Modern Intellectual History (2024), **21**, 410–440
doi:10.1017/S147924432400012X

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Utopia in New York: Nicola Chiaromonte and the New York Intellectuals' "Superstition of Science"

Amanda Swain*

IES Abroad, Milan
*Corresponding author. E-mail: aswain@iesabroad.org; swain.ae@gmail.com

(Received 29 August 2022; revised 26 December 2023; accepted 12 January 2024)

This article reintroduces Italian antifascist intellectual Nicola Chiaromonte to anglophone twentieth-century intellectual history by foregrounding Chiaromonte's transatlantic exchange with the New York intellectuals. Drawing from Chiaromonte's unpublished notes and correspondence, as well as his published writing in English and Italian, it elaborates how what I call Chiaromonte's "negative utopianism" migrated concepts and concerns from the political-philosophical context of 1930s Paris to 1940s New York. Though descriptions of Chiaromonte in New York accentuate his rejection of Marxism within sectarian radical circles, I resituate this tension vis-à-vis the philosophical clash between Chiaromonte's speculative, phenomenological conceptual framework and his US milieu's scientific rationalism and naturalistic pragmatism. Thanks to his influence on Dwight Macdonald's politics *magazine, Chiaromonte became a contact point with the ideals animating the antifascist resistance and the theoretical transformations inaugurated by the decentered subject—one whose promotion of relationality and limit as grounds for recentering the transatlantic left had longer echoes.*

In his memoir *The Truants*, William Barrett identifies "two small episodes" from "the fall of 1945" that "seem to sum up" the world of the New York intellectuals at the time: a lively conversation at a Greenwich Village bar and a "jolly little gathering" of refugees at the home of Nicola Chiaromonte.[1] Saul Bellow's *roman-à-clef* of New York intellectual life, *Humboldt's Gift*, likewise situates Chiaromonte alongside "[Philip] Rhav and [Lionel] Abel and Paul Goodman and [Delmore Schwartz]" as part of an influential "group that discussed politics, literature, and philosophy" in 1940s Manhattan.[2] Describing Chiaromonte's role in this milieu, Mary McCarthy

[1]William Barrett, *The Truants* (New York, 1982), 30, 31, 32. For an introduction to the New York intellectuals see Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Durham, NC, 2017); Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals:* Partisan Review *and Its Circle* (Madison, 2004); Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester, 1995); Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Los Angeles, 1991); Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York, 1986). All translations from Italian are the author's unless otherwise noted.

[2]Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift* (New York, 2019), 325.

explained that "[f]or us he was a maestro … I don't mean only for myself … but for all of us": "At the time we knew very little of his past … The years in exile, the war in Spain as a pilot in the squadron of [André] Malraux, the flight from France—these were all things we learned little by little and not from him. His legend grew from the different testimonies."[3] The New York intellectuals, she added, had experienced their exchange with Chiaromonte as encounter with "utopia": "One certainly cannot say that he was optimistic, but he always had a broader vision than others. There was pessimism in him but also a great refinement of thought, along grand classical lines. In America this didn't exist, at least as far as I know. His thought was more generous than that which ran in our intellectual circles."[4]

Despite such notable literary and autobiographical appearances—also in texts by Malraux, Natalia Ginzburg, Czeslaw Milosz, and Giorgio Agamben, among others—and though he has recently been rediscovered in Italy, Nicola Chiaromonte (1905–72) is largely absent from intellectual histories of the twentieth century written in English.[5] As the tributes above begin to suggest, however, Chiaromonte was a noted interlocutor in Italian antifascist circles and a protagonist in mid-twentieth-century New York intellectual life, before eventually becoming coeditor (with Ignazio Silone) of the Italian Congress for Cultural Freedom magazine *Tempo Presente*.[6] Working across multiple languages and privileging correspondence with friends over book writing, Chiaromonte certainly did little to cultivate public recognition—especially given his unorthodox views and embrace

[3]Mary McCarthy, "Prefazione," in Nicola Chiaromonte, *Lettere agli Amici di Bari* (Fasano, 1995), 9–16, at 11, 13.

[4]Ibid., 12.

[5]André Malraux, *Man's Hope* (New York, 1967). Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familigiare* (Turin, 1963). Czeslaw Milosz, "From the Rising of the Sun, VI: The Accuser," in Milosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931–2001* (New York, 2001), 320–25; Milosz, "The Prioress," in Milosz, *To Begin Where I Am (*New York, 2002), 85–101, esp. 85–6. Giorgio Agamben, *Autoritratto nello studio* (Milan, 2017). Gregory Sumner's excellent *Dwight Macdonald and the* politics *Circle* (Ithaca, 1996) offers the most extensive discussion of Chiaromonte in relation to the New York intellectuals. Chiaromonte is also discussed in Carol Brightman, *Writing Dangerously: Mary McCarthy and Her World* (New York, 1992); Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals*; Andrea Scionti, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom in France and Italy, 1950–1957," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22/1 (2020), 89–124; Marco Bresciani, "Socialism, Antifascism and Anti-totalitarianism: The Intellectual Dialogue (and Discord) between Andrea Caffi and Nicola Chiaromonte (1932–1955)," *History of European Ideas* 40/7 (2014), 984–1003. Chiaromonte's Italian rediscovery is demonstrated by the appearance of an anthology of his collected work in the prestigious I Meridiani series by Italian publisher Mondadori: Nicola Chiaromonte, *Lo spettatore critico: Politica, filosofia, letteratura*, ed. Raffaele Manica (Rome, 2021). For an introduction to Italian Chiaromonte scholarship see Gino Bianco, *Nicola Chiaromonte e il tempo della malafede* (Rome, 1999); Cesare Panizza, *Nicola Chiaromonte: Una Biografia* (Rome, 2017); Andrea Caffi and Nicola Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?" Una corrispondenza sulla rivoluzione (1932–1955)*, ed. Marco Bresciani (Naples, 2012); Matteo Marchesini, "La verità del dialogo: Un ritratto di Nicola Chiaromonte," in Marchesini, *Da Pascoli a Busi: Letterati e letterature in Italia* (Macerata, 2014), 345–80.

[6]When Chiaromonte does appear in anglophone scholarship, he is typically a cursory mention in studies of others. See Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*; Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*; Hugh Wilford, "An Oasis: The New York Intellectuals in the Late 1940s," *Journal of American Studies* 28/2 (1994), 209–23; Frances Kiernan, *Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy* (New York, 2002); Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (New York, 1994); Wreszin, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949–1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (New York, 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

of "political-outsider" status.[7] This in fact is why some Italian scholars situate him within *l'altra tradizione*: "the other [non-Marxist leftist] tradition" comprising anarchism, libertarianism, and independent socialism—a current also understood to include his friends Hannah Arendt, Albert Camus, and Dwight Macdonald.[8]

Even this brief sketch I hope begins to explain why, in his obituary for Chiaromonte, French editor Maurice Nadeau deemed him "one of the last secret maestros of an entire generation of European and American intellectuals."[9] In what follows, I attempt to reintroduce this "secret maestro" to the Anglosphere by highlighting Chiaromonte's contributions to twentieth-century transatlantic intellectual history. I focus on just one scene of Chiaromonte's intellectual mediation: his debates with the New York intellectuals during the 1940s. While the New York intellectuals were not a unified group, I consider them a discourse community with disparate opinions but shared attitudes and interpretive approaches that at the time was renegotiating its understanding of leftism—an evolution often considered deradicalization—and primarily operating outside academic institutions in small-circulation highbrow periodicals with significant weight in bohemian, literary, and radical circles.[10] Drawing especially from Chiaromonte's unpublished notes and correspondence, as well as on writing he published in English and Italian, I discuss his New York years as a period of transatlantic encounter involving forms of cultural translation and boundary work in which affective ties and public and private discussions facilitated the filtering and transmission of ideas. As I highlight, bringing Chiaromonte back into conversations about the New York intellectuals helps foreground the "multidimensional axes of alignment and divergence" shaping their discourse world and, especially, the relay between their philosophical assumptions and their understandings of politics.[11]

Indeed, Chiaromonte directly challenged the prevailing New York intellectual worldview. His distinct conceptual orientation, alluded to by McCarthy above, reflected what I call a *negative utopianism*: a speculative but deeply critical form

[7]The Chiaromonte–Camus correspondence has been published in French (original) and Italian translation: Albert Camus and Nicola Chiaromonte, *Correspondance*, ed. Samantha Novello (Paris, 2019); Camus and Chiaromonte, *In lotta contro il destino: Lettere (1945–1959)*, ed. Samantha Novello, trans. Alberto Follin (Vicenza, 2021). Selections from the Chiaromonte–McCarthy correspondence appear in Italian translation: Francesco Rognoni, "'Quella parte del mondo inventata da Molière': un assaggio del carteggio Mary McCarthy–Nicola Chiaromonte," in Maurizio Ascari, Alessandra Calanchi, Rocco Coronato, and Franco Minganti, eds., *FINKFEST: Letteratura, cinema e altri mondi: Guido Fink nei luoghi del sapere* (Fano, 2016), 139–51.

[8]*L'altra tradizione* has been discussed by Fondazione Alfred Lewin and the organization Amici di Nicola Chiaromonte.

[9]Quoted in Panizza, *Biografia*, 5. Editor at *Les lettres nouvelles*, Nadeau also worked with Camus at *Combat*.

[10]Some did have strong institutional ties. For instance, Sidney Hook and Meyer Schapiro both taught at Columbia University. Wald's description of the New York intellectuals' political evolution represents the standard reading: "Before World War II, the[ir] bright center was revolutionary Marxism, and afterward it was liberal anticommunism." Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, xiv–xv. Also see Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 150.

[11]This sociological description of the community comes from Daniel Bell, "Oral History Interview with Daniel Bell, 1978," sound recording, Columbia Digital Library Collections.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

of aspirational politics in which a negative stance towards human power, perfectibility, and the status quo indexed stubborn commitment to the possibility of *otherwise*.[12] This outlook was premised in an understanding of human existence as consciousness of our embeddedness in an unintelligible world: a jarring foundational encounter with forms of dependence, uncertainty, and vulnerability which precede, exceed, and impinge upon us, constituting an immaterial constraint on our actions and capacity for knowledge. Considering this experience the origin point of both thought and sociality, or rather of all human intercourse, Chiaromonte saw a single horizon encompassing the social, cultural, moral, philosophical, and political domains. He thus construed politics "in the Greek sense of 'having to do with living together,'" recognizing "there are many actions that have no political object, but … hardly a human action that does not have political implications."[13]

This expansive notion of politics claimed relationality as political, framing the intersubjective bonds indexing our interdependence and common vulnerability to an incoherent world as the locus of solidarity. It also drew upon Plato—not only for a dialogic model of intellectual inquiry that disavows self-assured or coercive knowledge, but also to reconceive the move beyond formal politics as a form of *engagement*, especially in moments of historical pressure.[14] Yet Chiaromonte linked the reflections on the relation between individual and *polis* and on the thresholds of human understanding and control that he drew from ancient Greek thought to early twentieth-century explorations of antihumanism and the failures of modern rationalism, situating the phenomenological method and "Heidegger's metaphysics" in "Plato's shadow."[15] He identified these philosophical impulses as a conceptual matrix underpinned by shared emphasis on what we do not know and on the notion of measure in which "existentialism becomes simply the Greek sense of life: awareness of human limits and at the same time refusal of resignation."[16] For

[12]Chiaromonte seems to have employed the term "negative utopianism" only once and quite differently: to describe fascism as a form of negation substituting the reality of ideas with ideology. Nicola Chiaromonte, "Nota sulla civiltà e le utopie," in Chiaromonte, *Lo spettatore critico*, 93–106, at 93.

[13]Chiaromonte to Abel, 6 April 1969, Chiaromonte to Abel, 24 May 1964, Nicola Chiaromonte Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter NCP), Box 3, Folder 90.

[14]This interpretation of Plato contrasted others framing him as illiberal and authoritarian, such as Karl Popper's. Chiaromonte's reading saw Plato's *Republic* as an ideal, not a blueprint for philosopher rule; it was strongly rooted in Plato's Seventh Letter. Contemporaneous interpretations by German émigrés (Popper, Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Arendt) seem more informed by the German rereadings of Plato underpinning Nazi ideology. Chiaromonte's turn to ancient Greek thought, however, does bear kinship to Arendt's, as well as to Camus's and Simone Weil's. On Chiaromonte's antifascist Plato see Amanda Swain and Valerio Angeletti, "Paolo Milano, Nicola Chiaromonte, and the Politics of Friendship," in preparation. On Chiaromonte and Arendt see Pietro Adamo, "'Politics,' il radicalismo libertario, e Hannah Arendt," in Margarete Durst and Aldo Meccariello, eds., *Hannah Arendt, Percorsi di ricerca tra passato e futuro 1975–2005* (Florence, 2006), 57–72; Paola Carlucci, "Intellettuali nel Novecento: il confronto di Nicola Chiaromonte con Hannah Arendt," *Ricerche di Storia Politica* 1 (2011), 3–28. On Chiaromonte and Camus see Samantha Novello, "Nicola Chiaromonte e Albert Camus: Un dialogo filosofico-politico," *Il pensiero storico*, June 2020, 131–50.

[15]Nicola Chiaromonte, "A Greek Poet in England," *New Republic*, 28 May 1945, 760–62, at 761–2. Chiaromonte's account of the work of Demetrios Capetanakis in the review indexes features of his own conceptual framework.

[16]Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Chiaromonte this refusal of resignation, despite our awareness of the negative boundaries informing our knowledge and experience, instituted the utopian impulse: it opened space for speculative questioning of what is and what could be, and for the spontaneous emergence of creative alternatives.

To clarify the origins of this negative utopianism and its stakes in the New York intellectual setting, I first situate Chiaromonte's thought vis-à-vis the historical context constituted by 1930s Italian antifascism—especially the debates of Giustizia e Libertà, a movement largely exiled in France at the time—and by the critical "reconsideration of modern science and Enlightenment humanism" taking place in interwar Continental philosophy, which established the conceptual formation from which existentialist, structuralist, and post-structuralist thought eventually emerged.[17] I highlight how Chiaromonte's analyses of the totalizing reach of fascist power, firsthand experience of political resistance, and familiarity with early French engagements with phenomenology dovetailed with his interest in non-Marxist socialism to generate an understanding of politics as a domain where the individual conscience and its entwinement with others played a fundamental role. The significance of this orientation—which was inflected by strong opposition to the modern nation-state and to instrumentalism, rationalization, and the use of force—crystallized most visibly in 1940s New York in Chiaromonte's influence on Macdonald's *politics* magazine. I therefore subsequently turn to Chiaromonte's arrival as a refugee in Manhattan, foregrounding his political mobilization of philosophical speculation, phenomenological method, and the idea of limit in a context strongly committed to Marxist vocabulary, a Hegelian understanding of history, and forms of naturalistic pragmatism, stances underpinned by the Cartesian subject and its practical will.[18]

I thus underscore how Chiaromonte—an early, direct contact point for the New York intellectuals with the ethos and ideas animating antifascist resistance and with the philosophical transformations inaugurated by the decentered subject—helped shape the identity of *politics* and set its editorial agenda.[19] Though

[17]Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, 2010), 80. On this development as a repositioning of Greek thought see Catherine Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago, 1996); Miriam Leonard, *Athens in Paris: Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-war French Thought* (Oxford, 2005).

[18]See Antonio M. Nunziante, "La fenomenologia negli Stati Uniti (1939–1962): l'utopia di una definizione," *Rivista di Filosofia* 2 (2018), 265–86. Phenomenology and existentialism grew in the US after the mid-1950s. See Lester Embree and Michael Barber, "The Golden Age of Phenomenology: At the New School for Social Research, 1954–1973," in M. B. Ferri ed., *The Reception of Husserlian Phenomenology in North America* (New York, 2019), 99–106; and Don Ihde, "Phenomenology in America (1964–1984)," in ibid., 345–64; George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore, 2003).

[19]Though I do not have space to discuss it here, Chiaromonte was also a conduit for existentialism: he was a key reference point during Camus's 1946 US trip—encouraging Camus to visit after the two resumed contact in 1945, meeting Camus's ship at the pier, introducing him to American friends, and serving as a cultural translator—and he saw Sartre and Beauvoir during their own trips to New York. Like Abel, he solicited advice from Camus, Caffi, Jean Wahl, and Sartre for the 1947 *politics* issue on contemporary French thought and for an unrealized existentialism anthology. See Chiaromonte, *In lotta contro il destino*; Albert Camus, *American Journals*, trans. Hugh Levick (London, 1990), 32; Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*. Like Caffi, he appeared repeatedly in Abel's short-lived magazine *Instead*, which was influential for the development of surrealism in the US and foregrounded French thinkers addressing existentialist themes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

most descriptions of Chiaromonte's encounter with New York intellectual life concentrate on his precocious rejection of Marxism in a sectarian atmosphere, I situate this political tension in relation to the conceptual clash between Chiaromonte's negative utopianism and his US milieu's prevailing scientific rationalism—a conflict which also helps clarify why Chiaromonte's outlook remained problematic for many New York intellectuals even after they took distance from Marx.[20] Although the utopian vision that Chiaromonte brought to *politics*—which looked beyond immediate results and institutions and toward decentralized networks, small groups, and coordinated public gestures, and which rejected appeals to mass mobilization, liberal universalism, or scientific planning—challenged key New York intellectual assumptions, it bore some kinship to perspectives advanced by other marginal left-wing voices of the period, such as the radical pacifists and religious left, who similarly attempted to disrupt the conceptual force of bourgeois individualism, bureaucratic collectivism, and realpolitik by reconceiving the moral, relational, and smaller scene as sociopolitical terrain.[21] In this sense, Chiaromonte's political engagement with what, paraphrasing Tolstoy, he called "the serious dependence in which we find ourselves with regard to others" belongs to a mid-twentieth-century intellectual current that located politics in the pivot between ideas and everyday practices and aspired to a revolution that was above all sociocultural. Indeed, Chiaromonte's attempt to excavate ground for the transatlantic left outside the Marxist and liberal traditions by recentering it on intersubjectivity proved decisive in positioning *politics* at what Staughton Lynd later recognized as the heart of the "first New Left."[22]

[20]See accounts of Chiaromonte or of the *politics–Partisan Review* tension in Barrett, *The Truants*; William Phillips, *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life* (New York, 1983); Lionel Abel, *The Intellectual Follies* (New York, 1984); Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York, 1984).

[21]Abel to Chiaromonte, undated [1964], NCP, Box 1, Folder 4. On this intellectual current see Amanda Swain, "Personalism and the Politics of Love: Revisiting the Radicalism of Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.," *American Quarterly* 73/1 (2021), 75–100; Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston, 2011); James Tracy, *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (Chicago, 1996); Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York, 2009). Intersections between mid-twentieth-century US radicalism and French mediations of phenomenology merit further study, especially the relationship between political translations of phenomenological ideas and the so-called New Left. For instance, Chiaromonte belonged to the same Parisian discourse world as Emmanuel Mournier, who developed French personalism in *Esprit* in the 1930s and later worked with Camus on *Combat*. Mournier was a major influence on Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement, which developed an anarchism with kinship to *politics*'s just blocks from the magazine's office. Radical pacifist A. J. Muste, who collaborated frequently with Day, publicly debated Macdonald in 1947 at an event partially sponsored by *politics*—and the magazine also published pieces exploring personalism or personalist themes. Macdonald collaborated with Day in several political campaigns and profiled her for the *New Yorker*.

[22]Nicola Chiaromonte, *The Paradox of History: Stendhal, Tolstoy, Pasternak, and Others* (Philadelphia, 1985), 85. Staughton Lynd, "Marxism–Leninism and the Language of *Politics* Magazine: The First New Left … and the Third," in George Abbott White, ed., *Simone Weil: Interpretations of a Life* (Amherst, 1981), 110–36, esp. 110–11, 127. Lynd saw the New Left tradition inaugurated by *politics* epitomized by Weil, Silone, and Muste—figures proximate to Chiaromonte and Macdonald.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Utopian antifascism

Described by his childhood friend Alberto Moravia as a serious young man "pathologically intolerant to fascism," in 1932, at age twenty-seven, Chiaromonte joined the underground antifascist movement Giustizia e Libertà ("Justice and Liberty," hereafter GL)—a network which, among many others, included Emilio Lussu, Leone Ginzburg, Aldo Garosci, Franco Venturi, Alberto Tarchiani, and Carlo Levi.[23] Though it circulated antifascist propaganda in Italy, GL was directed from Paris by Carlo Rosselli and other political exiles who considered emigration a form of continued resistance.[24] By the early 1930s, the movement's political aims and analysis largely advanced democratic–libertarian socialism: it considered fascism not a class-based reaction by the Italian bourgeoisie nor a caesura in Italy's historical development but a sociocultural phenomenon with wide, if passive, support in Italy and origins in the failures of the Italian national unification project.[25] Recognizing fascism's continuity with the preceding liberal order and inherent place in the "autobiography" of a country without strong democratic foundations, GL thus identified a profound interrelation between Italian culture and the Mussolini dictatorship and conceived opposition accordingly—largely considering workers, youth, and intellectuals a vanguard for catalyzing the regime's downfall and exploring forms of federalism, syndicalism, and autonomism to challenge and replace it.[26]

Chiaromonte's contributions to GL debates were distinctly utopian, as they reflected belief that ideas shape society and constitute the terrain where politics play out. His 1933 essay "Nota sulla cultura e le civiltà," for instance, framed the imagination of a better society as an activity intervening in the world in oblique, unforeseeable ways by constructing an *otherwise* which, never realized "in determinate forms," resided "'nowhere' outside the human intellect."[27] This promotion of ideals aiming not "to impose gestures but to spark thoughts and autonomous moral life," to "inspire thoughts not direct action," implied rejection of the coercive instrumentalism animating Fascist ideology.[28] Upholding such positions, and already a suspected antifascist conspirator, Chiaromonte was informed upon to the police in 1934—just months after becoming co-coordinator of GL's clandestine Rome cell. Promptly emigrating to Paris, he joined the movement's exiled leadership in an atmosphere where left-wing politics were intersecting critiques of humanism and rationalism.[29]

[23]Alain Elkann and Alberto Moravia, *Vita di Moravia* (Milano, 2018), 117. On GL see Marco Bresciani, *Quale Antifascismo: Storia di Giustizia e Libertà* (Rome, 2017); David Ward, *Antifascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943–46* (Vancouver, 1996).

[24]Renato Camurri, "Idee in movimento: l'esilio degli intellettuali italiani negli Stati Uniti (1930–1945)," *Memoria e Ricerca* 31 (2009), 43–62, at 47.

[25]Ward, *Antifascisms*, 124. Bresciani, *Quale Antifascismo*, 32.

[26]Ward, *Antifascisms*, 124–5. Bresciani, *Quale Antifascismo*, 15, 187, 22. Also see Corrado Malandrino, *Socialismo e Libertà: Autonomie, Federalismo. Europea da Rosselli a Silone* (Milan, 1990).

[27]Chiaromonte, "Nota sulla civiltà e le utopie," 96.

[28]Ibid., 96, 108.

[29]Ihde, "Phenomenology in America," 361. Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 4, 51. Also see Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927–1961* (Ithaca, 2005); Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York, 2003).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

As Stefanos Geroulanos has demonstrated, the early interpretations of Husserl and Heidegger and symbolic rereadings of Hegel developed in interwar France inaugurated "a new philosophical background" which shifted away from totalizing visions and the monist subject and toward notions of an entrapped human whose finitude, first-person experience, and free moral choice were also delaminated from bourgeois individualism.[30] This "philosophical event," as Geroulanos notes, relocated "the subject within an ontological horizon that precedes and contextualizes the Cartesian cogito and delegitimates philosophical reliance on it," subverting "the classical transcendental juxtaposition of subject to object" and traditional separation between human and reality by recognizing the subject's "perennially unsuccessful attempt to come to terms with … a world that it plays a part in forming but cannot fully comprehend"—conceptual moves radically destabilizing "the prevalent figure of man as independent observer, actor, and interpreter of the world."[31] Though not belonging directly to the philosophical discourse space, the GL movement, heavily composed of intellectuals, was proximate to these conceptual transformations, as its debates openly engaged conversations in history, sociology, and economics that traversed philosophical concerns. Moreover, several GL collaborators attended the Sorbonne or frequented the Left Bank, and movement publications addressed the work of figures including philosopher–historian Élie Halévy, left-wing literary star Malraux, and philosopher–sociologist Georges Gurvitch—the latter an early advocate of phenomenology in France whose juridical pluralism, conceiving "social law arising spontaneously and independently of the state's juridical order," had considerable purchase in GL circles.[32]

Already familiar with Husserl and noted for his love of Plato, Chiaromonte contributed actively to this context, exploring the relay among politics, subjectivity, and modern European culture. In 1934 and 1935 he participated in Paul Desjardins's Décades de Pontigny conferences alongside leading European intellectuals and political figures, including Moravia, Rosselli, and Gurvitch.[33] He attended the 1935 International Congress for the Defense of Culture with Rosselli, Malraux, and Gaetano Salvemini—writing a series of related articles for GL—and, again with Malraux, was present at the 1936 International Writers Association meeting.[34]

[30]Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 51, 56–8. Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 17. This "philosophical event" involved Strauss, Roger Caillois, Raymond Aron, Wahl, Emmanuel Levinas, Georges Bataille, and Sartre, among others.

[31]Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 51, 15–16, 8.

[32]Ibid., 17, 3–4. Bresciani, *Quale Antifascismo*, 122; Marco Bresciani, *La rivoluzione perduta* (Bologna, 2009), 187. H. S. Jones, "Catholic Intellectuals and the Invention of Pluralism in France," *Modern Intellectual History* 18/2 (2021), 497–519, at 508–9; Panizza, *Biografia*, 105. For instance, Franco Venturi attended the Sorbonne and Giorgio de Santillana lectured there; both were avidly engaged with contemporary intellectual debates. Chiaromonte and friends frequented the Latin Quarter's iconic Café Capoulade. Philosopher Brice Parain and Sorbonne professor Pierre Pascal were proximate to GL circles.

[33]See Ignazio Silone, Alberto Moravia, Paolo Milano, and Enzo Tagliacozzo, "Ricordo di Nicola Chiaromonte," Radio *RAI* broadcast, 11 March 1972. Bianco, *Nicola Chiaromonte e il tempo della malafede*, 1. Panizza, *Biografia*, 15. Santillana, Angelo Tasca, and Gurvitch were also present. The 1934 *décade* addressed "totalitarian" states. François Chaubet, *Paul Desjardins et les décades de Pontigny* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2000), 237–67.

[34]Bresciani, *Quale Antifascismo*, 148. Panizza, *Biografia*, 15, 93, 102–5. Herbert Lottman, *The Left Bank: Writers, Artists, and Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (New York, 1982), 2, 42. Lottman notes, "Every significant writer with a social conscience was invited" to the congress.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Indeed, regularly frequenting Malraux and his salon during this period, Chiaromonte also befriended philosopher–sociologist Raymond Aron—who, fluent in the ideas of Heidegger, at the time was attending Alexandre Kojève's famous seminar on Hegel and in 1937 delivered a doctoral thesis articulating a shockingly radical "refutation of progressive rationalism."[35]

Yet Chiaromonte's most important friendship in Paris developed with Andrea Caffi, a Russian Italian student of Simmel and participant in the 1905 Russian Revolution who, never a Marxist–Leninist, was afterwards imprisoned by the Bolsheviks. A significant influence on GL debates given his knowledge of Russian revolutionary events and experience with political conspiracy, Caffi's vision of a unified, antifascist Europe was highly critical of centralized power and national sovereignty.[36] Caffi's pluralistic, homophilic conception of sociability as a form of noncoercive political attachment was particularly impactful for Chiaromonte. Indeed, their close friendship was cemented by a conviction that antifascism should promote not the traditional hierarchical political forms that they saw GL predominantly inclined to support but a federated internationalism that operated horizontally, leveraging guilds, associations, and other small groups in the underground work of preparing a better society.[37]

This approach reflected Caffi's and Chiaromonte's shared understanding of the Fascist dictatorship's relationship with Enlightenment rationality. Having joined GL as Nazism was ascending, Chiaromonte considered fascism a new, not uniquely Italian political genre resulting from the flaws of modernity and its philosophical underpinnings. His comparisons of "the State of Mussolini with that of Stalin and the eventual 'Third Empire' of Hitler" saw these regimes distinctively exploiting the social, economic, and cultural disorientations precipitated by World War I to consolidate totalizing power: the rise of serial production, the mass market, and standardized consumption, together with bureaucratic centralization aimed at enhancing mobilization, had calcified the social energies and forms of togetherness naturally characterizing human experience, resulting in a wide politicization and militarization of everyday life and in a modern subject lacking meaningful experiences of interrelationality.[38] Despite recognizing the "crisis of Western civilization" to be an abused "formula," Chiaromonte nonetheless believed "[t]here is a crisis, and it is profound": it extended beyond the breakdown of industrial capitalism to implicate the entire political, cultural, technological, and religious structure of Europe, as systemic weaknesses transformed entire populations, especially "from

[35]Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 87, 91, 37. Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 58. Lottman, *The Left Bank*, 22, 42. On Malraux's salon see Mary McAuliffe, *Paris on the Brink* (New York, 2018). The seminar "attracted those who would make up the next generation of [French] intellectuals." Denis Hollier, *Absent without Leave: French Literature under the Threat of War* (Cambridge, 1997), 78.

[36]On Caffi see Bresciani, *La rivoluzione perduta*; and Giampiero Landi, ed., *Andrea Caffi, un socialista libertario. Atti del Convegno (Bologna, 7 novembre 1993)* (Bologna, 1993).

[37]Panizza, *Biografia*, 122–3. On Caffi and Chiaromonte see Marco Bresciani, "'Cosa Sperare?' Tra Andrea Caffi e Nicola Chiaromonte: un carteggio sulla rivoluzione (1932–1955)," in Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 15–76. In this sense, Caffi's thinking resonated with Simmel's work on social forms. Bresciani, *La rivoluzione perduta*, 210.

[38]Cesare Panizza, "La morte si chiama fascismo: L'analisi del fascismo di Nicola Chiaromonte," *Quaderni di Storia contemporanea* 36 (2004), 62–83, at 64–5. Nicola Chiaromonte, "Lettera di un giovane dall'Italia," in Chiaromonte, *Scritti politici e civili* (Milan, 1976), 11–17, esp. 17, 14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

1914 on," into anonymous, amorphous masses that were passive and subject to demagogic manipulation but could become "the irresistible force" of revolution if "agitated for reasons of conscience."[39]

In this sense, the failures of the modern nation-state and the rise of mass society had direct consequences for ordinary experience: structural breakdown and collective loss of faith in the ideals constituting Europe's conceptual foundations had undermined the frameworks previously supplying meaning, generating a nihilism easily manipulated by charismatic leaders who, reducing togetherness to instrumental relation with the nation-state, presented totalitarian belonging as a substitute for sociality.[40] Chiaromonte's analysis thus emphasized how fascism "arrogates discretional powers not only over the bodies but also the consciences" of populations: it "monitors and prescribes the way in which one must feel and think" and "demands unanimity in addition to absolute obedience," producing a mass subject unified not by interpersonal obligations, shared interests, or solidarity, but by force.[41] Responding to the complete "moral, social, political, economic disintegration" evinced by the rise of European fascisms thus required not recovery of lost beliefs or previous systems but a sweeping overhaul that would enable richer alternatives to unfold.[42] In this sense, opposing fascism—the secular anticlerical Chiaromonte argued—was above all "a question of the moral order," since merely posing questions about the value of human life "in a fascist atmosphere" put its entire system "in doubt."[43]

This account impressed many in GL, including Rosselli, who credited Chiaromonte with introducing the notion of the mass to GL's understanding of fascism, and Caffi, who shared Chiaromonte's reading of the European crisis.[44] Indeed, considering politics a "relation of the religious order," unfolding across multiple experiential domains with "irreducible" force, Chiaromonte and Caffi urged GL to look beyond traditional political parties to transnational networks that might radically disrupt fascist control by subverting its violent *raison d'état*.[45] This implied not direct action against the dictatorship—especially since GL operated primarily from abroad against an entrenched power—but cultivating space for resistance outside its logic of force and propaganda. Operating below this plane, where it could think and act autonomously, GL could prepare the regime's downfall by helping "spark" an "antifascist culture": encouraging others critical of or unsatisfied with fascism to take refuge in "[s]ponteanous life," "in the little space where the *gendarme* does not penetrate."[46] For Chiaromonte, this meant "thinking outside politics," opposing the state with "an existence, a mode of concrete and determined relations. Only there on living ground is it possible to carry out … the actual transformation of social relations, from which alone can come effective

[39]Chiaromonte, "Lettera," 13; Chiaromonte, "La morte si chiama fascismo," 44, 40, 65.
[40]Chiaromonte, "La morte," 59, 40, 43.
[41]Chiaromonte, "Lettera," 14.
[42]Ibid. 13–14.
[43]Chiaromonte, "La morte," 64; Nicola Chiaromonte, "Sul Fascismo," in Chiaromonte, *Scritti*, 89–103, at 102.
[44]Panizza, *Biografia*, 83.
[45]Quoted in Marco Bresciani, "Cassandra a Parigi," *Lo Straniero* 134–5 (2011), 57–72, at 66.
[46]Ibid., 61. Chiaromonte, "Lettera," 15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

resistance to oppression and … acts of disobedience and revolt."[47] Moving outside the formal political domain, GL could work not for the "restoration of ruined forms," such as the political parties of the liberal state, "but the palingenesis" of new ways of thinking and being that would draw others to its cause—remaking the society that had produced fascism in the first place.[48] For the courage to overcome self-interest or self-preservation and engage in revolt, Chiaromonte believed, was born of something more than just opposition to tyranny: it came from standing up in *the name of something else*, having "a real and concrete faith to fight for."[49]

This utopian stance conflicted with Rosselli's position: considering Mussolini's regime less stable, he envisioned more immediate opposition, while strong domestic repression and dissolution of the antifascist coalition in France had him seeking allies.[50] With the outbreak of war in Ethiopia in 1935 and formation of popular fronts in France and Spain, Rosselli was positioning GL closer to communist alliances and imagining a political party.[51] Chiaromonte had already challenged Rosselli's agenda as Rome coordinator: perceiving the link between political radicalization and affective ties, he had engaged groups of friends sympathetic to antifascism but not necessarily inclined toward direct action.[52] By late 1935, as the Communist International solidified behind the European left, he further embraced this approach—advocating (alongside Caffi, Renzo Giua, and Mario Levi) the "silent, patient, tenacious task" of creating via such groups a resistance culture whose goal was not "the fall of fascism pure and simple" but ensuring "that the end of fascism is the beginning of a true transformation of Italian society."[53] After Rosselli, who considered Chiaromonte an influential voice in the movement, refused to print his "Frank Explanation" of the group's dissenting position in early 1936, it dissociated from GL.[54] When Chiaromonte enlisted soon afterwards in a Spanish Republican air squadron (as "bombardier in the plane in which Malraux was the machine gunner"), firsthand experience of the power consolidation attending antifascism's entwinement with Stalinism only intensified his perception of a kinship between communism and fascism and his conviction that political parties not only were conservative but also eradicated the very sort of social energies which had given spontaneous birth to the Republican cause.[55]

[47]Quoted in Panizza, *Biografia*, 86–7.

[48]Ibid., 16.

[49]Chiaromonte, "Lettera," 12–14; Nicola Chiaromonte, "Tentativo di un parlar chiaro," in Chiaromonte, *Lo spettatore critico*, 14–20, esp. 15.

[50]Bresciani, *Quale*, 94. Bianco, *Nicola Chiaromonte e il tempo della malafede*, 39. Panizza, *Biografia*, 105–6.

[51]Bresciani, *Quale*, 172. Michele Battini, "Carlo Rosselli, 'Giustizia e Libertà' and the Enigma of Justice," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/2 (2012), 205–19, esp. 213. The movement eventually birthed the Partito d'azione in 1942.

[52]Panizza, *Biografia*, 96.

[53]Quoted in Bresciani, "Cassandra," 66.

[54]Chiaromonte to Rosselli, 30 Nov. 1935, "Lettere di un dissidio in Giustizia e libertà," Biblioteca Gino Bianco, at www.bibliotecaginobianco.it/?p=97&t=le%2Dlettere%2Ddella%2Drottura%2D%281%29.

[55]Abel, *Follies*, 136. Rosselli funded Chiaromonte's enlistment despite the rupture. Chiaromonte left Spain after six months due to Soviet consolidation of the Republican forces. See Panizza, *Biografia*, 141–5; Bianco, *Nicola Chiaromonte e il tempo della malafede*, 29. On Malraux's squadron see McAuliffe, *Paris on the Brink*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Chiaromonte spent the later 1930s alongside the GL dissenters in antifascist initiatives involving ex-communists and independent leftists, still proximate to GL circles but hoping to reconceive socialism outside Soviet-backed lines.[56] After the Nazi invasion of France dispersed the group, Chiaromonte later confessed to Aron the deep imprint left by this band of friends, "who kept each other company in isolation": "Though for seven years our principal occupation was to be Cassandras, that period appears today like an era of great fervor and carefree youth."[57] Indeed, this experience of solidarity became exemplary for Chiaromonte of the sort of tenacious resistance, disinterest in power, and affective bonds necessary to sustain utopian commitments.

Plato and Husserl in Manhattan

On 10 June 1940 Chiaromonte fled Paris for the unoccupied zone—reaching Toulouse, then was imprisoned in Marseille.[58] In August 1941—after a period in Algeria, where he met Camus—he succeeded in following friends Paolo Milano, Lionello Venturi, and Giorgio de Santillana to the US.[59] The refugee network Chiaromonte joined in New York had been partially constructed by Max Ascoli, a connection from GL circles instrumental in getting Italian refugees under the auspices of the Emergency Rescue Committee who from 1939 to 1941 was dean at the New School for Social Research—where he facilitated teaching positions for Milano and Venturi.[60] These Italian contacts also constituted Chiaromonte's bridge into the New York intellectual world. Indeed, first introduced by Santillana to Meyer Schapiro in Paris in 1939, Chiaromonte resumed contact with him during his first year in Manhattan.[61] Schapiro, an art scholar at Columbia University also affiliated with the New School, was active in refugee assistance initiatives and an

[56]During this period, Chiaromonte worked on a clandestine antifascist radio transmission. The group of dissidents still frequented GL figures, especially Franco Venturi, Garosci, and Carlo Levi. Chiaromonte also frequented Aron and A. O. Hirschmann; like Caffi, he engaged with Collège di Sociologie debates. Panizza, *Biografia*, 139, 157, 126. Bresciani, *Quale*, 228–9, 115, 33–4.

[57]Quoted in Bresciani, *La rivoluzione perduta*, 237.

[58]Chiaromonte fled Paris with Mario Levi, Franco Venturi, and Caffi—losing his first wife in Toulouse. On this period see Panizza, *Biografia*, 160–71; Bresciani, *La rivoluzione perduta*, 236.

[59]His Italian network in New York also included Niccolò Tucci, Ugo 'Mike' Stille, Aldo Bruzzichelli, Lamberto Borghi, Costatino Nivola, and Tagliacozzo, among others. Chiaromonte worked in the Italian section of the Office for War Information during this period, leaving the role in August 1943.

[60]Ascoli helped facilitate Chiaromonte's visa and passage to the US and also provided financial support. On Ascoli and Italian refugees see Ercole Camurani, "Max Ascoli: una scelta americana," in Renato Camurri, ed., *Max Ascoli: Antifascista, intellettuale, giornalista* (Milan, 2012), 88–106; Renato Camurri, "Idee" and "Max Ascoli and Italian Intellectuals in Exile in the United States before the Second World War," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15/5 (2010), 644–56.

[61]Schapiro to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 16 Feb. 1966, Meyer Shapiro Papers, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter MSP), Box 118, Folder 19. Schapiro knew several of Chiaromonte's friends: Mario Soldati had become friendly with Schapiro by 1930 (likely having taken a course with him in New York). Soldati offered to introduce Schapiro to renowned art historian (and GL affiliate) Lionello Venturi and to Moravia; he also put Schapiro in contact with Ascoli. Schapiro and Ascoli had begun corresponding by 1934, Schapiro and Venturi by 1936. By 1937 Schapiro also knew Santillana—who had begun working at US universities, including Columbia and the New School. In August 1939 Santillana encouraged Schapiro to see Chiaromonte in Paris, sending him Chiaromonte's address and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

established figure in New York intellectual circles; he introduced Chiaromonte to James T. Farrell and Dwight Macdonald, also part of this milieu, in 1943.[62]

In the early 1940s, the New York intellectual community was organized loosely around *Partisan Review* (hereafter *PR*), a small-circulation highbrow magazine of literature and culture with an "independent Marxist, but anti-Stalinist," editorial line that fused "'social concerns and literary standards'" into cosmopolitan, modernist criticism.[63] Having "lived through, or actually fought in, all the major conflicts of the time about which most of the intellectuals of New York only argued," Chiaromonte, as Barrett noted, cut a "striking" figure in this milieu.[64] The authority ascribed to Chiaromonte's knowledge of Italian politics and personal familiarity with antifascist resistance, especially as Allied forces invaded Sicily in 1943, was only augmented by his reconnection with Salvemini—a recognized voice in the American left-wing landscape whom Chiaromonte began helping assemble the US antifascist newspaper *Italia Libera*.[65]

Yet if, as Abel recalls, Chiaromonte "was sought after, praised, published, wined, dined, and regularly consulted" in 1940s New York, there were nonetheless points of dissonance between him and his new intellectual scene—largely arising from the leading role it assigned Sidney Hook.[66] In fact, Chiaromonte became within this context a sort of competing maestro vis-à-vis Hook, who was close to John Dewey and advanced a naturalistic pragmatism which, though anti-Stalinist, conceived Marx and Dewey as kindred philosophers of "purposive action" championing rationalism, humanism, and the scientific method.[67] Considering intellectual inquiry a process of observation, prediction, and induction whose proper object was "social, historical, or natural fact" and whose exemplar was ordinary problem solving, Hook charged philosophy with explaining "why a truth matters"; he thus followed Dewey in positioning "practical activity" and the satisfaction of concrete

an introduction card. Schapiro to Chiaromonte, 15 June 1948, NCP, Box 3, Folder 76. MSP, Box 122, Folder 7 (Santillana); Box 111, Folder 18 (Ascoli); Box 168, Folder 17 (Soldati).

[62]Chiaromonte to Schapiro, 12 Aug. 1943, MSP, Box 118, Folder 19; Farrell to Schapiro, 4 Aug. 1943, MSP, Box 688. Schapiro helped secure visas for refugee intellectuals and knew many exiles. In the summer of 1943 Schapiro, Farrell, and Macdonald discussed creating a committee to support Italian refugees—Chiaromonte's name seems to have come up in their conversations at this time. This was the same period as Macdonald's schism with *Partisan Review*.

[63]Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 18, 76.

[64]Barrett, *The Truants*, 91. While stationed in Italy, Barrett facilitated Chiaromonte's communication with family and friends—including GL figures, such as Alberto Tarchiani, Vindice Cavallera, and Lussu—by transmitting messages and packages. See NCP, Box 3, Folder 92.

[65]Enzo Tagliacozzo, "Il Gruppo di 'L'Italia Libera' di New York tra il 1943 e il 1945," in Antonio Varsori, ed., *L'Antifascismo italiano negli Stati Uniti durante la seconda guerra mondiale* (Rome, 1984), 385–99, at 385. Chiaromonte's positions were more radical than Salvemini's, though both opposed Allied policy on Italy. The two figures nonetheless expressed mutual respect and shared a deep sense of moral integrity. Chiaromonte's early US writings pivoted around this firsthand knowledge. For instance, his first *Partisan Review* article "On Italy" (signed as Mario D'andrea), which reviewed recent writing by Salvemini, remarked, "I remember Salvemini in Paris, in 1935, making a very short appearance on the platform of the Congress of Antifascist Writers." Mario D'andrea [Chiaromonte], "On Italy," *Partisan Review*, Sept.–Oct. 1943, 459–60.

[66]Abel, *Important Nonsense* (Buffalo, 1987), 180.

[67]Ulf Schulenberg, *Marxism, Pragmatism, and Postmetaphysics: From Finding to Making* (Cham, 2019), 26, 30. Christopher Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook* (Ithaca, 1997), 214.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

needs "at the centre of experience."[68] Though this previously had implied support for revolutionary struggles, by 1940 Hook, who considered political and philosophical idealism intellectually irresponsible, now framed scientific investigation of reality as more of "a circumscribing boundary" or "litmus test"—a means, as scholars have noted, of identifying "achievable collective goals and effective plans of action" and of resolving "normative conflicts" via "experimental flexibility" and repudiation of the unverifiable.[69] His naturalistic pragmatism thus mediated Dewey's rather than replicating it: it was more open to logical positivism and "empiricist separation of fact and value," more attached "to the scientific than to the ethical aspects of social analysis."[70] Yet Hook upheld Dewey's understanding of the individual's interaction with their environment as a productive, teleological process and belief that science was the ameliorative driver of modern society—positions with strong implications for thinking about history and for larger cultural debates regarding national identity.[71]

Hook's philosophy bore considerable weight for the New York intellectuals, especially *PR*'s editors: Barrett was hired by Hook into New York University's Department of Philosophy and *PR* cofounder William Philips had studied under him, while the literary criticism of fellow cofounder Rhav mirrored Hook's own intellectual evolution, moving from revolutionary commitments to what Leslie Fiedler called a "minimal Marxism" premised in "a naturalistic and rationalist position" and "faith in 'scientific method' as the sole criterion of truth."[72] *PR*'s editorial line hence filtered Hook's (and Dewey's) ideas into a pragmatist modernism which, though it did not emphasize scientific themes, downplayed formalism and mysticism in favor of experimentation, social concerns, and human potential—considering science's "concrete observation of our surroundings" complementary to high-modernist aesthetics and nurturing of the literary through its relay with reality, human agency, and progress.[73] *PR* moreover echoed Hook in conceiving absolute truths as abstractions inviting ideology, prejudice, and authoritarianism, and thus as antithetical to facts empirically verified by experience or revisable social values.[74] Indeed, in this setting a "scientific attitude" signified as a "freedom from dogma, unexamined tradition, and self-interest" that was classless, secular, and encouraging of a democratizing ethics—especially for intellectuals (like Rhav,

[68]Matthew C. Bagger, "Dewey's Bulldog: Sidney Hook, Pragmatism, and Naturalism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79/3 (2011), 562–86, at 568. Robert Talisse, "Pragmatism and the Cold War," in Cheryl Misak, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy* (Oxford, 2008), 254–68, esp. 259. Cheryl Misak, *American Pragmatists* (Oxford, 2013), 114. David Sidorsky, "Charting the Intellectual Career of Sidney Hook," in Matthew J. Cotter, ed., *Sidney Hook Reconsidered* (Amherst, 2004), 19–68, esp. 31.

[69]Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, 198, 214. Andrew Jewett, "Canonizing Dewey: Naturalism, Logical Empiricism, and the Idea of American Philosophy," *Modern Intellectual History* 8/1 (2011), 91–125, esp. 106.

[70]Misak, *American Pragmatists*, 156. Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of Liberalism* (New York, 1995), 230, 300–1.

[71]Andrew Jewett, "Science and Religion in Postwar America," in Joel Isaac, James T. Kloppenberg, Michael O'Brien, and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, eds., *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2016), 237–56, at 239. David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture* (Princeton, 1996), 161.

[72]Sidorsky, "Charting the Intellectual Career of Sidney Hook," 44. Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 51. Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Ordeal of Criticism," *Commentary*, Nov. 1949, 504–5, esp. 504. Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, 168.

[73]William Phillips, "Thomas Mann: Humanism in Exile," *Partisan Review*, May 1938, 3–10, esp. 8.

[74]Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, 173.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Philips, Hook, and much of New York's intelligentsia) coming from Jewish immigrant backgrounds.[75]

Yet this conceptual framework also forcefully delegitimated other philosophical currents: "'Heidegger is the backdoor to theology' Sidney Hook warned us at the time," Barrett later recalled.[76] It was also inclined toward naturalization. As "one of the first North American philosophers to comment on phenomenology," Hook had developed an interpretation of Husserl (still relevant to contemporary Anglo-American readings) emphasizing the latter's scientific impulses.[77] These attitudes help contextualize Hook's well-known 1943 *PR* essay "The New Failure of Nerve," which disparaged Continental "irrationalism" and saw secularism under siege by a rising interest in "moral and theoretical" concerns reverberating the "bagpipes of transcendental metaphysics" and pronouncing "the bankruptcy of Western European civilization" a "direct result of … the scientific and naturalistic spirit."[78] Elaborating this position in 1944 in "Naturalism and Democracy," Hook presented the "search for a center of value that transcends human interest," support for "demonstrably impracticable" or not "completely realizable" ideals, "concern with mystery rather than problems and the belief that myth and mysteries are modes of knowledge" as stances oblivious to "rational experiment and analysis as the only reliable instruments for … mastering the cultural and social chaos of our age."[79] Such views articulated a style of New York naturalism that became increasingly pervasive, as Bruce Kucklick and Andrew Jewett note, in postwar US intellectual culture, even as Dewey's fame with academic philosophers of the era dwindled.[80] Indeed, if institutional philosophy saw a postwar shift away from pragmatism, many New York intellectuals—public figures often adjacent to the academy or belonging to other fields—continued to channel its idiom.[81] Though not all were as emphatic as Hook, and their faith in science later became punctuated with

[75]Jewett, "Science and Religion in Postwar America," 237. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 122. Misak, *American Pragmatists*, 165. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 155. Also see Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture*; Sidney Hook, "Naturalism and Democracy," in Yervant H. Krikorian, ed., *Naturalism and the Human Spirit* (New York, 1944), 40–64.

[76]Barrett, *The Truants*, 123.

[77]"Numerous opinions that prevail among contemporary Anglo-American philosophers concerning the nature and value of Edmund Husserl's writings echo those expressed by John Dewey's student Sidney Hook during the early 1930s." Rodney K. B. Parker, "A Pragmatist's Impression of Phenomenology: Dewey's Bulldog Meets Husserl's Terrier," *Discipline Filosofiche* 300/1 (2020), 81–110, esp. 82. Until the late 1950s, most US philosophers promoting phenomenology tended to naturalize it. See Nunziante, "La fenomenologia negli Stati Uniti"; Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (Cambridge, 2010), 28–9.

[78]Sidney Hook, "The New Failure of Nerve," in Neil Jumonville, ed., *The New York Intellectuals Reader* (New York, 2007), 71–90, at 72–3, 78.

[79]Hook, "Naturalism and Democracy," 40, 43, 48, 50–51.

[80]Bruce Kucklick, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720–2000* (Oxford, 2003), 195–6. Jewett, "Canonizing Dewey," 120.

[81]Especially Rhav, Philips, Howe, Schapiro, and Harold Rosenberg. On pragmatism in the US academy and its purported eclipse see Talisse, "Pragmatism and the Cold War"; Misak, *American Pragmatists*; Bruce Kucklick, "Philosophy and Inclusion in the United States, 1929–2001," in David Hollinger, ed., *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II* (Baltimore, 2006), 159–85. Scholarship on the New York intellectuals can be situated in relation to the intellectual through-lines connecting Dewey, the New Left, and the rise of neo-pragmatism in the late twentieth-century humanities. For instance, criticism that *politics* overlooked Deweyan pragmatism recurs in Sumner. On pragmatism and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

recognition of "tragedy, irony … contradiction" and the drawbacks of technology, such insights were largely naturalized and aligned with pragmatist commitments to "concrete, situated," and scientifically informed problem solving.[82]

For Chiaromonte this intellectual ethos disclosed a "superstition of science" that was itself dogmatic.[83] Arriving in Manhattan "totally obsessed" by the idea that "we had arrived at humanity's zero hour"—and identifying an alternative relay among science, ideology, and authoritarianism to the one emphasized by Hook—he sought a secular, immanent, but durable moral anchor, long convinced that optimism about historical progress and human agency had been extinguished.[84] Thus while *PR*'s editors considered the impulse to investigate "the ultimate questions—an idea so utterly unpragmatic that one is almost tempted to call it 'un-American,'" Chiaromonte accentuated the very concern sidelined by Hookian practical judgment: final ends, the question not of *how to achieve* our goals but of what they *ought to be*.[85] This position was premised in his view of politics as, "above all, a moral question … of choosing what a man should be"—or rather, his experience of antifascism as the personal decision "not to yield," though fascism had "put an end to politics" and, demanding "nothing less than unconditional surrender," "made it impossible any longer to regard morals as a private affair."[86] With this memory in mind, as "defense against the almost irresistible pressure of American 'pragmatism,'" Chiaromonte in New York read "all I could of Husserl"—becoming increasingly attuned to individual consciousness and its situatedness and consolidating a methodology which recognized the future as unknowable, understanding as relational.[87] Joining reading groups on Plato, Spinoza, and Kierkegaard, he correspondingly promoted writers such as Tolstoy, who challenged conceptions of history as rational, as well as libertarian and anarchist thinkers such as Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Herzen, who countered Enlightenment assumptions with communalism, federalism, and mutuality.[88]

Later describing Chiaromonte as a utopian "Platonist" (in an Aristotelian landscape), McCarthy recalled his outlook as expressing cultural difference: "Nicola introduced into our American circle something of Europe: a Europe different not only from America but also from that other Europe—which we had known until

---

the US left see James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York, 2001).

[82]Daniel Wickberg, "Modernisms Endless: Ironies of the American Mid-century," *Modern Intellectual History* 10/1 (2013), 207–19, at 217. Ihde, "Phenomenology in America," 345. Matthew Festenstein, "John Dewey: Inquiry, Ethics, and Democracy," in Misak, *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*, 87–109, esp. 97. On rising interest in tragedy and ambiguity see William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Prospect Heights, 1991).

[83]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 290.

[84]Nicola Chiaromonte, "Albert Camus," *Dissent*, Summer 1960, 266–70, at 267.

[85]Philip Rhav, *Essays on Literature and Politics* (Boston, 1978), 319.

[86]Nicola Chiaromonte, "From Italian Prisons," *New Republic*, 30 Aug. 1943, 273–5, at 273.

[87]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 154–5. During the 1946 US trip during which he frequently saw Chiaromonte, Camus also emphasized the dominance of pragmatism, quipping in his journal that under the heading of "Philosophy" in a New Jersey library one found only William James. Camus, *American Journals*, 38.

[88]Abel, *Nonsense*, 181.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

then only through Proust and Gide."[89] Gesturing toward Chiaromonte's interest in what we might recognize as non-Hegelian and perspectivist lines of thought, and positioning him in relation to a literary current attentive to the experiences of consciousness and relationality, McCarthy nonetheless sidestepped the connotation that 1940s New York ascribed to such "Platonism": detachment from empirical reality. Moreover, given prevailing understandings during the period of a Europe/America dichotomy and the *PR* world's highbrow aesthetic commitments, the embodiment of Europe she attributed to Chiaromonte can also be considered an index of prestige, rivalry, and elitism—especially as the US's global ascendance and the *PR* milieu's concomitant rediscovery of national intellectual traditions loosened the legitimacy that the community accredited to (and drew from) "Old World" culture. This helps explain why, if Abel later objected that Chiaromonte had "plac[ed] European thought and European politics above American thinking," Chiaromonte, feeling intellectually alienated in New York, had found it necessary "to retrace many already-beaten paths" for fear of being misunderstood and appearing "a snob"—since, he wrote to Caffi, "America is profoundly hostile to what in Europe, and especially in France, is considered intelligence."[90] "The fact, my dear friend, is that if there's anyone who has true need of an injection of 'metaphysics', it is really the Americans": "gratuitousness and spirit of insouciance do not have a place here," "they ask (that is, everyday life asks) immediately 'where these take you,'" since intellectual seriousness in America means "attributing importance only to the practical consequences of what one thinks."[91]

The political implications of these philosophical divergences became crystallized through Chiaromonte's impact on *politics*, the magazine directed by Macdonald from 1944 to 1949 which became sort of a rival to *PR*. Chiaromonte seems to have met Macdonald around the time of the latter's mid-1943 departure from the *PR* editorial board: Macdonald had long been averse to the board's positions on the war and privileging of literary-cultural over political content; he also challenged Hook's recent "Failure of Nerve"—questioning not its defense of science but its disinterest in exploring why pessimism and moral concerns were gaining intellectual ground.[92] "Sympathetic to" Macdonald in the ensuing "editorial

[89]Mary McCarthy, *Conversations with Mary McCarthy*, ed. Carol Gelderman (Jackson, 1991), 241. McCarthy, "Prefazione," 11–12.

[90]Abel, *Nonsense*, 181. Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 159, 319. Bellow similarly wrote, "I knew Chiaromonte well, liked him … considered him to be one of the better European intellectuals of the Fifties and Sixties. But Nick was, in many ways, a standard product, often deficient in taste, snobbish … The reason Nick and Hannah [Arendt] failed to notice the congealment of intellectuals into their own 'stratum' … was that they were terribly proud of their own super-eligibility for the highest of all strata. Their American friends could never hope to join them there. We were very nice but not *kulturny* enough to be taken seriously. But I shan't go on about Nick, who was certainly a considerable person. I don't always respect the rule of *de mortuis* but in his case I shall." Benjamin Taylor, ed., *Saul Bellow Letters* (New York, 2010), 354–5.

[91]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 306, 319.

[92]In the summer of 1943 Schapiro and Macdonald were aligned against Hook and *Partisan Review* cofounders Philips and Rhav. Schapiro challenged Hook in David Merian [Meyer Schapiro], "The Nerve of Sidney Hook," *Partisan Review*, May–June 1943, 248–57; Macdonald in Dwight Macdonald, "The Future of Democratic Values," *Partisan Review*, July–August 1943, 321–43. In August 1943 Chiaromonte asked Schapiro to introduce him to Macdonald; the two likely met sometime that fall. Macdonald's memory of their first meeting was slippery: he recalled first learning of Chiaromonte from Schapiro in summer 1943

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

wrangle," Chiaromonte quickly became a "contributor, advisor and talent scout" for his new magazine, which Macdonald later dubbed an "Italian-American co-production": "the American being me and the Italian being my dear friend, Chiaromonte, who was a close collaborator from the beginning."[93] By 1944, Macdonald was conceiving *politics* as a response to perceptions of a "terrible moral and intellectual void" and a vehicle for the "uncompromising radicalism" of "foolish utopians," since "critical analysis of old ideas and institutions is the precondition for the construction of new ones."[94]

Indeed, *politics*'s inaugural issue already indexed Chiaromonte's political vision. Identifying the magazine as democratic socialist in orientation, Macdonald's first editorial statement expressed desire to create "a center of consciousness on the Left" which, though employing Marxist analysis, would evaluate events "with the yardstick of basic values" and "broaden political comment … to include all kinds of social, technological, cultural and psychological factors"—nodding toward the meaning of "Politics to the Greeks, who were experts at it" and finding "[m]ost political writing today … superficial because it limits 'politics' too narrowly to the policies of certain parties and leaders, and … concerns itself too largely with the immediate future."[95] Macdonald's notes for the statement moreover paired disavowal of conservative political attitudes with declaration that "the Left is also in a bad way": its failures and disillusionments, reflected by the rise of nationalisms and "breakdown of international visions," Macdonald remarked, were resolvable by "neither reformism nor revolution"; they instead required an attitude that was "critical rather than positive."[96]

Peers quickly noted Chiaromonte's stamp on the magazine, and Chiaromonte himself recognized he was "the one who has most influence on [Macdonald]," though he considered the effect "aleatory": "he listens to me on little things and turns a deaf ear to others more essential."[97] Still, through *politics* Chiaromonte was able to draw attention to Gurvitch and Proudhon and to facilitate the publication of Caffi's "Violence and Sociability" and Simone Weil's "The *Iliad*, Or, The Poem of Force"—pieces Macdonald later confessed to being proudest of printing.[98] Though the ideas of the two friends did not always align, Macdonald shared

and meeting him in 1944, but also noted that Chiaromonte was involved with *politics* from the start, and the magazine's first issue reflects Chiaromonte's thinking. Chiaromonte to Schapiro, 21 Aug. 1943, MSP, Box 668. Macdonald to Chiaromonte, 7 April 1947, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter DMP), Box 10, Folder 241; Macdonald to Miriam Chiaromonte, 19 Jan. 1972, DMP, Box 10, Folder 240; 1968 *politics* reissue preface draft, DMP, Box 74, Folder 94.

[93]DMP, 1968.

[94]Quoted in Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 141. Dwight Macdonald, "'Here Lies Our Road' Said Writer to Reader," *politics*, Sept. 1944, 247–51, esp. 247.

[95]Dwight Macdonald, "Why Politics?", *politics*, Feb. 1944, 6–8, at 6–7.

[96]Ibid. "Why Politics?" draft, DMP, Box 79, Folder 166.

[97]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 246. Descriptions of Chiaromonte's influence are telling: McCarthy considered herself Chiaromonte's "convert"; Barrett called Chiaromonte Macdonald's "guru," noting it was about him that Philips had quipped, "Dwight is looking for a disciple who will tell him what to think." Vassar College Libraries, Mary McCarthy Papers (hereafter MMP), Box 187, Folder 7, McCarthy to Chiaromonte, March 6, 1968. Barrett, *The Truants*, 31–2.

[98]DMP, 1968. Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 380. Chiaromonte selected, edited, and translated letters from Caffi for publication. He introduced Macdonald to Tucci, who contributed a regular column, and to Nivola, who designed three covers.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Chiaromonte's interest in socialism's moral foundations, expansive conception of politics, and wariness of the modern state and of industrial society. If, as Macdonald later noted, the "common objection" to *politics* voiced by critics was its "Utopian" and "negative" tendency—its "hypercritical" attitude toward the scientific, progressive creed and interest in what Macdonald later called "metapolitics"—then it was Chiaromonte who contributed the magazine's signature themes.[99] Indeed, encouraging Macdonald to explore via *politics* the questions he did, Chiaromonte can be credited with helping him recognize how, as Sumner notes, "debates about militarism and the bureaucratic state, race and gender relations, and the moral autonomy of the individual were eclipsing the class issues that had preoccupied the Old Left."[100]

Hiroshima summer

The conflict that was engendered when this orientation being explored at *politics* encountered the Hookian conceptual framework championed at *PR* became apparent in August 1945, "Hiroshima summer"—which Chiaromonte spent on Cape Cod in conversations that Macdonald and McCarthy later considered pivotal: "a crossroads in my life. In fact, *the* crossroads," recalled McCarthy; "you've changed my whole intellectual outlook (you and the atom bomb)," Macdonald declared.[101] Chiaromonte's notebook from the period intimates what these discussions likely entailed. Among notes from Hook's *From Hegel to Marx*, Alfred North Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*, and Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*—as well as from Descartes, Kant, Sartre, Kierkegaard, and William James—it references Plato's Seventh Letter and Husserl's *Méditations cartésien*, identifying a shared epistemology underpinning "Socratic ignorance and Husserl's 'vow of poverty'": "absence of presuppositions ('I know only that I don't know anything') is the only fundamental principle of method—This preliminary assumption implies a constant act of faith in the *existence* of the universe as an object which infinitely transcends everything that can be said about it."[102] Remarking that such faith "implies the experience of the interrogation—the 'bewilderment'—the fact that the world has actually become a riddle," Chiaromonte's reflections presented human existence as "fragile, inconsistent … easily wrecked or distracted … made of contradictions"—indeed, "there is no meaning of human life outside of this condition"—and being as a state of perplexity: "consciousness of the absurdity and insurmountable riddle posed by the world."[103] With thought and "authentic philosophy" thus considered "activities that follow the moment when the world has been experienced as a collection of objects, a multitude of ways, and an absurdity," Chiaromonte framed "consciousness of the riddle" as "the presupposition of philosophy," meaning that "it is illegitimate to ask philosophy for a *solution* to this or that riddle or insurmountable limit."[104]

[99]Politics Past notes, DMP, Box 74, Folder 94.

[100]Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the* politics *Circle*, 87.

[101]McCarthy to Chiaromonte, 6 March 1968, MMP, Box 187, Folder 7; Macdonald to Chiaromonte, 7 April 1947, NCP, Box 2, Folder 52.

[102]Nicola Chiaromonte, Notebook [Truro, New York], 1945, NCP, Box 12, Folder 315, (hereafter 'Notebook 1945'), original emphasis.

[103]Chiaromonte, Notebook 1945.

[104]Ibid., added emphasis.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Such remarks signaled Chiaromonte's opposition to the attitude of consequentialism he perceived in peers inclined to rationalize and legitimate atomic nuclearism through reference to military outcomes, who rejected the question whether dropping the bombs was "a good thing to do" as "arbitrary and a sort of moral weakness."[105] Chiaromonte found this prevailing outlook underpinned by a conception of truth couched in terms of problem solving and results—assessing the atom bomb vis-à-vis its resolution of the problem for which it was invented, the Deweyan approach to ethical dilemmas—and thus implying that if something "is not proved more effective by … practical results—success—it is falser."[106] This stance disqualified not only speculative reflection on events, activity Chiaromonte considered inherently valuable "regardless of any practical conclusions reached," but also qualitative evaluation of the exercise of power.[107] Chiaromonte's complete repudiation of this approach was apparent in his September 1945 *politics* profile "Koestler, or Tragedy Made Futile"—a piece whose very title gestured toward the political possibility of negativism which mapped these critiques onto Koestler. Protesting that "the final test of his beliefs is success or failure," Chiaromonte maintained that Koestler "does not realize that by having accepted certain notions (Force against Appeasement, Democratic Order against Fascist Banditry, War against Surrender to Evil) he has placed himself on an 'official' level: a level on which questions are decided by Strong Measures, Efficiency, Good Generalship."[108] Not only did such triumphalism disallow discussions of responsibility or the problematizing of state discourses, it also suggested that "[w]hat people really are and feel does not count at all," since outcomes determine possibilities.[109]

The essay thus positioned Koestler as advancing an instrumentalism that was far from radical. Indeed, recalling the watershed moment experienced by those, like Koestler and himself, who had lived through the fall of France, Chiaromonte juxtaposed the presumptions of such a mind-set to the "genuine experience of Fate" presented by such events: "In the face of reality, one felt completely helpless. It was however left to one's free choice not to surrender to confusion, mystification, and evil."[110] Confronted with this decision, Chiaromonte contended, "Koestler had chosen the worst: a middle-of-the-road path between despair and … provisional hopes on the Lesser Evil."[111] Such accommodationist moderation, he argued, undermined the potential instead inhering in embrace of "unalloyed pessimism regarding the whole framework of the present society" when it was "founded on a conviction that does not depend on historical vicissitudes for its confirmation or disapproval."[112]

It is in this sense that Chiaromonte saw Plato and Husserl offering conceptual ground for a radical political stance which critiqued the "narrow interpretation of Kant and of modern philosophy in general" framing the "ultimate, or

[105]Chiaromonte, undated notebook [1944–5].
[106]Chiaromonte, Notebook 1945.
[107]Ibid.
[108]Nicola Chiaromonte, "Koestler, or Tragedy Made Futile," *politics*, Sept. 1945, 266–70, at 266–7.
[109]Ibid. 267.
[110]Ibid.
[111]Ibid.
[112]Ibid. 268.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

metaphysical, questions" as "absurd or unimportant."[113] Notes he formulated between 1945 and 1947 demonstrate that this political position featured a decentered, interrelational subject ("Man is a creature who can only know himself in relation to something that he thinks or does … Never complete. Always existing in relation to the other and *others*. Hence 'socratism'") who moved in a landscape resistant to the claims of Enlightenment modernity ("Rationalism sets certain limits … Irrationalism shows that these limits can always be denied, that they are fundamentally arbitrary") but found a durable orientation point in the immaterial constraints informing its existence—an "experience which tells me that *Truth is*" even if "I don't know what it is."[114] "The relativist," Chiaromonte noted, attuned only to historical ephemera and effective outcomes, is "incapable of conceiving himself 'in relation to …'":

> he asserts that whatever is said or done is an ultimate fact, and does not raise any further question except the question of its possible or probable consequences in the world of facts. The question of Truth for him is reduced to this, the factual. But to stake everything on the factual means precisely to assume that the question of truth has been solved once and for all: that Truth is the factual.[115]

Replacing speculative reflection and engagement with our experience of limit with truth-as-fact, Chiaromonte insisted, delimited thought in a manner that, rather than precluding ideology, only established a new regime of "Truth."

The search for new roads

These ideas played a vigorous role in the debates that emerged around "New Roads in Politics"—a section of *politics* launched in late 1945 which Macdonald dedicated, in light of the bombings, to reimagining radicalism outside prevailing intellectual idioms and "speculat[ing] on new approaches to the central problem: how to advance towards a society which shall be humanly satisfying."[116] "New Roads" marked what Macdonald later recognized as *politics*'s shift away from "'solutions' on the practical plane" and toward "problems without concrete, easily identifiable" answers.[117] Accompanied by the in-person discussion series "Questions We Have in Common," "New Roads" featured writers who, "groping towards somewhat the same kind of alternative," explored nonviolence, anarchism, decentralization, and personalism as political resources.[118]

Chiaromonte's explicitly utopian contributions to this forum displaced the notion of class with an idea of social justice irreducible to material terms,

[113]Nicola Chiaromonte, "Way Station," *New Republic*, 24 Sept. 1945, 376–7, at 377.

[114]The notes were likely compiled between December 1945 and May 1947. General form of the question, NCP, Box 6, Folder 22, General 3, original emphasis.

[115]NCP, Box 6, Folder 22, General 2.

[116]Dwight Macdonald, "New Roads in Politics," *politics*, Dec. 1945, 369.

[117]Politics Past notes.

[118]Macdonald, "New Roads," 369; Dwight Macdonald, "Politicking," *politics*, Jan. 1946, 29–31, esp. 30. Macdonald, Abel, Coser, Paul Goodman, Frank Fisher, and Chiaromonte planned the series.

contending that the relevance of class struggle did not justify considering it the definitive historical determinant—which would suggest "an absolute and absolutely exact knowledge of the whole of human history."[119] Instead arguing that "no socialist idea or consistent line of action is conceivable if not based on the *idea of Justice*," Chiaromonte provocatively maintained that only by affirming "the possibility of" (and the possibility inhering within) "non-realization" could politics be "firmly grounded": "non-realization … does not impair to any degree … the reality either of the idea of Justice, or of the experience of the just and the unjust in the course of which the idea is revealed."[120] Writing Camus—whose recent New York visit had involved "long conversation" with Chiaromonte about "the need 'to create a society in a society,'" or sort of "secular church," which to start "would have a negative form"—Chiaromonte described this position as "living the question of justice as a Utopia."[121]

Though the problems addressed in "New Roads" reflected Chiaromonte's influence, little in the series excited him.[122] Its contributors were nevertheless denounced collectively by peers for retreating from concrete analysis toward the "empyrean," "eternal and absolute laws of morality" and "not deal[ing] in the terms in which the serious problems of the real world are posed."[123] Blurring the New Roaders' various arguments, critics spurned the series as an elitist "retreat toward individualism," since, Farrell noted, "belief in human values is one of the standardized formulae for retreat from Marxism."[124] Though Macdonald himself considered the reading of Marx that Chiaromonte presented in "New Roads" ungenerous, he too objected to scientific socialism's reliance on outcomes as proof.[125] Noting that it was "not only the Marxists" objecting to the series but "a sizeable segment of readers," Macdonald realized that he had not only "underestimated the deep hold" of "Marx's attempt to give socialism a scientific basis" for the audience of *politics*—"a magazine which has always been rather cavalier in its treatment of Marx's doctrine"—but also underestimated how many readers found completely "meaningless" the issue that "'New Roads' writers" considered "most important": "how to relate their political values to an ethical basis."[126] It is this disjunct to which Barrett referred in late 1946, when he denoted Macdonald's magazine as evidence that "between the smaller groups in [Greenwich] Village there are no common presuppositions."[127]

[119]Draft of Scientific Socialism (speech or essay), NCP, Box 6, Folder 22, 21–2.

[120]Nicola Chiaromonte, "On the Type of Socialism Called Scientific," *politics*, Feb. 1946, 33–44, at 37, original emphasis. Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the politics Circle*, 159.

[121]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 305. Camus, *American Journals*, 42. Chiaromonte, *In lotta contro il destino*, 47.

[122]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 306.

[123]Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 251, 256. James T. Farrell, "New Roads Discussion," *politics*, March 1946, 89–93, esp. 91. *Partisan Review* editors, "The 'Liberal' Fifth Column," *Partisan Review*, Oct.–Dec. 1946, 602–18, esp. 612–13.

[124]James T. Farrell, "New Roads Discussion," *politics*, March 1946, 89–93, at 90. Also see Lewis Coser, "Digging at the Roots or Striking at the Branches," *politics*, Oct. 1946, 323–8, esp. 324; *Partisan Review* editors, "The 'Liberal' Fifth Column," 608.

[125]Critique of "On the Kind of Socialism Called 'Scientific'," DMP, Box 153, Folder 22; Conversation with Lou Coser, 6 Jan. [1946], DMP, Box 80, Folder 176.

[126]Dwight Macdonald, "Whither Politics," *politics*, May 1946, 138–42, at 140–41.

[127]William Barrett, "The Resistance," *Partisan Review*, Sept.–Oct. 1946, 479–88, at 487.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Given the strong response both to "New Roads" and to his own positions, Chiaromonte began work on a subsequent essay intended, he wrote to Camus, to "describe the experience of justice in its radical consequences."[128] Yet he is typically remembered not for migrating "Socratic ignorance" or the phenomenological method to New York political debates but for precociously rejecting Marxism in an inhospitable atmosphere.[129] Farrell, an especially vehement detractor, certainly framed things publicly in such terms, maintaining the "real issue" at stake in "New Roads" was its substitution of social with individual morality and in Chiaromonte's position was whether Stalinism was "a necessary consequence of Marxism."[130] Yet though Chiaromonte, who considered moral crises collective but choices individual, contributed to this sectarianism, his rejoinders consistently returned to a philosophical footing: Farrell "is absolutely in favor of the Relative and the Empirical," he argued, and is "impatient with people who dare question the infallibility of Marx" simply because "they do not supply him, and his friends, with some 'alternative explanations that are empirically verifiable.'"[131] Inverting the charges he received of absolutism, Chiaromonte reframed such positions as dogmatic, lamenting that the "practical, or rather, the 'pragmatic,' becomes with such people a kind of Categorical Imperative"—and locating his own motivation instead in experience, in "some memories which [I] would not like to betray."[132]

Other "New Roads" commentators similarly leveraged philosophy. Louis Coser, for instance, cited Dewey to argue that "point[ing] out what ought to be makes sense only if a way toward the implementation of these worthy desires can be shown," since one's "values cannot be divorced from his goal."[133] David Bazelon's and Sebastian Franck's "New Roads" critiques likewise underscored that claiming an "idea is a reality, and one that exists nowhere but in human consciousness," is "unbelievable, *unless one assumes that human consciousness is the only reality*."[134] Yet it was Don Calhoun who, noting that "the pragmatist seldom shoots at the moon," most succinctly articulated the allegation implicit in Chiaromonte's stance: "the pragmatic method, in practice, tends to prefer those results which are relatively certain and scientifically demonstrable to those which are only possible, and therefore always tends to have a conservative bias."[135]

Such comments help clarify "New Roads" as a direct assault on the assumptions grounding what Chiaromonte called the New York intellectual community's "empirio-Marxism."[136] They also help explain why his speech at *politics*'s

[128]Chiaromonte, *In lotta contro il destino* 47.

[129]Wilford notes an "unwillingness" of contemporary historians "to entertain the possibility of a non-Marxist radicalism" that mirrors the New York intellectuals'; Mattson notices the tendency of intellectuals to ask whether the ideas of our objects of study are "realizable, or not." Wilford, "An Oasis," 211; Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism, 1945–1970* (University Park, 2002), 14.

[130]James T. Farrell, "New Roads Discussion," *politics*, March 1946, 91.

[131]Nicola Chiaromonte, "New Roads Discussion," *politics*, May 1946, 168–70, at 169.

[132]Nicola Chiaromonte, "Remarks on Justice," *politics*, May–June 1947, 88–93, at 90; Chiaromonte, "New Roads Discussion," *politics*, May 1946, 170.

[133]Coser, "Digging at the Roots or Striking at the Branches," 327.

[134]David Bazelon, "New Roads and Old Footpaths," *politics*, July 1946, 184–7, at 186. Sebastian Franck, "Escapism v. Marxism," *politics*, July 1946, 189–92, esp. 189.

[135]Don Calhoun, "Science, Politics and the Absolute," *politics*, Sept. 1946, 281–5, at 282.

[136]Chiaromonte, "New Roads Discussion," *politics*, March 1946, 91–2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

December 1945 Friday Evening Discussion yielded "especially violent feelings" in an audience with an evolving, even minimal, relationship with Marx.[137] Indeed, what seems to have most upset Chiaromonte's listeners that night was how his utopian positions undermined the reassurances offered by Cartesian claims about knowledge and challenged the predictive, progressive power they associated with science. After Chiaromonte had finished, Schapiro allegedly shouted that "following" him implied not "know[ing] what to do in a week, month or year" and being "in complete ignorance" even about "what we should do tomorrow morning.'"[138] This reaction, hurtful from a close friend who, Chiaromonte wrote to Caffi, privately "confesses to not being 'Marxist'—but simply 'scientific,'" foregrounds Marxism in this context as an emotionally charged attachment to scientific socialism that extended beyond the political to index a rationally structured, intelligible world which could be effectively intervened upon by humans.[139]

In fact, Chiaromonte's thoughts on Marx were by this time no surprise to either Schapiro or Farrell. In a series of summer 1944 letters to Schapiro recounting conversation with Chiaromonte, Farrell had underscored Chiaromonte's disapproval of Marx and admiration for Tolstoy, Plato, and Bergson, as well as his "quibbles of a methodological order" concerning the "business of doubt."[140] Presenting his own intellectual method as essentially pragmatist ("definition of problem, hypotheses, facts, conclusion, not meaning by that that you rigidly follow a serial order"), Farrell had lamented that Chiaromonte instead advanced "doubt" as "a positive position, a methodology"—and one which implied that "logic, scientific conclusions equal rigidity—equal mechanical solutions—equal authoritarianism."[141] Moreover, recognizing Chiaromonte's impact on *politics*, Farrell had explicitly framed this stance as dangerous:

> The relative success of POLITICS poses a problem. It is not enough to criticize as we have … The readers of POLITICS are not at Truro and at Eighth St. They are all over the country … Back to Nick. We should do whatever we can to keep him from writing articles like the letters he wrote us … There is trouble and confusion enough in the world, and this business will merely add to it. An Italian, cultivated, a revolutionary, machine gunner in Spain etc., it will be bad for him to write such stuff in this country now. It would be better, whenever he discusses with us what he ought to write to suggest concrete articles—set him loose on Gentile—have him write on Malraux, Silone, etc.[142]

[137]Abel, *Follies*, 187, recalled the audience including Farrell, Rosenberg, Philips, Rhav, Stille, Tucci, Arendt, Barrett, Schwartz, Walter Goldwater, and Macdonald. McCarthy was also present.

[138]Ibid., 187. Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 260–61. Abel's memoir and Chiaromonte's letter report a quasi-identical Schapiro response.

[139]Caffi and Chiaromonte, *"Cosa sperare?"*, 260.

[140]Farrell to Schapiro, 21 Aug. 1944, MSP, Box 688.

[141]Farrell to Schapiro, 15 Aug. 1944, MSP, Box 688; Farrell to Schapiro, 22 Aug. 1944, MSP, Box 688.

[142]Farrell to Schapiro, 22 Aug. 1944, MSP, Box 688. The letter, which discusses Chiaromonte at length, also nods toward Chiaromonte's influence on Macdonald: "Dwight now says he is a socialist who includes anarchism as socialism and many other things. I wonder if he has broadened his previous breadth through discussion with Nick?"

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

The threat Farrell perceived in Chiaromonte's negative utopianism resonates with Schapiro's alleged outburst, as well as with Abel's later suggestion, recalling Chiaromonte's Friday Night speech, that the issue he raised was perceived as not "purely intellectual … but to a very large degree a moral one."[143] "[M]ost of those who heard Chiaromonte that night and who thought of themselves as believers in science," Abel noted, believed *it was right* to try "to be scientific in whatever one asserted."[144] Indeed, they believed that the schemas of scientific socialism and scientific method not only organized experience and made the world knowable but enabled intelligent action to resolve problems. As Coser remarked, without presenting "more sharp-edged tools" as an alternative, "what liberation would that be to forsake an utopia that is logical and coherent" and the approaches "which up to now have seemed to be the most useful" to instead "embrace one that is illogical and incoherent?"[145]

A social justice to recenter the left

Such convictions overwhelmingly eclipsed the idea of justice that Chiaromonte was attempting to conceive as an alternative rallying notion for the radical left.[146] Already in early 1945 his *politics* review of Gurvitch's *La déclaration des droits sociaux* had begun framing ideals like justice not as abstract notions operating outside material reality but as processes belonging to everyday practices of social construction: the essay outlined Gurvitch's juridical pluralism as a form of noncoercive natural law emerging from the "mutual relationships of which society consists" that, opposed to "the monistic conception … at the basis of the modern centralized state" and "its claims on the spiritual sphere," "implie[d] a specific philosophical outlook … indebted mainly to Husserl and Bergson" and "a philosophy of law com[ing] straight from Proudhon."[147] Moving from this theoretical matrix, Chiaromonte suggested, allowed Gurvitch to recognize "individuals as not only living together, but also as not conceivable except in the context of their mutual relationships," and thus to present "the rights of the individual" as "one of the fundamental rights of the group."[148] For Gurvitch the forms of norm-making shaping the voluntary, ordinary reciprocal relationships characterizing associative life authorized wresting "power from the state in the name of the law … create[d] from below"—and thus addressed "the central problem of socialism": "how to give new life to the depressed and repressed social energies," by countering the "disarticulation of society into masses of individuals who have been dispossessed of the very sources of social power."[149]

Building on this view in the 1947 *politics* essay "Remarks on Justice" developed in the wake of "New Roads," Chiaromonte defined justice as "not an abstract

[143]Lionel Abel, "Science versus Justice," *Commentary*, 1 July 1973, 25–32, at 28.

[144]Ibid.

[145]Coser, "Digging at the Roots or Striking at the Branches," 328.

[146]For more extensive analysis of Chiaromonte's notion of justice see Amanda Swain, "Le osservazioni sulla giustizia di Chiaromonte," forthcoming.

[147]Nicola Chiaromonte, "Social Law, after Proudhon," *politics*, Jan. 1945, 25–8, at 26, 28. Georges Gurvitch, *La déclaration des droits sociaux* (New York, 1944).

[148]Ibid., 28, 26.

[149]Ibid. 26, 27.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

principle, a Moral Absolute, or a category of the Mind" but a "real activity" arising "in the concrete reality of the social condition."[150] Our awareness of justice as a possibility, Chiaromonte observed, unfolds *negatively* via intersubjective situations violating our expectations: perceiving something problematic through comparative "recollection and clarification" vis-à-vis previous interpersonal experience compels us "to ask ourselves 'why?' and 'how'?" a given situation is amiss, raising the question "not only of what is just and unjust there and then, but also of Justice itself, i.e. of the idea of Justice—of Justice in the absolute."[151] Recognition of a problem thus points us toward an absent something that we perceive *should* be there, uniting "the present and the this individual" with an "other who is in a different situation and place," in a manner which attempts "to give a real answer to the temporal in terms of a norm which is not *merely* temporal."[152]

Justifiable to others, since it unfolds from reflection on past experience of "the fact that men live *in relation* to each other," justice, Chiaromonte maintained, cannot be "confused either with the merely 'subjective' … or with the merely 'objective'": it is a process in which the individual must "conceive of himself as one among others, of the other as an individual like himself," requiring "recognition not only of the other, but of *the others*, as *we*—and of the fundamental solidarity of everyone with everyone else."[153] Thus though immanent, accessed through problematic situations, and confirmable by others—positions shared with a Deweyan conception of ethics—justice for Chiaromonte also indexed a relational tie, one bound to our vulnerability and the shared "primary and universal experience … that it is one thing to know what we want, and another thing to be sure that by following even the most reasonable and clever course we will realize our intention."[154] This awareness "of everything that we don't know" founded justice and any ethical impulse: it "might comfort the man who runs aground, and encourage him not to give up; lead the conqueror to wonder, and restrain his insolence."[155] It was, in other words, the horizon "between the order of the universe and human life" introducing limit into human behavior.[156]

The distinctiveness in 1940s New York of this understanding of political solidarity is highlighted by Macdonald's better-known "New Roads" essay "The Root Is Man," which migrated the same themes animating Chiaromonte's negative utopianism onto a more Cartesian landscape. Distinguishing between the "Progressive" who "starts off from what actually is happening" and the "Radical" who, more "pessimistic," starts from "'what ought to be' rather than 'what is,'" Macdonald argued that "[w]e must learn to live with contradictions, to have faith in scepticism, to advance toward the solution of a problem by admitting as a possibility something which the scientist can never admit: namely, that it may be insoluble."[157] Rejecting "(as the Greeks, by the way, did …)" both "[t]he religious

[150]Chiaromonte, "Remarks on Justice," 89; Chiaromonte, "New Roads," 169.
[151]Chiaromonte, "Remarks on Justice," 91; Chiaromonte, "On the Type of Socialism Called Scientific," 37.
[152]Chiaromonte, "Remarks on Justice," 89. Practical 6–7, NCP, Box 6, Folder 22, added emphasis.
[153]Chiaromonte, "Remarks on Justice," 89; Practical 6–7, NCP, Box 6, Folder 22, original emphasis.
[154]Chiaromonte, "Remarks on Justice," 92.
[155]Ibid.
[156]Ibid. 93.
[157]Dwight Macdonald, "The Root Is Man," *politics*, April 1946, 97–115, at 100.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the scientific views of the world"—and other "total, complete solutions"—Macdonald cited Kierkegaard to maintain that "it is better to admit ignorance and leave questions open rather than to close them up with some all-answering system."[158] Yet despite repeatedly disparaging pragmatism, Macdonald's essay looked toward outcomes and the experimental "test" of experience, mobilizing, as Calhoun noted, a notion of intuition resembling Dewey's.[159] Indeed, considering moral judgment analogous to aesthetic taste, Macdonald framed values as both absolute and subjective and located them in "a sphere which is outside the reach of scientific investigation" where "value judgements cannot be proved (though they can be demonstrated in … completely unscientific terms)" because rooted in something held in common: "the same thing," his notes explained, "that makes us respond to works of art."[160] "The first step towards a new concept of political action," Macdonald therefore argued, "is for each person to decide what he thinks is right, what satisfies *him*, what *he* wants. And then to examine with scientific method the environment to figure out how to get it."[161] Though Macdonald likely intended to ground political morality in a humanistic critical sensibility that, though accessed nonscientifically, still recognized science's practical significance, as Chiaromonte's comments on the essay emphasized, he presented an individualistic moral horizon oriented toward self-realization and personal satisfaction that elided interdependence or constraint and was founded on the familiar dualism between values understood as "a matter of 'feeling'" and an objective "reality, to which only vigorous measurement and reasoning apply."[162] "The Root Is Man" thus reaffirmed many of the assumptions that Chiaromonte's own thinking aimed to displace.

Indeed, though a staunch ally profoundly stimulated by the questions Chiaromonte raised, Macdonald's grasp on his utopianism remained only partial, and he contested Chiaromonte's lack of concreteness regarding "what the *content* of Justice, in your view, is."[163] When, in 1947, *politics* developed the Europe–America Groups (EAG)—an early transatlantic attempt at solidarity with the European independent left—and Chiaromonte returned to Europe tasked with finding collaborators, the gaps between them widened.[164] Chiaromonte hoped that EAG would help foster a sort of third-camp internationalism, acting as a "center of information" and transatlantic exchange organized around the problem of "what shall take the place of Stalinism on the left."[165] Yet EAG was from the

[158]Ibid. As Abel later protested, although Macdonald's original essay claimed that "Kierkegaard writes that sometimes wounds heal better if they are left open," the line was "keep the wound of the negative open." Dwight Macdonald, "The Root Is Man, Part Two," *politics*, July 1946, 194–214, esp. 212. Abel to Macdonald, 23 July 1946, DMP, Box 80, Folder 190.

[159]See Calhoun, "Science, Politics and the Absolute." On Dewey's approach to art and human growth see Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewy and American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1991).

[160]Chiaromonte, "The Root Is Man" notes, DMP, Box 80, Folder 190.

[161]Macdonald, "The Root Is Man, Part Two," 213, original emphasis.

[162]Chiaromonte, "The Root Is Man" notes, DMP, Box 10, Folder 241,

[163]Critique of "On the Kind of Socialism Called 'Scientific'," added emphasis.

[164]EAG included Barrett, Elizabeth Hardwick, H. J. Kaplan, Alfred Kazin, Nicholas Nabakov, Philips, Rhav, Isaac Rosenfeld, Schapiro, Bertram Wolfe, Schwartz, Steinberg, Dorothy Thompson, Dorothy Norman, Tucci, Borghi, Milano, and Salvemini.

[165]Chiaromonte to Macdonald, 3 Sept. 1948, DMP, Box 10, Folder 241. Chiaromonte to McCarthy, 9 July 1948, MMP, Box 343, Folder 25.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

start divided into the usual factions, with the opposing *PR*–Hook group interested in "formulating a serious opposition to Stalinism" via forms of militarization, scientific planning, and nationalism that Chiaromonte hoped the postwar left would overcome.[166] These tensions appear only lightly fictionalized in McCarthy's 1949 *roman à clef The Oasis*, which, satirizing Rhav's naturalism and Macdonald's empiricism, presents them as rival leaders of a utopian "colony" divided among "realists," whose "sense of intellectual assurance rested on … belief in the potency of history to settle questions of value," and "purists," who had learned from an Italian anarchist "certain notions of justice, freedom, and sociability" which "they were endeavoring to illustrate in action."[167] Though many scholars, as Wilford notes, have "misinterpreted" *The Oasis* as a "veiled attack on radicalism," the novella is perhaps better read as an attempt to work through Chiaromonte's ideas.[168] Seen from this perspective, the colony's failing utopia appears a reflection of its mistaken foundational premise: attempting to realize its ideals through literal implementation. Yet though Katy, the McCarthy-based character, recognizes her "desire to embody virtue" as the expression of "a naïve and acquisitive culture which imagined that there was nothing … which persistency could not secure"—the Cartesian subject's will to control—and the novella concludes with her shedding her oasis mentality (an attitude repeatedly disavowed in *politics*) to reengage with society, she nonetheless locates the colony's "true security" somewhere in the "practical realm."[169]

It is therefore probably unsurprising that, amidst personal preoccupations, the Berlin blockade, and intellectual infighting—and with Chiaromonte away—Macdonald and McCarthy, the key sustainers of his EAG position, lost momentum, ultimately finding his vision too elusive: "All that EAG actually proposes to *do*," Macdonald wrote to Chiaromonte, could easily "fall under the existing purview of *politics*."[170] Though Chiaromonte insisted from Europe that the enterprise "interested everybody to whom I have spoken," EAG dissolved in 1949, reemerging in a more overtly anti-Stalinist form that eventually evolved into the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF)—where Hook, Chiaromonte, and others from their circles came to play major roles.[171] This late 1940s consolidation of anticommunism

[166]William Philips, "The Politics of Desperation," *Partisan Review*, April 1948, 449–55, at 450.

[167]Mary McCarthy, *The Oasis* (Brooklyn, 2013), 7, 14, 11.

[168]Wilford sees McCarthy exploring "the causes of radical failure" and "impracticality" of Chiaromonte's "purist programme." Wilford, "An Oasis," 211, 221; Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 182. In ibid., at 241, 243, Wald highlights the novella's "retreat" from empirical experience into subjectivist alienation.

[169]McCarthy, *The Oasis*, 131, 130. Dwight Macdonald, "Comment: Koestler, Some Political Remarks," *politics*, Feb. 1944, 4–5, at 5: "One's endeavor should not be to withdraw into illusory 'oases' but rather to go out into the desert, share the common experience, and try to find a road out of the wilderness." Also see Chiaromonte, "Koestler."

[170]McCarthy to Macdonald, July 1948, DMP, Box 31, Folder 79, original emphasis; Macdonald to Chiaromonte, 10 Dec. 1948, DMP, Box 10, Folder 241. Decades later, McCarthy and Macdonald again lamented Chiaromonte's elusiveness on how ideas "should direct one's present actions" and "vagueness about What Is To Be Done now, concretely." Macdonald to McCarthy, 12 Sept. 1969, DMP, Box 31, Folder 780; McCarthy to Macdonald, Aug. 13, 1969, DMP, Box 31, Folder 780.

[171]Chiaromonte to McCarthy, 9 July 1948, DMP, Box 10, Folder 241; Macdonald to McCarthy, 30 July 1948, DMP, Box 31, Folder 779. Wilford, "An Oasis," 221, 211. Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 34. Macdonald initially believed letting the initiative fail might allow it to remerge in new form. On the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

among the New York intellectuals again suggests that the community's response to Chiaromonte, though originally couched in Marxist vocabulary, was deeply entwined with other beliefs—for by 1949 Chiaromonte's rejection of instrumentalism and the logic of immediate results was situating him, again in contrast to Hook and Farrell, among the left-wingers of the transnationalizing noncommunist left.[172]

Conclusion

After returning to Europe—first to Paris, then definitively to Rome in 1953—Chiaromonte's intellectual exchange with the New York intellectuals persisted. In addition to maintaining robust relationships with many American friends, especially Macdonald and McCarthy, as coeditor of *Tempo Presente* he developed an ongoing institutional link to the milieu, which he continued to engage via CCF conferences and publishing circuits.[173] Though highly critical of US society and politics—"Nothing can be achieved by American liberals (or radicals) … as long as they don't question American power as such"—in the Cold War context Chiaromonte remained "American committed, so to speak," given his longstanding skepticism of the aims and tactics of communist parties and recognition of the space that democracies, despite their flaws, allowed for dissent.[174] Yet if postwar cultural politics repositioned his discussions of questioning and mass society within larger discourses about intellectual freedom that bestowed new valences, then the rejection of the status quo and its official discourses and the qualitative assessments of power characterizing Chiaromonte's negative utopianism resulted in a continued critique of authoritarianism and power abuse that helped consolidate *Tempo Presente*'s editorial line as distinct in the Italian landscape for conjoining antifascism, internationalism, and noncommunism with criticism of the Western powers, US foreign policy, and the Catholic Church.[175] Indeed, upholding "an utterly negative attitude based on aims that are unrealizable in the immediate," yet opposed to resignation or withdrawal, Chiaromonte deeply challenged the model of intellectual commitment organizing the mid-twentieth-century Italian

New York intellectuals and the Congress, see Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Post-War American Hegemony* (London, 2002). On Chiaromonte's CCF role, see Scionti, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom"; Panizza, *Biografia*.

[172]See Scionti, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom"; Bell, "Oral History Interview with Daniel Bell."

[173]On his later relationship with the New York intellectuals see Amanda Swain, "'One of the Last Secret Maestros': Nicola Chiaromonte Between Europe and America," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 29/2 (2024), 127–43.

[174]Chiaromonte to McCarthy, 27 June 1969, MMP, Box 187, Folder 13.

[175]Chiara Morbi and Paola Carlucci, "Beyond the Cold War: *Tempo Presente* in Italy," in Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Lerg, eds., *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London, 2017), 127–48, at 130. *Tempo Presente*'s relationship with the CCF headquarters was fraught. By its second year, it had reduced CCF financial support to half. It often contested the CCF leadership—especially regarding support of the Catholic Church and antagonism toward Marxist sympathizers—but upheld the organization's general attitudes on cultural freedom. See Scionti, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom." Revelation of the CCF's CIA backing deeply upset Chiaromonte. His knowledge of the CIA backing is unlikely: Bianco says he was unaware; Bell suggests he knew indirectly. See Bianco, *Nicola Chiaromonte e il tempo della malafede*, 142; Bell, "Oral History Interview with Daniel Bell."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

left, which, shaped by the cultural strategies of the strongest communist bloc in Western Europe, exploited the legacies of liberalism and antifascism to maintain that radicalism "was impossible outside the party."[176]

Isolating and reconstructing Chiaromonte's 1940s debates with the New York intellectuals in relation to this longer career helps illuminate aspects of his thought which appear less pronounced in other contexts—especially how his mobilization of philosophy aimed to reground the left during a period of momentous transformation and world remaking. These debates, moreover, highlight presuppositions about "practical reason and self-assertion" underpinning the New York intellectual discursive context that still animate many current attitudes.[177] Indeed, Chiaromonte's criticism of instrumentalism and our desire to expunge uncertainty disputed not only the belief that we can fully know or control reality but also the progress and open-mindedness presumed to accompany Cartesianism and the cult of science—which Chiaromonte identified not with an advancing democratic pluralism but with a "totalitarian perspective of absolute rationalism."[178] In this sense Chiaromonte's reception in the 1940s and beyond can be put in conversation with a larger story about the formation of US Cold War discourse to which the New York intellectuals' style of naturalistic pragmatism and sidelining of other intellectual traditions also belonged. For though some aspects of the negative sensibility that Chiaromonte embraced were absorbed by the increasingly institutionally influential New York intellectual community in the postwar era, this process largely implied naturalizing ambiguity within their existing conceptual framework—generating what Amanda Anderson has called a "bleak liberalism" of "pragmatic politics" promoting "democratic process, piecemeal reform, and limited or ad hoc political measures."[179] As Johnathan Michaels, moreover, notes, this postwar liberalism also manifested an "abhorrence of metaphysics."[180]

Yet Chiaromonte's migration to influential US radical circles of a wide, interrelational concept of politics which channeled transnational antifascism and the ethos of resistance, too, has a legacy. Indeed, through the vehicle of *politics* his negative utopianism became one of the intellectual strands nourishing American New Leftism. If it was ultimately the desiring, autonomous self of Macdonald's "The Root Is Man" which was eventually mobilized by the New Left—rather than Chiaromonte's decentered, interdependent subject—the qualitative critique of power, attempt to move beyond individual/collective and subjective/objective dichotomies, and recognition of the political content of consciousness and everyday social experience that Chiaromonte promoted were nonetheless points of interest for later US radicals. Characteristically, however, Chiaromonte himself remained skeptical of the philosophical assumptions underpinning this later New Leftist

[176]Chiaromonte to McCarthy, 27 July 1969, MMP, Box 187, Folder 13. Steven Gundle, *From Hollywood to Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991* (Durham, NC, 2000), 30. Scionti, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom," 103.

[177]Chiaromonte, *The Paradox of History*, 87.

[178]Nicola Chiaromonte, "Camus and Moderation," *Partisan Review*, Oct. 1948, 1142–5, at 1142.

[179]Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago, 2016), 39, 116.

[180]Jonathan Michaels, *The Liberal Dilemma: The Pragmatic Tradition in the Age of McCarthyism* (New York, 2019), 14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X Published online by Cambridge University Press

formation: in the rebellion of these young radicals he once again identified a veneration of effective action that disregarded the truth of limit.[181]

Acknowledgments. This article reflects the support and feedback of many colleagues and friends. I would especially like to thank Deborah Nelson, who first encouraged my study of Chiaromonte; the Associazione Amici di Nicola Chiaromonte, an organization comprising several scholars whose work is an important foundation for my own; and the *Modern Intellectual History* editorial board and their anonymous reviewers, for their valuable comments. I am also grateful for the generous funding of the Romeyne Roberto and Uguccione Sorbello Fellowship, which enabled some of the archival research in this article, and to Luca Corti and Matteo Vagelli for their patience with my prolonged fascination with Chiaromonte.

[181]Though sympathetic to the dissent characterizing the early 1960s, Chiaromonte was critical of later New Left justifications of violence and instrumentalism. See Cesare Panizza, *La rivolta conformista. Scritti sui giovani e il 68* (Forlì, 2009); Paola Carlucci, "La necessità del limite: il Sessantotto di Nicola Chiaromonte tra autobiografia e riflessione pubblica," *Ventunesimo Secolo* 9/22 (2010), 177–90; Sante Maletta, "Peripezie di un impolitico. Chiaromonte e l'altro Sessantotto," in Andrea Frangioni, Federico Mazzei, and Gemma Pizzoni, eds., *La storia come cultura: Studi in onore di Roberto Pertici* (Rome, 2024), 493–507.

Cite this article: Swain A (2024). Utopia in New York: Nicola Chiaromonte and the New York Intellectuals' "Superstition of Science". *Modern Intellectual History* **21**, 410–440. https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924432400012X