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Continuity and change**

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Abstract

In the paper I present and discuss an unpublished essay of Richard Goodwin found in the Goodwin's Archive at the University of Siena on the theme of social philosophy. I will illustrate the main points of his text, briefly compare these late views with those entertained at the beginning of his scientific life (namely his Harvard dissertation on Marxism also kept in the Archive) and add a few remarks in connection with the implications for economics suggested by his analysis.

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Richard M. Goodwin (1913-1996), hence RMG, was one of the most distinguished economic theorists of the XX century in the fields of business cycle and multisectoral analysis. He was also a very interesting and multifaceted personality as I have briefly described (Di Matteo 2000).

In the paper I present and discuss an unpublished essay of his found in the Goodwin's Archive on the theme of social philosophy.

The Archive is kept at the Library of the Faculty of Economics in the University of Siena: its content is fully indexed and can be consulted at <http://ase.signum.sns.it/index.html>. Although incomplete, the Archive is extremely valuable in supplying several pieces of information regarding RMG's professional and personal life. A short description of its contents is in Di Matteo et al. (2006). The Archive is particularly rich for the undergraduate period in Harvard and I have been working (Di Matteo 2008) with particular reference to his Harvard B.A. dissertation, *A Critique of Marxism*.

The Siennese period (from 1980 until his death) witnessed for RMG a vigorous scientific activity and a rich social life. Among various documents included in the Archive it is interesting to consider a brief (8 cc) essay "Sketch of a Possible Social Philosophy" (indexed as: I.1.a/1/p). Although written in English, the text could have been prepared as a basis for a public talk to be given at the end of the 80's in the city of Siena.¹

The piece, certainly not in a final version, is of interest for two reasons, one intrinsic to RMG's biography, the other extrinsic. On the first count it shows that there is a certain degree of consistency in his "philosophical" vision throughout his life, and at the same time there is a significant change in his political views. On the second count, it includes a few interesting hints for a reformulation of economics.

In what follows I will illustrate the main points of his text, briefly compare these late views with those entertained at the beginning of his scientific life (namely his dissertation mentioned above) and add a few remarks in connection with the implications for economics suggested by his analysis.

1. The problem of a social philosophy

Although put in the last page of the essay there is a *captatio benevolentiae*: how to justify that I write this essay? With his typical understatement and irony RMG states:² "All my life I have kept to a narrow and arid specialism; now I can afford to wander freely in forbidden pasture; I have no reputation to lose [...]". As we will see this is not precisely true as in his Harvard dissertation he adhered to a definite political and philosophical view to which I will come later in the paper.

Let me recall a few circumstances that, according to RMG, could help in constructing a new social philosophy that is adequate to the present time. Although the term is never defined by RMG it can be thought of as a general view and understanding of human and social life and of its evolution; it

¹ This is based on my personal recollection. In addition in the text there is a reference to existing socialist States which suggests that the paper was probably written before Autumn 1989.

² In what follows I will report in quotation marks the original expressions used by RMG in the essay.

also includes a guide for action. The term probably echoes Keynes's as expressed in the end chapter of his *General Theory*. There Keynes calls for a new "social philosophy" to be developed on the basis of the economic theory put forward in the preceding chapters.³ Here the starting point is different and more general, having its roots in a philosophical viewpoint. At the same time in both authors there is the idea that we need a change in our social philosophy as a means to a change in our behaviour.

RMG's states that there has been an exponential growth of specialized knowledge in recent times so that no one can actually dominate the world of learning:" It is not that I am against the specialization of knowledge; I fully acknowledge the wealth of our knowledge [...] and the power of it, [...]"'. However, he adds: "Surely the gravest ill of our society is that no one can possibly understand [...] what is going to happen to it."⁴

As a consequence RMG believes our civilization is drifting. We need therefore a social philosophy that is adequate to the present circumstances to understand the process that is evolving so fast: "The speed at which it is evolving makes such a vision more urgent than ever before". And this is the second reason why a new social philosophy is needed *now*.

This opening in my opinion reveals that RMG puts himself in the context shaped by the end of the great ideologies of the XX century that were able to provide exactly a comprehensive picture of the society, both in its structure and in its evolution. The view that a social philosophy is necessary, (implicitly) does full justice of those views that recently have been arguing that finally ideologies have been definitively erased (for good) from the social discourse.

In RMG's opinion the central, basic problem in building a social philosophy is how to know what is unchanging in man and what is changeable. Political theories that start from the fiction of the state of nature are an attempt at defining the immutable nature of man, but their approach is untenable as it gives rise to "inconsistent" doctrines, such as "Classical Reaction" and "Romantic Revolution".⁵ This view of man is therefore seriously defective and a different approach is called for.

2. A new way of looking at the society

The point of attack is characteristically Goodwinesque: we have to refute a static vision of man such as the one implicit in the state of nature approach and engage in a dynamic system analysis. Society must be looked at as a collection of thinking machines that interact with one another. Machines

³ "Our criticism of the accepted classical theory of economics has consisted [...] in pointing out that its tacit assumptions are seldom or never satisfied, with the result that it cannot solve the economic problems of the actual world." (Keynes 1936: 378)

⁴ It is interesting to note that in the last meeting of the American Economic Association Shiller & Shiller (2011) start precisely from the observation that there is a long term trend towards increasing scientific rigor and specialization to advance their plea for an "Economics as a Moral Science". So the starting point RMG chose is considered to be still worth great attention.

⁵ I am not able to understand what the first expression refers to, whereas with the second he probably has Rousseau and Marx in his mind.

have a wide variety of behaviour depending on how they are programmed. Man, although has a genetic code, can have a very large variety of behaviour. The latter depends on the social code that “[...] builds into him the vast variety of individual behaviour which we rightly prize.” The social code in turn is shaped by education in the widest sense (family, school, social groups, etc.): this code, contrary to the genetic one, can and does vary, albeit slowly.

The social code, again, is not defined by RMG but can be thought of as that set of values, rules and norms that govern our behaviour. “Thus man historically and collectively is free and makes himself, yet individually he is unfree and is made.”⁶ Man is governed via the social code which on one hand restraints his behaviour but on the other hand enables him to attain a rich individual existence by sharing the social norms of behaviour, modes of feeling and acting elaborated in the past.⁷

Therefore a bipolar nature of man, made of the physical and the cultural sides, emerges. The first can be assumed constant and therefore ignored.⁸ The cultural part is fundamental in keeping the society running and in good shape and this happens not in a single act of contract à la Rousseau but in a more or less continuous way through the elaboration of the social code allowing man to distance himself from the original Hobbesian state of nature characterized by aggressive, uncooperative behaviour.

The code evolves as is (slightly) altered during the transmission process from one generation to another and therefore enables the society as a whole to evolve too: social code coevolves with society. Hence the crucial role of the transmission mechanism and in particular of education (its main vehicle) that performs the task of transmitting a particular code of behaviour characterized by restraining the nature and freedom of man and injecting positive thinking that enable him to live satisfactorily in a complex, interdependent society.

There is an interesting remark about the importance of interaction among men as a key element in the evolution of the society, prompted by his contemporaneous reading of Fernand Braudel’s monumental study, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*: “[Braudel shows how] civilization [...] is the product of the weight of history, how it conditions and restraints but also how it propels forward with the ever changing permutations that come out of the interchange and resistance to the interchange of differing social groups. [...] in a powerful analysis of the role of Jewish *diaspora* he [Braudel] shows that their civilization was not attached to place and how potent an influence this was on the various regions they were pushed to, and equally how they were in turn transformed. So also with Islam.”⁹

⁶ He also add that: “Plato was wrong; we do not pull out what is in the human soul: we pack it in. The Golden age, if anywhere, lies in the future” and not in the past, I could add. The whole essay is pervaded by a strong anti Platonic attitude. I am not able however to infer whether there is a direct influence of Popper.

⁷ In the same end chapter Keynes (1936: 380) wrote: “[...] this variety [of life] preserves the traditions which embody the most secure and successful choices of former generations [...] and, being the handmaid of experience as well as of tradition and of fancy, it is the most powerful instrument to better the future.”

⁸ In a forward looking observation, RMG remarks that “[...] I find it impossible to visualize what terrors lurk in man trying to re-design genetic man”.

⁹ RMG’s emphasis. He probably refers to Chapter III of Part VI of Braudel’s book.

The new social philosophy that RMG appears to advance could then be characterized along these lines. We are aware that change and innovation are the source of all the “goodies”. This however should not lurks the fundamental importance of continuity in history achieved *inter alia* via the transmission of the social code. In fact the latter is not immutable but, as already remarked, subject to slow change and adaptation.

The “Romantic Revolution” with its extreme emphasis on change has led to overvalue the new and the young at the expenses of a more balanced attitude. The “oriental view” on the other hand goes too much in the opposite direction, stressing the unchangeable nature of man and therefore the importance of paying respect and homage to parents and masters who indeed have the eminent role of transmitting the code.

To stress the point RMG refers to painting, “the only other subject I am familiar with”. He reiterates that “one needs to recognize the reality of both tradition and change within that tradition for each important artist; both [...] must have a prize and no clear rule can be laid down, except that to go for maximal change is ruinous; the artist becomes clown, entertainer.” According to his view the tradition has been neglected so that “the result, though often brilliantly inventive, has become mannerist, decadent, unreal [...]; worship of change for its own sake and, in fact, Fashion [...]”.

This statement is the most remarkable as RMG, a painter himself all his life, can be described by and large as an exponent of abstract expressionism (Barche 1991).¹⁰

3. A few consequences

From this very general premise RMG draws two important consequences: the end of Utopianism and the rejection of Revolution.

As for the first, it is incorrect, he argues, to establish that man has a given, unchanging nature and on this basis decide which is *the* best form of society. Indeed, as already remarked, society evolves over time. This precludes a once for all, man made construct that solves the contradictions of the actual western societies: “End of Utopianism.” is the synthetic way RMG chooses to express his belief that is vain to search for an *ever valid* alternative to the existing arrangement of the society. Again, he expresses a negative attitude towards those (like Platonists and others) who believe that “if there is a Right Solution then it is right for all time [...]. But in fact all such Right Ideas are historically conditioned and delimited in their applicability to a particular time and place.” He actually claims more: “Indeed it is unclear that we can even rank different social organizations according to their goodness or badness; they are simply different.” This statement, contrary to the other, does not seem to be an implication of his premise. Probably it echoes Arrow’s impossibility theorem.

¹⁰ Barche (1991:11) wrote: “Goodwin felt especially attracted by the breakthrough of the New York School and in particular he was influenced by the paintings of Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline [...]. But his style varies a lot. [...] it may be said that the sixties were a very creative period in which we can see the greatest variation of his own brand of abstract expressionism.”

His view is also antirevolutionary as the continuity in the society is a vital ingredient of the social fabric. Societies do evolve in the long run, sometimes more speedily, sometimes more slowly but this is a more effective way of change than the abrupt alterations brought by revolutions that are doomed to failure. A positive explanation for the outbreak of revolutions is precisely that the required change of the social code has not been introduced at the right time.

To illustrate the point RMG refers to the sexual revolution as an example of a really fundamental social code change. The separation of sex and procreation via contraception calls for a change in the social code. The existing one, based on “Pauline Christianity”,¹¹ hinders the diffusion of contraception but is doomed to succumb. “My thesis is that the consequence of all this is not total freedom [...]. What it does is to force a redefinition of the human sexual and social relationship and entail a reformulation of the code. [...] What is required is how to define moral and immoral, not in simple terms of sex, but in the deeper [...] sense of egoism and altruism of self seeking and not damaging others.[...] One cannot miss the historical aspect of this technological moral code change [...].”

The danger of not swiftly adopting a new code is that we are left in a situation without effective guidance of behaviour: this can generate pain and suffering with children and adults alike. Here we have an example of the slow change of the code due not to its transmission process but to the difficulty of adapting to a technological innovation.

To summarize in a few words both implications: “Society cannot be reconstructed *ab ovo*, the possibilities are too great and we have no standard by which judge them. Rationality is no help [...]. We inherit an irrational, historically accidental situation and all we can do is modify it, not reconstruct it.”

A few comments appear to be in order at this point. It is clear that RMG acknowledges that Reason cannot and should not be the sole guide for action. Reason does not take into account history, can at best illuminate what presumably would happen, providing a sort of conditional forecast,¹² but it is hard to extract from this positive view a normative theory able to rank different social alternatives: its disregard for history is misleading if applied to the reconstruction of a society and, one can add, really frightening as the experiment of Communism has shown.¹³ I will come back to this point later in the paper.

There is a second set of implications from RMG's general view as expressed in section 2. The individualistic approach to economics, and other social sciences as well, is false. This derives from the recognition that the individual is unfree, his behaviour being controlled by the social code. More in general individualism as a doctrine is false, although RMG admits that it had a powerful impact on the society and he himself “was much attached to it, having grown up in its heyday”. Specifically in the XIX century it contributed to the development of the capitalistic society with its

¹¹ I suppose he refers to Catholic religion.

¹² In other passages he is even more cautious: “[...] society simply grew by a process (unknown and unknowable) of dynamic evolution” and further “we inherit an irrational, historically accidental situation [...]”.

¹³ In this view there could be an influence of the theses elaborated by Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialektik der Aufklaerung* but this remark is simply speculative.

emphasis on freedom (of initiative, laissez-faire, self help, etc.). At the same time its importance and its establishment were reinforced by the growing middle class.

However, following the Marxist-Hegelian philosophical tradition, RMG argues that individualism has lost its progressive force becoming a “dangerous luxury”. The reason is that individualism has come to be equated to reckless liberty. In particular complete freedom of procreation is leading man to an unsustainable development. Earth is limited and cannot accommodate such an enormous amount of population: “[...] the social suicide of unrestricted procreation alongside the prolongation of life has set up a biological suicide course: [...] the increasing rape of the earth’s raw materials and the subsequent exhaustion of them [...] and finally the cumulative pollution or alteration (harmfully) of the environment.” As a final consequence “the right of the individual to decide how many, if any, children he will have, probably should be denied.” The relentless pursuit of freedom is actually dangerous because does not take into account the limitations appropriately included in the social code. Romanticism by favouring extreme liberty from old habits and accepted rules exacerbates individualism and has to be rejected.¹⁴

The argument supporting restraints on population growth certainly is not new and its developments cannot be summarized here.¹⁵ It might be interesting to report the final words written in 1937 by Keynes (1973: 132-3) in his “Some Economic Consequences of a Declining Population”: “[...] if [...] persuaded and guided by the spirit of age and such enlightenment as there is, it permits – as I believe it may - a gradual evolution in our attitude towards accumulation, so that it shall be appropriate to the circumstances of a stationary or declining population, we shall be able [...] to get the best of possible worlds – to maintain the liberties and independence of our present system, whilst its more signal faults gradually suffer euthanasia and the rewards attaching to it fall into their proper position in the social scheme.”

Here too freedom and population size are closely linked and the full enjoyment of the former requires the limitation of the latter. The interesting variation is that, according to Keynes, the declining population was the outcome of western societies (as usual he disregarded the situation of the rest of the world), whereas RMG has clear in his mind the extremely rapid population growth of the LDC. Therefore, according to RMG, the declining population has to be a policy goal and, contrary to Keynes, cannot expected to be delivered in the absence of appropriate action.

4. A further consequence.

As we have already stated, following RMG, a society can be modelled as a series of interacting agents differently programmed that can show a wide pattern of different behaviour.

This is a suggestion especially valid for economics which is the most important social science. And it is an extremely innovative suggestion, a road that is now widely practiced with the help of

¹⁴ RMG goes very further in claiming that “The right to strike, such a hard-won victory, probably has to go too [...]”!

¹⁵ For a survey of recent developments on the population problem see Dasgupta (1995).

computer based simulations. He placed himself at the frontier of economics in advocating a reformulation of economics based on his view of interacting agents. He certainly was not aware of what was about to start in those years but this is even more significant of a consonance of ideas and perspectives. Indeed in the last twenty years among mainstream economists there has been an increasing interest in an evolutionary approach based on simulations of agents endowed with different norms of behaviour.¹⁶

On the other hand economic and social life is so arranged that occasionally a collapse ensues: “to understand it properly one requires a theory and a study of its whole structure; the parts will not suffice”. He was fascinated by the new mathematical developments in dynamical theory such as chaos and complex theory and in his Siennese period he worked extensively in this area making extensive use of simulations and employing one of the first available software, thus indicating how open he was to innovations.

Finally, since the programming of the individuals is done socially (mainly by education) individualism, or better, individualistic approaches to the study of society are false.

As a consequence of the previous argument economic theory based on consumer sovereignty (i.e. given tastes, the only problem is how to satisfy them) is doubtful as it assumes that tastes are pre social. “The fact is, of course, they are a product of historical evolution and as a such have no rational foundation [...]. We immediately see that, in capitalism, tastes are substantially, not entirely though, determined by capitalist producers. Thus we produce in order to satisfy what is corrupted by our efforts to produce; it is viciously circular [...]. A narrow technical point is that all theories of optimizing over time have to be built on the assumption of unchanging tastes, and therefore they are all false.”¹⁷

This theme is developed in RMG’s paper delivered in Rome in Autumn 1988 at the annual meeting of the Società Italiana degli Economisti and subsequently published (Goodwin 1989) and is a further indication of the period in which this essay was presumably written. The thesis echoes Galbraith’s famous dependence effect expressed in his *Affluent Society* (1958) but disregards the severe criticism by Hayek and Wallich (for the terms of the debate see Phelps 1962).

5. A contradiction in the evolutionary view

RMG is smart enough to be aware that the evolutionary view to which he subscribes, although superior to the “Romantic Reaction”, is itself liable to criticism and is not free from contradictions. According to him a Platonist (again!) “riding a particular wave of History, will declare this specific

¹⁶ For an exhaustive survey of the topic see e.g. Tesfatsion & Judd (2006) and in particular the excellent paper by B. Arthur (Tsfatsion & Judd 2006: 1551-64) precisely on the relation between the agent based modeling and the evolutionary view. He maintains: “One thing noticeable about agent based studies is that they are nearly always evolutionary in approach. Why should this be? [...] If heterogeneous agents [...] adjust continuously to the overall situation they together create, then they adapt within an ‘ecology’ they together create. And in so adapting, they change the ecology.”

¹⁷ By the way this is also a piece of self criticism with respect to Goodwin (1961).

configuration to be immutable, i.e. Day-before-Yesterday is to last for ever and it must be frozen [...] forever. This reveals its fatal weakness as change goes on, the position becomes increasingly irrelevant [...].”

But at the same time his own position is liable, he admits, to criticism as to historicism everything is flux, except that historicism itself is true: “Hence it is a Russell Paradox: the historian who tells you that all historians are liars.”

In addition he underlines that it is in conflict with the moral rules that govern our behaviour and are supposed to be valid for ever, being based on what is Right or Just. Here to illustrate he adds a personal remark informing us that he himself experienced this conflict. He had long thought that he would have reached a knowledge such as to get him to the “oasis of Good Life”. This attempt, better called hope, was probably rooted in one of the ideology, we noticed, that were existing and alive in the past century. But this proved to be unattainable: “perhaps it was a mirage all along! I became Bored and I have run after Novelty [...]. And this is what seems to me to be happening in our society.”

Hence we see the root of the above noted difficulty in shaping a new social philosophy and the persistence of the love for change as such that, according to him, is not to be praised. This personal attitude is a factor in the disillusion of his political views strengthening his vision of the society as an evolutionary process.

6. Implications of the process of globalization: which social philosophy is now possible?

In spite of the difficulties of his evolutionary view RMG grasps the nettle and embarks in a series of remarks with explicit reference to today’s situation. Although, as I said, the paper was probably written more than twenty years ago, we think that his observations maintain their interest. The danger today, he remarks, is that change is so rapid and so much worshipped that the necessary continuity is impaired: the difficulty of sketching a new, appropriate social philosophy being both a result and a cause of this situation.

What are presently the main features of the world economy in the era of the (now) so called globalization? Due to the increasing division of labour there is a widespread interdependence among economies fostered and fed by a prodigious growth of international trade: the landscape is dominated by large multinationals run by a very restricted power elite. This feature of a unified world market populated by world actors is to be regarded as a permanent, not transitory, phenomenon. The reason being an increasing demand for these worldly goods coming from the so called Third World. Population there wants to reach the same standard of living that is enjoyed by people in the western rich states. RMG thinks that the distribution of goods (and welfare in general) is really unequal across the nations of the world and that it will prove impossible to avoid a redistribution, already in the medium run.

Indeed RMG's statements were soothsaying: this is exactly what is happening under our eyes via the impetuous growth of many LDC and the wide swings in population.

The idea that we can revert to a "small scale, [...] locally self sufficient production" is, according to RMG, childish, absurd, however desirable it might appear to certain sectors of the population of the rich countries. Again this is a prophetic statement by RMG on the possible reactions in Western countries to the globalization process.

All this forces us to change our social philosophy radically. According to RMG the "inherited political philosophy [...] of democratic control [...] will in the future be subject to attrition, if indeed it survives at all." The real power of decision both in private and public organizations because of the complexity of the structure will be in the hands of small, unaccountable elites. The difficulty in controlling them will not be lessened: indeed, the development of technology brought about by the expanding economy will require more expertise and knowledge than before and this will not be available to the mass of population.¹⁸ The latter could well be consulted but this is a very different matter from possessing control over the crucial decisions. Wright Mills in the chapter on "The Mass Society" of his *The Power Elite* wrote (Wright Mills 1956:317, emphasis in the original): "Authority *formally* resides 'in the people', but the power of initiation is in fact held by small circles of men. That is why the standard strategy of manipulation is to make it appear that the people [...] 'really made the decision'. That is why even when the authority is available, men with access to it may still prefer the secret, quieter ways of manipulation."¹⁹

On the other hand the traditional answer by socialists (like myself, RMG acknowledges) to this situation, namely planning, is no longer a valid option, as the State too is run by small elites and has become so big as to be uncontrollable.²⁰ One can probably hear the echo of the failure of the communism experience, when RMG writes: "There is a real potential gain in having the broad lines of development of a society under the control of able individuals as opposed to the mindlessness of our free market scramble system; but there is a price to pay and a frightening danger involved." All this, he goes on, poses an impossible challenge to the Nation State which is clearly inadequate to deal with a global economy; on the other hand there is no sign of a world government appearing or of a decline of multinationals. On the top of that he finds extremely disappointing the results of the attempts at building supranational entities, like the "Common Market"(sic!), which in theory appear to be able to deal with a such a formidable task. How prophetic these words appear today in the middle of a very serious world crisis (August 2011)!

His pessimism, although somehow in contrast to his evolutionary view, comes out clearly out in the last part of his essay. Keynes (1936: 378-9) in the last chapter of the *General Theory*, on the contrary, was still confident that it would be possible (and desirable) to marry some measure of individualism (if it can be purged of its defects and abuses) with central controls to bring about full

¹⁸ He appears to think that the (now) so called Digital Divide will be a reality.

¹⁹ The whole chapter is relevant, including the discussion that follows the quote about the critical importance of education of the people.

²⁰ He is more pessimistic of Keynes who wrote (1936: 381): "The authoritarian state systems of today seem to solve the problem of unemployment at the expense of efficiency and freedom."

employment. In this case he argues “ [...] there is no objection to be raised [...] of the manner in which private self interest will determine what in particular is produced, in what proportions the factors of production will be combined to produce it, and how the value of the final product will be distributed between them.” RMG after so many decades of active economic policy shows less confidence in the power of ideas as opposed to that of vested interests in getting to a satisfactory situation.

7. A short comparison with the theses of the Harvard dissertation

At this point a comparison with some of the arguments expressed in his Harvard dissertation is outlined.

The thesis *A Critique of Marxism* (Goodwin 1934) was completed in April 1934 (RMG was 21 at the time) in fulfillment of the B.A. degree in Politics at Harvard and is written under the influence of Whitehead’s vision. In the Introduction RMG expresses “[...] the best philosophical synthesis I can make [of Whitehead’s theory]”. The corpus of the thesis is dedicated to an interpretation of Marx as a revolutionary figure and at the same time to a criticism of his economic theory, including his labour theory of value. Let us first summarize the main points RMG puts forward in the Introduction:

a) According to RMG it is the merit of Alfred North Whitehead to have reconciled scientific knowledge with the study of man. How? By elaborating an approach that can be termed “organic mechanism”. It must be recognized that reality is bipolar including mentality as well as physicality and that the intrinsic character of each event is a product of its social environment.

b) This approach is useful for the study of man as well as that of energy or matter. A quotation can help understanding: “Each event is causally free from all other events contemporary with it, though they are not independent for they have a common past [...]. Thus in the immediate present there is a possibility of freedom. Mentality is the source of novelty. In the more inorganic world the element of physicality predominates and each event is completely determined by the past. But in the more organic and complex spheres the element of mentality asserts itself and the possibility of freedom is realized. [...] Thus ideas can and do have effect in the world of sense and there is gradually realized in this world a purposive, normative, teleological element.” (Goodwin 1934: XVI)

c) as for the specificity of social studies RMG states: “Science has spoken of [...] universals, laws valid in all time and space. This conception, I suggest, may not be useful in studying society. (Goodwin 1934: XXI) Therefore in the study of society “[...] account must be taken of ideals and ends; human beings must be treated as purposive creatures. For an ideal to become a program of action is as much an element of ‘givenness’, though with a tendency to change and elaboration, as the most physically determined drive [...]. It is for this reason that within a period when the ends of

society are fairly unchallenged, there is the most possibility of prediction and unbiased observation.” (Goodwin 1934:XXIII)

Therefore we can conclude with Whitehead that ideals do influence actions of men.

d) But this certainly is not the end of the story: “[...] inevitably one must allow for an element of novelty and of the possibility of value judgments based upon real freedom. [...] The growth of mentality in man has given him a mobility, a capacity to change which results in freedom. “ (Goodwin 1934:XXIV).

This element of rapid change, real novelty in human history is important. It cannot be entirely explained by the interaction of the forces in the ‘givenness’. As an example of change introduced into the ‘givenness’ by the freedom brought by ideas, RMG quotes the experience of the New Deal that was at the time in its infancy.

This portrait of the evolution of society that here emerges is however rather realistic as witnessed by his quote of the opening sentence of Whitehead (1925):”The progress of civilization is not wholly a uniform drift towards better things.”

From all this I surmise that by and large the philosophical views expressed in the thesis are kept until the end of his life. There the juxtaposition and dialectics between givenness and novelty can be considered akin to the evolutionary vision expressed here, founded on the role of the social code as a factor of change. A difference can be found in a less favourable role here for individual who was still at the centre of the stage there. And the evolutionary vision just sketched there becomes absolutely central here.

We can conclude that in spite of the different language there is a high degree of continuity between the two Goodwins, in that they both share an evolutionary vision of the society driven by the freedom of new ideas that represents the novelty in a given situation.

The fact that the evolutionary vision is more developed in the essay is, I think, partly the result of a drastic change in his assessment of Socialism. On this aspect the two Goodwins diverge radically. In the thesis RMG was “an ardent Marxist”: “I think Marx has, in his fundamental ethical principles, allied himself with the deepest moral tradition of the Western world- the Christian-Platonic conception of the dignity of the human soul.”(Goodwin 1934:109) And a few lines later: “The fundamental ethical aim has existed for around 2000 years, the important thing is working it into reality.”(Goodwin 1934:114). And finally: “I am unable to forecast the future, but I do think the Communist Party has the possibility- I would not say certainly or inevitably- of being the present day representative and effective agent of the Christian-Platonic doctrine of the dignity of the human soul, pushing it still further towards its realization in the world.”(Goodwin 1934:122). What has happened in the aftermath of World War II (at least in Europe) has been, instead of popular revolutions, a series of *coup d’état* that led the communist party in power.

But what is more significant is the sentence that comes immediately after when RMG maintains: “Obviously, the Communist goal is hopelessly Utopian, but ‘Impracticable ideals are a program for reform’” the last words being a quotation from Whitehead (1933:52). It was precisely this Utopia

that failed to materialize as reformers seldom reach their ends: this was never closer to the truth than in the case of Communism that RMG thought to “contain the relevant ethical ideal of our time”.

But in the essay we are discussing there is not only the awareness, based on his evolutionary vision, of the historical failure of revolutions, there is a definitive theoretical criticism that such an Utopia can be a valid goal. The repeated criticism of Platonism contained in the essay is certainly not directed to the ideal of the dignity of the human soul but precisely to the idea that this Utopia should be the basis of a revolutionary movement. In this respect the gulf between the two Goodwins could not have been wider.

8. Final remarks.

The short essay I have summarized is extremely dense and includes also other elements that I have overlooked for the clarity of exposition.

It is important in reconstructing RMG’s biography as a social scientist in that it shows that there is a certain degree of consistency in his philosophical vision on the nature of man and society across time and at the same time there is also a dramatic change in his political views.

The changes in the latter are partly dependent on the events of the “short” century as Hobsbawm called the XX century, precisely with reference to the failure of the Communist experience but partly depends on a different critique of Marxism from the one expressed in his Harvard dissertation. The criticism now is not only to Marx as a thinker but also to Marx as the “spiritual progenitor of a movement”, the “creator of a religious myth” that promises heaven here on earth.

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