Institute of Ideas and Institut français

Attention Seeking: multiculturalism and the politics of recognition
Institut français, London
16 November, 2002

Please recognise my identity - accounting for the contemporary concern with recognition

Identity politics, whether in the realm of race, culture, sexuality or even individual self-worth, dominate the contemporary world. Some argue that social progress develops through the struggle for recognition of these identities. Has the need for recognition always been a key driver in history? To what extent is our identity based on having our differences affirmed? Is the claim for recognition of identity an end in itself?

Speakers:

Elazar Barkan author of *The Guilt of Nations*: *Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*
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Simon Thompson Author of *The Political Theory of Recognition,* forthcoming from Polity Press
Discussion chaired by **Claire Fox**

Frank Furedi

I want to speak about a few ideas I have been working on over the last year, year and a half, and the issue that I am quite interested in is the way in which a lot of the debate that is taking place in the realm of politics seems to have acquired an increasingly emotional and psychological character. In particular, I have been struck by the way in which the debate about cultural politics, the way in which the debate about identity and recognition, has been gradually overwhelmed by concerns which in a previous era would have been seen as psychological concerns of the self, things to do with self-discovery and self-realisation.

One of the most interesting things that I have found, and something that I am quite concerned about – it is not simply of academic interest, I am also quite emotionally concerned about this as a human being – is the way in which we tend to think of injury and oppression, things to do with exploitation or injustice, more and more in therapeutic, emotional terms, rather than the terms in which they might have been understood twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. It seems to me that throughout modernity, at least for the last 200 or 300 years, people have understood that there was an element of dehumanisation that was bound up with racism, with other forms of oppression, class exploitation and injustice, which does raise aspects and elements of the question of recognition. But in the past the dehumanisation of the other, the dehumanisation of people, has always been situated within a subordinate context to other kind of concerns.

What has happened today is that this order of things has been completely reversed. And, because of a massive cultural shift that is taking place, and I would argue that we are still very much at the beginning of this cultural shift, we are tending to more and more reinterpret problems that might have been seen to have socio-economic causation in the past, or problems that in the past would

have been interpreted as social in character, as having a psychological dimension to them.

For example, these days, we live in a world where we talk about nations healing. No longer is it just an individual healing, but whole nations are healing, so if you did as I did after September 11th and looked at the debate in the United States, all the post September 11th discussion was by definition therapeutic, it was all about the concern with children's trauma, about the potential psychological distress suffered by the citizen. It was very much in that discourse that the whole post September 11th development was understood.

We talk about Native Americans, or people whose ancestors were enslaved, for example Afro-Americans, as having low self-esteem. And if you look at books being written, all kinds of people have low self-esteem because of what has been done to them, or the experiences that they collectively suffered, sometimes, four-, five-, six-hundred years ago. We talk about the Irish people still being in a state of trauma about the Potato Famine and various other emotional abuses that they might have suffered. And quite often when you read contemporary historiography, or the claims made by certain cultural groups, they talk about themselves being scarred for life, and when they say scarred for life, they don't mean a knife that has cut them, they talk about scars on their psyche, scars that they are bearing on their emotions.

And in fact it has become so pervasive that not only are cultural groups to some extent cashing in on the language of therapy, but everybody else is too. So in Europe the EU is now organising initiatives for communities that are unemployed, who, because they are unemployed, have collective low self-esteem, or other emotional problems that have come about as a result of that. And, of course, we would expect that as we define problems emotionally, so we come up with therapeutic solutions. So, these days, when you get made redundant in Europe you get counselling – you don't get a job or even an offer of a job, you get counselling.

These days, whenever you have a major transition, a historical transition, in a community, you have a Truth and Reconciliation Committee of some kind which is meant to put things right. You have everybody, from the guy who runs the gas chamber to the person who fought against it, holding hands and making each other aware of their specific experiences, and obviously recognising one another in the course of doing that. Therefore, increasingly, what we find is that problems that would have been seen as social problems or political problems or economic problems are now responded to with acts of affirmation, acts of validation, rendering that experience valid and all the rest of it. That to me seems quite important.

I find it quite puzzling that in the literature this particular turn is often misunderstood and seen entirely in cultural terms. The whole turn towards identity politics, or the politics of multiculturalism, is very much seen in the form in which it presents itself. Most of you are intelligent individuals in this room, and we all know that the way in which we present ourselves is the way in which we want to be seen, not necessarily the way that we really are. If I meet you and want to impress you I am not going to tell you that I am shy or crapping in my pants because I am really intimidated by you. I'm not going to tell you about my personal problems. I will present a particular rendition of myself, the way I want to be seen.

Yet for some reason, when we look at political movements, we say these are multicultural movements, these are cultural movements, these are identity

movements, and then there is a big discussion about what does it mean, this identity? Both the critics of multiculturalism and the supporters very much get imprisoned within the parameters of culturalism. One group does not like it because it is divisive and the other one loves it because now they have got a voice and they can express in a way that has never been expressed beforehand. It seems to me that what we call identity politics, the politics of multiculturalism, is fundamentally driven by the turn towards the therapeutic, fundamentally driven by exactly the same forces that in Anglo-American in particular – but more widely, Western societies – have driven individuals in their quest for self-realisation. I think the quest for cultural identity is paralleled by a more pervasive demand for self-identity. I would argue that in the end the quest for self-identity always over-rides, and will always over-ride, the broader attempt to gain more general social, collective promises of identities.

It seems to me that there are a number of problems with this. I think the first problem with the politics of recognition, and the whole turn towards therapeutics, is that, by definition, the right for recognition that is granted, and the rights that are bound up with it, always and without exception represents an invitation to the state to affirm that identity. I think you will find that time and time again people who are looking for recognition are looking to institutions and to bureaucracies, and to governments, to create the institutional structures and the legal framework for that recognition. And therefore real recognition, in terms of dynamic inter-personal relations, the way I feel about you as a human-being, always has a secondary, a partial, a perfunctory character to it.

It seems to me that, given the importance that is attached to recognition, by definition we find that this has been the experience with identity politics, and multicultural politics. There is always by necessity an incentive to elaborate, to inflate, and to make permanent that identity. One of the interesting things we know after studying identity is that it is fluid and plastic, and susceptible to modification, even within people's own lifetimes. The turn towards therapeutic makes us live that identity, and the more that we live that identity, both individually and collectively, the more we make it permanent and durable, and narrow the range of human experiences that are open to us. I think, more simply, that when you look at the invitation to be recognised, ultimately what you are demanding is a diagnosis. You are demanding some form of diagnosis about who you are and what you are. Not necessarily in a medical way, although that often happens these days as well, but in a comparable cultural way.

Most critics of recognition, and there are not very many because you have got to remember that recognition very much represents the mood and temper of our times, continually emphasize its divisive character. And most critics of multiculturalism emphasize its divisive character, which I think is fine, but it does not go very far. I think that you could make that accusation to a lot of other movements and political approaches; divisiveness is evident throughout the western world at this time. I'm not saying that it is not divisive, but I do not think that that in any way represents its most distinct feature. It seems to me that the real problem with recognition, with multiculturalism and identity politics, is that it involves a process which formalizes relationships. Recognition involves a formal process of granting recognition. It involves the institutionalisation of recognizing somebody, of affirming and validating an individual, or a people, or a group's experience. Even though it might be demanded, and even though people might feel good about the fact that a hurt or an injustice that was done to them 400 years ago, or 500 years ago or even just the other decade is formally recognized, even though there is that element of feeling good about it, in the end recognition that is given formally is unsatisfactory.

I would argue that recognition that is institutionalised, recognition that acquires a legal form, recognition that is written down on pieces of paper and negotiated about, debated about, that requires a codified character, is ultimately unsatisfactory to the human experience. It does not really resonate with our personalities. It does not really resonate with engagement. And we know that, because we know that people who are recognized, for example black South Africans recognised by what the Truth and Reconciliation Committee has done, or Native Americans who have been given bits of paper that tell them that they are the true ancestors of the United States, do not get up in the morning and feel that they have worked on their alienation, on their self-estrangement and say 'I feel really brilliant'. I think that people, after a certain period of time, understand that this kind of recognition does not really touch their personality.

I think what happens is that, increasingly, individuals become estranged from the identity that has been given to them in this kind of automatic, formalized, institutionalised way. That is why we find that, alongside the politics of multiculturalism, is the ceaseless restlessness to redefine yourself, a ceaseless restlessness to look for new injuries on which you can make claims, a ceaseless restlessness to somehow start a new game and start all over again. Because, at the end of the day, the underlying quest, which is the quest for self-realisation, which is a very individual one, will not get sorted out, will not be answered by this very general, formulaic recognition that is given to a group in relation to historical experience. Clinton and Blair can say 'I am sorry' to groups for the past, but that is not really going to be felt as very satisfying by anybody. Therefore in a sense the fundamental flaw of recognition politics is that the more it pursues that which it aspires to, the less likely it is to attain and to realise it.

Elazar Barkan

I have a slightly different take on things. Relative to what you have heard so far today, I would like to differentiate my perspective foremost by suggesting that I am a historian. For me what this means is the way in which I study the subject is empirical and not aspirational. I am studying the data that I as a historian, and others, can agree or disagree about, but I am primarily informed by what I see as evidence, rather than what I think ought to be the case. I don't theorise so much, although we are always informed by theories, but primarily my interest is to document what has happened around this question that I am studying.

In this particular case, my book, *The Guilt of Nations*, is a survey of restitution and reparation cases over the last fifty years, but primarily over the last ten years, divided into two sections. One of them is cases that stem from World War Two, the legacies of it, and the Cold War. The second one is post-colonial cases, mainly indigenous peoples and African-Americans. I think that it is not so much a representative survey as a comprehensive survey. I do not know that I have left out many cases of reparation, not of discussion that has not unfolded, but rather of political discussions, real discussions that happen between the representatives of groups, among nations, about questions of reparation.

And Frank, I will just suggest something before I talk about what you have just said. I would not know for myself whether a formal apology is satisfactory. But I do know that from the survey I have done that I have never seen a victims' group that suggested that they do not deserve an apology. They may want more of an apology, but they do not say that the apology is not important, or that it is not satisfactory as an idea.

So let me move on to suggest something about identity from the perspective from which I see it. Identity is a profoundly collective characteristic, although often it is manifested at the individual level. While in the final analysis all groups are composed of individuals, I would like to argue that the importance we give to identity lies in our affinities with others in our chosen group. It is not our individual identities that define our identities, but rather it is our group affiliation. The other aspect that I would like to suggest is that our history increasingly shapes our identity, that is group identity. When I say increasingly I mean it both as a generalisation and as a time-dependent comment, meaning that the proposition is historically specific. It is not an abstract concept, it is the political meaning of the concept of identity today. It is particularly applicable in the post-modern and post-Cold War periods, where the expanding numbers of groups and nations recognise the malleable nature of their own history. The predicament of identity is that, legally, we privilege the sovereign nation over all other groups, although culturally, ethnically, and in many other ways, we search for the mechanism to validate those other identities.

I will give you an example. There are only a couple of hundred states in the world, but there are thousands of languages, and this is one measure of identity that is not available through the nation-state. The individual belongs to several identities, which we have talked already about. But the plurality of identities only extenuates the demand for recognition as a political factor. If, for two centuries before the nineteen-sixties, identity was increasingly dominated by national identities, then since the nineteen-sixties, human rights, civil rights, post-colonial struggles, have led to a shift of attention to the victims. When we studied Whiggish history, we studied the elites; the focus was on those elites and their privilege. When we study social history, when we study post-colonial history when we study women's history, we study groups that have suffered and that were victims throughout history. And it is not surprising that when we shift the subject-matter to groups that are under-privileged, we pay more attention to that. We do not pay only attention to prime ministers and royals. That is a different historical perspective.

Questions of recognition and identity, both international and domestic, are closely intertwined. This is most apparent in a world that shares moral and political commitments to individual rights as well as to group rights. This universe has abundant contradictions, there is no doubt, but it increasingly, at the same time, subscribes to a shared political culture. And I think that if I had to make a comment about what we heard this morning, it would be that there was too much demarcation between the abstract and the concrete political, as though those are separate spheres, while I think that when we observe the real political and social world, there is a great deal of overlap between the two. Recognition demands negotiation between the interlocutors, namely those who demand the recognition, and those who are supposed to grant it. I think the process of the negotiation teaches the parties a lot about each other.

In the cases that I have studied, I dealt primarily with the relationship between victims and perpetrators. The case studies were taken from southern Russia in the 1990s, cases of restitution. I see a pattern forming that leads to a new kind of international morality, that is a willingness to pay greater attention to history as a formative political force. If we examine – in a different take to the previous speaker about the TRCs – the question of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, from my perspective – which I think is different from the previous speaker – I do not see it as an either/or situation. It is not that we have an egalitarian world, or that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is supposed to transfer us immediately into an egalitarian world. We are talking about a situation of long suffering, of dictatorship, of apartheid, or whatever it would be, and this is

one step in a long road. The recognition, the act of recognition – nobody suggests that it solves everything, nobody suggests that you wake up in the morning (this sentence is repeated by everyone, including myself) and things are settled. It is one step in a long process.

In the past, history was supposed to provide objective knowledge of events that were largely immune from re-interpretation. History was the past, and therefore it was not that important, because it did not really impact on our lives. With relativism and post-modernism – and I can give you a long lecture about it but I hope that the short-hands are sufficient – history has become much more malleable; namely, our political struggles today change the ways in which we view history, and this transformed way of viewing history changes who we are. So our histories and our identity are closely intertwined, and those shape the way that we view ourselves; and we like to view ourselves as ethical beings, all other things being considered. So the new history is of both winners and losers, and history has become a form of negotiation, not subject only to the professional historian, not only subject to impartial enquiry, but part of a political exchange.

Let me just close by saying that I think that group identity is something that has to be negotiated with other groups. The recognition in this regard is part of a political process; it is not something that is either right or wrong, it is not a utopia that we are aiming at, but it is a form of political activism, usually one that aids in a slight way the minority in question to pursue their own policies that are beneficial to them. Until we get to the aspirational world, where equality amongst individuals does not take account of group identity, I think we have to pay attention – greater attention – to the group affiliations of individuals, despite all its complexity, and to include that as a part of the political process.

Claire Fox
Simon or Steve, over to us, or over to you. If I can just ask you initially – one of the first points that Frank Furedi made is that he had noted that exploitation, oppression, injustice in the political sphere were these days dealt with in the therapeutic and emotional sphere. Can I just ask you, first of all, whether you recognise that – is that something you feel is true, or do you even dispute that? I am just not sure how widely known or seen that is, that people see exploitation as a personal hurt. Have you any views on that?

Simon Thompson
It is certainly the case, isn't it, that in the last – I am not sure how you measure it – in the last ten, twenty, thirty years, with the so called rise of identity politics, the politics of difference, there has been a shift in the political universe of certain sorts of societies from – to put it in terms that Nancy Frazer uses – from issues around distribution, to issues around recognition. So the move that some people make at this point is to say that we have forgotten important issues around real social and economic inequalities in our obsession with this self-indulgent quest for authentic identity. There is no doubt some truth in that. It does not mean that the people presently struggling for social and economic justice have gone away, but it does mean that they occupy less attention in the quality press, and in various forms of the mass media, and so on, because it is in some sense more exciting to talk about identity than it is to talk about decent childcare provision or the pay gap between men and women.

Claire Fox
If you could just leave it at that for now because I want to come back on that in a minute. But Steve, just initially, what are your thoughts on that.

Stephen A Erickson
My impression is that we are already on the other side of the high-point of the therapeutic culture, and that, as a matter of fact, it will dwindle even in the vocabulary we use.

Claire Fox
Now do expand Steve, don't be tantalising. (Laughter)

Stephen A Erickson
Claire had so terrified me about how short my remarks were supposed to be that I didn't know what I would be allowed. (Laughter) Well, let me say that in many ways I think that in the course of a number of decades, from about the middle of the twentieth century on, a therapeutic, psychological vocabulary and culture were often the surrogates and substitutes for essentially a disintegrating religious understanding. I rather think that that psychological substitute for a religious understanding has proved in many quarters to be as unsuccessful as the religious understanding that it in many ways began to replace. This is not a credential for these remarks, I just mention it as an empirical fact that has slight relevance to it. From seeing some of the things that are being done at some of the Los Angeles psychoanalytic institutes from a number of different angles. I think one of the things that has happened, that in many ways we might deplore, is that the economic vocabulary and the language of economics, even beyond the overt language of politics, has turned into, in many ways, a replacement for therapeutic language and I think that we are going to see that more and more in the world.

Claire Fox
It is interesting that you seem to be suggesting there that the form demand for recognition takes is in some ways, or has in the past, replaced the way that people identified with religion. But what you were saying, I think, Simon, was that there is a decline of political language – or, as you say, social and political questions have been sidelined and people express themselves in this way. But one of the things that has surely happened is that politics now expresses itself in this way. When people go on strike, it is very much done in terms of recognise me, my identity – and so on. Surely you can see that it is not just that those issues have been sidelined, but that recognition has entered in there as well.

Simon Thompson
I guess it's entered in there as well because the two cannot truly be separated. There is no injustice which can be understood purely in cultural or psychological terms on the one hand, or which can be understood in, let's say economic or resource terms on the other. The two are closely bound up. One can imagine injustices which are more directly cultural in their character, and ones that are more directly economic, but there are elements of both involved in each case. So when Marx looked at class struggle in the nineteenth century, he was looking at something that appeared to be not understood in cultural or psychological categories, but in fact, if you read various of Marx's essays away from economic theory, you get plenty of accounts of cultures of resistance in the working class. I'm reading too much back into Marx there, but the two are always necessarily entwined would be my point on this.

Claire Fox
I suppose there is a tension – which obviously Frank and Elazar can come back on – but the tension that was expressed in the opening remarks, it seems to me, is whether there is any gain to be made from group rights, demanding recognition, and demanding recognition of an institutional form. Is this going to rectify injustice? I think it's entirely appropriate for someone to say that just because

someone said sorry does not mean that it is the end of the road – but is it the start of a road that we should even be going down? I mean, Frank Furedi was suggesting that maybe not. Is that the way that you see people having their political exploitations rectified, either from the past or in the present? Steve, what do you think?

Stephen A Erickson
I think concern for recognition is largely an attempt – that is not understood correctly to be such – to compensate for the underlying loss of a sense of identity. If a sense of identity has been lost, people don't actually have a good sense of who or even what they are. Recognition concerns, I think, largely takes place on a level that's – I don't want to say higher, because I mean lower, and don't want to say superficial because I don't want to sound insulting, but I think that issues of recognition are less fundamental than issues of identity, and one of the reasons these issues have become so strong in our times is that most of us have lost a strong sense of identity.

Claire Fox
Simon, your thoughts.

Simon Thompson
I think I've forgotten the question – it's to do with group rights…

Stephen A Erickson
I just ignored the question. (Laughter)

Claire Fox
Do you think there it has any validity – is it going to work? If you actually have an assertion of group rights that says we demand that you recognise what has happened to us in the past, what is happening to us now – even if it takes a therapeutic form – is this adding to a sense of justice in the world or not?

Simon Thompson
I would defend a certain form of the politics of recognition, but it would not be one which involved what is rightly seen as the incoherent claim that all cultures are deserving of equal esteem because, as I think the speakers prior to us today have amply demonstrated, there is no useful sense that we can give to culture there which would make sense of that principle of giving equal esteem to culture. However, to reject that crude notion of equal esteem for groups is not to say that people can't coherently demand recognition for, I would say, various things.

To make my case I would need just a minute of two to make a distinction that's picked up in the literature, by psychologists and by moral philosophers amongst others, between respect and esteem. It is a distinction referred to very briefly in the written version of Frank Furedi's paper. The best way to think about this distinction between respect and esteem is to think of the sentence 'I have my pride but that is nothing to be proud of'. 'I have my pride' meaning that I don't wish to be treated in certain insulting, humiliating or patronising ways, and if I have my pride, I expect to get respect from others. And the institutional form that this has traditionally taken in our sort of society is subjective rights, that my right to freedom of speech enables me to say what I want, so someone else doesn't tell me what to say or to think. That is respect.

The other half of the sentence 'that is nothing of which to be proud', I'm proud of certain things about myself, I'm proud of certain virtues that I have cultivated – can you be proud of your modesty? That's a contradiction in terms, isn't it? But you may be proud of your bravery, you may be proud of your academic

achievements, you may be proud of the way that you brought up your children. Now there I may be proud of all sorts of things and feel self-esteem but that certainly doesn't mean that I can demand esteem from others because it may not be the case that others value my achievements. They may think that I've brought my children up poorly, they may dismiss my academic achievements as hollow, but although I can't demand a right to be esteemed – it makes no sense – nevertheless I can, I think, coherently demand a right not to be dis-esteemed. In other words, to remove all those double negatives, I can demand an end to discrimination.

Claire Fox
Okay, can I get you all to talk to each other now a little bit? Frank, now you made a point that I think it is worth trying to expand, and maybe you want to come back on some of the things that have been said, just about this formalisation and institutionalisation of relationships that you talked about. But in some ways, from what is being argued, it seems to me is that it's no bad thing that certain things are formalised and institutionalised, that certain things are rectified through formal channels. And that, actually, it does no harm that it is brought into the public realm that, for example, a state has treated people appallingly or exploited them or whatever. How do you respond to that?

Frank Furedi
Well, I think certain things ought to be formalised, like a green light and a red light on a road; it should it be a law that we agree that we stop at a red light and everything. I think that certain things ought to be formalised that are to do with certain commonsensical things like traffic laws and everything else. The problem is that, at the moment neither the American state, nor the British state, nor the French state, nor the German state, are able to give any expression to any identity to do with their nation. The elites of these societies have lost the capacity to be able to, in any sense, affirm their citizens. And the only way that they can gain any legitimacy is by giving certain groups within their society recognition rights which can be given fairly easily, because they don't involve the more difficult process of real authority. Therefore today, the state in all these societies has only legitimacy in so far as it has identity-conferring ability. I think that multiculturalism and identity politics are really about, not empowering people, but about empowering the state. That is my main objection to it.

Now, people have used words like aspirational and empirical, and I think that it's fine if we can do it; we all make claims about understanding empirical reality, but in the end you will have to decide – so Steve's empirical reality is a world that I am not familiar with, because of all that I know that goes on in the United States, where therapy trips off the lips of everybody; all that I know is that I see September 11th happening, and everybody goes into trauma. Depression, children must be counselled about this, counselled about that – so maybe I am not very good at empirical studies, and maybe some have a more profound understanding of this, but you can just see that this is beginning to become more prevalent. And, globally, all this therapeutic stuff, which began in the west coast of the United States, goes to the east coast, goes to Europe, and is now all over the world – Eastern Europe, France, Italy we are all being influenced by these developments, so it is an empirical reality.

But I do think there is a very important problem here, which was raised by Elazar Barkan, which is history. You see I – and this is where the aspirational comes in, and I have to say that sometimes I cannot help myself but talk about what ought to happen – I'm worried about the fact that – and he is absolutely right – that we are more historical than ever before. And I am worried about the fact that people and groups live in their pasts more than they did before. I am really concerned

about the fact that people find it very difficult to give an expression of who they are in terms of what they achieve with their own two hands, and what they do with their friends. We have got to go back to what happened when Columbus discovered America, or what the Germans did to my people in 1941. I do get worried that, for example, Jewish identity – which used to be forward looking – I mean you might not like Zionism, but Zionism, for its sins, was future-oriented, about making a new world – Jewish identity today is craven, returning to the holocaust one more time, 'oh we are survivors' one more time. I am worried when it gets completely re-oriented towards the past and loses any future orientation. And I wonder that other groups in society no longer look to the future, but revel in the past and live in the past, because as a person who believes in the achievements of the Enlightenment and humanism, I do worry when we have to crawl backwards all the time, because that is the only way that we can make sense of our lives, and that is where the aspirational element comes in.

Claire Fox
So, Elazar, you are now an apologist for the state – you're allowing the state to have new legitimacy through conferring authority, so you basically just end up giving the state a new role; and you've also lost all sense of future orientation, and everyone's wallowing in the past. Any thoughts? (Laughter)

Elazar Barkan
I think that I am not in the best position, actually, to prescribe what is best. So it is not about whether I think that it is good that we indulge in history, or that it is bad that we indulge in history. I am not usually in the habit of sort of adjudicating whether people are stupid, or whether minorities or groups are mistaken in choosing their policies, etcetera. I'm trying to observe what happens. Now, the state has power, it has different forms of power; inequality is not limited to issues of recognition. Economic inequality is growing or diminishing; it is probably growing – we are unhappy with multiple facets of our political, social and economic life – so to focus all of that into the politics of recognition is, I think, over-loading the bases. I am much more limited in my analysis of it.

Given all other things being equal, recognition of identities, and the ability of people to lift themselves up as a group, not as individuals (I'm not talking about individuals, I want to emphasise that, I'm talking about groups and about group representations by minorities in a world that is limited to few states; 200 is not too many when there are so many other groups, and these are the groups that give voice to those minorities) – that is better than them not having a voice. Does it resolve everything? No. Would it be better if there was greater equality? Yes. I could go on with the list of all the other things that need to be righted. If you focus on just that slice of the political, I think it is better to have recognition than to ignore people.

Claire Fox
Okay, just finally, before we go out and take some questions from the audience, just really to both of you – on either of these questions, really. One aspect of this is that Frank Furedi is saying that having the group identity is quite problematic, because it's what happens to you as a group, you have no control over it, it denies the idea of an individual's achievements if you're conferring rights on the group. Then there is this idea that through things like restitution and the claim for group rights that, actually, we get caught up in the past and lose all sense of future orientation.

Stephen A Erickson
I think Frank said something terribly important about the issue of belonging, and if I paraphrase him, with Frank's own alteration of my paraphrase, there's a serious problem now about what belonging is going to be, because it becomes more and more difficult to belong in any sense to tradition or the past, at least in the so-called First World. And as belonging becomes more difficult, identity becomes more difficult, and I remember Frank said that there's some concern about whether belonging can be future orientated. What will you belong to, what will you relate to, as an ongoing entity that not only has a past, but has a future. I think that has become a terribly serious question, a vital problem.

Simon Thompson
I'm going to follow Steve's earlier practice of ignoring the question. There's a certain way that this discussion is going about the nature of recognition that I'd just like to say something about, and it's this idea that the recognition seeker necessarily places themselves in the position of vulnerability, and kneels down to the person from whom they would receive recognition, because it's not an idea that has been challenged. I'd just like to say a little thing about it. I think this relationship of recognition between persons and groups is complex and ambivalent. I'm thinking, for example, of why the Groucho Club was so named. I didn't realise that it was called that after Groucho Marx's quip: 'I would not be a member of any club that would have me as a member.' Now this can be interpreted in recognition terms – that if the club recognised me it couldn't be a club I would want to join, if it didn't recognise me it was the place I would want to join. And if you put him on *Oprah* today, you'd probably diagnose Grouch Marx as having low self-esteem of some kind which generated this remark, an ambivalence about recognition.

Another one – I read a book recently – and I'm dashed if I can remember who it's by, someone from Essex, I think – and he spends a lot of time analysing the sentence which goes, and I remove a swearword, 'We're here, we're queer, so get used to it'. Now this seems to be a bold assertion of identity – queerness in this case – that isn't asking for recognition from anybody else – 'so get used to it'. So at first, you think, well, maybe there are forms of recognition where one does not kneel to, quite often it's the state that's referred to here as the body giving recognition. On second thoughts as I began to think about this sentence- 'We're here, we're queer, so get used to it'- I was thinking, well, why is the statement being made, because it's still being addressed to these people who presumably can't get used to the fact that 'we are queer'? Again, a massive amount of ambiguity about the relationship of recognition, and it's not clear that there's a supplicant and a giver involved in all of these positions, which seem to me to be quite fluid and changeable.

Claire Fox
If the queer theorist from Essex is here, don't take offence at not being recognised, or even remembered. Frank, I wanted you, just quickly, to respond to that, because I think that is quite a crucial thing. Does it always have to be a position of supplicantcy? You set it up in that way, but sometimes people appear to be quite assertive when they demand – I mean, most of the people who have demanded that I recognise them haven't done so in a very passive way, they've been rather aggressive and appear to incorporate something into that demand that would not suggest, as you have done, that it makes them a weakened character. Maybe you'd like to outline that quickly?

Frank Furedi
As it happens, I agree with everything that Simon said that time around. There's nothing wrong with demanding to be recognised; I think it's when you demand to be recognised because that is the way that social, cultural and political life is meant to be that it becomes formulaic and standardised. It's a bit like – have you been watching BBC recently? There's this new BBC channel on, and they ask you – with all these wonderful people laughing and giggling – 'have you heard your own voice?'. The message being that now the BBC has finally become enlightened; we've got an Asian channel and we're giving you a voice. And that's really what I'm talking about, where basically you have formulaic recognition being given in all kinds of ways by institutions, which then comes to dominate the parameters within which political debate, political negotiation and discussion takes place. That is my concern. What happens is that all the angry people, that Simon talked about, begin angry on Monday, and by Wednesday they're pussycats, as they go into consultation groups with a new minister, demanding a grant from the lottery fund. And gradually their anger becomes, in a sense, institutionalised. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but that's what's happening in a sense, and I think we should be aware of it and not flatter that with potential qualities that it simply does not have.

Claire Fox
Okay, audience, let's get a few thoughts from you.

Audience member 1
I think that from time to time we've seen many experiments trying to generate new forms of democracy, but later on we have realised as a society that our old traditional representative democracy is still the best. And I am quite interested in what Professor Barkan said when he explained that it is necessary to take account of groups' opinions in the political process, because I understand that he means that they have the voice of minorities. In that sense, I wonder if we are now discussing a new kind of democracy, where 90 per cent of the population, for example, in this country, white Anglo-Saxons, is going to be represented by MPs, and the rest, the ethnic minorities, are going to be represented only by the leaders of ethnic groups, that are not really selected in a democratic process. In that sense I think it is necessary to talk clearly about this new democratic system.

Audience member 2
My name's Sandy Starr from *spiked*. I wanted to take issue with the idea that just because we recognise people's identity, that doesn't preclude doing other things to help the disenfranchised, in maybe more traditional ways. I don't think that is true. Last week I was in a housing estate in East London and the UK government's Department for Education and Skills had launched a project there where everyone living on the estate was wired up – their TV had been converted into a web browser, they had been given video cameras, and they had been hooked up to each other so they could film each other and broadcast to each other, so they could express their identity, so the community could be made stronger, so they could all have some positive self-image.

And this is one of eight such projects that the DfES is launching in estates across Britain, and obviously for some people on those estates this will represent some improvement to their lives – they didn't have web access before, and if they've got video cameras they can film each other. You can see the problem if the government starts to see that the way to improve people's lot is helping them in terms of recognition, in terms of their positive self-image. Once that becomes the focus of the discussion you are not having a more substantial discussion about how to improve these peoples' lives. And I think that is the problem. I think it's a

little disingenuous to say just because we're doing one doesn't mean that we can't do the other – it's problematic when the focus becomes upon recognition; it does stop being a proper discussion about how to help people.

Audience member 3
Hi, this isn't a point, it's a question really, to Professor Erickson. When I was making notes on what you said, you were talking about how you think we have gone beyond therapeutic. I've got 'post-therapeutic' here. You were saying how you think that economic vocabulary has replaced therapeutic language. And then you got cut off, and went on to another point and I don't understand what you are saying though it sounds quite interesting. I was wondering if you can expand on that a little bit, please?

Audience member 4
Tony Gilland from the Institute of Ideas. It was just picking up on Elazar Barkan's point that the process of negotiation over recognition teaches both parties a lot about each other. And it just strikes me that today there seems to be too much emphasis on understanding each other. I mean, do we need to understand each other so much to live and work together? I mean if, for example, there's some aspect of a particular culture that I want to investigate, I might want to go to a museum or whatever. If I've got a friend who invites me to their house who's got a different culture to my own, I might show some interest in their culture, but that's at a very personal private level, if you like. But in the public world, I do not see why we should need to understand each other so much, and it seems that the emphasis placed on it can only fit a society that is actually very static, that has not got a dynamic to it, where that obstacle to getting on with each other in the public world would be allowed to get in the way. So isn't multiculturalism really a sort of symbol of a quite static society?

Audience member 5
Steven Schick. Can I ask Professor Barkan whether he doesn't recognise that there's an inherent paradox in what he's saying, because on the one hand he says he's really just a historian and is interested in recounting historical events and what is going on in contemporary society. And on the other hand, yes, well, this is an instrument of political activism affirming group rights. And can't in fact the activism take over the history, as it has done in Goldhagen's case, in his current book about the Holocaust and the Roman Catholic Church, which John Evans just said was a product of compensation culture. And perhaps you loose the history, and are just left with the political activism.

Claire Fox
Okay, thanks. Anything you want to pick up on, panel – starting with Steve?

Stephen A Erickson
Well, to the question asked to me, in a few words – and therefore I have to sound far more dogmatic than I am to keep within Claire's time frame – I think we are moving more and more into a kind of economic Darwinism. I rather think that we are going to be moving into a deflationary environment. If you want to talk about this simply in financial terms, it's in the nature of, for instance, the healthcare industry in the United Sates, that the insurers will do less and less for people with so-called therapeutic problems. And I think that the general mood is turning, in a way that is terribly problematic, toward a kind of Christian-right religion, amongst other things, that will not use a therapy vocabulary. I could say a few more things about this, and if you come up to me I could see who you are and talk to you after the session.

Claire Fox
Okay, thanks. Simon, do you want to pick up on anything?

Simon Thompson
I think there was one question that came more in my direction than others, and that was the question about the shift from – in the terms I'm using – distribution and recognition. I mean, all I was saying was, to be very simplistic about it, that I agree that this shift toward recognition has led to the neglect of simple issues of economic and social justice. I follow a form of theory of justice in which these would be two integral moments. In practice, all I mean is that a just society is one that has to address issues of mis-recognition and mal-distribution at the same time. That is not to say that it happens now, and I agree that there has been a shift from one to the other, and that it is damaging and unhelpful in many ways.

Elazar Barkan
There are several issues. Regarding the first question – I can refer to a couple of them together at least – it is a messy world, there's no doubt that it's a messy world. So the question is whether we are trying to demarcate it so neatly that we say that we should ignore one aspect or another. The lady that asked about political representation and democracy. Yes, when we validate the existence of groups, that does not mean to say that the groups exist as nomads and are not influenced by what is going on in society, or that their influence is not shaping the language of politicians, elected officials they are actually interacting. Elected officials want to be elected, they want to be re-elected, they want to attend to their constituencies. And therefore, when you have a group that is making an impact, then people will respond to that. So there is a close interaction between the existence of the state, of the democracy, and identity, or the politics of identity, if you will, through group rights.

If we had had the time, I would have given several examples of that, but perhaps just a quick example of the Japanese-Americans in the United States who, during the eighties, although a politically insignificant group, managed to, for complicated reasons, receive reparations for their internment during World War Two on the west coast. That has changed the dynamics of the Japanese-American community in a fundamental way. Now that is not because they had great leverage over the political system, but it was a combination of ethical considerations, of political activism within the group, the relationship of the group to the larger community, etcetera. It is a complicated matter, the calculation is very fuzzy. It's not that if we validate groups that we diminish the democratic system, or the voting; this does not happen if we elect group representatives – it is part of the political system or, if you want, the civil society which is becoming so much more important as a supplement and as a corollary to the political system.

Perhaps a few words on the question of activism taking over politics. You can look at activism in a derogatory way or in a complimentary way. If I understand your question correctly, then activism is wrong in this case because it takes over that objective history that was the purview of the historian. My own knowledge does not recognise an objective history; it recognises give and take among historians, it recognises professional discussion, it recognises that we are able to demarcate a space within which reasonable disagreement can take place. And I think that activism in this regard, if you want, is one more component of that production of history, but there is no objective superior narrative that can surpass all other narratives.

Frank Furedi
Just very briefly I think that if you look at the experience so far of recognising groups through institutional means, you've got to ask the question: has it improved the situation, have we become more sensitive to each other and to our needs, or has it created a dynamic that has in some sense made things worse. Now maybe I haven't got the same knowledge that you have, but certainly I would argue that whenever a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is set up, sociologists always predict that you are going to have more conflict and more hatred and more bitterness, rather than less conflict, less hatred, and the people holding each others' hands.

I don't know as much about Ireland as some of the Irish people in this room, but I know that when I go to Ireland now and talk to people in the two communities, the number of people who have some kind of a cosmopolitan attitude towards one another has actually diminished, and there's far greater sectarianism today in Ireland – you know, hatred, where a lot of people who used to call themselves Republicans now call themselves Catholics, and a lot of people on the other side have taken that view – than was the case before the peace process. More money is being spent on counselling and healing wounds and everything else, but it seems to have a very different effect. If you go to South Africa, where this whole business is always promoted as the high point of human achievement of the twentieth century, and you talk to people, Cape-Coloured people, Black people, White people you do not get a sense of genuine empathy towards one another – and so on, and so on.

Real recognition is invariably short-circuited by institutional intervention from the state, because that dynamic, and what the state puts in place, are very, very different. And if you want to see real recognition, then you should go to the West End of London, and you will see kids of all colours, all shapes, all sizes, all nations hanging out with each other, and you can see that there is a fluid dynamic going on there, where people are recognising one another, and they are doing that not by having their voices validated by the BBC Asian channel, or by this or that, but because they are human beings who have come to know each other, like each other, understand each other. It's not free of conflict by any means, but that is the way these things happen, and I think that by politicising identity and politicising recognition in this way, we are actually making things worse for everyone all round. On the other hand, if you can give me some successful examples of multiculturalism anywhere in the world, I am happy to eat some bits of my clothing. (Laughter) That is not the experience. Multicultural projects have this inexorable dynamic towards failure.

Claire Fox
Don't try him out on that. There's a person at the back:

Audience member 6
Well, thank you for recognising me as a person at the back. I want to talk about the idea of people having low self-esteem and demanding recognition, because I know lots of people who you would think are in the most recognised group possible, i.e., indigenous white Europeans, who are clinging on with every bit of their strength to any tiny speck that they have that can make them demand recognition – i.e. they have a Welsh grandmother, and they believe that this gives them a chance to say 'I am an oppressed group, recognise me for who I am'. This is particularly so for women who say – as you say with a backwards-looking mindset – that they look back to sexist issues that have largely been resolved now, just to try to say that they are in some way marginalized and to be able to be angry about something. And basically we are all running away as fast as possible from the idea of being a straight white male, and all that sort of thing.

I would therefore say that those people you would think are the most mainstream groups, who perhaps have had the most recognition of all, don't seem to have the high self-esteem that people think they will achieve by being recognised; they in fact seem to have quite low self-esteem, and the idea that they are not worth anything if they haven't got something to be angry about. So I would say that if you do get recognition as a group and you do move in to a kind of mainstream acceptance, might you not end up with that kind of disillusionment as well?

Claire Fox
That's a very interesting question. The person in front there. Ah, it's another of my colleagues.

Audience member 7 (Dolan Cummings)
I wonder if people could comment a bit on what I see as at best a tension, and at worst a contradiction, between recognising groups, or even individuals, and actually engaging with them as people with particular merits and abilities. It seems to me that the recognition that we have been talking about is intrinsically non-judgemental, because if it was about making judgements we wouldn't be talking about recognising a cultural group or whatever, we'd just talk about recognising what was good about them. It seems to me that this kind of promiscuous recognition does express a certain contempt for what's special about any particular culture. It refuses to engage about what is particular to them, and just says 'Yeah, you're alright with us, never mind about what you think is special about you'. That does seem to be a problem: if you don't have an objective standard of judgement in terms of what you are recognising, then is recognition really worth anything?

Audience member 8
Two quick ones. One is I'm very interested in the use of the word therapy in these kinds of discussions, because traditionally, that has a very specific definition that's really within the private sphere. I mean the practices of psychoanalysis and therapy etcetera were not traditionally part of the political process. So rather than us talking about those concepts as having a place in the political process, is there a sense in which issues which simply aren't political are being politicised, and that's what is represented by our using therapeutic terms in political discourse.

The second question I had is this: I came of age during the height of PC in Washington DC, and found it very annoying, primarily because I felt that fundamentally, it seemed that people's identities and potentials, etcetera, were very fluid and flexible, and very hard to define in such simplistic racial terms. The only nagging doubt – and I was wondering whether you had a response to this – was whether that was merely my perception because I came from the majority race, and was in a position where I did have a sort of fluidity and flexibility, in terms of what I did with my life, that other people genuinely didn't have. So I was wondering whether you could respond to either of those?

Audience member 9
My name is Craig Bailey, and as a historian, I appreciate and adore Elazar Barkan's need for evidence. But as somebody who is interested in eighteenth and nineteenth-century issues, I find it particularly difficult to link up that evidence to contemporary identity, and the issue of identity. And I was wondering, in this political process, how do you validate which claim, compensation or apology is indeed valid? I don't know if I'm misquoting you, but I thought in *The Guilt of Nations* that you stated that the grievance was relevant if it still impacted upon the group in question. And I was wondering how can that impact be

demonstrated though evidence, and how far back in history can we go, or indeed must we go, to settle these sorts of issues?

Audience member 10
Pauline Haddaway – I'm a director of a gallery in Northern Ireland. There was a reference to how this all works on the ground, and Northern Ireland obviously came up because it is where it's all happening really, in terms of identity politics. And what I really wanted to say is that it is a preoccupation; as someone who works running a gallery, I also count identities – those who come through the doors. And there is a certain surreal quality about all this because in a city that is increasingly characterised by division and sectarianism of the most vicious sort, we are also implementing side by side with this an Equality Act. And under section 75 of the Equality Act, we categorise people according to nine categories, and we count them and we send the results in to whoever our statutory funders are, to let them know that we are doing our bit.

And apart from the sort of surreal quality to all of this, I think the main problem is that in fact at the heart of this, what you actually see is an attack on knowledge, an attack on ideas. Someone said earlier today that culture – one definition of culture – was related to the transition of knowledge, and culture should be defined as the sum total of human knowledge passed down through learning and teaching. In that case, multiculturalism represents the defeat, the denigration of knowledge and ideas.

In a practical way: consider two of the categories, two of the identities which we place on people. One relates to their political opinion, the other relates to their religious belief. And obviously political opinions and religious beliefs, I always believed, were a product of conscious thought and were formed in that way. They are now denigrated in this absurd situation to identities, and we work out where people come from ideologically by where their postal address is. Their postcode tells us what their religious and political beliefs are, and that is good enough, apparently, because in the world of identity politics, political opinions are no more than an expression of an identity.

Audience member 11
My name is Shirley Laws. I've just got a brief question for the panel as to how, or whether you see a relationship between recognition and inclusion – the whole discussion around issues of inclusion in education and elsewhere.

Audience member 12
I just want to go back to something that Frank Furedi was saying about the identities, the group identities, of victims, because the reverse side of that coin is that perpetrators of alleged wrongs also acquire a group identity with two rather bad effects. One is that sometimes – as perhaps has been the case with the Whites in Zimbabwe – people who are the descendents of people who perhaps oppressed people come to lose the sympathy of many people when they come to be oppressed themselves. But the more important point, I think, is about the phoney ersatz rhetoric of apology that you get as a result of this idea of collective responsibility. If Tony Blair apologises for the Potato Famine in the nineteenth century, or even perhaps if the Vatican now apologises for things that the Catholic Church did throughout its past with reference to Jews and so on, one wonders if they can really believe what they are saying, because real apology is the painful recognition of personal responsibility for something. If you don't really think that you have that responsibility – because you don't, in fact – you actually devalue the currency of apology.

Audience member 13
Josie Appleton*, spiked online*. One of the interesting points in Elazar Barkan's book *The Guilt of Nations* is the point about the process very much being led by the guilt of the mainstream, by a sense of regret, a sense of the need to appease. And I wondered if you thought that that actually presents any problems for the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, because guilt is not a great emotion, it is not a great way to start building relationships with people. If I feel guilty about someone, in a sense I am trying to absolve myself more than I am actually building a sensible relationship with them or recognising them as an individual. So it is very much the concern of the guilty that is leading this. I wondered if you see any problems with that?

Secondly, in terms of your point about the process giving minorities a voice, historically minorities have always claimed a place in society and claimed political authority on the basis of particular ideas, and those ideas have come from the mainstream more than anything else. If you look back at the Native Americans in the 1950s, the way they claimed their place in society was to do with nationalism and claiming their civil rights in the 1960s and 70s. And now people claim their position in society almost through their incapacity. They claim authority by proving that they are unable to take that place. And doesn't that present some problems too, because what sort of voice is that, if the basis of your political authority is to say that you are not really able to take that place in society?

Claire Fox
I've just got time for two more hands that have been up from the beginning and I have ignored. And then the panel – anything you want to come back on for a few minutes at the end there.

Audience member 14
There seems to have been an idea put across that the psychological politics of recognition exists in some sort of relationship with a different sort of politics that is to do with social problems and understanding things as issues to do with social organisation. I was wondering if people had time to comment on what they thought had happened to the second one. So we seem to be in agreement that we have the rise of the politics of recognition and the dominance of a more psychological way of understanding problems. I was wondering if it was possible to give any account of where the other bit had gone to. I mean, you seem to be suggesting, Simon, that you thought it was still there, but it's just that the media doesn't report it as much. So it's less sexy to talk about things that we used to understand in social and economic terms and more sexy to talk about things that we think of in psychological terms. I got the impression from Paul earlier on that he thought it was because we got more sophisticated about understanding problems. We got into multiculturalism because we've all got more humble and think that old-fashioned ideas to do with rights and equality, and trying to get rid of racism by getting rid of immigration controls, and so on, was just a bit unsophisticated. Where's that other way of thinking about problems gone to?

Audience member 15
I was interested in Frank Furedi's point about how anger can be institutionalised, and the way in which people's legitimate demands can be co-opted by the recognition process. And I think that you can see that really clearly in the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, which is like Britain's own version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where the families' demands for justice, which have been going on for twenty five years, and their demand that someone gets the blame for these killings, have now been transformed into a demand for recognition of their past suffering, and a recognition that something went wrong on that day, rather than someone being particularly to blame. And what's missing in all this new

therapeutic inquiry, in contrast to legal inquires in the past, what's missing is any sense of political responsibility – that anyone can claim responsibility for these acts, or apportion blame for carrying them out. And so you can see how recognition of past suffering becomes a way of obsessing on the past without ever closing it, or without ever resolving it, and people become imprisoned in their past.

Claire Fox
I just wanted to comment myself on the way that institutions play this game, and how actually it becomes quite difficult as an individual not to become embroiled in it. So at the conference organised by museum professionals, the Museums' Association, on cultural diversity, what was interesting was that a curator there was arguing that to put on an exhibition about the Irish Potato Famine, they had to consult local Irish people. And when I pointed out that I was Irish and that I had absolutely no authority or insight, nor indeed did I care about the Irish Potato Famine, they were outraged that I wasn't prepared to get involved. And you could see that, from their point of view as an institution, what I counted as was as the relative of the Irish Potato Famine. In order for them, in fact, to take any notice of me, I had to say that I cared about it, and they particularly didn't want to take any notice of me, because they didn't agree with me. So it became better to try and characterise me as the 'ancestor of' so they could work with me and we could put on an exhibition about which I know nothing.

While somebody was talking about their Welsh grandmother, and people queuing up to find a basis on which they would be recognised, it's also the case that the institutions are queuing up to recognise us, and you start to realise that if you are going to get a slice of the cake – not necessarily financially but to be taken any notice of in this society – you almost have to play the game. So I think there is something quite pervasive and broad going on here. And if anyone wants to share Potato Famine stories with me, please come and see me.

The panel have not had enough time, but the subject gets more time after the break, and the panel will be available for questions informally throughout the rest of the conference. Although they haven't been given any sort of time to say the sort of things they'd like to, I hope that they will give us their last thoughts, and you will carry on talking to them after the session.

So, Steve, are there any thoughts you would like to share with people in this formal sense before you do so over coffee?

Stephen A Erickson
Very quickly, and seriously, the questions and comments have been so thoughtful that now, happily, it strikes me as arbitrary that the four of us are up here rather than in the audience, and a number of you in our place.

Claire Fox
Don't flatter them too much, Steve!

Stephen A Erickson
No, that's actually the case. Now I've been a professor a long time and listened to a lot of people. To the Washington DC woman, as I will call her, I think that the short answer to your first answer is yes, politics will fail consistently as therapy.

Now in the back of the room, there was a question asked that had to do with the notion of individuality. It wasn't quite put the way that I am now going to put it, but it had to do with how individuals might, in order to be recognised, identify themselves in terms of some Welsh grandmother or whatever. I think there are

two notions of what it is to be an individual that bear on this. One I will call the romantic notion, which I will put this way – that you could have a certain mole at a certain place on your forehead, or a certain kind of idiosyncratic feature that identified you. And I think that there are a lot of people who think that their individuality, and the recognition they deserve, should be through some form of uniqueness, and often a very superficial form. The other form of individualism that I think matters would be called – it's a term from earlier in the twentieth century – existential individualism, where you become an individual. It's not something given to you by idiosyncratic features, but it's a task.

Finally, I just returned from talking to some people in the Czech Republic, among whom were some of the dissidents who you know well from back in the seventies and in the eighties; and now times have changed, and the dissident movement, with Vaclav Havel and these people, which had at its core at the time a concern about the demands of systems versus the real aims and needs of human life. The claim made was that the demands of various forms of system were eroding – or even making no longer recognisable – what the real needs of human life are. Havel, in a very, very famous piece called *The Power of the Powerless*, which appears – amongst other places – in a book called *Open Letters*, makes the following statement: that he thinks that, in the Western world, in ways that are far more subtle, pervasive and harder to discern, there are various demands that various systems put on us – political demands, economic demands – and we react negatively and sometimes angrily to the various forms and structures that society imposes on us. Could it be that there needs to be a certain disengagement, and renewed reflection, on what the true aims of human life are in a way that doesn't simply escape to a tradition that, for many of us, has gone stale, or escape to something that you might find kind of new, in one of those really odd places like California.

Claire Fox
Thank you. Simon?

Simon Thompson
I don't have time to say what I'd like to say. One point is a point I developed in my first go at this topic, on the case of Northern Ireland, and I've brought along my first four offprints from the article. I'm not selling them, I'm giving them away if anyone wants to pick them up at the end of the session.

Welsh Granny. I'd like to leave my last word, as I always try to, to Homer Simpson. Yesterday's episode was fantastic, and I think it's most of what we need to know about this subject. I don't know whether you saw it? Homer reads a new employment policy at the Nuclear Power Plant, entitled *Am I Disabled?*. He wants to find a disability that he has so he can work from home, and it turns out – I only wrote two of them down every one on the list was fantastic – he doesn't have 'Juggler's Despair', nor does he suffer from 'Achey Breaky Pelvis', but it turns out that if he puts on another sixty pounds of weight, he will be clinically obese and can work at home. So against his better judgement, he attempts to get fatter, achieves the desired weight, stays at home, is now so big that he has to wear a frock, and a fat man's hat, as he calls it, and finds out that when he travels out of the house he suffers from lots of humiliation and he is shamed in all sorts of ways and doesn't like it, and says he is going to start a campaign against the discrimination that he suffers. It turns out that in the end he decides to slim down again because Marge no longer finds him sexually attractive. But I think that in that little sketch, the twenty minutes the Simpsons take to develop that idea, you find out a lot of what you need to know about Frank's fantastic stuff on recogntion and the therapeutic culture.

Claire Fox
Thank you very much – and amusing too. Can I ask you to sum up?

Elazar Barkan
I guess I have to apologise – the questions are very complicated and I am not going to begin even to give any justice to any of the questions. But perhaps, just a general observation, on the one hand it is presented as if multiculturalism is this sort of thing that is static – a static society – but on the other hand, that it's this dragon that has to be slain, as though we are all overwhelmed by this new and rapid changes. We should diminish it to its reasonable impact, which is quite marginal on our life, and on society's life in general.

There were several questions about *The Guilt of Nations*, and specific questions about history – how do we validate cases, how do we negotiate between groups, etcetera, and I would be more than eager to talk with you about it, though doubt that I can answer them all. Perhaps just a comment about whether apology is insincere, it's devalued, or how do we, with apology, start building relationships. Let me just suggest one thing that – and I tried to say it before, but I'll try and emphasise it in a different way – I think victims don't think that the apologies they receive are meaningless, they may want more but it doesn't devalue the apology, it increases its value. Precisely the fear that the dominating society has of these apologies is a testimony to this impact.

The question of how we start building relationships with apologies: we don't. Apology comes, not at the beginning of a relationship, but as the result of crimes by perpetrators, and it's a complex concept, and I develop it, so I'd be glad to do it some other time. But it is not the beginning of a relationship, we don't start with a clean slate – multiculturalism is not part of a clean slate, it's between groups with identities, with histories, with suffering. Some nations feel that they have to address it, others that they need to repress it. I give you just one example: one polarisation is between the way Germany thinks it needs to address its Nazism and Japan refuses to acknowledge its crimes during World War Two. These are both modern democracies, these are both countries with long national traditions. I can try to explain why one nation goes in one direction, and the other in another, but the question of recognition is profoundly related to the way that societies see their present culture.

Claire Fox
It's a great book – you have to buy the book, and read the book, and talk to him afterwards. Sorry to cut you off there. Frank?

Frank Furedi
Just quickly a response to the person that somebody called 'the woman from Washington DC'. A therapeutic relationship in politics is the same thing as in one-to-one therapeutics – it's driven by two essential dynamics. One is empathy, that you give empathy to whoever you are giving recognition to. Secondly, it is based on non-judgementalism, the therapist is not really judging you. And I think precisely because recognition involves empathy and non-judgementalism it is very attractive to most of us, that is why the state finds its' recognition institutionalisation unproblematic; nobody is going to object to being recognised when they are not being judged, and also when they are getting a bit of empathy.

I'm just going to end on the same point as the previous speaker, which is on apologies – maybe a slightly controversial point to end on. I on a personal level have a lot of disagreements with my family; we all disagree. But the one good thing I learned from my father, who is Jewish and spent time in a concentration camp, is that he always refused to accept any apology, because he always argued

– how can they apologise for this? But he also argued: that I don't believe it's every German and the idea of the Germans collectively apologising to us is nonsensical. Secondly he always refused the idea of compensation, on the grounds that to compensate something like this involves completely trivialising the whole experience and turning it into the language of hard cash, when it is something very different.

I agree with Hegel on this, who more or less made the same point in his *Master and Slave Dialectic*, when he first discussed this particular kind of question. I have a real worry here – when at first I was doing my studies, I couldn't understand how people could apologise, aside from the question of why I should apologise for anything, because I've never been consulted about anything that anyone has ever done? I also couldn't understand why people would apologise. At first I thought they were just lying – you know, when the Catholic Church apologises to the Muslims and the Jews for the Crusade, I just said to myself, they are bullshitting, they don't really mean it. Or when they apologised for the Spanish Inquisition – all of these; the Australians are apologising to the Aborigines. At first, I thought they were just lying, and I think that I was wrong; I think they really mean it, at least the people who are in the fore-front of promoting this. The reason for that is that when you actually look at the language of apology and the language of guilt, and you unpack it and see it, it's got an almost modern religious connotation to it. Because, basically, what you are saying is that our society is so evil, we've done such disgusting degrading things, we've been so terrible to the Native Americans, we've been so bad to the Muslims in Jerusalem and to the Jews here – how could we ever be so bad?

And there's actually what I find a very distasteful, elitist standpoint here; that is that the more you emphasise guilt, the more you emphasise all the terrible things you've done, the better person you are, because despite all these things you have risen above that, and aren't you ever so enlightened? And you are saved, unlike everyone else. And I think when you talk to Americans and when you talk to British people and European people who buy into this guilt game and everything else, that is what they are expressing. On the one hand their special character, but they are also expressing their own contempt for the rest of society. So I'll leave you with that thought.

Claire Fox
Elazar Barkan particularly deserves our thanks, because he came so far, and Stephen also travelled quite far, and downwards it goes after that. But actually, we'd like to thank them for the quality of the contributions they have made, and I'd also like to thank you. Thank you.