted - thereby containing an eternal element of injustice. There is nothing steadfast to ground a world-construction on, the same sources inform us, so any view or conception is deemed arbitrary, said to advocate a special interest and is often associated with ethno- or ego-centrism. As Christopher Lasch laments: "Standards, we are told, reflect the cultural hegemony of dead white European males" (Lasch 1995, p.105). That there can be no talk of controlled progress in human societies is the inescapable conclusion.

A quite different tradition is what is often referred to as classical liberalism. Liberalism is a word which today has attained a painful political aftertaste, but when it is used with contempt those who employ it is certainly far from what the classical liberalists themselves understood by it. In its subjunctive form its primary focuses are individual and minority rights, property rights, limited government, and social progress. And I believe Locke's –to pick one author where all of the above is

present- specific mention of the Indians and his reverence for nature (two subjects dear also to our text) is certainly not something the champions of the more cynical theories of Globalisation and profit-seeking would readily quote.

In classical liberalism, epistemology and ethics are closely connected. Here, one *can* apply a qualitative vocabulary because there *is* a standard of judgement. And there can be a standard of judgement only when there exists knowledge of a perfect order which actions can be seen either as conforming to or deviating from. Something which through reason and temperance can have its reach extended to serve as a guide for the determination of the benignity, or evil of human actions. Classical liberalism's guarantee of secure knowledge lay in the necessary kindness of the Creator, their perfect order was nature. The gateway: a metaphysical apprehension to what is perceived as a fundamental similarity of design in the universe's *cosmos* and the *logos* of man. Out of this, there springs, more or less, fiction because truth becomes allegory. The measure -unit of morality becomes the degree of concordance with the spirit of the universe or nature's ways. Playing one's role in the allegory is to act ,like Thomas Paine expressed it: "as he acts benignly towards all" (Paine 1947, p. 52). Judgement is a matter of grammar, so to speak. A search for the unmistakable traits of this acquitting element. The reason that the way nature operates is undeniably perfect is that it has been created by a perfect being, and thus imitating it in a human society would be creating a good society after the model of the creation. We have here two wildly different principles underlying the interpretation and judgement of actions and societies:

- 1) By seeing oneself as part of a whole, endowed with a sense of unity with one's surroundings one establishes a relationship to nature that is emotional in its character. Even though one cannot comprehend how this unity is secured, the order of nature is so perfect that it must have been created.

- 2) This whole guarantees harmony because it is made by a perfect being. Acting in accordance with it is not subjective, it is living according to your maker's scheme, a spirit of harmony, which is ultimately benign to all and therefore of universal validity.

Here, an opportunity arises to shed light on some important aspects of the novel, and in particular to start looking at the act of fictionalising as carrying out specific tasks. Because, one must distinguish between different approaches to nature, and mark the fact that different readings of nature produce different conceptions of that perfect being. And the fact that, conversely, different conceptions of that perfect being produce different readings of nature. There are two very different branches sharing these two above mentioned assumptions, but differing in their conception as to the design of nature. Paraphrasing Ernest Cassirer we can call these two the *natura naturata* and the *natura naturans* traditions, and the novel takes place at a crucial time in the battle of attitudes looking to dominate in a world sent to the *naturans* view by what Alexandre Koyré calls the movement *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. One to accept the incomprehensibility of the cosmos, and be overwhelmed by nature and to find inspiration in its spirit, and the other a quest for certainty. So we will allow an interlude, into which we will take Cassirer and his thoughts and terms with us, mainly for two reasons. One reason is that many of the novel's sympathies will appear in a clear light when presented in terms of the *naturata/naturans* dichotomy. The other is that it will show, if successful, that the real danger according to the novel lies not in the shapes these models take on, but in the pretense of being able to determine, represent, and explain the universe in its totality and thereby ending fiction. Precisely what the classical liberalist tradition renounced, for example when Thomas Paine asked "Canst thou find out the Almighty to *perfection?*" and had to answer with a no.

In the *naturata* tradition, it was the authoritative interpretation of the Holy Book as laid down by the Catholic Church which threatened to end fiction by allowing only one text -and one reading of that text- to explain the world order. This sanctioned the hierarchical feudal society and forms the

basis for divine rights monarchy . When that interpretation had to be amended because the world literally changed, the nature of the creator changed from that of the author of a finished work, to that of a continued presence in nature. Nature becomes the new text, and enter the Royal Society of the one-dimensional notion of cause and effect as the new “clergy” (*M&D*, p. 726) and the new threat to fictionalising. A threat because its formulas and symbols strive for the same validity as the semantic extensions of the words of the Bible once were empowered with by the authority that produced *them*. This sanctions a disenchantment of nature that deprives its components of their potential to signify (in the novel a major point is made out of the eleven days Braddock took off the calendar, thus inhumanising even time, which all emplotments serve to humanise). And the window of opportunity presented by nature’s new-found prestige and inscrutable magic -when it was first said to harbour God’s text- to surround man with meaning and all with equal access to the divine, is quickly shut by the nakedness of its pure relations as these are discovered. And in the wake of these discoveries follow the pretenses of control and manipulation. Mason and Dixon travel in the time-space of the friction and tension between these attitudes, which may perhaps account for the monstrosities and hybrids of the space-space they travel in – as the novel does tells us that “Time is the Space that may not be seen” (*M&D*, p. 326).

Interlude - Natura Naturata v. Natura Naturans

The difference between the two metaphysics relates to the question of whether or not the divine is present in the world at present. The *naturans* view implies His presence in the actual creation whereas the *naturata* position is that there is a clear distinction between the creator and the creation. There emanates from these two distinctly different takes on the world’s prestige, of course, very differing laws of nature. The official medieval thought had held on to the Aristotelian conception of a prime mover, and went from this axiom down through the diversity of being which comprises the physical

world, giving each part of it its role and its nature according to its relationship and proximity to that first mover. And the world and its matter is lower, in a sense, than that which is where “mathesis should rule” (*M&D*, p. 723). So, as the elements of nature do not have a divine element in them which guarantees them all, in one measure, equal importance in the whole, they are assigned one in a strict hierarchy. Ernest Cassirer in his *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* tells us how the Renaissance nature philosophy attacks this conception and seeks the true essence of nature not in the “realm of the created (*natura naturata*), but in that of the creative process (*natura naturans*)” (Cassirer 1968, p. 40, his italics). This suspends the dualism between creation and creator, and the divine is now an “original formative principle which moves from within” (ibid). The material and worldly matter of the physical world is no longer alien to the substance of God and it acquires a whole new status and degree of prestige. Cassirer quotes Giordano Bruno:

God is not an external intelligence rolling around and leading around; it is more worthy for him to be the internal principle of motion, which is his own nature, his own appearance, his own soul rather than that as many entities as live in His bosom should have motion

(ibid.)

Cassirer explains why this new conception of truth was of such extreme danger to the church. It was because no longer was truth guaranteed by right interpretation of text and words, it lay rather in God’s work , nature. Thus shifting the key to religion and right beliefs from one clergy to another, whose raw material were “figures and numbers” (ibid.) and whose instrument was method. They were the scientists who could “know nature’s handwriting [and] decipher her text” (ibid.). We remember the men who tell Dixon about the Jewish Automaton in America and how they called the new continent a “secret Body of Knowledge” (*M&D*, p. 487). They tell him “Forms of the Land, the flow of water, the occurrence of what us’d to be call’d Miracles, all are Text” (ibid.). And Mason,

after the visit to the underground cave south of the line, is convinced: “it is Text,- and we are its readers, and its pages are the Days turning” (*M&D*, p. 497). It is not so much the change in address of text’s which troubles the novel, but more so the desire to be authoritative in the reading process, or even to take over as Author¹. Just as the Catholic Church took over as authors in proclaiming their own ultimate readings. The novel often circles around this overflow of meaning in nature, corresponding to the overflow of meaning in text, which is as little reducible to the dead data the Royal Society always want from Mason and Dixon (or, analogously, to the physicality of the text securing a one-to-one relationship between a word and a thing) as it is inflatable to its grand dream of putting all the data together into a final formula, which will give them the key to the universe (take over as narrators, proclaim a final meaning). The first project, of “reducing Possibilities to simplicities” (*M&D* p. 345) is frequently derided, as here:

Royal Society members and French Encyclopædists are in the Chariot, availing themselves whilst they may of any occasion to preach the Gospel of Reason, denouncing all that once was Magic, though too often in smirking tropes upon the Church of Rome,- visitations, bleeding statues, medical impossibilities,- no, no far too foreign. One may be allowed an occasional Cock Lane Ghost,- otherwise, for any more in that Article, one must turn to Gothic Fictions, folded acceptably between the covers of books.

(*M&D*, p. 359)

We see how this scientific effort is consciously linked to religion and how fiction appears as a counter force. The second project, the formula only they will be able to dispose of, Maskelyne’s eternal dream (the “Gift of Power” [*M&D*, p. 731]), is also treated with the uttermost scepticism. In the novel, hopes of avoiding this “single Version, in proceeding from a single Authority” (*M&D*, p.

¹ When Mason, who never stops reading, finally has his “Initiation” (*M&D*, p. 725) after “Fifteen years in the Business” (*ibid*), and is asked “well what does it mean?” (*M&D*, p. 726) he can only say that really he has “No Idea” (*ibid*). It is only valid to him. The sense of understanding or of having a place in the whole is more important than definitions, Mason’s cosmology is pure and willed fiction.

350) is always bestowed on the act of narration and fictionalising. The world of fiction is more than the sum of its parts, as opposed to the Royal Society's clockwork. Literature, Cherrycoke says, far from being unequivocal rather works like one of Haligast's "Contrivances" (*M&D*, p. 390) which "multiply the apparent forces, often into disproportionate results" (*ibid*). The printed book is, he speculates

thin layers of pattern'd Ink, alternating with other thin layers of compress'd Paper, stack'd often by the Hundreds.[Mr. Dimdown weighing in:] "Or an unbound Heap of Broad-sides[...]dispers'd one by one, and multiplying their effect as they go."

(*ibid*)

That part of the Enlightenment, as Cassirer sees it, which by paying more attention to method and not to what is to be found out, through a uniformity of inquiry also wrests a single-dimensioned reality from nature. This reality is looked upon as separate from the understanding of it, which is judged as higher, and thereby they attempt to assert the autonomy of nature and the intellect both alike. Cassirer makes clear the enormous impact the analytical method of Newton had on the eighteenth century, not only in science, but in philosophy as well. But what is the point, Cassirer asks, of severing the ties between natural science and metaphysical content, if we do not "succeed in eliminating metaphysical elements from its structure" (Cassirer 1968, p. 59)? It is in this impossibility of eradicating all traces of metaphysics in its structure, the novel sees the flaw in the pretense of having access to a higher truth as a sanctioning of power. In this way, the Royal Society are of the same breed as the Catholic Church whose access was secured by right biblical interpretation. As science also succeeds in exporting its method to what then becomes social sciences, this proclaimed mastery of an instrument (method) also comes to serve as a demand for *political* power. In the novel *Franklin*, of course, is the man who "tames" lightning, controls the natural, previously mysterious

powers, and thereby achieves political power (“for they esteem Franklin a Magician.” [M&D, p. 488]).

The traces of metaphysics in science’s structure, Cassirer finds in the vicious circle of Leibniz’ argument for why “laws of reality” (Cassirer 1968, p. 59) cannot deviate from those of “mathematics and logic” (ibid). According to Leibniz all things are governed by reason

because otherwise there would be no knowledge, which would be contrary to the nature of the sovereign principle.

(ibid)

To this Cassirer objects that it is no less than an offence to the “most elementary laws of logic” (ibid) to take that which is to be proved and turn it into the argumentation’s “weightiest argument” (ibid). By making, in the latter stages of the novel, the vista of the Mason-Dixon line into a zone (very much like the *Zone* of Brian McHale’s [McHale 1994], a term he developed with frequent references to another great Pynchon novel) where competing and irreconcilable ontologies co-exist, and by showing how the space of the line, through its entrapment of the chicken etc. is *qualitative* (i.e has a nature of its own), our attention is drawn to the metaphysical implications even of pure reason, which is as relative as it is pure. And of science - whose product the line is supposed to be. Making space qualitative is the most ancient mark of what is today often called superstition (Eliade, 1961). And the novel is apt to show how the attraction of the notion of an independent and pure science can veil archaic patterns of behaviour, as we shall see another example of when Eliade is called upon in our conclusions. When Cherrycoke concludes that the final Christ is “pure uncertainty” (M&D, p. 511) he alludes, in my opinion, precisely to the fact of the natural limitations of knowledge. To Mason, in the end, this is the sole thing that permits faith.

The novel is very interested in the attempt of science to substitute fantasy, and treats with suspicion all attempts to eradicate the final mystery of human existence, and any attempt to justify

exercises of power over other men by claiming to have access to or knowledge of this mystery which in its nature is unknowable. In the novel we meet many conceptions of the world's key, all of which are treated as relative. Rather the importance of these conceptions seems to be their ability to provide a sense of completeness, a *narrative* understanding of one's standing in a whole, which allows meaning and purpose.

Of special relevance to our preoccupation with ethical foundations is what Cassirer has to say about materialism. The materialism of the Enlightenment, an Inquisition of such models, which Lamettrie and Holbach to Cassirer's mind are the main advocates of, to find its "conceptual core" one should not look in natural philosophy, "but in ethics" (Cassirer 1968, p. 69). There is a world where everything is "equal in value and validity" (ibid), but still their philosophy aims to "command and to forbid" (ibid). What they forbid is superstition, which stands in the way of the rational progress. But this thought fails to take into consideration something which Pynchon's book masterfully shows, that in every man there is a "conscious denial of everything that Reason holds true" (*M&D*, p. 769), which is an equally powerful agent of action. Indeed this second consciousness can be aggravated by reason and analysis, as when Vaucanson's duck in the novel explains how the worst part was always when the scientist would show its machinery to the audience. And the duck is in many ways a symbol for the excessive impinging of reason's on the wholeness of life experience. And a metaphor for the need for individuality, a narrative and not mathematical identity, and a kind of freedom which totalitarian and all-explaining theories are alien to. And the individual must also be able to exist in and for itself, not as a mere shadow of its purer form. "Whatever they may *represent*, yet do they remain, dismayingly, Humans as well" (*M&D*, p 404) , in the language of the novel. Everywhere is the insistence we pay more attention to the superfluous than "our poor cold Chronologies" (*M&D*, p. 696). Everywhere the insistence not to disregard , but to reverence and cherish the completeness and complexities of life. To avoid "reducing Possibilities to simplicities"

(*M&D* p. 345) , not to move from “subjunctive” to “indicative” (*M&D*, p. 677) and to avoid “reckless Monologue” (*M&D*, p. 308). The necessity of developing freely along whatever lines one wishes to pursue is never doubted, so that not “one broken Link could lose us All” (*M&D*, p. 349). And often, in the novel, the knowledge of the relations of nature is shown to assist Kings and rulers, who can use them as metaphors they themselves are central in, who always carry a flamboyant taste for the categories which naked data attempts to expel: colours, smells, tastes etc. (i.e the orgiastic). So while it does not lament the change from the *vita contemplativa* to the *vita activa* it wants to allow for this activity to be disinterested and to be able to signify different things to different individuals (see *M&D* , p. 97) – not a centrally planned project. Pynchon is closer to the thought of Diderot, and with few alterations Cassirer’s description of Diderot’s thought could have served as an epigraph for *Mason & Dixon* (as nature here starts to take on the attire it wears for evolutionary epistemologists):

[In Diderot] it is this oscillation between the two poles of freedom and necessity which brings the circle of our thought and existence to completion. By such oscillation, not by a simple assertion or denial, we can discover the all-inclusive concept of nature, that concept which in the last analysis is just as much beyond agreement and contradiction and beyond truth and falsehood as it is beyond good and evil because it includes both extremes without differentiation.

(Cassirer 1968, p. 72)

However, the point was to show that even if there has been shifts of emphasis and different ways of looking at nature, there has in both major branches of the tradition been agreement upon the premise that nature is a source of knowledge as to the face of the divine. Obviously, the novel is closer to the spirit of the *natura naturans* tradition which is hierarchy breaking and allows for the prestige of all creatures and the assertion of individual rights in a very fundamental way that correspond nicely with Pynchon’s eternal love for his preterites. Much more so than the more elite v. “low life” horizontal thinking implied in the *natura naturata* tradition. But, they are both dependent in

the last analysis of a connection between reason and a divinity, and I wish to separate them from the tradition of evolutionary epistemology which treats survival as its fundamental category. But this does not render the novel fatalistic, because the wager is that survival depends upon a complexity which is best secured by the free development of the individual, and therefore survival, freedom and the ethics which allows them are interconnected. With fiction as its guarantee. And if survival and freedom is contingent upon one another, survival ceases to be a negative or minimal concept. It is for this reason it is so important to stress that the demands Hayek makes from his position within the evolutionary epistemology correspond, largely, with those made in the classical liberalist current.

1.2 Attempting Synthesis

So when we now move on to the theories of evolutionary epistemology - which holds precisely that no fundamental and final justification for moral beliefs are possible on the grounds of secure knowledge- it is imperative that it is not confused with a moral vacuum. It does say that each individual is inscrutable and that there is no sure way of convincing men of the moral superiority of actions. But, as von Mises put it:

It is not from a disdain of spiritual goods that liberalism concerns itself exclusively with man's material well-being, but from a conviction that what is highest and deepest in man cannot be touched by any outward regulation.

(von Mises 1985, p. 4)

It takes as a fundamental assumption that man from his surroundings and reason alone cannot produce an indisputable body of knowledge proving an existing order made by a superior being, and explains modes of thinking (such as the scientific inquiry) as having survived because they allowed the survival of those who employed them. To plan for a complex self-ordering of a culture on the

model for example of the human brain, as we shall see Friedrich Hayek do, is ,however, far from abandoning ethics. It is simply asserting that since there will always be destructive elements, among men and in nature (which does not exist for our well-being alone), one should not devise a system of strict hierarchy because, in the words of the novel “One broken Link could lose us all” (*M&D*, p. 349). Habermas also goes far in filling the notion of survival with value when he says survival is not merely survival, but also contains traces of what those who have secured it have understood as *the good life* (Habermas 1994, pp. 312-13).

Relativising all systems of finitude, in a notoriously Bakhtinian way, and rather operating as a matrix of different epistemes, *Mason & Dixon* suggests that human interest, like Habermas has it, is what *produces* knowledge. Towards the end, we remember, Dixon even exclaims that “Men of Science” (*M&D*, p. 669), may indeed be “simple Tools of others, with no more idea of what they are about, than a Hammer knows of a house” (*ibid*). This is where the novel is in accordance with the first rather than the second tradition we have outlined. But it also communicates the insight that there nevertheless are constants and indisputably consistent elements in all human endeavour. This constant is the human nature’s ubiquitous unpredictability and ultimate irrationality, its conscious denial of everything that reason holds true which cannot be touched by outward legislation, constantly secured precisely by the conspicuous absence of transcendental guarantees or self-evident principles. And the other thing that never fails our human predicament and environment is change, relentless and never diminishing change. Man and his environment are in an eternal cycle of incessant mutation, always in a state which knows not complete prediction, repetition or rigidity. Naturally, *Mason & Dixon* supplies analogy (an analogy including of course also the false prophets who believe themselves to be able to master this unruly universe):

Here is a paradise of Chance,- an E-O Wheel big as a roundabout, Lottery Balls in cages ever a-spin,
Billiards and Baccarat, Bezique and Games whose Knaves and Queens live,- over Flemish Carpets,

among imported Chippendale Gaming-Tables, beneath Chandeliers secretly, cunningly faceted so as to amplify the candle-light within, they might be children playing in miniature at Men of Enterprise, whose table is the wide World, lands and seas, and the Sums they wager too often, when the Gaming has halted at last, to be reckon'd in tears.

(*M&D*, p. 421)

I submit, the novel takes these two traditional justifications of fatalism and derives, alchemically one could say, a rationale supporting a design of no design entailing its very own ethics and standards of judgement. It sets up the ideal of abandoning planning and ideology on the grounds of the fruits of deconstruction, instead advocating a tapping of the powers of spontaneous creativity. We see how this moves the trust of making a good society from conscious planning, which depends on a finite order and complete knowledge of all parts and their connections, to man's capacity for pragmatic problem solving and through trial and error evolve systems of complexities and efficiency far exceeding that which can be conceived by a planning mind or rigid ideology and strict hierarchy.

Austrian economist and Nobel laureate Friedrich Hayek was one of the first to conceive of an economic theory of a division of knowledge. He ascertains in what he in his age would call his greatest insight -*The Use of Knowledge in Society* - that since any individual's bent, information and situation change all the time, the information which the planner (ideologist, King, Ruler etc. in our context) would have to have access to in order to construct or operate a system accounting for the views, wishes and needs of all exists only as "dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals possess" (Hayek 1945, p.519) It is never for the "whole society 'given' to a single mind that could work out the implications and can never be so given" (ibid). Hayek reaches the conclusion, a conclusion which by my reading *Mason & Dixon* also arrives at, that "in the ordering of our affairs we should make as much use as possible of the

spontaneous forces of society, and resort as little as possible to coercion” (Hayek 1991, p. 13). Thus proclaiming, by my reading, two (for the sake of argument) fundamental principles, it too:

- 1) By abandoning planning and governance, the spontaneity and accumulative experiences of the people through a process of trial and error is able to devise and evolve systems of great complexity ever refining themselves, their connections and applications towards a state where each individual is allowed maximum liberty to live according to his individual desires while not endangering the survival of the community at large. Thus ethics lie “between instincts and reason” (Hayek 1998, p. 11), because “The concept of morals makes sense only by contrast to impulsive and unreflective conduct on the one hand...and to rational concern with specific results on the other” (Hayek 1998, p. 12), so that we must “all of us serve people whom we do not know [and live on] the services of other people of whom we know nothing” (Hayek 1998, p. 14). This is possible because “we stand in a great framework of institutions and traditions[...]into which we fit ourselves by obeying certain rules of conduct that we never made [and have never understood] in the sense in which we understand how the things we manufacture function” (ibid).
- 2) The values these institutions, regulations, traditions, laws etc. will tend towards will be not objective, not subjective, but intersubjective. Hayek explains it this way: “Disliking these constraints so much, we hardly can be said to have selected them; rather they selected us; they enabled us to survive” (Hayek 1988, p. 14). In the novel it is expressed, as we might expect, in a slightly different language, but the meaning, I think, is similar:

What Authority enforces the Practise? Governor Hutchinson? The company Troops? I suggest that more than either, 'tis the awareness of living upon a *Slumbering Creature*, compared to whose size, we

figure not quite as Lice,- that keeps us so uniquely attentive to Life so precarious, and *what Civility is truly necessary, to carry it on.*

(*M&D*, p. 128, first use of italics Pynchon's)

Conscious amelioration is thus possible, not through the positive attainment of absolute truth, but through allowing a fundamentally selective process of trial and error and an open sharing of the information gathered in that process. Transcendence is achieved by the individual contributing to a system which produces something greater than the sum of each individual input. Greater because what is planned for is in its nature unknown, and therefore as many independent outlooks as possible is advantageous so that when one model is no longer of use there are others standing by, and no one broken chain can lose us all. It is rather more important to release those in chains. It is not hard to see how fiction is raised to prominence in such an outlook, and the modern novel can be seen almost as such a test-laboratory for human potential. The most important contribution one can make is not enforcing a code of interpretation upon someone else, because that impedes the information creation and thereby reduces the inexhaustible number of discoverable relations and interconnections of the world to "simplicities that serve the Ends of Governments" (*M&D*, p. 345). And we will see, later, how Roland Barthes places a similar hope with the inexhaustibility of the interpretations of textual strings. By showing how language and narrative do not have to be read to a specific end or lead to absolute ideological interpretations, he wants the reader to make his own particular meanings out of the text and trust them, thus producing a similar spontaneous, mutative, unpredictable product of combining imaginations. This produces a great diversity of interpretations, and Barthes' hope is that in creating that diversity it will be harder to -by what in *Mason & Dixon* is called "reckless Monologue" (*M&D*, p. 308) - manipulate. It will be clear that *Mason & Dixon* operates according to principles of stimulation of spontaneity and anti-positivism, always geared towards avoiding a situation "unfriendly to Worlds alternative to this one" (*M&D*, p. 359). And , to

further heighten the prestige of free fiction, when we make the case that Pynchon's ideal of hierarchy suspicion resembles closely the world of the carnivalesque as described by Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and His World* we will see this carnival spirit secured by nothing other than one of the fundamental categories of fiction - analogy.

But for now, we will use the next part of our work to make the connection between the novel and the spirit of anti-authoritarianism of classical liberalism.

Part II - As Little as Possible to Coercion

2.1 *Mason & Dixon* and the Spirit of Classical Liberalism

In his *Novum Organum*, Francis Bacon, whom we shall return to with regularity, wrote:

Again, we should notice the force, effect, and consequences of inventions, which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which were unknown to the ancients; namely printing, gunpowder, and the compass. For these three have changed the appearance and state of the whole world; first in literature, then in warfare and lastly in navigation.

(Bacon 1854, vol. 3, p. 370)

In the course of the first seven pages of the novel our main narrator, Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, tells us of his encounter with each one of these. First, in explaining how he came to meet Mason and Dixon, he says that the story begins with him being arrested in London for insurrectionary printing. When thrown in jail, he temporarily loses sanity over the staggering realisation that:

my name had never been my own,- rather belonging, all this time, to the Authorities, who forebade me to change it, or withhold it, as 'twere a Ring upon the Collar of a Beast, ever waiting for the Lead to be fasten on

(*M&D*, p. 10)

He is then sent "for the best of Medical reasons" (ibid) to sea on an "Engine of Destruction" (ibid), where of course there would have had to be a compass. And certainly "thirty-four guns' worth of Disaster, and only one Lesson" (ibid). I find it worth noting that these three inventions are at the disposal of the government, who restrain Cherrycoke from using the one and forces him away by way of the other two. I make this point because he describes the realisation that the government has

power over him as a very fundamental discovery, in fact as an “entire loss of Self” (ibid), and as “one of those moments Hindoos and Chinamen are ever said to be having” (ibid). His tale of America, it should also be noted, is told on request, and he chooses to begin it with accounts of lack of personal freedom in England. Governance and subjection is a major theme of this novel, and eternally the subject of liberalism. Bacon, if we return to him, did go on to assert the potential dangers of these inventions if available to the wrong ambitions, of which even he specifically mentions the government’s :

It will, perhaps, be as well to distinguish three species and degrees of Ambition. First that of men who are anxious to enlarge their own power in their country, which is a vulgar and degenerate kind; next that of men who strive to enlarge the power and empire of their country over mankind, which is more dignified, but not less covetous; but if one were to endeavour to renew and enlarge the power and empire of mankind in general over the universe, such ambition (if it may so be termed) is both more sound and more noble than the other two.

(Bacon 1854, vol. 3, p. 370)

If we return to the printing press, a flaming defence for the right to unlicensed printing was made almost three decades before Cherrycoke’s brush with the law, in John Milton's *Areopagitica*. I shall talk about this to further tie Pynchon to the tradition of classical liberalism, and also because it will bring up a new point which permeates our text. And because the discussion of that crucial point in liberalist values (freedom of publishing) will take us into a new subject, I should relate the second and third invention, gunpowder and the compass, to liberalism before starting it. The connection is obvious and has to do with the militant imperialism they made possible, and the exploitation of resources found in the territories of others. As we already mentioned, Locke specifically prohibits this in the case of the Indians, and the rights of minorities we said was one of the central issues of

the liberal tradition. This subject will later reappear when Mason and Dixon debates whether or not they should take the liberty to run their line over the territory of the Indians as the line draws to its close, but for now, let us move to Milton's defence of freedom of print.

In 1643 the British government's *Licensing Order* gave it the right to censor books and hinder any text they might see as member of that family of

false, forged, scandalous, seditious, libellous and unlicensed papers, pamphlets and books to the great
defamation of religion and government

(Quoted in Milton 1973, p. 63)

from going into print. Disillusioned and not least angered by this, Milton, steeped in cultural and political knowledge, finds it easy to cite good authority in favour of his protests and in a rhetorical masterpiece ridicules the parliament for passing such legislation. For example, he makes it clear only the most unchristian of institutions, such as the Spanish Inquisition, employ such means. And he would be rhetorically remiss if he didn't point that out under the religious climate in England at that time. More interesting is the following, he mentions a certain Mr. Selden who is said to "by exquisite reasons and theorems almost mathematically demonstrative" (Milton 1973, p.14), have proved that

all, opinions, yea errors, known, read, and collated, are of main service and assistance toward the speedy attainment of what is truest. I conceive therefore, that when God did enlarge the universal diet of man's body, saving ever the rules of temperance, he then also, as before, left arbitrary the dieting and repasting of our minds

(ibid)

Here lies a crucial point, and our next subject. That all intellectual offspring, conceptions and views needs to be tested, not by expertise, but rather run through a collective mind belonging to the

people, corresponding to Cherrycoke's later conviction that "Remembrance belongs to the People" (*M&D*, p. 349). Milton draws the following conviction from it:

For those actions which enter into man, rather than issue out of him, and therefore defile not, God uses not to captivat under a perpetual *childhood of prescription*, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser.

(Milton 1973, p.14)

We remember the words of von Mises quoted in the first chapter and Cherrycoke lamenting the fact that "Small numbers of people go on telling much larger numbers what to do with their precious Lives" (*M&D*, p. 153). Note, before we run the opposite view, how intimately related in Milton's argumentation are ethics and epistemology.

The opposite view of course is hierarchism, that for example of Thomas Carlyle, who believed a strong elite had to be summoned to plan for society. The Hobbesian vision of enlightened tyranny. Carlyle is infamous for his clashes with John Stuart Mill over the slave problem, a debate during which he said a number of outrageous things which I don't find warranting quotation, except to say this: Carlyle's core argument was the black people were lesser men ("two- legged cattle", he called them) and that they could not achieve adequacy as humans without the help of stronger men who knew better. This was not only his solution to the slavery issue, rather it seemed to be his answer to everything. The economic view, as it was developing at that time, on the other hand, was to regard such divisions as class, race, temperament, *geist* and other terms dear to the hearts of the romanticists as irrelevant and talk instead about *incentive*. The opposition to Slavery, one of the major themes of *Mason & Dixon*, as mounted by these economists influenced by classical liberalism, defended an absolute value because they held slavery to be wrong on account of the slaves being human beings and in that capacity possessing undeniable rights. They in fact took a nature law stand,

the principal equality of men, and coupled it with an understanding of man as eternally fallible. Where the romanticists entertained notions of perfectibility and an attraction to geniuses and strong men of history, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill spoke of incentive. Regardless how wholesome and good-hearted intentions any man might have for any other man, to Smith's and Mill's minds he cannot force the values these intentions spring out of upon others.

Carlyle, to his defence, did have the perfection of society in mind, which is not the basest of motives, I suppose. The economist's response to this can be epitomised by the following words of von Mises': "The impracticability of Socialism is the result of intellectual, not moral, incapacity" (von Mises, p. 407). And by socialism he meant every society based on central governance. These dry mathematics, as they were made out to be (Carlyle famously called economics the *dismal science*) in fact represented a continuation of a long natural law/limited government tradition running from Overton's *Arrow Against All Tyrants* via John Lockes *treatises* who would later help fuel the American Revolution – which occupies an important role in the underlying flow of historical events in the novel – to Thomas Paine and which in America finds its most forceful language in the works of Emerson and Thoreau. This should also be kept in mind when we return to Hayek, an economist, as often as we do.

Thomas Paine was a writer and pamphleteer who exerted an enormous influence in the colonies around the time of the revolution, and heavily indebted to Lockean ideals and ideas he wrote in *The Age of Reason* that no authority should be accepted without personal inquiry. All attempts to sanction power from special connection to the divine, one of the novel's major concerns, to him is merely what "has been employed in all ages and perhaps in all countries to impose upon mankind" (Paine 1947, pp. 50-51). In the novel this concern is addressed again and again, through Maskelyne's dream of an "Investiture" (*M&D*, p. 731); the Freemasons; Franklin being looked upon by the people as an "Ancestor of Miracle,- or, of wonders, *which pass as well with them*" (*M&D*, p. 488, my

italics); the Catholic Church; the divine rights monarchy; the story of the two court astronomers sentenced to death because they failed to predict an eclipse, since the emperor as a “Child of Heaven” (*M&D*, p. 624) needed to know of such events beforehand etc. The only thing Paine allows ethics to be constructed upon is what is available to all:

The creation is the Bible of the deist. He there reads, in the handwriting of the Creator himself, the certainty of his existence

(Paine 1947, p. 164)

There is a strong connection between epistemology and ethics in Paine, too. Because the ways of nature is the only constant, in its harmonic sum, this is the only place to find indisputable knowledge, and thus it becomes also the sole place where one should look for moral guidance. But this is only possible through analogy, because one can never, in Paine, “make principles” (Paine 1947, p. 31), only discover relations. This is the meaning Mason derives from the passage in Job that presented itself to him when he “let fall open” (*M&D*, p. 742) –thereby acknowledging chance and asserting his freedom as well as winning back individual interpretation of text– his Bible in the observatory almost at the end of the novel. That God “hangeth the earth upon nothing” (*ibid*). It is widely accepted that Job speaks to the inscrutability of the final nature of God, and this to Mason is what permits faith and tolerance because as Paine instructs “if we knew it as a fact, we should be the mere slaves of terror” -the eternal fear of so many Pynchon characters. And even if Paine can get carried away when speaking of the uses of the scientific principles, they are always connected to making man happy -not necessarily in that they produce effective results, the search and the nourishment of curiosity is in itself a source of happiness. The demystification of creation as something everyone might indulge in by combining different material, and not something reserved for almighty powers is very strong in Paine and rests perhaps still as one of the more important impetus of American inventiveness. The main point, however, to us remains his constant insistence that there is no

mystery to nature -he would also consider Maskelyne a walking cautionary tale- in that it is nothing *but* mystery and must evade all attempts at a final description. On the next to last page of *Mason & Dixon* the elderly Mason embraces this deism, although with him nature at this point testifies more to the eternal uncertainty than to a Supreme Being². The full meaning we ascribe to Mason's words to Franklin will have to wait until our chapter on Habermas, but we notice ,for now, their similarity to Paine's creed:

Sir, you have encounter'd Deists before, and you know our Bible is Nature, wherein the Pentateuch, is the Sky. I have found there, written ev'ry Night, in Astral Gematria, Messages of Great Urgency to our Time, and to your Continent, sir.

(*M&D*, p. 772)

In the thoughts and writings of the two illustrious American *Transcendentalists* Emerson (a man named Emerson in the novel at one point reproaches his contemporaries for being so inclined to desires of "Authority and mindless O-bedience" [*M&D*, p. 231] that they wouldn't recognize transcendence if it came up and bit them "in the Arse" [*ibid*], but one would be hard pressed to make the case for a full match) and Thoreau, this view appears again and again. They further elaborate on the theme of the linkage between epistemology and ethics. Since the only true knowledge one can have is that which is obtained from nature, so should your code of ethics present itself to you from that infallible source if you can connect to it. In Paine it reads like this:

² This is basically Paine's feeling to, when he poses the question "Canst thou find out the Almighty to *Perfection*?" (Paine 1947, p.27) and finds he must answer no, because his understanding is so limited in comparison to the omnipotence of God. Variations on the evasion of this "perfection" abound in *Mason & Dixon*, a white whale ever evading capture. Mason sums up his quest for a passage to where "Mathesis should rule" (*M&D*, p. 724) when he is forced to the following acknowledgement: "Stars and Mud, ever conjugate" (*ibid*). There is also a love of disinterested invention, as opposed to manic search for certainty and finitude, in Paine which is strongly echoed in the novel (especially in Dixon).

The belief of a God, so far from having any thing of mystery in it, is of all beliefs the most easy, because it arises to us, as is before observed, out of necessity. And the practise of moral truth, or, in other words, the practical imitation of the moral goodness of God, is no other than our acting towards each other as he acts benignly towards all.

(Paine 1947, p. 51)

In Emerson it reads, at times, as a more brute form of provincialism. But there is no dispute as to where one should look for moral instruction, and it is to be found far from inherited scriptures, in the essay *Self-Reliance* he writes:

It must be that when God speaketh he should communicate, not one thing but all things, should fill the world with his voice; should scatter forth light, nature, time, souls, from the centre of the present thought; and new date and new create the whole.

(Emerson 1979, p. 38)

Authority has little place here. He has little regard for those who wish to travel for knowledge, plentiful of mock befalls the idolatry of exotic marvels, materialistic tendencies and the acceptance of authority and doxa. Various elements of Emerson's *Self-Reliance* have gone on to, *pars* or *toto*, comprise quite contradictory American archetypes. The noble yeoman farmer, the environmentalist and the self-made man of creative entrepreneurship, are all examples. But also the narrow-minded, overly righteous and detached American, and the more cynical type of entrepreneur belonging to the strands of American capitalism which may include a reverence for self and a disregard for foreign examples and history, but at the same time also a relationship to nature and other men as a foundation for profit at all costs, so to speak, entirely alien to Emerson in the final analysis. And when I claim to see an affinity to Emerson in certain parts of the novel it is the first rather than the

second set of types I have in mind³. But from the imagery and tone of some passages, the wonder is small they have served as influence for imprudent attitudes:

Power is in nature the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul.

(Emerson 1979, p. 41)

The intensity of Emerson's language is everywhere strong, the ingeniousness of his examples rivals that of Locke's, while his referential style paradoxically is calling at every turn for the irrelevance of historical examples in a strangely suggestive rhythm of arguments made through a richness of imagery second to none of his contemporaries'. It is perhaps not strange that a good many different outlooks have had him serve as legitimation or directed blame in his direction. Myself, I suppose a sense of historical continuity and the expulsion of hindering dogma both alike can bring about changes for the better - as in, for example, explaining the Renaissance one can do as little with the one as with the other lest they can be combined.

But the situation on the new continent was unstable and restless and since many had fled from British oppression there was a sensitivity towards being commanded, in way of life or in religious practices alike. Again and again, rigidity gave way for accommodation and tolerance because of ever immanent secession. Those who took issue with rules of governance simply went downstream. "Detachment, the beginning of the west" (*M&D*, 445), the possibility of escape as a

³ We see again which fine line that has to be walked in linking the text to these authors, and a major feat of the novel's is indeed to build its universe on a delicate balance between thoughts present already in the Enlightenment itself. From Paine we can take the limitations of pure reason which is so crucial to the novel, but we must guard the text from his suspicion towards dream and fiction and a lack of apprehension to technical inventions that may, on the other hand, be found in Emerson. From both we can make use of an ever present scepticism to authority and likewise of a confidence in civic virtues. From Emerson we can take the reverence of nature, while at the same time we must note that the novel is alien to his idealisation of solitude etc.

major constituent of the modern psyche's formation is a recurring theme in *Mason & Dixon*. *Self-Reliance* is absolutely indebted to that spirit, there can be no doubt. A technique which may have served to decrease the need for that overthrow of ruling power that Locke provided a rationale for, but which may still be an answer to many of the same problems. Another element in Emerson which the novel is conscious of is the fear of the elite, Emerson is as sceptical toward the Bostonians as Pynchon is of elect Cohens, and the local communities are always in the novel portrayed with great warmth and profound respect. The classical liberalist views on the human being's undeniable rights grounded in nature's ways are no doubt present in Mason's thinking throughout and their match complete in his full-grown deism towards the end. So are the views of the dangers of centralisation of power so essential to Locke, Paine and the French Enlightenment obvious to both explorers. Be the power political or financial in its origins. To illustrate, we can quote Dixon on the powers of political groupings:

I knelt, transfix'd. I would have done whatever he bade me. 'Twas the only time in my life I have felt that Surrender to Power, upon which, as I have learn'd after, to my Sorrow, all Government is founded. Never again. No more a Maiden as to thah', and thankee all the same.

(*M&D*, p. 312)

And Mason brooding on the implications of that power which capital represents:

I discover'd the Rulers who do not live in Castles but in housing less distinct, often unable to remain past Earshot of the Engines they own and draw their Power from.

(*M&D*, p. 313)

These two means of amassing power are juxtaposed in the narrative, actually on pages opposite from each other. Mason and Dixon saw slavery at the Cape, at St. Helena and again in America. They see a parallel in the wage workers back home not being paid decently, and look beyond local

circumstances to identify what they perceive as an inherent human trait. One of the more fundamental justifications of liberalism has always been man's fallen character (as well as defences grounded on the assumption of the inherently good nature of man). The explorers grow increasingly suspicious of masters, and fear that they themselves are being taken advantage of. Hierarchical organization is mistrusted because it accumulates power which exerts an attraction in itself, an attraction they see as an equally fundamental force as any phenomenon of nature's. They see the struggle for the control of this force as fuelling history. A history where large scale developments take place, hugely important decisions are made and vital questions as to the development of society are answered by the few rather than the many. Where the few without flinching bargain and make deals, argue charter language and divide profits without the consent of, or even without asking, their fellow men. Where the actions of few determines the fates of countless "Stage-Managers of that perilous Flux" (*M&D*, p. 545). They see how excessive ambition pays its way with petty promises of advancement and favours. The trick is as old as time:

For, as long as it remains possible to keep us deluded that we are 'free men', we back Inhabitants will
feed the Metropolis, open new roads to it, fight in its behalf

(*M&D*, p. 488)

At the Cape they realise how the line exerted one of its powers, though itself having no physicality, through this phenomenon – as something which serves both as a prohibition and a field of attraction which can be used by the demagogue to produce shame and fear as well as ambition to climb the ladder. As long as it is believed anyone can succeed on the merits, the desire to reach a position will be strong enough to pull attention away from the system itself - the mythology of the Dream. The explorers see how two distinct cultures develop. One for the rulers and one for the oppressed. But equally strong as the willingness to uphold the line for a perpetuation of benefits, can be the desire to

transgress it, suggesting it is somehow unnatural and artificial. And here, their internal differences duly noted, is where all the great names of the liberal tradition converge. Locke (who perhaps carries the strongest language of all to his condemnation of the “disorder ambition has filled the world with” [Locke 1943, p.206] that the novel so explicitly bares naked), Paine (who was always quick to point out the relationship between trade and religious claims of superiority), Smith (whom we saw in opposition to the hierarchists on the slavery issue), Emerson and Thoreau (who spoke inflammatory against slavery) would all agree upon the issue of slavery and likewise agree that an expansionism to subjugate and disallow the natural development of a people cannot be defended. With their understanding of the individual and the relativity of the moral value of ordering principles which form in societies on the basis of its world outlook and local circumstances, they can hardly be quoted other than in opposition to such a mercantilism.

The line creates a field poignant with feelings, desires, limits, rules, obedience, transgression, ambition and fright. It brings with it a whole infrastructure of human feelings and situations. It is Pynchon’s genius to show how the demarcation often is arbitrary or serves base purposes, even if it is sold in as a higher standard or a progress of some kind. What follows is often far more natural, but before we treat that it must be said at this point that it is exactly here we must see the necessity of relinquishing the notion of a Supreme Being, and replace it with a final indeterminacy that invites fiction⁴. To outlaw the higher standard which does not come from within, but from a line drawn by others. Therefore, I think that, partly, what Mason is talking about when he explains his deism to Franklin at the end of the novel, are the thoughts and conceptions his observations allowed him, the metaphors they allowed him to construct and the understanding of their independence from him and

⁴ It could at this point be objected that this is already the nature of these authors’ notions of God, but it will later become clear that the order that establishes itself from the spontaneous interaction of individuals in the free society as pictured by Hayek, to which we will ultimately tie the novel’s hopes and Mason’s “deism”, is of a structure that cannot be conceived or comprehended by any one mind however great, a hybrid form that if we were to utilise the concepts of these authors’ first principles to explain it we would have to allow for man to exert an influence on that first principle, a thought that does not fit into their framework in the final analysis.

thus vice versa. Precisely the kind of speculations Maskelyne implores him to strike from his reports before they are submitted to the Royal Society. The full irony of his speech to Franklin will, though, have to wait we can bring in Habermas and Peirce. Suffice it here to say that the only god acceptable is that which springs out of the individual, and that an understanding that the world is a slumbering creature where man for his survival depends upon a civility and heuristics which absolute truths endanger is necessary. So, then, what seems to follow in the wake of the line? What seems to follow is a complex system of rules unwritten on how to get around it, in fact discourses of opposition and conservation both alike are invariably constructed and men are seen to belittle themselves both aspiring blindly to the standards set by others (which Emerson fears so):

One night I dream I have come to a Bridge across a broad River, with small settlements at either approach, and in its center, at the highest point of its Arch, a Curious Structure, some nights invisible in the river mists, Lanthorns burning late,- a Toll-House. Not ev'ryone is allow'd through, nor is paying the Toll any guarantee of Passage. The gate-keepers are members of a Sect who believe that by choosing correctly which shall dwell one side of this River, and which the other, the future happiness of the land may be assur'd. Those rejected often return to one of the Inns clustered at either end of the Bridge, take a bed for the night, and try again in the morning. Some stay more than one night. When the Bills become too burdensome, the Pilgrims who wish strongly enough to cross, may seek employment right there,- at the Ale-Draper's, or the laundry, or among the Doxology,- and keep waiting, their original purpose in wishing to cross is often forgotten, along with other information that once seem'd important, such as faces, and their Names

(*M&D*, p. 529)

and in closing out the “wrong” persons, despite merit, with intrigues and fraternisation as is the case with the personal conflicts at the Royal Society.

I quoted the last passage at some length also because it leaves no doubt as to the author's interest in social mechanisms, and shows how tuned he is to their having a life of their own. It shows

how something can come into being due to a specific event, but then merge and fuse with existing norms and established structures and signifying systems almost to the point of hiding or disappearing – and a hybrid is formed. The line which in itself is nothing, creates around it a whole mythology and a set of stories of success and failure so powerful that the attraction to part-take in them comes to surpass in importance living virtuously by renouncement for the “common safety” (*M&D*, p. 769) and respectfully attending to limits one has agreed to in order to uphold structures and traditions that secure an incentive for people to act in a certain way ultimately instrumental to one’s own freedom. So here the story-telling must end, and when The Story becomes a frozen entity, mythology, all that remains are roles. And to part-take in these stories, this mythology, is nothing less than filling roles in them created by others. To be a character in someone else’s fiction. This is a perennial fear of post-modernist fiction, for which McHale cites Beckett’s *Malone Dies* as a classical example, where Malone “retroactively alters the ontological status of Molly’s and Moran’s world by claiming to have been its author” (McHale 1994, p. 12). Mason and Dixon always fear they are being controlled by forces beyond their control. And with the oscillation in ontologic status, voices, levels etc. we mentioned at the outset, clearly *Mason & Dixon* with its indeterminacy aims at a counter effect.

However, sure as there will be poseurs, there will also among the rejected, as we can see from the analogy of the above quoted passage, form a different society, the sub-culture, on the other side of the bridge. The novel never fails in providing compassion for these cities, ever assuring them of their moral highground. Mason and Dixon ever suspect that which comes from above, and in the novel every grand theory is met with scepticism.

It is almost as though everyone knows from himself how frail man’s moral harness can be. Everyone knows temptation, everyone knows deceit and which staggering proportions desperation can achieve when summoned to protect personal position. So everything that comes in the cloak and

demeanour of common good, progress or moral superiority in directives, orders, customs and laws from above is treated with suspicion. And if it feels not right, a labour to construct other narratives with other heroes and values immediately commences. To construct other possible worlds, different endings, de-crown kings and institute new ones, create new orders, new frontiers, aspire to rebellion, conspire freedom, soften defeats, console humiliation, face adversity and beat it back with imagery. One assumes that Lord Acton's axiom of power and corruption holds universally true. And that the forces who seek control will stop at nothing, that the Jacobites, just as much as the "Forces invisible" (*M&D*, p. 226) which create them, will forever be and that as Emerson (of the novel) informs, the dispute "did not end with Cromwell, nor Restoration, - nor William of Orange, nor Hanovers" (*ibid*). There are also numerous passages where it is made clear that when one cannot cling to power, one compromises. And bargaining parties ever decide for the unchosen, as Mason suspects was the case when Franklin and his people stopped the Paxton boys:

Now, as then, the preponderant question is, What kind of Arrangements were made? With conquest in their grasp and sight, our own Barbarians in like wise turn'd, and sought once again their wild back-lands, renouncing their chance to sack the Quaker Rome.

(*M&D*, p. 488)

This wish and desire for control, over nature and over people is viewed as a double-edged sword, as it is both the impetus of a questing mind with the sense of purpose that entails, but also too easily a means of subordination and circumspection of the freedom of others. This desire is a force, something inherent, original. Dixon can see this already at the Cape, when Mason cannot:

Indifferent to Visibility, wrapt in the melancholy winds that choir all night long, persists an Obsession or Siege by something much older than anyone here, an injustice that will not cancel out.

(*M&D*, p. 68)

So the Dutch send people to “the End of The World” (ibid), and subjects its people *en route* to profits and a conquest of the world, a world created in their image - indeed nothing less. To claim land and inaugurate their ways in an ever increasingly tangled web of colonies, a European world outlook franchise. Pynchon brilliantly depicts the arbitrary element of impinging on the freedoms of others on account of bringing to town a superior code of morals, and determining for others what their fates are to be. He shows how everyone suffers from the arbitrary and therefore artificial demarcation, as the Dutch at the Cape are deprived of their natural emotions, sexuality becomes commerce and the Cape becomes a machine, designed so for it to be possible to control and operate it “from a single Point” (*M&D*, p. 68). Also signalling the artificiality of the self-proclaimed master status of some over others is the irony that

excesses of Ill Treatment are transform'd to Joy [and that] excesses of Well-being at length bring an Anguish no less painful for being metaphysical.

(*M&D*, p. 151)

De Sade and Freud here combine for the explanation of the entropic counter forces to the logic of the dark side of the Enlightenment. Thus, as sure as there are those whose ambitions are control and machination, there are provisions for a life in subjugation: the social entropic energies contained in the unchosen, Pynchon's beloved destitutes, derelicts and preterites:

Mason, of Mathematical Necessity there do remain, beyond the Reach of the V.O.C, routes of Escape, pockets of Safety,- Markets that never answer to the Company, gatherings that remain forever unknown, even down in Butter-Bag Castle.

(*M&D*, p. 69)

His master metaphor, entropy is set up precisely to defeat these hierarchies that accumulate the power which exerts the fatal attraction. That is his trope of hope as to the fear of hierarchy as expressed in classical liberalism. The good news: it always wins. Here is the deviance from previous works, and I will leave it as unscientific as to place it in his voice. Pynchon's voice, this time, is full of warmth and consolation as he speaks of "all Unchosen Philadelphia" as a "Mobility that is to be" (*M&D*, p. 759). Part disillusion, true, but never only that. In grief over the illusory differences that hamper co-operation, yes, but depicting with the outmost positivity and hope people's ability to come together to make agreements, attach to each other, to resolve disputes and fuel each others dreams. The elderly Mason makes peace with himself and his family in the end, where he regrets his absence from their lives, but instils his son with a feeling of purpose and of possibilities. He assures him his actions have had purposes, that he has known love and friendship and that life has proven a versatile, equivocal experience he has somehow made his way through and is able to find meaning in. In short, there is regret he has not guided his *own* son, but quizzed at all rims of the earth for the guidance of all men. That is his loss, and his lesson.

Mason & Dixon also suggests the increased control and prediction of natural and celestial phenomena led to a rekindling of the age-old obsession in man for prophesy. For the machine controlled from one single point and the perfect society. But the machines in Pynchon's fiction always go off and live a life of their own, far exceeding the boundaries we had drawn for them and the roles we intended them to fill, as Vaucanson's duck is a perfect example of in this novel. And as the novel progresses, the inheritors of the liberation from feudalism, driven by desire to create by use of reason what by inspiration the old rulers promised to assure, is seen enslaving people themselves. The increased mastery of the material nature led to a wish of making such predictions for man as well, forgetting that at the core of his very humanity is always his liberty from automatically acting

according to any set of rules. As Dostoyevsky's basement chronicler asserted: if anyone could come up with a fool-proof system of how to behave, no doubt someone, somewhere, if only for the apparent idiocy, would do precisely the opposite. "We were not meant to play Theatrical Rôles" (*M&D*, p. 533), as Zhang tells Eliza Fields at one point. The rules –as we now move from one liberalism to its modern extension- regulations, institutions, markets and laws of society are not instincts (or secured through inspiration), nor are they, or can they be, derived by stringent logic from infallible sources. They are a human construction that when it works according to its objectives secures safety, allows diversity, diversissements and the individual to shape the world according to his bents within his own sphere. It is grounded on principles that can embrace good actions, and seek to unmask evil when it sees it. A system where

The solution ever depends upon removing time-rates from questions of storing Power. With the proper deployment of Spring Constants and Magnetickal Gating, Power may be borrow'd, as needed, against repayment dates deferrable indefinitely

(*M&D*, p. 317, my italics)

That is: no hierarchy. There is a gift in man of making agreements, contracting in order to pool resources and have a common view of the opportunities and obstacles in the material space they share. This is the other face of the Line. Although it might be a unhealthy structure (a "conduit for Evil" [*&D*, p.701]) the effort that goes into making it is nevertheless never short of spectacular. The division of labour is impeccable, they face dangers and adversity with (a sort of) bravery, show painstaking diligence, endure boredom and console each other etc. These efforts, though, the novel seems to suggest, should not go into lines of separation, but making a visto for all - "who might not come to believe in an Eternal West?" (*M&D*, p. 671). This is the prospect of a positive line of no return. This freedom of the individual and their interaction is a project. And what allows this project

to go on are the institutions, markets, laws, rules and regulations written and unwritten of a society, who are, as it were, the residue of human co-operation. Culture is an expression of that component in man that looks to exceed the small group. A space where can live those who believe themselves to advocate the good, where one agrees upon *something*, in the final analysis, and the cultural structures and products are there as proof of their applicability in securing for those who inhabit them prosperity, multiplication of their numbers and a continuation of the project.

But at times these mechanisms of shutting out the forces which threaten the idea they are set to protect, do not work. Someone gets in under the radar, the betrayal of the good intentions disguises itself, sells out his fellow man for personal gain. This is the nature of corruption and surveillance, of control and demagoguery. To this, all Pynchon's books can serve as illustrations, but in *Mason & Dixon*, again, there is something else. A profound insight is at the core of his voice this time, a bedazzlement at the clear view of two such distinct components in the fabric of man. One inclining to co-operation and trust, the other to manipulation and mischief. One to adopt to threats of the common intentions and to accommodate those intentions as more is learned of their implications. The other to perpetuate superfluous parts of cultural constructions and institutions, betraying their intentions in order to secure personal power and profit:

There may be found, within the malodorous Grotto of the Selves, a conscious Denial of all that Reason holds true. Something that knows, unarguably as it knows Flesh is sooner or later Meat, that there are Beings who are not wise, or spiritually advanced, or indeed capable of Human Kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting,- known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night, - and any who see them out of Disguise are instantly pursued,- and none escape, however long and fruitful be the years till the Shadow creeps 'cross the Sill-plate, its Advent how mute. Spheres of Darkness, Darkness impure,- Plexities of Honour and Sin we may never clearly sight, for when we venture near they fall silent, Murderings must be silent, by Potions and Spells, by summonings from

beyond the Horizons, of Spirits who dwell a little over the Line between the Day and its annihilations,
between the number'd and unimagined,- between common safety and Ruin ever solitary.

(*M&D*, p. 769)

Common safety is the prospect of a culture, ruin ever solitary is its counter forces. Man is here made a tragic figure, striving to high ideals, but inherently carrying his own endeavours' impediment and retardation. Because it has to be trial *and* error. In the space between these, is where, I believe, Thomas Pynchon sees history unfold. And nothing is more dangerous than the hierarchical structures that the classical liberalism went to such lengths to limit, where time rates are not removed from the storage of power, because it may produce

some Symbol of the People who won't care a rat's whisker about his Borough, who will indeed sell out his Voters for a chance to grovel his way to even a penny's-worth more Advantage in the World of Global Meddling he imagines as reality.

(*M&D*, p. 405)

But where it not for the civility truly necessary to keep it alive, there would be nothing to jockey for positions to rule over. So there is something to build on. Our culture evolves like anything else, and while there is no sure-fire set solution to have it develop in the precise right direction at any given time nor to perfect it absolutely, the intention of those who develop and change cultures, or subcultures, is a constant as much as incessant change is the only constant of their environments. And as much as the indisputable fact that the very stuff their creation is made out of is neither indestructible nor impenetrable. *Mason & Dixon*, I submit, is seeing a harmful structure in the accumulation of power, coercion and pretenses of overview from a central position, and laments the devaluation of the spontaneous powers and civility of man. As we see, these are not new suspicions and the novel stands in a conscious relationship to its ancestors.

Evil has come in many disguises, its advent sometimes mute, sometimes marching to loud drum-beats. But these vulnerabilities are *societal* issues, and evil must always be a parasite on good intentions, the basest of human motives living off the best - exploiting trust vested. Trust being the capital of human possibility. Rather it winning in that manner, the novel seems to say, than not to acknowledge and act upon what one can only call the more noble and spiritually advanced impetus of common safety. Culture and institutions, always changing, thus become, to borrow a phrase from Charles S. Peirce, “the concrete life of the men who are working to find the truth” (in Habermas 1994, p. 94). So we have two constants where some scream loudly there cannot exist any: change and the equally constant adaptation to it according to principles of safety, persistence and individual realisation: culture. The direction of this project, should, the novel suggests, move in the direction of building down hierarchical power systems, reduce opportunities of coercion, value local rather than universal understanding, and interaction with rather than control over nature.

What we see is interesting, because it shows that had there not been a bond, a unification in beliefs extending over a real period of actual time and space, there could have been no dispute. So these are societal issues, because men feel safe in a society guided by principles, laws and regulations, and there is a record of thousands of years of history to suggest he cannot base them upon nothing. No dispute without the axioms to fight over, no society without this fight. And the objective of the fight can never be recognized or described with absolute accuracy as it does not have a definite form or shape, nor can it ever be attained for it is incessantly changing. Approaching it is the only thing one can do. Choose common safety over ruin ever solitary. So as sure as the right path is followed when we try to define the order of things and which actions should be allowed and which should be punished, equally certain is it that the doubt and the friction will always remain. At times the doubt is well founded and triumphs, that is when societies change, morally or in organisation. However, where power is collected and stored, the will to command that power is oftentimes more

preponderant than the wish to create the more just society. Where free men speak freely, discuss, agree upon those things which humans agree upon, disagree upon others, and protect each other's freedoms by refining their laws and customs, in which fiction and debate hold not insignificant places. I cannot help but to think of the scene towards the end of the novel where the elderly Mason is caught by immense surprise that someone would hold a closed party at the inn, a private party for a select group of people. Elsewhere, the inns are an example of the public nature of truth, an informal venue of discussion. Dogma, surveillance, threats, power broking which all abound in the novel threaten to take over when the pursuit of common interests is hampered by the wish of some to create a common identity. *The narrator.*

Mason's deism, then, contains this insight of the impossibility of total closure, and therefore the need to communicate and tolerate different (literally speaking) points-of-view. When "Christ is pure uncertainty" (*M&D*, p. 511) deism is reading the impossibility of an all-encompassing system out of nature. He jests at Maskelyne's chase for the "Phantom Shape" (*M&D*, p. 772), Maskelyne for him being a "walking cautionary Tale" (*M&D*, p. 134). Himself, he has "ascended, descended, even condescended, and the List's not Ended,- but [has not] yet *trans*-cended a blessed thing" (*M&D*, p. 746). He comes to understand that, to borrow from Cherrycoke: "Doubt is of the essence of Christ" (*M&D*, p. 511). He knows coercion and schemata can make faith difficult. With the belief to have found the answers in the stars, the Rulers with Divine Powers eventually drove their unchosen away and more than a few to America. Where the refusal to accept authority of any kind tries to bring about a new order where no authority is accepted, except on the merits of what they do. The continent Mason is now on, he realises, reckons "the Stamp Act is simple Tyranny" (*M&D*, p. 405), the speed with which it is all happening confounds Mason, he is inside

something styling itself "America" coming into being, ripening, like a Tree-ful of Cherries in a good summer, almost as one stands and watches,- something no one in London, however plac'd in the Web of Privilege, however up-to-the-minute, seems to know much about

(ibid)

We are now very far from divine rights. And it is this development, from feudality and divine rulers and ancestors of Adam via representational government to this independent community ideal on the way to freedom for the individual, I think Mason sees America as a stage in when he speaks of the continent as an engine to Franklin towards the end. Man cannot believe in nothing, so when accountability is removed from whatever dwells in the *Habitaculum Dei*, a project must ensue to place that accountability with the individual, which is what Habermas will give us a chance to talk about in the next part. And there we will also try and say something about what this final stage in the individual's freedom and accountability may look like. The quest for certitude, at any rate, must be abandoned and the novel speaks of a need to find hope in the transit rather than arriving at the destination. And since accepting incomplete systems is so important to this project, I now briefly want to touch upon three different aspects where the need to restrain the intellect and accept heuristic measures is expressed in the novel. The relationship between Mason and Dixon and their special friendship, the narrative's evasion of a uniform reading, and the portrayal of language in the novel. The first and the last will be treated together in the next sub-chapter. While the narrative as a structure will be treated in a separate one thereafter.

2.2 How the Power may come to be sorted out betwix't them

Mason and Dixon knew seldom reproach, rather their differences are muted in humour and disarmed by their jesting dialogue. Through the power of the unspoken, in their very special way of

narrating their personalities, the one to the other, there is an element of profound respect. A great measure of respect also resides in the tardiness of their language - through nuances of imagery, examples and analogies they approach each other's views. They understand the intricacies of choice and that some principles weigh heavier than others, allow time to pass before passing judgement and before expecting renouncement of believes, sympathies and antipathies - knowing how important they are to the feeling of self. It is surely one of the more particular traits of the novel, in my opinion, that they know not instant condemnation or persuasion. They understand and respect the fundamentally personal nature of understanding and that tolerance does not come if one has not felt loss, appreciation not without temporary absence and friendship not without giving and taking. Always, they are echoing the great line from Friedrich Hayek that men are of use to each other only so far as they are different from each other.

Mason and Dixon cease to hold grudges, they indicate how they feel towards each other through comments and their rhetoric, but there is no instant judgement. Their feelings are always injected anew into language and when there is silence, it is always knowing that they will speak again. When they do, they will change emphasis, make new histories and alter their imagery and analogies to indicate how the meaning of concepts and words has changed in their thinking and through their *mutual* experiences since the last time:

...Beginning to learn, each at his own rate that the choice not to dispute oftentimes set free minutes, indeed hours otherwise wasted in issueless Quarrelling. Neither appreciates this at the time.

(*M&D*, p. 461)

No one word or explanation is above suspicion. This process is dialectical and the approach is always more important than to define once and for all. There is no closure, no rigidity and no dogma. Their language is always open to change as it responds to those of others, this way words and events find

their weighting and importance, force and meaning only in *context*, in language itself always regenerative and renewing – adapting to the only constant: change. Thus, what lives in it exceeds reason, it is able to take up elements of the real and unreal, the dead still have worldly presence in it, and there lives a connection with others and with history. And words and things may, above all, signify more than one thing.

Watch how plain language is a powerful instrument, powerful enough to encompass and convey one meaning of what the most sophisticated minds of our own times spend both time and two kinds of capital to map, here is Lonze's butterfly effect anticipated:

all that has to happen is some Beaver, miles upstream from here, moves a single Pebble,- suddenly,
down here, everything's changed! The creek's a mile away, running through the Horse Barn! Acres of
Forest no longer exist! And that Beaver don't even know what he's done

(*M&D*, p. 364)

This is a brilliant, though not original observation: that the phenomenon *in the mind* is the same for what these two articulations, the landlord's paradox and our scientists' specialised vocabulary and mathematical functions, are answers to. It is the realisation that acts can produce unfathomable consequences. That everything on a smaller scale is interconnected. And it is worth noting how the landlord's tone is one of awe, and that controlling, intervening or manipulating this process is not even a remote possibility for him to consider. Elsewhere in the novel, mathematising and inquiring into ever more detail is connected, primarily through Maskelyne's behaviour on St. Helena, with paranoia. Here we can see again one of the major themes of the novel, how interest creates knowledge. The novel seems to favour a practical understanding of nature, geared towards interaction, not intervention - and to suspect the overzealous search for the ultimate cause with a kind of megalomania and need for control which ultimately doubts fate. These are expressions of

two different wishes, one to live with nature, the other to control it. Thus, the landlord asserts his freedom when he seems most vulnerable, and his life does not in the final analysis depend on total control or knowing everything. This teeming of ambition is very central to the novel, and local understanding always has greater value than universal principles.

In fact, there is something more universal about the landlord's tale, because it requires no further explanation where the mathematical equation would have to be accompanied by a key as to what they stand for, or re-presents. Pure representation in general is mistrusted in the novel. Language, it is true, is also a representation, but one arrived at necessarily by consent. And capable of change, different in its pretenses as it is from nomenclature. Language is thus a dialogue *par excellence*. Were it not for the ability to accept an imperfect, plastic, mutating, intangible object ever in transit, but with no clear destination – no communication would be possible. Next, I wish to show how *Mason & Dixon* as a narrative does all it can to achieve a similar state of indeterminacy.

2.3 The Centre of it all, Moving Someplace Else Like Thah'

There is a rather delightful passage in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* where count Leinsdorf cunningly leak to the press leading officials' plan of a *Year of Austria* in commemoration of its unifying ideal (which thusly he hopes to elicit from its reading public since he himself or either of the project's protagonists have any idea what it might be) which has made of it such a great nation. Much to his dismay and surprise, though, he does not reap a clear candidate emanating from the root of the people as he had hoped for, but a number of idiosyncratic inventions, constructions, world-systems and ideologies. There is an echoing scene towards the end of *Mason & Dixon* where Mason at an inn runs in to Dr. Johnson and his hagiographer Mr. Boswell. The explorer cannot bite his tongue at the apparent inflation the world incessantly seems prone to contribute to of one single man and his

particular opinions. A world of a dozen Dr. Johnsons, and Boswells being a dime a dozen. Whose "ev'ry spoken remark" (*M&D*, p. 747) will "be lost forever to the great Wind of Oblivion" (*ibid*). Mason then proceeds to dip his tongue in the poison magically always at his disposal, whereupon he mocks the heightened intellect and the enormous trust vested in him:

as all civilized Britain gathers at this hour, how much shapely Expression, from the titl'd Gambler, the Barmaid's Suitor, the offended Fopling, the gratified Toss-Pot, is simply fading away upon the Air, out under the Door, into the Evening and the Silence beyond. All those voices. Why not pluck a few words from the multitudes rushing toward the Void of forgetfulness?

(*ibid*)

Mason & Dixon sort of operates right in that space, in the void of what could have been. A chronicle of how possibilities are reduced to certainty that preserves the voices who didn't make themselves heard, and recounts the struggles and defeats of those who were swept away. The beginning makes it clear too many losses go untold, and by making this clear in the very beginning it reads like a proclamation of realising Paul Ricoeur's project when he asserts that the whole of man's suffering history cries out and *demande recit*. In the last quote the feeling of resentment towards the systemising efforts of an untimid and irreverent intellect is reinforced. There is no human genius grand enough to comprehend all bits in their totality. And whoever tries, with history or with people, it reflects more upon their agenda than their ability to correctly contextualise all recorded human events and subjugate to unifying principles:

Facts are but the Play-things of lawyers,- Tops and Hoops, forever a-spin...Alas, the Historians may indulge in no such idle Rotating. History is not Chronology, for that is left to lawyers,- nor is it Rememberance, for Rememberance belongs to the People. History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power over the other...that there may continue more than one life-

line back into a Past we risk, each day, losing our forebears in forever,- not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All,- rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonic Deep, with only their Destination in common.

(*M&D*, p. 349)

Here, all the stored suspicion of naked Positivism is let out all at once. In its turn, *Mason & Dixon* sports a self-proclaimed unreliable main narrator, often recounting events he did not attend and inserting bits and pieces on request from his audience. The novel harbours a multitude of voices not always clearly distinguished (and how can there be Authority when one knows not who is speaking?), none of which are given priority. There are plots and counterplots, twists and turns, historical figures speak on par with supernatural beings and dream is as real as waking moments. Words have double meanings, the text opens up to other texts through innuendos and intertextuality ever implying it is not a closed entity. And since the meaning of its words are so determined by its individual reader, surely it is more than the sum of its parts. And when I detect intertextuality I cannot claim other than that I must read that passage differently from one who didn't make the connection. Likewise, I can never be sure of having grasped the full meaning, for are there connections I cannot make? Obviously. My readings are my readings only.

French critic Roland Barthes always suspected that the belief within a society (the bourgeoisie's *Occidentalism* was the target of much of Barthes' critique) that values are objectively given and not products of history, produces a particular kind of literature. This realism is to the imagination what reductionism is to world-construction: disenchanting. Or ,as the man without qualities would say, "gain[ing] in terms of reality and los[ing] in terms of the dream" (Musil 1979, p. 40). The world of such ideology-mirroring literature, is a world where every word corresponds to a fixed entity in a closed, comprehensible space with discernable mechanisms. But what determines the action in *Mason & Dixon*? The stars? French frigates? The Royal Society? What is recorded of what

the explorers did in their earthly life? All together perhaps? Certainly none alone. This literature Barthes fears is the literature of a single cause and effect, of action and reaction, of calculation and control. When its authors adhere to the belief of absolute knowledge, this allows them to build up to a final meaning and often there will be a voice of reason who is given priority and which is through various techniques affiliated with that of the physical author himself. Since their world is a stable one, the signifying system is frozen, so to speak, which allows the use of stable symbols. A mythology can be formed, a mythology for the belief that reckons itself independent of precisely that kind of an entity. Symbols can only serve as stable symbols if the rules of the system is unalterable, which by Barthes' theory the ruling or privileged prefer, the same way one cannot solve a mathematical problem if the rules of multiplication and addition changes every instant. In this form of literature, there can be no confusion of voices, that is to say: for reason to make its voice heard over irrationality's it must be clear which is which. And, for there to be a voice of reason there must be one of irrationality, which is often designated to that which is simply the opposite of what these ideologists hold true. A process Edward Said has brilliantly shown at work in his study *Orientalism* (Said 1978). In short, they empower their ideals and view of the world with the truth value of the last digit in the following computation: $2+2=4$. Obviously, for it to add up, the units, scale and method must be beyond discussion. And for the novel to equal an unequivocal meaning its units must also be clear and its mode of combination must be transparent, known and beyond reproach. In Barthes' ideal text, on the other hand, and this must be quoted at length:

les réseaux sont multiples et jouent entre eux, sans qu'aucun puisse coiffer les autres; ce text est une galaxie de signifiants, non une structure de signifiés; il n'a pas de commencement; il est réversible; on y accède par plusieurs entrées dont aucune ne peut être à coup sûr déclarée principale; les codes qu'il mobilise se profilent à *perte de vue*, ils sont indécidables (le sens n'y est jamais soumis à un principe de

décision, sinon par coup de dés); de ce texte absolument pluriel, les systèmes de sens peuvent s'emparer, mais leur nombre n'est jamais clos, ayant pour mesure l'infini du langage.

(Barthes 1970, p. 12)

In short: a text where no single, broken link could lose us all. *Mason & Dixon*, I suggest, is such a text. It can be likened to a cannonball catapulted by Pynchon's narrative, communicative desire, flying into whatever net - knit by previous texts read and notions of the world - whichever reader holds up. Not one, but many, each net indented by the cannonball as the other texts and notions are challenged by this new narrative, before flinging the ball into the air again where it picks up momentum and heads by way of connotations, word playing, innuendos, intertextuality and its action for the next net. Leaving none of them unaltered at the time of departure. Such is his way with me, and a case in point is my reading of the novel's very first paragraphs. Which I wish to make a new interlude of, to show how such a free reading can function as a part of an argumentation, as well as it can stand on its own (all *M&D* quotes from pages 5 and 6 in the edition previously referred to).

Interlude - Follow the Bouncing Ball

I have seen the crying of lot 49 at the end of that novel become the screaming in the sky in the opening sentence of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's powerful dissection of cold war mentalities. But now, in his wintry first words of *Mason & Dixon* he contently asserts that "Snow-Balls have flown their Arcs" -it is over, they but "starred the *Sides* of Outbuildings" (my italics) and did not amount to apocalypse. The ball again catches speed with "the Sleds are brought in and their Runners carefully dried and greased" before in my case being welcomed into the following net knit by a passage of Don DeLillo's. Referring to the American B-52 bomber planes and their pilots on constant alert during the heights of the cold war, he says in his masterful *Underworld* : "But the bombs were not

released[...]The missiles remained in the rotary launchers[...]The men came back” (DeLillo 1999, p. 122). I pause also to notice Pynchon's trademark caution in that he says their runners are “carefully dried and greas'd” indicating they might well be employed again, and that there is a case to be made this is a recurring angle from which he reads history: his beloved preterites running the ideological sleds of the elites. Before like Munchausen we climb back on the ball I would like to halt long enough to adopt a line from the ending paragraph of *Gravity's Rainbow* as something of a motto: “Follow the bouncing ball.” (Pynchon 1975, p. 760). It sends us in from the cold, after international involvement follows splendid isolation and domestic Rockwellism (for images are also texts): we hear of a “a stocking'd-foot Descent made upon the great Kitchen, in a purposeful Dither since morning, punctuated by the ringing Lids of various Boilers and Stewing-Pots” and are invited to “retreat to a comfortable Room” where the children play. A room containing a mahogany card table and the narrative's perfect *mise-en-abyme* with a

Wave-like Grain known in the Trade as Wand'ring heart, causing an illusion of Depth into which for years children have gaz'd as into the illustrated Pages of Books...along with so many hinges, sliding Mortises, hidden catches, and secret compartments that neither the Twins nor their Sister can say they have been to the end of it.

And then, the historical analogy to the post-cold-war *mentalité* of internal fractions for want of external threats:

This Christmastide of 1786, with the War settl'd and the Nation bickering itself into Fragments, wounds bodily and ghostly, great and small, go aching on, not ev'ry one commemorated,- nor, too often, even recounted.

So the recounter takes centre stage, reverend Wicks Cherrycoke with his grand tale of America.

Textual understanding, as we rejoin our line of argumentation, is individual and meaning lies in the interaction between the text and the individual. What, to my mind, *Mason & Dixon* shows is the dangers of reason when it ceases to use its powers on itself. On at least three levels we see how totality is not possible. The meaning of the text (1) is not determined by the physicality of the text, the letters' linearity and the their combinations alone. Rather it is created when I labour to detect it. The same way, the factual and physical world (2) does not guarantee a single, uniform reading. And, lastly, neither do the events constituting our human history (3) secure for themselves a singular interpretation. I would now like to present the theories of Jürgen Habermas on *Knowledge and Human Interests*, and show how his conclusions and model rest on the same type of observations *Mason & Dixon* makes, and how, also, it supports the possibility of acting rationally towards amelioration even without a frozen system.

Part III - Order in Chaos

3.1 Jürgen Habermas' Epistemologic Matrix

In Habermas' thinking, far from being guided continually or containing an instrument of navigation securing right passage, the elements of truth have only "their Destination in common" (*M&D*, p. 349) one could say. And this destination is to Jürgen Habermas' mind determined by the human interest which guides the questioning, that is to say that truth cannot be objective because it depends on the subject receiving/creating it. Habermas quotes Charles S. Peirce:

All human thought and opinion contains an arbitrary, accidental element, dependent on the limitations in circumstances, power, and bent of the individual; an element of error, in short. But human opinion universally tends in the long run to a definite form, which is the truth. Let any human being have enough information and exert enough thought upon any question, and the result will be that he will arrive at a certain definite conclusion, which is the same that any other mind will reach under sufficiently favorable circumstances

(in Habermas 1994, p. 93)

Habermas explains how Peirce with his concept of eternal inquiry as a way of life, saves knowledge from the risk of being false, corrupted or meaningless - because it is *willed*. Man chooses to direct his efforts in a certain direction, and the scientific, that is systematic, inquiry of the question they pose is the "concrete life of the men who are working to find out the truth." (in Habermas 1994, p. 94). There can be no knowledge which is not mediated or based on former knowledge, that is: evolved. There are no provable ultimate foundations for knowledge because the thinking individual carries with him a certain cognitive model which decides which phenomena are interesting, as they are to serve in testing projects of current notions. Peirce also declines the tradition of immediate, intuitive access to infallible sources. Because "the controversies about the true sources of intuitive knowledge

has never led to a satisfactory consensus” (Habermas 1994, p 97). *Mason & Dixon* is full of such natural deviances, telluric forces wanting of a pass of entrance into existing functions of reality-description etc. In the novel, ends and explanations are easily discarded, however the data are dear and the new conception always retains what was true in the former. Habermas explains the implications of disregarding the thing-in-itself, and not detaching reality from the explanation of it, the subject from the object: “eliminating the thing-in-itself makes it possible to change perspective” (Habermas 1994, p. 108). To change perspective, and the possibility of doing that, is one of the grand technique of the narrative we are studying. The constant back and forth between Mason and Dixon, of course, is its most frequently recurring manifestation.

Almost by necessity there must lie a tremendous poetic power in changing perspective, as narrative is only possible through mediation, and what the recounting medium filters out are the things that go unexplained. A different point of view or filter will allow the world to contain *other things* – which enter into connections with the existing elements and make them appear in a new light. If one considers the age-old, never-disappearing tricks up the whole canon’s sleeve, an enormous amount of their poignancy lies in distilling ordinary, common, experiences and rendering them new. Techniques of sudden denouement abound, for example changing the point of view to make all events narrated appear in a new light. Or connecting scattered elements and characters together in unexpected ways - each individual’s role changing as who is recounting changes, because they all have different motives. It was so that literature itself discovered how to be ideological, when at one point it was found that the truth belongs to the one who does the narrating. The instability of Pynchon's fictional universe underscores the point at which our discussion has now arrived. Nor did Barthes ever leave this to state itself. But the more remarkable thing is that when the novel was

suspected of such exploitation, it sparked a flurry of metafiction to bare the processes in which meaning and history was distorted, nay, betrayed.

Speaking of Thomas Pynchon's work as sparks generated in the friction from changing ontologic and epistemologic perspectives can shed light on the nature of his deployment of grandiose language and extreme concepts. Because the detachment from a familiar horizon entails such vertigo in man, the language is intense and can often contain high pathos. For these are the mechanisms also in those all-too-real experiences when a friend becomes an enemy, or when a beloved's face changes from that of an angel to that of evil itself on the eve of realisation in the light of the new perspective, in the metamorphosis of denouement. This is the source of the golem, the demiurge, the robot who is more human than man and so many other of Pynchon's favourite themes. Personifications, they are, of the moments of sudden realisations, and the wish to keep them at bay. Of epistemologic and ontologic vertigo, and the ambiguity they hold. There is partly a desire for the oracle, and partly a fear of it because feelings are operative in pairs the perfect knowledge would have taken away the possibility of the positive that built the stakes for the negative. To remove that potential for error and calamity is also taking away surprise and, more importantly, free will. Indeed, in *Mason & Dixon*, the hope of the transcendentalists become, in a way, the characters' worst nightmare. That they are not the authors of their own faith. Mason, Dixon and even Maskelyne always antagonise themselves with this thought, their suspicions moving from "Are we being used, by invisible forces unknown even to thy Invisible College?" (*M&D*, p. 73), to "As if we're lodgers into someone else's fate" (*M&D*, p. 73), to "no Action, no Thought nor dream, that had not the Co. for its Author" (*M&D*, p. 128), to "it turn'd out to be simple after all" (*M&D*, p. 772).

As for Habermas, the reason he had for including Peirce was to credit him with being “The first to tread the dimension of a self-reflecting philosophy of science” (Habermas 1994, p. 90). When Habermas’ research suggests to him that the notion of pure theory itself came into being as the express manifestation of a wish (to reign in the forces that in the Greek Tradition “still appeared as gods and superhuman powers” (Habermas 1994, p. 306) in order to “provide the subject with an ecstatic purification from the passions” (ibid), Peirce’s scepticism as to the possibility of first principles and ultimate facts is evidently welcomed. Instead, Peirce has reality depending on the inquiry that produces it, claiming that the manner in which the questions are posed determines the opinion that will ultimately be reached. So the opinion/conclusion reached does not depend on what “*you or I or any man thinks.*” (in Habermas 1994, p. 96, italics mine). Peirce says the point at which the inquiry stops, determines the opinion, and this point is again dependent on the opinion found there satisfying the conditions which spurred the search for it. Mason, I think, comes to see America as such a project, where the fugitives from oppression seek to dispense with authority. At any rate, at the end we are told he looks at Franklin “as if it *didn’t matter much what Franklin thinks*” (M&D, p. 772, my italics) and tells him America is a

great single Engine, the size of a Continent. I have all the proofs you may require. Not all the connexions are made yet, that’s why some of it is still invisible. Day by day the Pioneers and Surveyors go on, more points are being tied in, and soon becoming visible, as above, new Stars recorded and named and placed in Almanacks....

(ibid)

So, accepting Habermas’ wager on behalf of the novel that survival always contains the image of the good life, and we take Mason to mean by this the freedom of the individual, and America as a stage in that process (succeeding feudal kings and representational government, coming into being as

something new) working as a “great single Engine” to arrive at its Lockean ideal as the ending point in a Peircean inquiry that has that as its impetus, we can now begin to articulate the full meaning of his words to Franklin as they figure in our reading. There is, in effect, more to suggest that Pynchon have at least *considered* an ending point. Here is Peirce, first, in a passage that could have fit right into the novel:

And the *catholic consent* which constitutes the truth is by no means to be limited to men in this earthly life or to the human race, but extends to the whole communion of minds to which we belong, including some probably whose senses are very different from ours, so that in consent no predication of a sensible quality can enter, except as an admission that so certain sorts of senses are affected.

(In Habermas 1994, p. 109, my italics)

This, then, might seem almost like a paraphrase, and if the link is accepted the irony of Mason’s deism as he relates it to Franklin can be filed in full:

Perhaps there is no Disjunction...and men, after all, want Rome, want Her, desire Her, as both Empire and Church. Perhaps they seek a way back,- to the single Realm, as it was before Protestants, and *Protestant Dissent*, and the mindless breeding of Sect upon Sect. A[...]condition before Light and Dark, Earth and Sky, Man and Woman, a return to the Holy Silence which the word broke, and the Multiplexity of matter has ever since kept hidden, before all but a few resolute explorers

(*M&D*, p. 522-523, my italics)

It is evidently crucial to say that Peirce would most likely not could have conceived of such a connection himself. His project was intricately connected with a thought of scientific progress. It is we who have defined this process’ goal/opinion for purposes of a reading and thereby filled its form with an inquiry for individual freedom. Later, we shall try to say something about the nature of this inquiry, basing ourselves on a tentative analogy to the model of the Wolf of Jesus as it appears to us

in our reading of the novel. By my reading Mason sees America as a stage in an inquiry of mankind, in Peirce's sense of the word inquiry, of transferring accountability from the Supreme to the individual on the grounds of the ubiquitous indeterminacy of the world's ontology and the opinion, also to be taken in the Peircean sense, will be the riddance of authority in any other sense than Lockean and a faith in spontaneity and civic virtues.

But let us turn again to Habermas. He reaches the conclusion that the interest of human knowledge is in the human interest, which ultimately is safety *and* what we conceive as the good life. The awareness that we live "on a slumbering creature" (*M&D*, p. 128) is not the sole content of human actions as Habermas sees it, they always "transcend mere self-preservation" (Habermas 1994, p. 313). Science - in the sense of pure theory - is the project, not of providing God with a dwelling-place, but of throwing off the yoke of fatalism, making gods and super-human beings "powers of the soul" (Habermas 1994, p. 306) and by taking a reflective, contemplative view demand emancipation from them. Demand a relationship to them which transfers accountability and responsibility to the individual, Habermas says. Much like the self-reflective process of psychoanalysis can be directed at emancipation from compulsory thoughts. Habermas says that attention to pure theory on how to account for the relationship of these powers and their presence in the mind, promises purification from them. Purification because they are then explained as mental acts, which is something towards which one can have an attitude without being punished, something one can act upon and hope to alter. Not a inhuman, if anthropomorphic, power which affects, intervenes and perhaps even violates, but can neither be addressed nor reproached without additional fear of retribution. He claims

In the Greek tradition, the same forces that philosophy reduces to powers of the soul still appeared as gods and super-human powers. Philosophy domesticated them to the realm of the soul as internalized demons. If from this point of view we regard the drives and affects that enmesh man in the empirical

interest of his inconstant and contingent activity, then the attitude of pure theory, which promises *purification* from these very affects, take on a new meaning: disinterested contemplation then obviously signifies emancipation.

(ibid)

Habermas distinguishes this domain of knowledge, emancipatory, from work knowledge and practical knowledge. That is, from those relations revealed by questionings motivated by the wish for technical mastery of one's environment and the search for intentions respectively. The former is "*technically exploitable knowledge*" (Habermas 1994, p. 191, his italics) and includes among others Physics and Chemistry while the latter is "*practically effective knowledge*" (ibid, his italics) well understood as the hermeneutics and directed at "interpreting foreign cultures as well as[...]appropriating one's own traditions" (ibid). In this matrix of knowledges Mason and Dixon travel. The interest behind the technically exploitable knowledge they generate is what they constantly worry about. They always know that they only provide data, and what use they will be put to is whatever the Royal Society has in mind. The narrative lets us understand that the free intellect is as agile as the high-rollers of sciences with motives ever grander, or interests ever base. We have quoted already the landlord who discovered his very own chaos theory while looking at the beavers and there is also in the novel to be found a pre-theorized description of entropy sent in to the Royal Society by a retired naval officer speaking of an "invisible Grain built into Creation, whereby, it is less work to rip than to cross cut" (*M&D*, p. 142) to cite but one more example out of a stock that seems inexhaustible. In fact, since interest is what creates knowledge one should make sure the individual's interest is allowed to reign supreme. The whole movement of *Mason & Dixon* goes in that direction, it is a homage to the individual and an acknowledgement we have made our world what it is, and implores us to accept the responsibility inherent in that view as well. The enemy is as always rigidity and finitude, the control from a single point. These are the stakes of liberalism and its being breached by artificial

hierarchies have their names. In literature it is the pure realism Barthes detested, in theology it is dogmatic fanaticism, in politics it is Fascism, in science it is scientism – and “any who see them out of Disguise is instantly pursued” (*M&D*, p. 769). Habermas says

Only when philosophy discovers in the dialectical course of history the traces of violence that deform repeated attempts at dialogue and recurrently close off the path to unrestrained communication does it further the process whose suspension it otherwise legitimates: mankind’s evolution toward autonomy and responsibility

(Habermas 1994, pp. 314-315)

This violence that deforms attempts at dialogue, can excellently well by my reading stand for the line in the novel. And the unrestrained communication undoubtedly harks back to our Mr. Selden whom Milton quoted, and cannot be severed from the concept of an evolutionary epistemology. Both the market and the state, who battle for legitimacy, depend on civic virtues and a minimum of competence to survive, and certainly autonomy and responsibility. It is this insight that leads Christopher Lasch and ,to a different extent, Richard Sennett to embrace a “third way of thinking” (Lasch 1995, p. 101), indeed nothing less than a dialectics of both sides of a divide, the left and right of contemporary American politics. Where civic virtues are cultivated through a reverence of common everyday experience, common sense (where truth is public, which is what politics used to be about), and where respect is something other than tolerance - in the sense that to expect something from yourself is to expect something from others. Where compassion is not the “human face of contempt” (Lasch, p. 105). In the novel, the inns are the perfect metaphor for the publicity of truth, and the belief in places where all can come together and communicate freely, as opposed to the closed party Mason is so bewildered at when he travels with his son in his age and the new times. I suspect his author as well as his himself would rather have it the old way:

As torch- or taper-light takes over from the light of the sunset, what are those Faces, gather'd before some Window, raising Toasts, preparing for the Evening ahead, if not assur'd of life forever? as travelers come in by ones and twos, to the smell of Tobacco and Chops, as Fiddle Players tune their strings and starv'd horses eat from the trough in the Courtyard, as young women flee to and fro with fatigue, and small boys down in strata of their own go swarming upon ceaseless errands, skidding upon the Straw, as smoke begins to fill the smoking-room...how may Death come here?

(*M&D*, p. 364)

When *Mason & Dixon* identifies the perennial perils of both the market and the state, the real enemy is then no single view so much as the abstract ideological structures “that appeal to elites” (Lasch 1995, s. 112). It is in this light, I believe, Pynchon’s preoccupation with the chosen, unchosen, faceless committees, reckless monologue and preterites etc. is best viewed.

I know “a third way” smacks perhaps of compromise. It carries, it may be said, the stench of cowardice, and that I could surely try harder to identify an inclination in his voice, or count the examples to try and see which side (the market or the state) are portrayed least favourably the most times. I simply do not believe that is a good idea, nor would it give any meaning, I think, to rely more on the incidents towards the end of the book or to give extra credit to anything said by a major character than any of the explorers’ sidekicks. There is no Delphic voice, the narrative mixture of voices obfuscating the origin of the textual stream and its constant tributes to uncertainty heeds no call of coming down on either sides on the line. However, I must say, the market in its pure form, which is how we treat it, is much more compatible with this project and a far more natural entity than the state.

This lack of Delphic voices implies an attitude towards severing the links to persona and treat the ideas independently of whence they come. And if views differ there should be dialogue, the true danger is to construct ideological barriers that shut out important information, or confine the space where you can look for the truth. That is how the line works and Wicks Cherrycoke in a

meditative moment suspects that after the Creation's second day when "G-d made the Firmament" (*M&D*, p. 361) and divided the waters under it "from the Waters which were above" (*ibid*) – thus creating the "first Boundary Line" (*ibid*)- all else "in all History, is but Sub-Division" (*ibid*). The negative line of no return. And of course, as ambiguity is hard currency in this novel, we meet both those who prophetically proclaim that in the world to come "all boundaries shall be eras'd" (*M&D*, p. 406) and those who choose for their model "Imprisonment" (*M&D*, p. 522).

My thesis is simple: Because it realises human interest is what creates knowledge, the novel as I read it warns it is not in the human interest to believe in *one* all-encompassing truth. If it is true that the mode of inquiry decides what will be seen, and one man can never see the whole field at any given time, then a way of sharing information is the only way an answer can be arrived at. The way Maskelyne says he has been looking from St. Helena while Mason and Dixon observed *the same phenomenon* from the Cape, the idea being that the errors would "cancel out" (*M&D*, p. 475). The world is different for each one of us, our wishes constantly changing and the good society is the one where as many as possible of these are recorded, and one where granting them assures one's own gratification. Thus they must be communicated, intersubjectively. And every man's personality must be allowed to form within confines that guarantees the equal possibility of all to so develop. This personality, when one invests something of oneself in it, becomes identity. Dixon speaks of a land-surveyors north-point as something which he may draw and "embellish, in any way he pleases, so it point where North be" (*M&D*, p. 688), to a certain extent confined, true, but still with room for freedom. Further, he says, it is important to

keep Faith with it,- for an often enormous Investment of Faith, and will, lies condens'd within, giving
it a potency in the World that the Agents of Reason cares little for.

(*ibid*)

For hints that it is indeed stories that go into making this identity, we can point to Cherrycoke's description of the fictional Hamlet who has "quite eclips'd for us the man who had to live through the contradictions of his earthly Life" (*M&D*, p. 351) and Uncle Wade being described as a "collection of family stories[...]difficult to reconcile with the living Uncle" (*M&D*, p. 31). With ideology, one advocates a set of rules to ensure the attainment of a set of possibilities viewed from one angle and point of view. If the human interest is, and all kinds of humanity in its real form must from here depart, to create a world where every individual can live according to his wishes and beliefs within his own space, the individual must shape his world and not have it fully determined for him.

What one learns about the world through creating it according to one particular view-point is only what can be seen from there. It is to live within the confines, not of your own making or of what is strictly possible from the material surrounding you – but confines made from the intention of creating the best out of what was seen from one point of view at a particular point in time. To be told what is good and to have to listen to monologue and not being included in conversations concerning the entity to which you certainly belong, either from people of good intentions or those whose objectives are profit and more profit is indeed what brings about the monoculture. However, even if there is a way of bringing together the information in each perspective, a way their errors could cancel out, one would still meet limitations. Or better, the society based around individual freedom and equality working optimally would also tend towards a pattern determined by that very goal. Like an opinion at the end of a Peircean inquiry. But hitting true limitations is also fulfilling potential. *The wall we would hit would be no less than our destiny* Anything else is abandoning fate, painting our own from a lacklustre palette. *Mason & Dixon* chronicles, in my opinion, this transit of faith, from the outside to the inside.

What makes possible the pursuit of the only true humanity, the fulfillment of capacities, is the realisation that as well as there are two ways of having “all boundaries...eras’d” (*M&D*, p. 406), there are also two ways of having them drawn up to make a model of “Imprisonment” (*M&D*, p. 522) like that of the Wolf of Jesus in the novel. They can be erased by nihilism, where no space is qualitative because each object and phenomenon is inhabited by the same element of incompatibility with what a meaningful structure would be, which renders them meaningless all and one. Every moment in this world is tautology. Likewise they can be erased by an organic deism, where each object is inhabited by the same divine element assuring them all a meaning. Like indispensable words in a sentence.

And, when “The World grows restless” (*ibid*) and “Faith is not willingly bestow’d upon Authority, either religious or secular” (*ibid*), there are two ways of drawing up lines – that is, building a culture: “If we may not have Love, we will accept Consent,- if we may not obtain consent we will build Walls” (*ibid*). If all cannot automatically live in harmony guaranteed by a goodness of all men, or a consent on setting the rules can be reached by all men possessing perfect reason, walls are built, but the walls are “to be the Future” (*ibid*), that is: they will evolve and not be fixed as the stars. These walls determine what is allowed with us, and they are constructed, and amended, by the wish of securing a society where individual liberty is the goal : “so shall we find [in these walls]all we may need...Rules of Precedence, Routes of Approach, Lines of Sight, Flows of Power” (*ibid*). There are two ways of drawing these lines, in monologue –ideologically, as at the Cape- or in dialogue trusting direct human relations and contact to in spontaneous and accumulative pragmatic problem solving evolve institutions and traditions necessary to brandish those involved in the enterprise with the instruments mental and physical needed to develop their personalities for their own sake. This is the dominant issue throughout the novel, suspicion of control and authority (“for the human life figures as nothing,- that being all the secret to Governance upon Earth” [*M&D*, p. 226]), the insistence

upon the freedom to be different, difference as a necessity for discovery and creation, the love for hybrid forms etc. It is of the essence, Hayek says of such an order of interaction, that its results be unpredictable⁵, an “Order[...]in Chaos” (*M&D*, p. 281) one could say, with “Markets appearing, with their unwritten Laws[...]power beginning to sort itself out” (*ibid*). Where one trusts the “Civility truly necessary, to carry it on” (*M&D*, p. 128).

We can again we turn to Hayek, who sees morality as having evolved (a set of stories that allowed us to survive, no less) thus seeing the following of abstract rules (contained as often in myths and novels read as in legislation and constitutions) as having survived in spite of the lack of universally acceptable justification, because it allowed those who practiced it to move from the “small roving band” (Hayek 1988, p. 11) to the “extended order” (Hayek 1988, p. 35) and prosper and multiply. What he advocates is for this process to be allowed to carry on, and he thinks it is a fallacy to think that once we understand more about how complex some of the systems we have evolved are, that we can suddenly start to plan the details of their further development. Habermas also sees morality as having evolved, not only with respect to mere survival, but also containing within them traces of the image of the good life as it has evolved with those who have inaugurated, kept, refined and abolished them. At this point, I hope the attention they are being given is starting to pay some dividend.

Now, before summarizing my findings and concluding which implications they must finally have for the possibility of ethics, I wish to represent a different approach to the ever present tension between hierarchy and its rivals. Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the Carnival.

⁵ And here we understand the need to move beyond the anthropomorphic notion of an ordering mind, because this design is unpredictable in its essence, and built on difference. This is not to say that the divine may not have just *that* quality. Evidently I am in as hopeless a position to try and determine that as any other, and faith has very little to do with these kinds of distinction.

3.2 The Uniform and the Costume: Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnival

When Mason and Dixon leave the Cape, they are bid farewell by the same "police official" (*M&D*, p. 102) who welcomed them when they arrived. Bonk, as he is trademarkedly called, in jest suggests they "Tell them at the desk, [he] was not such a bad Egg" (*ibid*). Jovially, he addresses them as "Fellows" (*ibid*), pun perhaps intended, as here is again a linkage between bureaucracy/hierarchy and being a chosen/elect. Also, this is a variation on the theme of Mason and Dixon's freedom, whether or not they are complicit in sinister affairs. " 'Not in England, Sir,' Mason protests" (*ibid*), but when we get to England, of course that is exactly what there is. However, at this protest Bonk laughs and

For the first and final time they see him laugh, and glimpse an entire Life apart from the Castle,
in which he must figure as a jolly Drinking Companion.

(*ibid*)

In his *Rabelais and His World* the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin portrays no more and no less than such an entire "second life" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 6) of jolliness -where drink and laughter played a not insignificant role - the carnivalesque. The carnival to Bakhtin was where all the unofficial attitudes of the feudal culture converged in a state with its very own time where the people "lived during a given time of the year" (*ibid*). It was a separate sphere, as it were, where the hierarchy of official structures were turned upside down. It served as a "suspension of all hierarchical rank" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 10). The carnival was a completely self-contained unit, making through its own language - essential to which were "billingsgate" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 6), "oaths" (*ibid*), "curses" (*ibid*) and a grotesque imagery- possible a special communication which Bakhtin connects specifically to the marketplace. This second life is "organized on the basis of laughter" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 8). The marketplace with its *cris* and curses retained some of the atmosphere of the carnival even when the carnival's time was not strictly in session. And that it had its own time is to be taken rather literally,

the tradition of the Roman Saturnalias - “a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn’s golden age upon earth” (Bakhtin 1984, pp. 7-8) - remained unbroken, Bakhtin tells us, in the medieval carnival. It had its own space as well, for while the carnival lasts, there is “no other life outside it” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 7). This space was in pole opposition to all that was “ready-made and completed” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 11), and a place where all lofty and exalted ideals were parodied, derided and debased with the most flagrant vulgarity. But not a sceptical, cynical vulgarity as much as a regenerating and revitalising one. “Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture” (ibid), Bakhtin informs. So is bare perfection, and to Rabelais, the most perfect creation was never the symmetry of the great dome or the imperturbability of the heavenly bodies, it was the human body. Only through the body, as a final judge, did the material of the world find its true meaning.

For the individual marketplace participant in the Middle Ages, there was no doubt as to the transient nature of all things. Evidence of this was to be found in all nature. But here lay also the possibility of fearlessness, because, and Bakhtin stresses this fact, the carnivalesque laughter is ambivalent. Ambivalent in that it is universal and thereby also is directed at the participants, at he who is laughing. This he distinguishes from modern satire where the writer more often than not puts himself above the object of his funmaking. This is a sterile humour that is severed from the universal spirit the laughter of the carnival originally carried in medieval times:

The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of mockery, he is opposed to it.

The wholeness of the world’s comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears is a private reaction.

(Bakhtin 1984, p. 12)

This friction between seriousness and jest has always been present, even in primitive cultures. The difference being, according to Bakhtin, that once the structure of the politisized (that is, hierarchical) feudal society was established it was no longer possible to bequeath both parties with the same

“officiality”. Once the hierarchical structures became a fact, the serious ideological facet split from the masses of the marketplace. Once, when the universal spirit was still maintained in the carnival, the people *lived inside it*. And the festive spirit was linked inextricably to time, points of crisis or events of considerable importance in the cosmic cycle. The spirit could be universal only because it was granted approval by the “highest aims of human existence” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 9), the ideals. Or, the impetus of knowledge. Thus, from what we have been discussing earlier it is definitely not surprising that this ideal should have created a highly particular set of imagery and linguistic operations, and have a language fully its own. This ideal, according to Bakhtin, was the unity of the universe. The people was not separated from the world, in this conception they too “are incomplete[...]they also die and are revived and renewed” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 12). The whole outlook is transit, but that never becomes a cause for horror, because *they too shall be revived*, and the physical proof of this freedom is a laughter which by operating as a subjunctive and reassurance at one and the same time

purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality.

(Bakhtin 1984, p. 123)

How may death come there? And is it not at the Cape marketplace where after exchanging grumpy curses Mason, Dixon and the reverend proceed to pun on William of *Orange* and a mango? The inns are seen as a remnant of this marketplace tradition in the novel. The excesses of Mason and Dixon in food and drink and smoke is also a recurring element in the novel. And their language develops exactly the way Bakhtin says people who establishes friendships on these terms change their language. Curses becomes terms of affection, and “mutual mockery” is certainly permitted (see

Bakhtin 1984, p. 16 and *M&D* throughout). And their behaviour changes also according to the pattern Bakhtin lays down, even to the detail of the touch on the shoulder (Bakhtin, *ibid* and *M&D*, p. 737). At any rate, without this Bakhtinian angle it is impossible to fully appreciate their relationship. But the world they perform their infamies in is a world in many important aspects different from the outlook of the Bakhtinian carnival. From the belief in a hierarchical world structure of Aristotelian elements, the world had had to relinquish its privileged location as the centre of the universe. Bakhtin explains how in the Renaissance the emphasis of world and universe construction changed from a vertical one, up towards the immutable objects free from the laws restricting creatures and elements below the line, to a horizontal one, with orientation points on a horizontal line of linear time. This is another important line in the novel, between the platonic ideas and the body. The eternal and the transit. Bakhtin also notes how the official feasts started to break the old unity by giving priority to the present over the past, thus dealing a fatal blow to the conception of wholeness in the feasts they sponsored. Thereby starting to sever the ties between death and revival, heightening the stakes, necessarily, of survival and providing circumstances more favourable to extortion. When you are separated from the world and a highly personal time is allotted you, fear is more likely. Time being linear, the subject of its *teleos* can serve as an element of demagogy. The outlook of the State is startlingly different from the folk culture carnival, they did not condone utopia on earth. Bakhtin says of them:

On the other hand, the official feasts of the Middle Ages, whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. The link with time became formal: changes and moments of crisis were related to the past. Actually, the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present.

(Bakhtin 1984, p. 9)

This is creating a tremendous window of opportunity for the manipulative, that Pynchon is aware of this connection I can only be sure of, and this is one of the major themes of the novel. To present one of many examples, consider the ambition of Maskelyne to have a feast to the honour of his profession:

Maskelyne fancied that, when he became Astronomer Royal, there might be an investiture, a Passage, a Mystery...an Outfit. He began designing, with the utmost restraint and taste of course, ceremonial Robes for himself, bas'd upon the Doctors' Robes at Cambridge, Rose upon Scarlet, a black Velvet Hat, Liripipes, Tippetts, Sleeves to the ground,- decorated all over with Zodiackal Glyphs, in a subdued Gold Passementerie. But to whom could he show it? The Royal Society might not approve. The King might be offended. When at all, might he have occasion to wear it? Perhaps an occasion could be proclaim'd. Star Day. Ev'ryone up all night. No flame allow'd.

(*M&D*, p. 731)

It is certainly different from the men on the *Seahorse* when they cross the equatorial line in gay spirits. Cherrycoke as a matter of fact points out the festivities' direct correlation to the fact of nature that their shadows lay perfectly beneath them. This is precisely such a cosmic moment which warrants feast in Bakhtin's carnival spirit, when one passed from one stage to the other, so there was a "Ritual of Crossing Over, serving to focus each Pollywog's Mind upon the Step he was taking" (*M&D*, p. 56). Bakhtin asserts that in the original carnival spirit there can be no feast without *sanction*. When the occasion rather is *proclaimed* the situation is all together different. Then, the mask of the carnival has become the uniform of authority. And the diversity of the carnival has also become uniform. The unity is broken down into hierarchy, and it is also worth noting the important part information plays here, the higher you come the more is revealed. This is in terms of information the

closed society of positive knowledge, not the Open Society⁶ of evolutionary epistemology. The designed uniform is also a trademark of the Freemasons which are mentioned on occasions in the novel and is the prime example of the mistrusted elect groups of the closed inner circles which Pynchon goes to such great lengths to deride. The next element of Bakhtin's study I would like to make use of is the role he assigns to sexuality in the state of carnivalesque freedom and I wish to show how it relates to the sexuality at the Cape in the novel.

In Bakhtin sexuality is expectedly positive, as the sexual organs imply revival and are in a special relationship with the continuation of the universe. The lower bodily stratum stands in direct opposition to high-brow concepts (elements of which are preserved in language today, but without signifying the wholeness and positivity it once did) and is a concrete guarantee of the growth and multiplication of the people. Because they were bonded by the universal spirit, this growth was something all took part in and which provided them safety. It is not unexpected to find, then, the sexual reproductive organs and activities playing a central role in this unification and bonding. The awareness of the constant growth and persistence of the people was secured a positive meaning through laughter, because laughter unifies and thereby connects everybody to a body that is able to enlarge itself, that is: to wrest the means of subsistence from earth, subdue her threats and function like a (collective) person of well-being. Therefore food and the sexual functions and organs permeate the carnivalesque language. In it, not only do they form parts of this analogy (of the collective body as a guarantee of revival), but they also stand for the totality of the outlook. They are also there to be evoked as symbols of the exalted. Far from being degenerate, such language here holds a crucial position in reminding the people of their unity and success. Their language and laughter presented them with a consciousness of continued growth *and* a bond which allowed all to live in an analogy - that of the enlarging body of the people as opposed to their own individual body and time - that was

⁶ As perceived by Karl Popper in his book by that title.

essentially positive. To live inside this analogy was to take part in a different and transcendent body exceeding each individual and a means of defeating earthly time and earthly power and personal time, death and power. It

presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also meant the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts.

(Bakhtin 1984, p.92)

Sex and the reproductive organs held a privileged place in this elaborate system which “degraded power” (ibid), and is therefore likely to interest our author in some form or another. Particularly interesting I think the picture Bakhtin paints is with regards to the sexuality of the Dutch Cape in the novel.

In the colonial Cape Town the motives of sexuality have moved from those of “Pleasure” to those of “Commerce” (*M&D*, p. 66). In the elaborate scheme of getting Mason to sleep with one of the slaves so his contribution of “whiteness” will increase the value of the baby on the market (*M&D*, p. 65), “’tis Slavery, not any form of Desire, that is of the essence” (*M&D*, p. 68). Sex here is a perpetuation of the hierarchy of an existing structure. It is void of the element of bringing together, it becomes a construction and a experiment. Indeed the new universal is the Far East India Company, desiring “Control over ev’ry moment of ev’ry Life here” (*M&D*, p. 154) The Cape Dutchmen and women have lost their positive regenerating powers and their organs and sexuality can no longer be associated with what is organic, alive and growing. When Johanna bares herself in front of Mason, “The light in the room is darkening with unnatural speed, turning her nipples and mouth black as ashes” (*M&D*, p. 87). So a complete reversal has taken place, sex is connected now, not with regeneration and universality, but with death, darkness and ashes. In language, it has

become inappropriate and can only be alluded to, its connection to the degradation of power is completely expelled.

There are also other things implying the oppressors are far removed from the spirit of carnival freedom. For example, in the carnivalesque imagery, the fluids of the body and excrements have a highly particular meaning. They are important in the unity between the body and the world in that they are evidence of the processes in which man processes the elements and material of the world. The same way, food occupies an extremely important position as the symbol of the victory over earth's dangers and the fruits of labour. The use of these images are very conscious throughout the novel and especially in the Cape section. The Dutch are associated with an obsession for purity, and avoidance of mixture and hybrids so essential to the grotesque of the carnival, and to newness and avoiding stagnation. For example, Cornelius calls the *ketjap* "Filthy Asian stuff" (M&D, p. 79) and do not want his daughters to eat it. Pynchon specifically mentions the "Blood, Semen, Excrement, Saliva, Urine, Sweat, Road-Mud, dead Skin" (M&D, p. 88) that the slaves must clean off their masters' laundry. We are also told that Mason and Dixon cannot stand eating with the Vrooms because the eating is so closely connected to their particular history and "moral instructions". (M&D, p. 83) Thereby, food loses its function as universal symbol of co-operation and freedom. The cooking of the locals is portrayed with a completely different sentiment, it is associated with honesty, light, physicality, community and life:

The abrupt evening descends, the charcoal fires come glowing one by one to life, dotting the hill-side, night slowly fills with cooking aromas,- shrimp paste, tamarinds, coriander and cumin, hot chilies, fish sauces, and fennel and fænugreek, ginger and *lengkua*.

(M&D, p. 82)

And then, the link to the transcendence of such a relationship to food, as opposed to that of the sterile Dutch: “Windows and doorways open to lives finite *but overwhelming*, households *gathering against* the certain night” (ibid, my italics). There is also, leaving the Cape, the episode where Florinda and Mason attends the hangings at Tyburn. Here again is a subtle interplay of images of death, sex and food. That passage can be read to illustrate many similar points, but we will content ourselves merely with remembering their very first words to each other. When they meet, she greets him with “Hallo, d’you think he’ll [Lord Ferres who is about to be executed by hanging] get much of a hard-on, then?” (*M&D*, p. 111) To which Mason replies that “’tis usually the Innocent who get them, and the Guilty who fail to” (ibid).

The last theme of Bakhtin’s study I wish to apply to *Mason & Dixon* is the theme of the agon. This is the concept of the formation of images and meanings in pairs, a dual tone which represent “top and bottom, front and back, life and death” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 434). He mentions Don Quixote and Sancho as the classic of such pairs in world literature, and tells us it has always been the master trope of the laughing people who understand “the gay relativity of the limited class theories and the constant unfinished character of the world” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 432). They who understand the necessary inextricability of “falsehood and truth, of darkness and light, of anger and gentleness, of life and death” (ibid). This in clear disharmony with the monotone of official ideology. At the very pinnacle of monotony, the heights of the Stalinist era in his home-country Bakhtin wrote:

In the official philosophy of the ruling classes such a dual tone of speech is, generally speaking, impossible; hard well-established lines are drawn between all phenomena[...]This struggle [between duality and monologue], of course, continued during the following centuries, but it acquired new, complex, and sometimes hidden forms. However, this theme is outside the scope of our present work.

(Bakhtin 1984, p. 433)

Almost seventy years later, it fell, to say the least, well inside the scope of an American novelist tracing the origins of his own country. The parallels of the above quote to our text are almost too obvious to elaborate upon, except to say this: he felt the need to address these issues with a tone of urgency even if he belongs to the opposite, and victorious camp.

Mason and Dixon form a classic agon, the one an astronomer looking above to the firmament, the other a land-surveyor. The one a Platonic melancholic (at times ready to accept Hamlet's notion of the world as the quintessence of dust), the other lustful and playful. Mason drinks wine while Dixon swears to the grain, and so on. Dixon, when he goes to the north pole (having started at the Cape, thus completing a polarity of maps), and is taken into the grotesque's heartland, the underworld, he can return with the conviction that the bosom of the earth is as transcendent as the habitus of the stars. Bakhtin displays methodically the earthbound direction of the majority of the festive imagery of the marketplace, towards the earth for revival and rebirth. When Dixon tells Mason of his experiences at the pole, he does not fail to mention that on account of the shape of the earth, to take a step on it is always to "*de-scend*" (*M&D*, p. 740, Pynchon's italics). This is an essential pair of the novel, up and down, earth and sky, and they can be well understood in this light. A hint at an evolutionary principle and the transcendence of belonging to the same collective body of freedom is the very end of the novel when Mason's sons embrace their father's quest almost as an instigation of a religious example, pledging to go to America, they too, but to *settle*. At the eve of Mason's life and realisation they say:

- "We'll go there, We'll fish there"

- "*And you too*" (*M&D*, p. 773, my italics)

The Learned English Dog, which in the beginning of the novel is assailed by questions from Mason seeking the key to religion and all mysteries also comes back at the end, as the tale bites its tail so to speak, and this time not having to perform or answer to anything. Just being a dog alongside

two people who fish. In this new state of things, he affirms for the reader the unity of the inexplicable and the calculable, magic and physical reality:

I am a British Dog, and belong to no one, if not to the two of you. The next time you are together, so shall I be, with you.

(*M&D*, p. 757)

The theme of the eternal return falls outside our scope, we note only that the dog says this in a dream that Mason and Dixon have simultaneously. When they merge, the unknown and fantastical which the dog represents is explained at last – it is a promise, or pure possibility. And as they accept it, converge dream and reality, the thinkable and the possible. And America, “whose Name is something else and Maps of which do not exist” (*ibid*), is not something which has a clear beginning. Pynchon makes a point of introducing at least three different ones; the Vikings, the Indians and Columbus, and it can therefore not be used in a beginning-middle-end eschatological history so dear to ideologists⁷. Except of course his own, ending in the pure subjunctive. Rather it is something of an idea and a possibility. This subjunctive will always be able to perform as a yard-stick to measure the physical continent with. They will forever form a pair. The implied author providing one half, the implied reader the other.

Lastly, as far as this chapter is concerned, I would like to show some other pairs which are created in the novel. It is evident that concepts of continuation and change are associated with beauty and freedom. Some such concepts are transit, emergence, birth and complexity. They work in pairs with concepts signalling the finished and rigid, such as finite and simplicity. Another pair is formed by the two meanings of the word “power”, the natural, electrical power and the political, personal power. That is, what can be controlled and what cannot be controlled. We also should

⁷ The dangers of such readings of history has been instructively shown by F. Kermode in his *The Sense of an Ending*.

mention the Orient, this “*other* half of everything known” (*M&D*, p. 58), and the West. The slaves and their masters. The chosen, and the unchosen. The language and the nomenclature. Maskelyne always perfecting his calculations, and the man Mason and Dixon meet while on the line who measures everything by eye. The inn and the closed party, to name but a few. However, two such pairs in particular deserve perhaps some extra attention. One concerns freedom, and the extent to which Pynchon is relentless in detecting lack of true freedom. And the other is the relationship between free will and determination and constraint in the novel.

Beginning with the first, at the Cape a female slave slips into Mason’s bed on orders from Johanna Vroom to produce a baby that will “fetch more ‘pon the Market, there it begins, there it ends” (*M&D*, p.65). When, subsequently, Mason says that in England no man can ask a woman to do anything, the woman scoffs at this and says there are many instances where the white women have to carry children for no other reason than to secure the pride of their men. Another instance of interest is when Mason outside New-York meets what seems to be the pupils from one of von Mises’ courses when they tell him the “Stamp-Act” (in Pynchon the prime example of government intrusion) is “simple Tyranny” (*M&D*, p. 405). When Mason tries to tell them there is, after all, a difference between slavery and the weavers back home, they also refute the English model and says that with what they are paid the matter is only of a gradation of slavery. Here, absolutes must remain absolutes, an ideal must be an extreme, a pole, and no compromise can be accepted, because on the other side evil knows no boundry.

The agon of free will v. predetermination and control will be looked at in conjunction with Friedrich Hayek’s theories on societal structure and his theories on the human mind.

Although Hayek went on to become a Nobel laureate for his work on monetary fluctuations, his original interest lay in theoretical psychology. In 1952, his *The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology* was published, its main focus to show how our navigational aid in

our daily lives, the human mind, itself constantly changes. Its objective is to have at its disposal a variety of patterns of response to its external environment, which allows it to persist. The brain, he says, is comprised of a web of neurons who can connect to each other by way of synapses. These can form an unlimited number combinations and the complexity of the pattern they form is unlimited. An external impulse “pass in a great variety of directions” (Hayek 1952, p. 120) in our neural fibers and becomes diffused in it. Furthermore

every occurrence of a combination of such impulses will contribute to the gradual formation of a network of connexions of ever increasing density, every neuron will gradually acquire a more and more clearly defined place in the comprehensive system of such connexions.

(Hayek 1952, p. 103)

When their work on the line and the novel draws to a close Dixon has an epiphany, we who have followed his steps know it is a realisation that has been built up for some time:

Everywhere they've sent us[...]what's the Element common to all?[...]Slaves. Ev'ry day at the Cape, we lived with Slavery in our faces,- more of it at St. Helena,- and now here we are again, in another Colony[...]as if doom'd to re-encounter thro' the World this publick Secret, this shameful Core....Pretending it to be ever somewhere else, with the Turks, the Russians, the Companies, down there[...]the innocent of the World, passing daily into the hands of Slave-owners and Tortures, but oh, never in Holland, nor in England, that Garden of Fools...?

(*M&D*, pp. 692-693)

He also reproaches himself and Mason for having taken the king's money, and scorns the distinction Mason sets up between “Hirelings” and “Slaves” (ibid). This ability of Dixon's to, through repeated sightings of similar phenomena, see gradations and detect a concept from linkable occurrences, and the way this is built up in the novel, corresponds unnervingly with the neurologist concept of so

called long-term potentiation (LTP). LTP changes the efficiency in logistics, and is caused by recurrent and *traumatic* experiences (Baudry & Davis, 1996, but anticipated in Hayek). This maturation in the novel, ending in Dixon's realisation as quoted above, leads to the incident where Dixon acts on it and takes the whip off the slave-driver and frees the slaves. And it is also consciously connected to Cherrycoke's insistence that it is the diversity of differing details and "embellishments" through generations of family lore (*M&D*, p. 696) which have allowed the story to have surviving the "pure truth[...]about each Figure, no matter how stretch'd" (*M&D*, p. 695). That is, the more variation there is the story's components "gradually acquire a more and more clearly defined place in the comprehensive system of such connexions" if we use Hayek's vocabulary. These differences in storytelling, spontaneous mutations springing from the desire or need to tell the story are

part of the common Duty of Remembering,- surely our sentiments,- how we dream'd of, and were mistaken in, each other,- count for at least as much as our poor cold Chronologies.

(*M&D*, p. 696)

It clearly emerges, I think, that the reason for telling stories and the function stories and narratives fill is not to capture exactly what happened and in which order, but to represent a relationship between the parts. The slave-driver will remain the slave-driver and uncle Jeremiah the hero of this story, and that will be so even if the story is told in a language an hundred, or more, years older than the episode itself. Fiction is here seen as a powerful tool of remembrance to guard insights, and it too must adapt to changes to survive. There is a common element to all these models, to Hayek's mind model and his proposition for a self-ordering society as opposed to the centrally planned, Barthes' ideal text, Habermas' matrix, and Cherrycoke's preaching not one broken chain should be able to lose us all. It is a front against the one-directional laws of cause and effect which is so central to the

empirical-analytical attitude of the Royal Society, ever reducing possibilities to certainty. This brings me to Hayek's model of causation, "downward-causation" and how it in many ways is similar to that possibility of freedom which Mason and Dixon receives in the novel, and we can discuss individual freedom and free will in the novel. A central part of Hayek's argumentation has to do with his conviction that most knowledge arises, not from "immediate experience or observation" (Hayek 1998, p. 75), but from a "continuous process of sifting a learnt tradition" (ibid). He distinguishes between having knowledge about something and following rules of conduct. The ability, he says, to follow traditions and rules of conduct is an ability that is very different from knowing what effects one's actions will produce. This conduct, he says

ought to be seen for what it is, the skill to fit oneself into, or align oneself with, a pattern of whose very existence one may barely be aware and of whose ramifications one has scarcely any knowledge.

(Hayek 1998, p.75)

He also claims that if we were to stop doing everything for which we do not know the reason, we should soon enough perish. Hayek stresses the point that the traditions are often wiser, in a sense, than man, and that the macro-structure or the rules of conduct in a culture often regulate the individual mind. But the individual can also act to regulate the macro-level. This is possible through language use and examples of action. The slave-driver episode is exactly such an example of action, and Pynchon makes a conscious effort to link it directly up to that of language remembrance and family legend *and* the accumulation of "evidence" leading up to the insight. Again, as with the north-point, there is restriction, but not total restraint.

However, it is important to distinguish, as Hayek does, between two different freedoms. One from coercion and the arbitrary exercise of power by other men, the classical liberalist freedom, and one from restraints altogether. The novel is always out to protect the first freedom, but has little

concern for the other, a utopian ideal. When the novel does make a direct extrapolation from a structure to society, it is from Emerson's watch, where it was said "time-rates" must be removed from storage of power, and the connection to Hayek's theories about local knowledge and diffusion of knowledge and on-the-spot decision making is again very strong. The fact that it is said to have perpetual motion can also be taken as a strong indication its results are connected to the focal point of all evolutionary thinking, survival. The wager is again, that survival will not merely be survival, but also contain what Habermas believes it to contain, the idea of the good life. There are also two other clocks mentioned in the novel, which we should discuss with regards to this subject we are now on. The pendulum swing Ellicot and Shelton clock. One of the main problems in attaining the longitude was time keeping at sea, because the sea would cause the clocks to beat out of synch. When the Ellicot and Shelton clocks meet on St. Helena when the observer teams change clocks, they talk mostly about the Cape, but, we are told, what they really wanted to talk about but could never quite get to was the ocean. In a possible reading the ocean to the clocks could be the yearning for a higher truth, their relationship to it could be read as analogous to man's relationship to nature and its ultimate mystery. And to the search for the better way of living in synch with something that we cannot control, but only adopt to :

Neither Clock really knows what it is,- beyond an undeniably rythmick Being of some sort,- tho' they've spent most of their lives in Range of it, sometimes no more than a Barrel-Stave and a Hull-Plank away. Its wave-beats have ever been with them, yet can neither quite say, where upon it they may lie. What they feel is an Attraction, more or less resistible, to beat in Synchrony with it, regardless of their Pendulum-lengths, or even divisions of the Day.

(M&D, p. 123)

The nearest the subject they get is the one clock saying to the other that it doesn't care to much for ships, whereupon it snaps back: "Ha! Try being below the waterline" (ibid). No fatalism is allowed. If

the above reading is allowed to continue, then the clock that did solve this problem was the Harrison watch – constructed precisely so that an alteration to one of its parts would sift through to the other parts so as to leave the whole in balance. The parts are set up so as to detect change and act “blindly” and accordingly to preserve the organism’s function as a whole. Each part behaving in a certain manner, but to a certain extent indifferent as to why. The parallels to Hayek’s dispersed information and spontaneous, blind co-operation where prices act as such a mode of information which allows the participants (in Hayek’s market) to, without knowing to the full extent why, best organise his plans to co-operate most effectively with the whole while at the same time assuring the largest possible extension of his freedom – are obvious enough. There is also a clear line of evolution in the Harrison clocks (H1-H4), and its system is sure enough opposed by Maskelyne. And of course, even with that clockwork, there remained a slight margin of error. And the ocean remained the ocean, to my knowledge. So in the polarity of total freedom and a total surrender to fatalism, we arrive at a middle point which preserves the notion of a free will.

It could be objected that Hayek is a materialist, which is to say that everything in his thinking is reducible to interaction between material. And that in his final analysis, then, thoughts too are but the physical world’s interaction with the sensorium. However this becomes a moot point, with regards to free will, as many have pointed out, when considering his repeated insistence that the mind can never contain itself, and therefore must always act as if it had free will. This is a point which appears many times in *The Sensory Order* and bears some resemblance to the Gödel theorem. He says that the brain can never be in a position where it can prove its own independence, so man has no choice but to act as if he had free will. In the novel, this is one of the major themes as we know, and the concern here is many-fold. The control from above is one, but Mason breaks that “symmetry” (*M&D*, 718) and the Royal Society did have to bow to the pressure of the Harrison

clock, and had to award Harrison the Longitude money. It was even by the king's order Harrison was righted after the Board of the Longitude had been difficult with him, implying at least some rust in the conspiracy. And Maskelyne never receives his "Gift of Power" (*M&D*, p. 731). Further, the slave-driver incident is an act which at least must have given the impression of freedom. And, since such a point is made of telling us there is no final proof of the action itself, it is the way it is kept alive true language which receives the more attention. And this freedom of making stories dies hard. The possibility of an action or a thought infecting other people's outlook and actions and the ultimate futility of the question of free will secures the individual a prestigious place in every fibre of Pynchon's thought. And since the unknown cannot be planned for, a division of labour is necessary, which Mason and Dixon provide the perfect example of. He lets his two poles achieve identity and separate fates. He scorns those who try to tell others what to do with their precious lives, and trusts them with keeping together in common safety to protect from the implacably cruel. So, as we said in the introduction, the playing field is far more level this time around, and I submit, that we have here seen the balance tip in favour of free will. But not free from all constraints, regulated by a macro-structure but also with the possibility to act towards affecting it from below. However, given the extreme complexity of the novel, the importance of the question and the track-record Pynchon is credited by many competent readers with for the opposite view, I implore the reader to treat this merely as a very tentative conclusion. But as far as this work is concerned, with conscious amelioration possible, and free will intact, our base for an ethics might not be impossible to obtain as we move to sum up our findings as they relate to that question. We will also venture in the same, to suggest a few points of relevance to our own times as we perceive them in some aspects of the novel.

Part IV - Ethical Implications and Possible Points of Allegory

Both as we try to recoup some of the elements and traits of *Mason & Dixon* that we have talked about, placing them with regards to the question of the possibility of an ethics -and also while discussing possible points of allegory to our own times found in the novel- it will be necessary to look at some of the historical events underlying the narrative. And it is imperative to say that the concessions which will have to be made in doing so are practically innumerable. They cannot be treated with the kind of detail and context they deserve to be explained historically, it is rather their symbolic relation to certain points of debate within moral discourses and current trends as perceived by us which can be assessed. Not their coming into being as contingent events. Chiefly, the events will be looked at in correlation with the relationship they stand in with regards to differing moral outlooks organised around differing principles and convictions.

In Homeric ethics, says Alasdair McIntyre in his *A short History of Ethics*, lay a fundamental relation between performing well one's duty, and being virtuous, because it was taken for granted that role had to be filled in order for the society to function well. The *arete* of a king and a wife, or a king and a king's wife for that matter, was therefore wildly different. So the moral system depends upon and springs out of the social organisation to which they belong. Then, it was believed that the function each person could fill was determined more or less from birth. The system relies upon a metaphysics where each thing or object has a "nature" which makes it fit for something particular. This could well co-exist with the theory of the Aristotelian elements, where the stone falls to the ground because it lies in its nature to dwell on the ground - it "belongs" there. However, almost every moment of earthly life testifies to the arbitrariness of programmatic succession -chronology-

of securing certain results. Not with regards to every objective, certainly, but many. Enough, at least, to establish and have survive the paradigm of making small, often idiosyncratic and irrational, changes, jump levels etc. to see if a process can be improved upon, or simply to do something different from what one did the last time. Indeed it seems often contrary to personality and human nature to try and withhold this “curiosity”. Regardless if the chance of improvement is merely statistical, abstaining from it consequently over longer periods of time is not unknown to produce results of insanity and extreme boredom. This activity is one of the most fundamental human traits I can think of. That this *modus operandi* -which triumphs continually and every day, everywhere, in greater or lesser operations, with smaller or greater consequences- should become at one point or other the object of an extrapolation to have its reach extended enough to allow experimentation in societal structuring is perhaps not surprising. Whatever the reasons for the transformation, the structure was different in the *polis* from what it had been in the Homeric world. And sure enough, the virtues of a cunning and aggressive Homeric king can only be detrimental to the structure of the polis if the individual members of it should take them to heart. Certain actions have indeed, no matter what the reasons, gone from being instrumental in upholding one structure to being outright dangerous to another. And since there were also variations from one polis to the other, a question emerged –according to McIntyre- as to whether there were universal principles in nature, *fysis*, which could override regulations in particular places - *nomos*. The sophists took the position that one could not discuss justice as such, only Athenian justice, Corinthian justice etc. While Socrates, in Plato, holds that what the morally bad person lacks, is precisely the ability to conform to a community. I will not follow this debate further, but instead point to the similarities in friction when the medieval feudal society, and accompanying hierarchy, gave way to early capitalism. Aristotle’s views, which maintained the predestination of an individual’s most fitting role in society and his claim for the rigidity of the ordering of this society (Plato is in accordance as far as his three groups of society

corresponding to the three parts of the soul is concerned) had come out victorious and through scholasticism the Greek classical views on the city-state exerted a profound influence on official moral views during the middle ages. Both in medieval Europe and in the polis, the individual is always secondary to the larger unit.

Professor McIntyre singles out two thinkers who especially started to extract the individual from society and build a moral system which salvages the individual from the fate of the larger unit. Luther and Machiavelli produced two distinct individuals, a religious and a secular one. Luther severs the ties between social contribution and ethics, and he is able to do so because of a theological interpretation which colours all wants and wishes depraved. Although it is well known what Luther thought of political rebellion, the fact remains that he completely isolates the individual and holds it to be responsible in the final analysis only to God. Neither did Machiavelli carry any illusions as to the core of human, individual behaviour. He reached this insight perhaps as a result of the energetic changes in his own times, different orders passed by frequently and to Machiavelli testified, perhaps, to the need, or desire for one. The individual is a player in the game, and the objective of the game is to acquire power. This machiavellian master puppet is a source of fear for many of Pynchon's characters, and neither Mason nor Dixon are exemptions. However, making a game of it the way Machiavelli does, totally clears out any supernatural elements, and states unequivocally that it is possible through manipulation to scheme for a system which is favourable to you. So in midst of all the cynicism, there is a clause for equal opportunity. There are no longer any unquestionable justifications for a political order, which is an idea that finds its way to Locke in his defence of the 1668 revolt.

And here we move to one of the crucial events underlying *Mason & Dixon*: the rebellion against James II to put William of Orange on the throne. James was overt in his Catholicism and adamant in strengthening the power of the throne. He soon clashed with parliament and when he

tried to manipulate upcoming elections Whigs and Tories alike joined forces against him. After the trial of the seven bishops in 1688, and after the masses had cheered their acquittal, William of Orange was invited to come from Holland with armed forces to overtake the throne. The main reasons for this move were fears of religious intolerance and fear of the king's disregard for private property, a concept as dear to Locke as it was irrelevant to Plato. William simply marched on London, something he could never have done were it not for the tremendous lack of support for James II amongst the people at large. However, they chose to let him go all the way to London uncontested, showing clearly how unpopular the king was. With William it was possible to introduce in 1689 the *Declaration of Rights*, emphatically limiting the king's power and directing it towards parliament. One of the main focuses was again strictly economic, in that the king was not allowed to issue new taxes. Of huge importance was also the clause that prevented the king from tampering with the laws. Important aspects which would come to dominate America were thus stressed in this process, equality, protestant ethics, limitation of taxes and property rights. John Locke was chief ideologist for this transformation, and it is important to note in our context three important facets to core classical liberalist economics in his teachings. First, that his defence for property rights was rooted in natural law, man's labour belongs to him and everything he might wrest from nature is his own:

He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. Nobody can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then, when did they begin to be his? when he digested? or when he eat? or when he boiled? or when he brought them home? or when he picked them up? and it is plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That labour put a distinction between them and common: that added something to them more than nature, the common mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right.

(Locke 1943, p. 130)

Further it is the law of nature that every man is exempt from arbitrary power and that the law of nature applies to even those enforcing the laws. The trust vested in institutions are so vested for them to assure compliance to the law of nature. It is important here to remember that Locke's state of nature is quite different from Hobbes', in it there are already organisational features present such as families and property rights. The need for the contract in Locke arises more in need of improving upon the enforcement of the law, because it is noticed that the punishment of unlawful acts is sometimes inconsistent due to biased interests. So the contract has its justification in preserving a principle that is already in effect and that the society's members abstractly acknowledges as helpful:

The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule[.]the first and fundamental positive law of all commonwealths is the establishing of the legislative power; as the first and fundamental natural law, which is to govern even the legislative itself, is the preservation of the society, and (as far as will consist with the public good) of every person in it.

(Locke 1943, p. 127)

There shall be one law only "for rich and poor, for the favourite at court, and the country man at plough" (Locke 1943, p. 189). In this context it is also needed to add that Locke exempts outsiders from the reach of these laws, because they have their justification solely in the consent of the people, and it would be logically contradictory to demand others to follow them. This is essentially the underlying rationale when Dixon tries to persuade Mason they cannot run their line across the Indians' territory. And lastly, Locke establishes the individual in no uncertain terms, if it is violated it can, *every man* can, punish the violator. Since Locke finds slavery unlawful according to nature and gives every observer of such a breach the right to "be executioner of the law of nature" (Locke 1943,

p. 120), it is well in line with his thinking when Dixon takes matters into his own hand's in dealing with the slave-driver. Thereby acting for "all those of us who have so failed" (*M&D*, p. 698 and the recurring scepticism towards "Philadelphia Lawyers").

Classical liberalist economics are quick to mention the benefits of these ideas. Since the highest in man cannot be legislated, the sole thing one can do is provide for a corpus of laws and an apparatus of enforcement which allows the individual maximum liberty to shape for himself what will be his space and his things and thereby his personality. Economic progress is furthered by the fact that there is a rule of law, because from an information point of view it allows the individual to easier predict the actions of others and to align his plans better to those of his fellow men. That what he makes should be his own, they can never doubt. There is, we have seen, much in the novel which indicates an affinity in spirit to these opinions. But it also shares Locke's apprehensions. There is a relativism in Locke which is strongly present also in *Mason & Dixon*. The *longue durée* aspect is strongly emphasised in that local communities and local customs are revered with respect to the meaning they provide for the inhabitants and in that it is the "wisdom" of the character types and traditions that emerge as important. World-construction is an activity that renders readable man's environment, makes the world intelligible and therefore a home. Thus, the histories, the powers of the imagination makes and sets the ground for a common set of rules of conduct which is a prerequisite for any extended order of co-operation. The most clearly pronounced danger in the novel is expansionism and intrusion. Both commerce and politics invade Mason's home town, his "doom'd Paradise" (*M&D*, p. 407). Reason, blind to itself, scars the nature and the order of the Indians in shape of the Mason-Dixon line. The natives at the Cape are shamelessly intruded by European colonialism, the Americans infect the Indians with diseases, and the Jesuits are everywhere to try and convert people into the "right" faith. The entropic connotations are set up to defeat this hierarchical frame of mind, and the Cape's "black-market" and the allegory of the town formed by

the rejects that didn't gain passage into the society which tried to perfect itself by granting admission only to a certain kind of people are also elements suggesting the impossibility of exporting or ranking world-outlooks. The lack of dialogue this represents and the danger of by means of power to get rid of elements, or force compliance from elements which does not fit into one's own thinking, might be *possible* because of inventions which are the fruits of a sophisticated mind at work. However, acting on this possibility is nevertheless a result of the lack of prudence in *applying* this reason, often acting from very basic motives, to the paradoxical effect that it reduces possibilities to certainties and thus moves in a direction of less complexity. The single dimensioned cause-effect thinking is a desire for control, and is treated with severe scepticism in the novel. As we have seen, local knowledge, pragmatic solutions, a desire to live with, not to control, nature is everywhere portrayed with more congeniality. Always coupled with a ubiquitous admiration for people's own ability to solve problems and come to agreements which have a particular rather than universal validity. Trusting these powers of spontaneity, it sides again and again against the coercive powers of government and rigid ideological frameworks. We have shown the line to be an integral part of the structure of ideology, and how it prevents information sharing and clouds the beliefs on either side because it can lead to a tendency to define important concepts merely as having to be the opposite of their binary oppositions, held by *the others*. We pointed to the work of E. Said as a display of this technique in action. At the Cape and in America with the treatment of the natives in both places and the characterisation they receive from the colonialists, this process is echoed. These lines which are often arbitrary blur the wholeness of a human experience. Brutally severing dream and reality, reality and fiction. For example, the use of fiction (in the act of narrating and picturing other possibilities and lines of action leading to other possible results) is a highly important constituent of empathy, and the ability to change viewpoint one in collecting different information and sentiments before considering action. These are both important skills in preventing harmful and hurting actions. A person's stories

projects his or her vision in a wholly different way than pure descriptive statements can ever do. In them, concepts and conceptions receive their value in a context, not as absolutes. This was the function of the ancient story-telling tradition which Cherrycoke's situation alludes to. In his magnificent *Se una Notte D'inverno Un Viaggiatore*, Italo Calvino can not yield to *Il lettore's* desire for the end of the story. The sixth reader in the library tells him that the spirit of ancient story-telling was alien to absolute finitude, and that meaning lay not in precise definitions, but in a long story:

C'era qualcuno che passava per una strada e vedeva qualcosa che colpiva la sua attenzione, qualcosa che sembrava nascondere un mistero, o una premonizione; allora chiedeva spiegazioni e gli raccontavano una lunga storia...

(Calvino 1994, p. 304)

The nature of these stories lay in their openness and polarity, reflective of the inescapable truths of the human condition which Pynchon so fears losing contact with:

Anticamente un racconto aveva solo due modi per finire: passate tutte le prove, l'eroe e l'eroina si sposavano oppure morivano. Il senso ultimo a cui rimandando tutti i racconti ha *due facce: la continuità della vita, l'inevitabilità della morte*

(ibid, my italics)

Despite these fiction's advantages it is often devalued and one can get the impression that reality, whose wanton sister fiction is made out to be, is simply something that happens. We talked about the narrative, conversely, operating in a void of what could have been, preserving voices that were not allowed to enter the conversation or were swept away. The point lies not in that the one opinion is more correct than the other, as much as in establishing and commemorating their actual and undeniable presence. The focus and goal is not revisionism in the sense of validating one

opinion over another, so much as baring a flaw in the structure of elitist development, its lack of ability to avail itself of important information by not having the ability to change viewing points and access the thinking of others (a distinctive feature of fiction and fictionalising). And its blindness to its own nature, to its own history and to its own inescapable limits. The structure of *Mason & Dixon* forces such operations to take place, its pure complexity serves to slow down the reading, and I firmly believe some of its content can only be accessed by second and third readings. This advocates a different way of treating meaning, not that something must necessarily be *unveiled*, for that implies one meaning is truer in some sense than another, rather it is emphasising how omitting or ruling out competing voices is rhetorical because it disguises aspects of actual (for by others it is, factually, perceived differently) meaning. The moral emphasis in the novel lies, then, in this respect, not so much in intentions versus the consequences of acts, but more in the duty to *discover* what is actually willed. This will can often be obfuscated by ideological lines, sanctioned by a pretense of control of the uncontrollable and knowledge of what is finally unknowable, and therefore society is in danger of moving in a direction most people do not want it to move in. This is a thought, as we begin to speculate on relevance to our own times, to which Christopher Lasch devotes considerable attention in his *The Revolt of the Elites*, where he says his (and Pynchon's) contemporary political situation (1995) in the US is ridden by such a mistaken attitude :

The parties no longer represent the opinions and interests of ordinary people. The political process is dominated by rival elites committed to irreconcilable ideologies...the politics of ideology has distorted our view of the world and confronted us with a series of false choices

(Lasch 1995, p. 112)

Lasch identifies different reasons for why this unhealthy cycle is allowed to carry on:

Unfortunately the inordinate influence wielded by special-interest groups, the media's vested stake in conflict, and the adversarial mode of justice embodied in our legal system promote conflict rather than consensus.

(Lasch 1995, p. 109)

Pynchon, too, in his novel often has focus on the ambiguities and contradictions surrounding a wish for equality and resolving of conflict, it is enough here to mention Uncle Ives who makes good money selling guns to both the Indians and the settlers. The *homo classicus* of this type of behaviour in post-modern, counter-realism American literature being of course Milo Minderbender, of *Catch-22* fame, a man quite content to run a war from both sides.

Christopher Lasch' book, which I have already quoted a few passages from, contains the key to this aspect of my reading of *Mason & Dixon* pertaining to relevance to our own times. Lasch claims that elements of Socialism, empirical-analytical over-emphasis in the sciences, a flawed psychology looking in the wrong places when trying to restore the abilities necessary for successful contributions to the community, a degradation of common values in favour of information manipulation and a misunderstood cultural relativism have all combined in complex ways to jeopardize the achievements of small-community work ethics, communitarianism, historical continuity, religion and pragmatism. Socialism provided a taste for large scale production, scientism sanctioned the "abolition of shame" (Lasch 1995, p. 197) which have led nearly a whole profession of psychologists identifying social failure as merely a lack of "self-esteem" (Lasch 1995, p. 219), and the standardisation of intelligence tests has provided the world with a new elite -picked solely on basis of certain pattern-thinking skills- who rise to riches without the feeling of communitarian responsibility which the old American aristocracy had. These new elites are ever in transit, moving in a constantly global, cultural bazaar, always on the way to something new and exciting. The fact that this elite is recruited and recruits on basis of a single skill ("intelligence") and not on principles of

continuity or heritage, creates a new class society where, because intelligence is what determines your position in the system, the lower classes are drained of talent and deprived of leadership almost by definition, Lasch tells us. This is something which the novel is highly conscious of, and we can cite but one of many examples. Upon their last meeting Dixon tells Mason that he was viewed as something of a prodigy as a kid and that his father “came to an agreement” (*M&D*, p. 734) with John Bird. Dixon asks Mason: “How could he repay Mr. Bird[.]that’s what I can’t see” (*ibid*). Neither can Mason understand what his father could have done “for the Director-to-be of the Honorable E.I.C.” (*ibid*). But may it not be they who have been taken advantage of? Recruited on basis of their special talents as “symbolic analysts” (Lasch 1995, p. 35) for a project of “abstraction, system thinking, experimentation and collaboration” (Lasch 1995, p. 38, deriding Richard Reich’ belief in the “best and brightest” to control society, whose words they are originally)? Globalisation is not at all a new phenomenon, the novel makes at least that much clear. And Lasch’ preoccupation with more and more talents leaving their “doom’d Paradise” to work for the financial and cultural elitist centres in New York (Wall-Street) and L.A (Hollywood), and their disdain for ordinary labour, speaks its clear language as to the relevance of these issues. Further, Lasch sees the belief in science to provide tools for total control has led this new breed to constantly combat old age with an exaggerated cult of youthfulness based on carefully constructed diets and no-smoking rooms across the country (“Tho’ clearly[...]what’s needed, is a No-Idiots Area” [*M&D*, p. 365] as someone in *Mason & Dixon* tells us when he first hears the news of this invention) . Whereas the majority, Lasch claims, have realised that aging and the imperfection of the body and the certainty of death is something that is useless to combat. However, he is alarmed by the velocity with which these elitist views are becoming dominant. He connects this attitude of combating age as a symptom of the pretense of controlling nature and fate, and takes the psychoanalyst Leon Wurmser’s findings from conversations about feelings of shame with his patients to signify that this attitude is becoming

prevalent to the point of provoking feelings of shame (!) in people who are somehow reminded of the inescapable limits of human life. Wurmser identifies two of the most frequent response mechanisms to feelings of shame, one to hide from the world, and the other to seek complete union with the world. Both arose, he noticed, out of a fear of abandonment and led him to conclude that “the most intense experience of shame” (Lasch 1995, p. 201) originated from the “conflict of union vs. separatedness” (ibid). That is, the line and its counter forces. Lasch, in his turn, takes these observations as basis for his own conclusion:

What Wurmser’s patients experience as shameful is the contingency and finitude of human life, nothing less. They cannot reconcile themselves to the intractability of limits. The record of their suffering makes us see why shame is so closely associated with the body, which resists efforts to control it and therefore reminds us[...]of our inescapable limitations, the inescapability of death above everything.

(ibid)

The illusion of through science and the intelligence of “the best and the brightest” (Lasch 1995, p. 39) being able to achieve total control and evade these limitations, thereby expelling the insight that the universe does not exist for the “happiness” (a term not many could agree upon a definition for) of man alone, reaches its logical conclusion, to Lasch’ mind, in the *California Statewide Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem*. Lasch, who here provides a perfectly possible reading of *Mason & Dixon*, tries to take this fact in:

Those wonderful machines that science has enabled us to construct have not eliminated drudgery, as Oscar Wilde and other false prophets so confidently predicted, but they have made it possible to imagine ourselves as masters of our fate. In an age that fancies itself disillusioned, this is the one illusion-the illusion of mastery-that remains as tenacious as ever.

(Lasch 1995, p. 246)

Because this *is* an illusion, he says, shame *should* evoke feelings of awe and reverence and it also explains why shame and curiosity are so “closely linked in people’s minds” (Lasch 1995, p. 212). We have seen how the novel constantly addresses these issues, of Lasch’ concerns we can isolate three particular ones of which the novel is always conscious: the need for making pure reason and logic relative (to see that facts are “theory-laden” and cannot be released from metaphysical content), to see the inherent dangers of hierarchical structures and ideology, and to stress that control over nature and the dispelling of what Lasch calls the “ultimately irreducible element of mystery in human affairs” (ibid) is neither desirable nor possible and cannot even be sanctioned by the enormous increases in knowledge produced by the theoretical sciences. To the taming of the intellect’s ambitions (“The Gospel of Reason” [*M&D*, p. 359]) almost every page is committed. There is much to be said for the connection of this gospel to Comte’s positivism, once very much in vogue, and that it has now become clear that these pretenses produced unforeseeable effects which can haunt us for a long time. In the novel, it is made clear that the control from a single point is undesirable, that the space of the line –the epitome of pure reason, distinguishing one thing from another– is as magical as any element in primitive world constructions. Mason’s insistence something in the self knows unarguably “flesh is sooner or later meat” (*M&D*, p. 769) to us meant precisely the impossibility of denying our inescapable limits, and we used the terms of Bakhtin to show how folk traditions and the wisdom of the people, which Pynchon ever stands by, can contain a more fundamental truth than those who “appeal to elites” (Lasch 1995, p. 112).

In the final, poignant scenes with Mason and his son the backside of the hopes attached to science of ridding the world of mystery and surprises is displayed on two levels. Shame is, in those whom Lasch criticizes, what the murmurs from “the malodorous Grotto of the Selves” (*M&D*, p. 769) and the words of that “something” which knows “flesh is sooner or later meat[and that there

are beings]indeed not capable of Human Kindness” (ibid) have become. So only using Lasch will yield a number of possible points of allegory to Pynchon’s novel, and Lasch is very contemporaneous, since the one is a critic of what the other warns of . In Mason’s reunion with his son this pretense Lasch implores us to lay down becomes both a personal shame and at the same time also has the symbol effect of hinting at a cultural shame. Mason feels bad for having abandoned his family to consort with the highest men of science. The project Bacon (from which Pynchon has borrowed his combination of the words reduced and certainty) hailed as the final stage in human redemption (counter to which runs in the novel the project of transferring accountability towards the individual in its own rights) has here shown its dark side to Mason who now knows that death is inescapable as age catches up with him and he knows full well that what Lasch calls an irreducible element of mystery to life cannot and should not be defeated. I think his discovery on a personal level corresponds with the novel’s scepticism towards the cultural project on the macro-level which C.S Lewis once tried to put his finger on with these words:

The process whereby man has come to know the universe is from one point of view extremely complicated; from another it is alarmingly simple. We can observe a single one-way progression. At the onset the universe appears packed with will, intelligence, life and positive qualities; every tree is a nymph and every planet a god. Man himself is akin to the gods. The advance of knowledge gradually empties this rich and genial universe: First of its gods, then of its colours, smells, sounds and tastes, finally of solidity itself as solidity was originally imagined. As these items are taken from the world, they are transferred to the subjective side of the account: classified as our sensations, thought, images or emotions. The Subject becomes gorged, inflated, at the expense of the Object. But the matter does not rest there. The same method which has emptied the world now proceeds to empty ourselves.

(Quoted in D.E Harding 1979, p.9)

We can here point to the fact that the expulsion of the creatures dwelling inside the earth (where Mason is taken when at the pole) follows from the fact that Mason's scientific observations will make it possible to calculate the size of the earth, thereby allowing mathematics and formulas to annex their territory. I think Pynchon as well as Lasch must see a paradox in the second leg of this project as perceived by Lewis -and, it is true, a similar mapping as that which took place of the globe in the times of the novel is taking place today of the body- because Lasch claimed that shame and the body were so closely linked because the body resists all efforts to control it, and Pynchon writes that what follows from the pretensions of total control inherent in overambitious scientism has to be a wager upon the body. The elves of the underworld, figments of imagination whose days are soon numbered, they know, by the scientific spirit, ask Mason what seems to be *the* question:

'Are you quite sure, now[...]that you wish to bet ev'rything upon the Body? -*this* Body?- moreover, to rely helplessly upon the Daily Harvest your Sensorium brings in,- keeping in mind that both will decline, the one in Health as the other in Variety, growing less and less trustworthy till at last they are no more?

(*M&D*, p. 742)

Friedrich Hayek, our resident liberalist, explains his concerns with this planned increase of a single category of facts for purposes of control:

The idea that the human mind ought "consciously" to control its own development confuses individual reason, which alone can "consciously control" anything, with the interpersonal process to which its growth is due. By attempting to control it we are merely setting bounds to its development and must sooner or later produce a stagnation of thought and a decline of reason.

(Hayek 1991, p. 123)

This “attempt to control it” might perfectly well be a key to understanding the line, and nothing is to prevent us from identifying what Hayek here calls the “interpersonal process” with what in the novel is called the “Civility truly necessary”. It is in this light I read Maskelyne pleading to Mason that he strike from his reports what his observations mean *to him*. There shall be no fiction, only pure relations. But in the novel, not only are these relations’ space qualitative in its disenchantment, and the machinations in possession of feelings (projections of what needs in us they serve?), but we also see Pynchon showing how “our world” –taken as the rational scientific way of thinking- is also always perceived as a centre (Greenwich). This centre is Europe, and the imperial colonies are satellites. The accumulation of power in centres, where the “back Inhabitants” (*M&D*, p. 488) are always far from the “Home Planet” (*M&D*, p. 133) and the “Metropolis” (*M&D*, p. 488) often returns . In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade explains how “our world” is always at the centre of the cosmos, so here is another way *Mason & Dixon* attempts to show how the modern conception of a pure science has veiled archaic patterns of behaviour which we still are inextricably tied to. The war of independence was precisely this, cutting the life line to the mothership. And as the line draws to a close we are told of an “effort” (*M&D*, 691) in both explorers to:

convince themselves that whatever they have left upon the last ridge-top, just above the last stone cairn, as if left burning, as if left exhibited in chains before the contempt pf all who pass, will find an end to its torment, and fragment by fragment across the seasons be taken back into the Tales preserv'd in Memory, among Wind-gusts, subterranean Fires, Over-Creatures of the Wild, Floods and Freezes...

(ibid)

This is a direct appeal to the collective consciousness of a nation who lives upon a continent whose natives they killed in enormous numbers, as well as a statement of an ideal narrative understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit. A clear relativisation of objective knowledge.

There can be little doubt that today “scientifically proven” is a forceful label, a notion as powerful in its imperialism, or Globalisation, as the Jesuits’ missionary work. Hayek says of such totalitarian ideals that they undermine the foundation of all morals, the “sense of and respect for truth” (Hayek 1991, p. 115). He says that to become a dominant and directing principle, such a one as we treat scientism here, it cannot just be about values or moral convictions, because here the individual will always be more or less in keeping with his local surroundings. No, they must “extend to questions of fact where human intelligence is involved in a different way” (ibid). The unknowable is of course the ultimate such category. In the novel the Catholic church is the archetype of a hierarchical organisation basing their power on information as to what holds the world together and directs the fates of each individual. But also science is seen as driving for the key to the universe, as with Maskelyne’s dream of the ultimate formula, which he would use so wisely (*M&D*, p. 731). Today, the dream of scientific control is still very much alive. And the hunt for the key to expel all that is not wanted is still searched for, can we really hope that those who find it have all said to themselves “I will use it wisely, of course”? And what suffers in this quest is a simpler notion, civility. The world, according to Hayek, is made up of interacting individuals “possessing different knowledge and different views” (Hayek 1991, p. 122). This is what constitutes the “life of thought” (ibid), through this interaction, the new can enter the world. And it is absolutely necessary that this new cannot be predicted. Ideological divides and hierarchical institutions are in danger of obstructing this process. A process which Hayek claims is a social process based on differences. Just as Barthes reading as desire is guaranteed by difference. The extinction of such differences –amongst the driving forces of modern science– I think is what Pynchon fears the most. And that beliefs become so absolutist that they prevent the interaction to go on because it is replaced by killing those on the other side of the line, examples of which abound. And for me, the main focus of the novel lies in not trying to rise above what we saw Lasch’ call the irreducible mystery of life and not permitting any

filling of that lacuna to sanction a shutting out of others who may not subscribe to the same set of beliefs. The elfs, whose symbolic significance is now well established, suggests to Mason a connection between our preoccupation with ultimate causes and the neglect of civility:

And wherever you may stand, given the convexity, each of you is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else, all the time, out into that Void that most of you seldom notice. Here in the Earth Concave, everyone is pointed *at* everyone else,- ev'rybody's axes converge,- forc'd at least thus to acknowledge one another,- an entirely different set of rules for how to behave.

(*M&D*, p. 741, italics Pynchon's)

Nor is it insignificant, I think, that Pynchon makes it so clear that Mason and Dixon to a certain extent are incompatible. It is, however, “not a faltering on either man's part, or the mistaken impression of one, or any moral lapse,- 'tis a difference of opinion” (*M&D*, p. 678). Freedom, says Friedrich Hayek, involves freedom to be different. And this is where we should take up again the question of ethics. When Pynchon again and again stresses the different idiosyncratic and chance-ridden stories which have sent different people to “America” (“Whose Name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist” [*M&D*, p. 757]), how the new is never planned, but mutates itself into being spontaneously (“America” itself we remember was described as coming into being like cherries in “a good summer” [*M&D*, p. 405], “almost as one stands and watches” [*ibid*]), and with his continuous suspicion of coercion he realises that

an order arising from the separate decisions of many individuals on the basis of different information cannot be determined by a common scale of the relative importance of different ends.

(Hayek 1998, p. 79, his italics)

However, it is the true boundary, and therefore, as we said, also the fulfilling of a potential. We can therefore now conclude with regards to ethics. It remains a very difficult question to answer, and I am forced to conclude that here, in the end, perhaps our goal escapes us. For, the objective is to trust the interaction of free men in a free society where time-rates are removed from the storage of power, that is abstaining from trying to plan a further development from the arbitrary information we can have at any given moment, and avoid accumulation of power. And even though we have salvaged both free will and the possibility of conscious amelioration, this awareness has been reached through a structured argument, or better: prolonged thought upon a question while sifting different material. Therefore the use of that free will is of no good to those not in a position to know. One cannot from a vantage point expect the needed behaviour from anyone but oneself. And what good is right knowledge to those beings incapable of human kindness, as the novel calls them? We know the novel to propose a curiosity and tolerance seen as needed to develop many, not one, different approaches so that not one broken chain could lose us all. Decentralisation of power, the respect for local knowledge and civic virtues are all important elements in such a process. In short, one should look towards *Planned Chaos* to borrow a title from von Mises. So are venues of meeting, where rank is put aside and a natural consensus can be reached based upon principles which the community knows to function. But not all are in a position to write novels saying this or in positions where they can build down the existing system. In short, since we have arrived at a model from an angle, so to speak, bringing about change for the better is not possible without this knowledge and that in a position where it matters. Since we have reached an ethics in a highly particular way, through our work as it has proceeded, we cannot expect others to act in a certain way that this personal thinking has led us to believe would be beneficial. No more than we can demand that others read the novel in the same manner. However, I can apply what I have found to myself. But that process will not take place *here*. Even if I presumed I knew which kinds of actions would be beneficial in bringing about the new

design (whether or not I accept the argument I read the novel to present does not belong here), since I would have come upon it arbitrarily I could not expect a similar attitude from others. But, I can place hope in the idea, and if it is communicated it will be tested. And this is nothing more than to say that the novel projects a world of its own, with its own ethics, which is an old claim of literary theory's and contains nothing new. However, it is of interest that we have established that the text seems to be conscious of this.

And if it ends here, with me saying the novel is a condemnation short of demanding, and at the same time full of hope, I am more than comfortable leaving the uncountable shortcomings of my efforts "as an exercise for anyone strongly enough interested. And what could that be? What Phantom Shape, implicit in the Figures?" (*M&D*, p. 772)

Conclusion

Even though to Mary “it turn’d out to be simple, after all” (*M&D*, p. 771) *Mason & Dixon* is, in many ways, a meditation on complexity. A complexity that is taken as a positive concept when it counters totalitarian notions, but also treated as something to combat –very frequently by embracing it- when it threatens to dispel meaning. If Paul Ricoeur is right when he claims that the action of emplotment is a manifestation of a grappling with the phenomenon of time as *it* manifests itself in an individual – then time appears as one of the inescapable categories of fiction as well as of life. Belonging to that category of concepts that are as inexplicable as they are undeniable. So that the polarity of complexity and simplicity is always present in a story as well as in that which it represents. Precisely because what it sets out to do is to humanize and “explain” (as in the Calvino quotes) what is alien or unexplained or threatening, so that we may live in its midst. And literature, in its complexities, keeps coming back to its favourite themes.

Mason & Dixon is a text that is highly aware of its premises. The relative stability of the world and the self which allows contemplation, their ultimate incompatibility which is fictions guarantee of eternal motion, the inescapable entities of the human condition - primarily time, death, evil and the quest for a humanization of these larger-than-life forces, a quest that lends to the novel whatever interest it might enjoy from the world- the traditions to which it belongs (one of the very first narratives in our canon follow the trials and tribulations of a man kept from his own doomed paradise and vividly describes the chaos and degeneration of standards from which it thereby suffers), the ambiguity of its words that guarantees a living and open system, its dependence on a reader etc. And at the same time conscious of what it allows; the interaction of imaginations, time to pass differently and a tangible awareness of that “simple, sentimental Bond,- quite common among the People” (*M&D*, p. 472) that occurs when we “drea[m] of and [are] mistaken in, each other” (*M&D*, p. 696).

And what is this novel, if not a conscious blend of the two parties on either side of the divide it draws up - science and fiction. It is indeed an argument, the epitome of reason, and still it carries an argument that can only be made in fiction because the argument itself is the heart of fiction. Indeed making what is to be proved its weightiest argument. And if it succeeds, is it not precisely its “superstition” that has allowed it to succeed? Because, speaking in the tradition of fiction, scared lifeless it may be extinguished, does it not call upon its gods? Homer, tribal story-telling and Hamlet as we have seen are invoked, but also many others. Does it not paint the devil on the wall, saying there are creatures not capable of human kindness, and that murderings must always be silent, by potions and spells? Does it not see itself and what it represents as light where there could be dark? Does it not try to make itself -fiction as something that should be heard- survive by a ritual? First drawing up the narrative situation, then introducing the narrator, then carefully bringing in the characters etc. Does it not let itself ramble on, its many voices without clear demarcation letting the whole speak almost in tongues, trying to connect to a sort of inspiration that has visited others before, to write great - whatever that must finally mean. And does it not mutate? A giant of nearly 800 pages it is the novel itself as a genre mutating into a form it needs to survive. Fiction as an explanatory model, after thousands of years, now finds itself in a position where it in order to survive must accomplish a greater feat of storytelling than ever before. And the moral of that story it has to make the world believe, is that it must be kept around – as a way of understanding. Today, the novel is the only place where this can be done. *Mason & Dixon* clearly recognizes this situation, and the gloves come off. Here is fiction commemorated in order to survive. In that story it *must* tell, fiction “no matter how stretch’d” (*M&D*, p. 695) will make survive its “pure truth” (*ibid*).

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