Williams, Raymond.

*Progressive, Rational*

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Private, Progressive 243

life. This development was deeply connected with corresponding changes in the senses of INDIVIDUAL and FAMILY (qq.v.).

Private life still has its old sense, in special distinction from public life ('what he is in private life') but it is the steady association of private with personal, as strongly favourable terms, that now seems predominant. In certain contexts the word can still be unfavourable – private profit, private advantage – but the association with personal independence is strong enough to permit the extraordinary description of large joint-stock corporations as private enterprise (where the chosen distinction is not from public but from State). Private, that is, in its positive senses, is a record of the legitimation of a bourgeois view of life: the ultimate generalized privilege, however abstract in practice, of seclusion and protection from others (the public); of lack of accountability to 'them'; and of related gains in closeness and comfort of these general kinds. As such, and especially in the senses of the rights of the individual (to his private life or, from a quite different tradition, to his civil liberties) and of the valued intimacy of family and friends, it has been widely adopted outside the strict bourgeois viewpoint. This is the real reason for its current complexity.

See COMMON, FAMILY, INDIVIDUAL, PERSONALITY, SOCIETY, UNDER-PRIVILEGED

PROGRESSIVE

Progressive as a term of political description is comparatively recent. It appeared in theological controversy in mC19 but had been preceded in politics by the formation progressist: 'socialists and progressists' (1848); 'two natural and inevitable parties ... conservatives and progressists' (1856). The opposed term, conservative, was then itself recent in a political sense, though it had been used since C14 in the general sense of preservative or preserving, and conservatory had a rather earlier political application. The currency of conservative as a political term is usually dated from Croker (1830): 'what is called the Tory, and which might with more propriety be called the Conservative, party'. It was then widely used,
Progressive

formally and informally, in political argument, and extended during mC19 to describe more general attitudes. Progressivist and progressive were natural counters within this argument. Disraeli (1844) wrote: 'Conservatism discards Prescription, shrinks from Principle, disavows Progress.' From the 1880s the Progressives were a generally Liberal group within municipal politics: 'there were Progressives who are not Liberals but . . . no Liberals who are not Progressives' (Rosebery, 1898). In C20 progressive has been widely extended, not only to indicate general positions and parties, but to describe particular policies and attitudes. Thus progressive conservatism has been heard of.

Quite apart from the complications of specific controversies, progressive is a complex word because it depends on the significantly complicated history of the word progress. This has been in English since C15, from fw progressus, L - a going forward, from rw pro - forward and the past participle of gradi - to step. Its early uses were of a physical march, journey or procession, then of a developing series of events. There is no necessary ideological implication in this sense of a forward movement or developing series, as we can still see in uses like the progress of a disease. All that is certainly meant is a discoverable sequence. On the other hand the very association of these senses - moving forward and discoverable sequence - made choice of the word natural when the new senses of CIVILIZATION and of HISTORY (qq.v.) were being established, especially in C18. Bunyan, in The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), caught the primary C17 sense of a journey but in the way he completed his title, 'from this world to that which is to come' included the sense of a manifest destiny and future (which especially in the future gathered the same ambience), and this was soon to be secularized and given a wholly new content. The key specialization of sense, outside certain limited contexts, depended on understanding movement as from worse to better. It was the abstraction of this movement, as a discoverable historical pattern, that produced Progress as a general idea, in close association with the ideas of CIVILIZATION and of IMPROVEMENT (qq.v.). The further idea that this was an evident or discoverable general movement of history completed the abstraction, notably in the Universal Histories of the Enlightenment. The sense was further supported by the developing idea of EVOLUTION (q.v.), where an inherent principle of development to higher forms became the primary sense. Young, in 1742, used
progress in the general sense of improvement:

Nature delights in progress; in advance
From worse to better; but when minds ascend,
Progress, in part, depends upon themselves.

Yet even this is different from the eventual abstraction of an inherent process of social and historical improvement. Though based in C18, the full development of the idea of Progress, as a law of history (‘you can’t stop progress’), belongs to the political and industrial revolutions of IC18 and C19. It is interesting that because of the mixed character of these changes Progress came to be questioned or opposed not only from conservative or metaphysical positions but also by those who saw different or contradictory movements in history, which made the abstraction of Progress as a universal social or historical law merely IDEALIST (q.v.). In C20 progress has retained its primary sense of improvement but has an important (as well as an ironic) sense which takes it simply as change: the working out of some tendency, in evident stages, as in the older sense. Any particular progress may then be approved or disapproved, on quite different criteria.

Progressive is a difficult term in politics because it has this history behind it. It can still be used simply as the term opposite to conservative; that is, for one who welcomes or advocates change. In its most general and improving sense it is an adjective applied, by themselves, to virtually all proposals of all parties. There is an important complexity in that, on the one hand, the phrase is used generally of the Left (by parts of the Left) as in progressive-minded people, but, on the other hand, is used to distinguish supporters of ‘moderate and orderly’ change (as is EVOLUTION, opposed to REVOLUTION (qq.v.)), where the sense of a steady step-by-step journey in some general direction is called upon, as in ‘a progressive but not a socialist party’, or ‘Conservatism is orderly progress; we are the genuinely progressive party’. It is certainly significant that nearly all political tendencies now wish to be described as progressive, but for the reasons given it is more frequently now a persuasive than a descriptive term.

See CIVILIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, EVOLUTION, EXPLOITATION, HISTORY, IMPROVE, REACTIONARY, REFORM, REVOLUTION
(q.v.). On the other hand, radical was readopted, especially in the United States from the late 1950s, in a sense very close to the eC19 use; as such it is often virtually equivalent to socialist or revolutionary, and has gathered the same range of responses as in that earlier period. The choice of radical, especially in the United States though it has been imitated in Europe and elsewhere, can probably be related to mC20 difficulties in the definitions of socialist and communist (qq.v. and cf. Marxist). Radical seemed to offer a way of avoiding dogmatic and factional associations while reasserting the need for vigorous and fundamental change. At the same time it avoided some of the difficulties in revolutionary (q.v.), making a necessary distinction between an armed rising and militant opposition to the political system. Radical then went far beyond its received mC20 meanings, but the problems of definition (including matters of 'dogma' and 'faction', or of principle and organization) were in the end not evaded by revival of the word. In extension from these movements, there is a set of associations with alternative social perspectives, as in radical technology. It is interesting that the old phrase radical reform (q.v.) has been split into the contrasted radical and reformist, within the radical movement, while elsewhere radical (with militant) does service as a contrast with moderate (which in practice is often a euphemistic term for everyone, however insistent and committed, who is not a radical).

See communism, liberal, progressive, reform, revolution, socialist

RATIONAL

The group of words which are derived from and include rational and reason is extremely complex. We have only to think of the contemporary distance between reasonableness and rationalization. The social and intellectual history involved in the development of these words is immense, but some main points can be picked out. Reason (from fw reisun or raison, OF, rationem, L, from a root in the past participle of reri, L – to think) had from its earliest uses in
C13 English two kinds of meaning. It was at once specific – a statement, account or understanding, as still in ‘believed with reason’ as well as in ‘a reason for believing’ – and general – a (usually specifically human) faculty of connected thought and understanding. There is no absolute need to oppose these two senses, but distinction and even radical opposition between them have been features of a long and continuing argument. There have been times when Reason, often in this use capitalized, has been sharply distinguished from the giving of any specific reason or reasons. The two most notable instances are the IC16 and C17 theological use of Reason, often emphasized as Right Reason, against new kinds of reasoning and rationality, and the IC18 and eC19 Idealist use of Reason as the transcendent power of grasping first principles, as distinct from the processes of empirical (q.v.) verification or rational calculation. Given this complexity, it is not surprising that in the most bitter disputes most parties have claimed to have reason on their side. Reason in the specific sense, of a reason for something, has been relatively uncontroversial and has remained common. Reason in the most general sense, as a human faculty, has always been there but has been so variously applied, over a range from reason understood as ‘informed by grace’ as opposed to mere ‘carnal reason’, to reason understood as a set of universal principles as distinguished from reason as the faculty of connected and demonstrated argument, that it is, obviously, a word that cannot be taken far on its own. Some of the effects of this argument can be seen in the changing and varying effects of reasonable, but the most important effects are in the senses of rational and its derivatives.

Rational and reasonable have the same primary sense, of being endowed with reason, as a creature, or being characterized by reason, as an act or argument. But reasonable developed a very early specialized sense of moderation or limitation, which says much about the understanding of the human condition within a medieval theological perspective: a resonable prayer (Chaucer, 1366), a resonable request (1399), resonable desyris (1561). It is interesting that this developed, from C17, not only into more general uses to indicate moderation (as now in ‘reasonable wage demands’, where there is already significant tension between reasonable and demand, and where the underlying principles, though as strong, are hardly as explicit) but also into a persistent use to indicate cheapness: ‘when
paper is more reasonable’ (1667); ‘at a very reasonable cost’. Rational never really followed this development, though the sense of moderation is not far away in polemical uses of ‘any rational person’ or ‘all rational men’, where the results of specific rationality or reasoning are usually confidently assumed in advance.

Rational, in its predominant sense, has remained relatively constant. It still means having or evidently exercising the faculty of reason, and its negative, irrational, quite strictly corresponds to this. But it is another matter with rationalist, rationalism and even rationality. The rational or rationalist physicians (cf. empirical) were a special case. The term really came through in theology and in the closely associated C17 social, political and intellectual arguments, where a Reason associated with faith, precedent and established law was challenged both by new reasoning and new concepts of the reasonable, and, in the complexity of the argument, by an appeal beyond (mere human) reason. (Cf. C. Hill: Change and Continuity, 1974; Ch. 4.) Thus from 1670: ‘a mere Rationalist (that is to say in plain English, an Atheist of the late Edition)’. This use has continued, though with variations of detail: cf. ‘the Rationalist ... makes the whole subject of Religion and Revelation ... a matter of sensible evidence or intellectual demonstration’ (Myers, 1841). Rationalism was formed in C19, mainly in this sense. Constant attacks on it provoked the counter-term Irrationalism.

A rationale, however (from C17), was still a reasoned argument or an underlying reason. It is interesting to trace the development of another qualification of rationality, which now occasionally affects even rationale and certainly affects rational and rationalist, but is most evident in rationalize. The theological use was once fairly simple: men were trying to reason about matters which ‘unaided reason’ could not resolve; they needed the help either of revelation or of authoritative guidance; those who refused either were mere rationalists, whether professed believers or not. The argument about revelation has gone its own way; the argument about authoritative guidance has extended much more widely. Meanwhile Boswell’s ‘pretty dry rationality’ (1791) expressed a new reaction; its context is religious but it is symptomatic of a distinction of rationality from emotion or feeling. These could be either established emotions (a feeling of loyalty or duty which rationalist thinkers were criticizing) or any emotions (which rationalists were
held to undervalue or despise, humans being now *emotional* as well as *rational* creatures, and the *rational* merely one ‘side’ of human nature). There was a C17 use of ‘only Mental or Rational’ (Gale, 1677) as opposed to *Real*, but *rationalize*, much more specifically, passed in eC19 through a sense of explaining on a rational basis to explaining away: ‘to rationalize away all the wonders’ (Kingsley, 1855). This has remained an important sense, and supports the deprecatory meanings of *rationalist* and *rationalism*. But the distinction between *reason* and *emotion*, the ‘two sides’ of human nature which became conventional in 1C18 and C19, was given a surprising new twist in C20. In Freudian and related psychology ‘feelings’ – *instinctual drives* – were given primacy; a reversal of the long definition of *reason* and the *rational* as central and constitutive human faculties. *Rationalization* was not now explaining away the divine or the wonderful; it was finding a false or covering ‘reason’ for an act or feeling which had quite other (‘instinctual’) origins. As this extended into common use, *rationalization* came to mean any false or substitute *reason*, even for the ‘real’ *reason*. Where this leaves *reasoning* and *rationality* has not been clear. *Rationalization* can be distinguished as false reasoning, but *irrational* is still avoided, since the distinction is not (or at least not consistently) made on that ground. Moreover, though more comfortable words are usually found, the associated conviction is usually that human beings are ‘at root’ or ‘fundamentally’ *irrational*; the *rational* is then mere reason-making and reason-finding, of a secondary kind. As in other matters, this position recalls certain earlier structures, of a theological or idealist kind, and *reason* where it is retained is defined by such a structure. *Rational*, in this structure, can be limited to sensible and coherent; *reasonable*, significantly, is ‘moderate’, a matter of accepting ‘necessary’ limitations.

The other significant tension, in this group of words in their contemporary use, is around *irrational* in quite another sense. Several new kinds of action, which have *rationales* and are often supported by extensive *reasoning*, are dismissed as *irrational* (‘the new *irrationalism*’; another variant is *mindless*) because they are not *reasonable* (*moderate*) in the conventional sense. To be *reasonable* or *rational* is to have certain assumptions of purpose, system or method which are then so deeply held that for others to challenge them is not only *unreasonable* but *irrational* (and probably a *rationalization* of
some quite other emotion or motive). It would help, against such confusion, if we could with any confidence call in reason, but we have seen how shifting that is. Reasoning, however, may still hold.

See empirical, experience, subjective, theory, unconscious

REACTIONARY

Reactionary is now widely used as a description of right-wing attitudes and positions (right and left having been conventional, from eC19, though much more common in C20, for broadly conservative and progressive positions, from a particular occasion in French parliamentary seating). But reactionary is a complicated word, if only because of the complications of progress and progressive (q.v.). Reaction came into English, in mC17, in a primarily physical sense: an action opposing or resisting another action – so that action and reaction became physical laws – and then, more widely, as an action influenced by or in response to a preceding action, especially in chemistry and physiology but more generally in the sense of a declared or observable response (‘my reaction to that’, ‘public reaction to that’). The political use came first in French, in eC19, in a relatively precise political context: it was used of attitudes and actions opposing or resisting the Revolution, with a strong sense of wishing to re-establish a pre-revolutionary state of affairs. It was from this special context that the word was borrowed into the specialized English sense, but with an early and wide range: ‘perpetuating of factious quarrels’ (Scott, 1816) as well as the eventually predominant sense of ‘opposing reform’. Reaction was then capitalized in a way comparable to the capitalization of Progress.

Reactionary has become difficult because it can mean (i) opposed to reforms, (ii) wishing to go back to some previous condition, (iii) by application, supporting a particular (right-wing) version of society. There are few difficulties when all impulses to change (actions) are from the Left, and all resistance (reactions) from the Right. But if, for example, a capitalist party is in an innovating phase, or if a