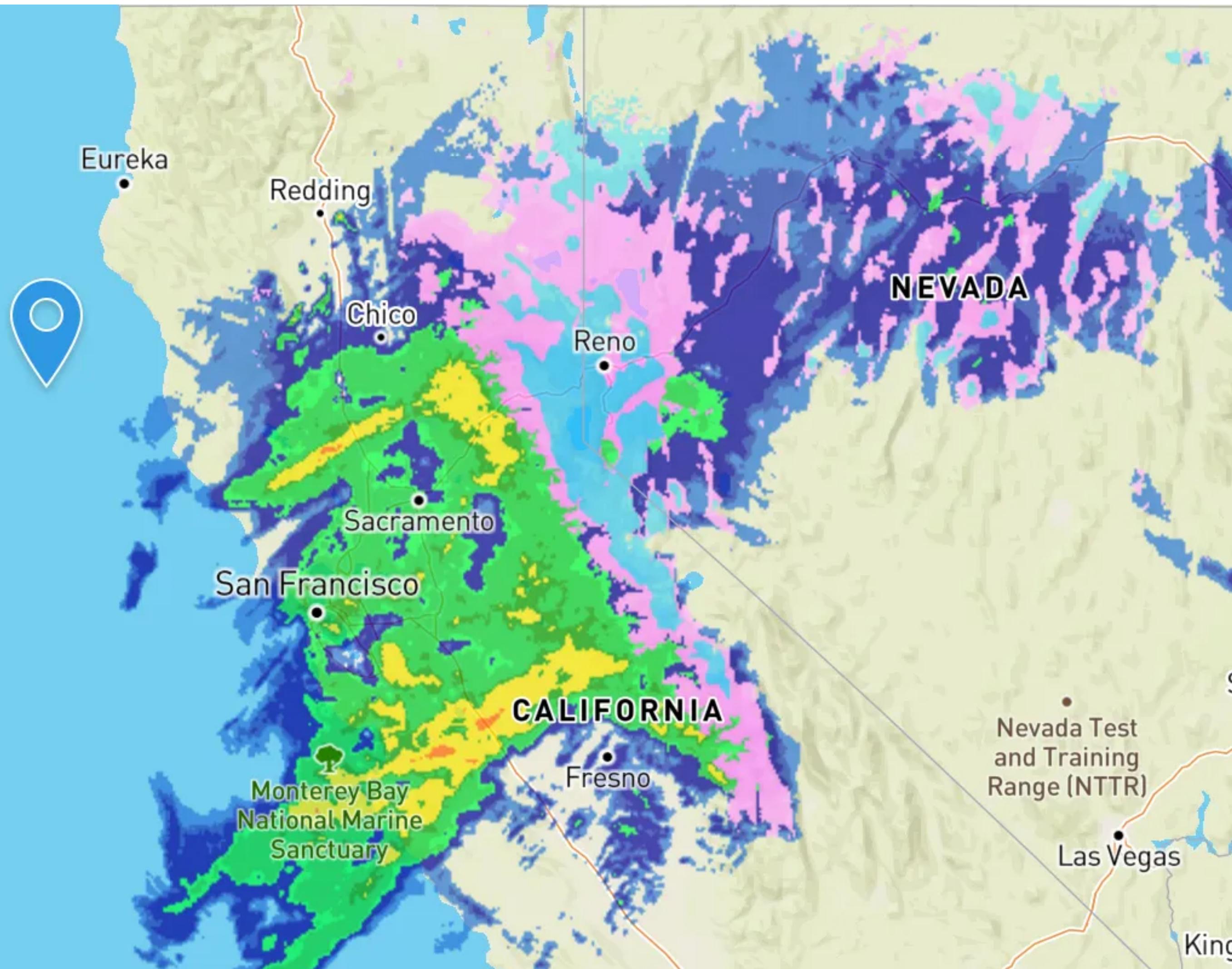


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CONDITION: Welcome Rain!





Here in Berkeley we are at 125% of average seasonal rainfall to date. We are two-fifths of the way through the rainy season, and have so far received half of annual average rainfall.

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FOCUS: Creeping Academic Idiocyâ€”Academic Freedom Edition:

Sigh:

Rajiv Sethi: From Hamline University to the Buddhas of Bamiyan: During an online art history class on October 6, a lecturer at Hamline University [displayed an image](#) of a painting—the Prophet Muhammad receiving his first Quranic revelation from the Angel Gabriel—14th century—commissioned by a Sunni king—considered a masterpiece of Islamic art. Cognizant that some students might find any depiction of Muhammad to be contrary to religious precepts against idolatry, the instructor provided written and verbal content warnings. What followed is both disturbing and depressingly familiar. A complaint was filed, the presentation was characterized by senior administrators as undeniably Islamophobic, and the lecturer (who did not have the protections of tenure) was fired. A letter by the chair of the religion department defending the instructor and providing context for the classroom exercise was published by the student newspaper, but then scrubbed from the paper's website after two days.





This painting is one of the images at the center of the discussion in the Hamline classroom. It is included in a historical text written by Rashid al-Din, a famous 14th-century Muslim vizier and historian.
(Edinburgh University Library, Or. Ms. 20)

As I have understand it, the prohibition (for those who follow it) against making an image of the Prophet Mohammed arises out of the context of the interaction of the Islamic "kumene" with the Byzantine Empire and subsequent Eastern Orthodox communities. The fear was that some believers would then take such images, and treat them like icons as holy and sacred things to be venerated. This would be bad: veneration and worship should be solely of the Almighty, the Merciful, the Compassionate. For, as Abu Bakr said upon announcing the death of the Prophet:

Whoever among you worships Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him): Muhammad has died. Whoever worships God: God is alive, and cannot die!

It seems to me that these days very very few indeed are in any danger of falling into error by turning a picture of Muhammed into an icon to be venerated.

The danger seems to lie on the other side to fall into error by ascribing a God-like transcendental holiness to Muhammed's face, in the sense that we see in Exodus 33:

And [the Lord] said, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen..."

Rajiv Sethi recommends:

- **Christiane Gruber:** [An Academic Is Fired Over a Medieval Painting of the Prophet Muhammad](#): "The dismissal of an instructor at Hamline University on baseless charges of 'Islamophobia' raises concerns about freedom on campus!"
- **Amna Khalid:** [Most of All, I Am Offended as a Muslim](#): "On Hamline University's shocking imposition of narrow religious orthodoxy in the classroom!"
- **Mark Berkson:** [Letter to the Oracle](#)

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MUST-READ: *Les Mis Daily*:

A nice way to use SubStack:

Victor Hugo (1862): [Les Mis Daily - Preface](#): "So long as there shall exist, by virtue of law and custom, decrees of damnation pronounced by society, artificially creating hells amid the civilization of earth, and adding the element of human fate to divine destiny; so long as the three great problems of the century—the degradation of man through pauperism, the corruption of woman through hunger, the crippling of children through lack of light—are unsolved; so long as social asphyxia is possible in any part of the world—in other words, and with a still wider significance, so long as ignorance and poverty exist on earth, books of the nature of *Les Mis*—cables cannot fail

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BRIEFLY NOTED:

ONE IMAGE: The Mountains of the Continental United States:



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ONE AUDIO: Josiah Ober: The Greeks & the Rational:

[Josiah Ober, *The Greeks and the Rational: The Discovery of Practical Reason*](#) (U California Press, 2022)

Josiah Ober & Javier Meija: â€˜Tracing practical reason from its origins to its modern and contemporary permutations, the Greek discovery of practical reason, as the skilled performance of strategic thinking in public and private affairs, was an intellectual breakthrough that remains both a feature of and a bug in our modern world. Countering arguments that rational choice-making is a contingent product of modernity, [The Greeks and the Rational: The Discovery of Practical Reason](#) (U California Press, 2022) traces the long history of theorizing rationality back to ancient Greece.

In this book, Josiah Ober explores how ancient Greek sophists, historians, and philosophers developed sophisticated and systematic ideas about practical reason. At the same time, they recognized its limitsâ€”that not every decision can be reduced to mechanistic calculations of optimal outcomes. Ober finds contemporary echoes of this tradition in the application of game theory to political science, economics, and business management. *The Greeks and the Rational* offers a striking revisionist history with widespread implications for the study of ancient Greek civilization, the history of thought, and human rationality itselfâ€!

<<https://overcast.fm/+s3EsH6lDk>>

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- **Noah Smith:** [The third magic: A meditation on history, science, and AI](#)!
- **Olivier Blanchard:** [Fiscal Policy under Low Interest Rates](#)!
- **Paul Krugman:** â€“[In the end](#), it all comes down to individual motives and decisions. A business that raises its prices doesn't do so because the Fed has increased the money supply. The chain of events that leads to that price rise may have started with the Fed, but the firm is responding to its own market conditionsâ€!. It's precisely because inflation isn't immaculate that we worry about things like supply shocks and wage-price spirals â€” and why estimating the cost of disinflation is so hardâ€!
- **David Roberts:** â€“[Great to see](#) Florida officially becoming a haven for pathetic failed dictator wannabesâ€!. â€œBolsonaro has been reduced to aimlessly walking around a gated community in Orlando after fleeing Brasil due to fears of several criminal investigations now that he no longer has presidential immunityâ€!
- **Hilzoy:** â€“[Peace in Europe](#) isâ€; an astonishing human creation, requiring a lot of ingenuity, diplomatic skill, and willingness to compromise. It does not maintain itself. We should never forget how deeply unnatural it is, and never stop protecting itâ€!
- **Mark Bellemere:** â€“[After wasting](#) a lot ofâ€! time on Twitter this past decade, I seeâ€! a chance to resetâ€! read more booksâ€!. The Bookly appâ€! allows you to keep trackâ€!
- **Perry Bacon Jr.:** â€“[The level of detail](#) and willingness to describe Stefanik's actions without pulling punches make this Nick Confessore story uniqueâ€!
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- **Steve M:** [Today I Learned What Right-Wingers Mean When They Say â€œBig Mikeâ€](#)
- **Aure:** [How to Remove Amazon Kindle Ebook DRM in 2022](#)â€!

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Â¶s:

David Singh Grewal: [A World-Historical Gamble: The Failure of Neoliberal Globalization](#): â€“In the midst of all this obvious geopolitical conflict, the *doux commerce* thesis would seem once again thoroughly repudiated. Nevertheless, confronted with the apparent failure of the world without walls, some defenders of neoliberalism still argue that the integration of our geopolitical rivals into a Western-led economic order has at least *contained* their sphere of action, even if it has failed to transform them. The argument is that we now have more leverage over them because they are part of the global economy than we would have if they were outside it. This argument focuses on global economic interdependence, which it imagines as at least limiting, if not eliminating, interstate violence...

Michael Ignatieff: [The Politics of Enemies](#): â€“Illiberal, populist visions have long defined democracy as majority rule backing up a strong leader, while liberal definitions have long insisted that majority rule must be balanced by minority rights and countermajoritarian institutionsâ€!. Liberals, like conservatives, know what there is to fear: the fatal cycle that begins with revolutionary enthusiasm and expectation, slipping into violence justified in the name of a better world, followed by civil war, dissolution of the state, and the authoritarian reassertion of controlâ€!. In any competitive democratic system, the temptation to treat an adversary as an enemy is unavoidableâ€!. Democracyâ€™s informal rules of engagement might best be described as a code of hypocritical civilityâ€!. Smart adversaries keep the contest clean to keep it under controlâ€!. Once elections are concluded, competitive passions are usually spent, and tried and tested forms of decorum resume their pacifying roleâ€!. Democratic assemblies and elections have regulatory codes that restrain extremist speech, but such codes will always be vulnerable to being gamed and manipulated by scheming opportunistsâ€!

Mixin Pei: [China: Totalitarianismâ€™s Long Shadow](#): â€“The Leninist party-state has in recent years reverted to a form of neo-Stalinist ruleâ€!. Post-totalitarian regimesâ€! possess far greater capacity and resources to resist and neutralize the liberalizing effects of modernization. However, the medium-term success of these regimes may only ensure their eventual demise through revolution. The socioeconomic transformation of societies under post-totalitarian rule empowers social forces and greatly increase the odds of revolutionary change...

Cory Doctorow: [â€œMetaverseâ€ means â€œpivot to videoâ€](#): â€“Google didnâ€™t need to build a successful video service. It could simply buy one.... In 2015, Facebook staged a raid on YouTubeâ€! sought to leverage this competitive advantage to force publishers to subsidize its video service rollout. Facebook defrauded these publishers, [falsely claiming that the unpopular, obscure videos that appeared on its site were actually runaway successes](#), drawing more views than the print articles the publishers specialized in producing. Facebook made grandiose claims about a profound shift in human behaviorâ€!. Publishers were taken in.... Publishers [experienced a mass-extinction event](#)â€!. In 2021, Mark Zuckerberg announced thatâ€! the internetâ€’s billions were clamoring to interact with each other as legless, sexless, low-polygon cartoon characters in a high-surveillance walled garden he called â€œthe metaverse.â€ [Its] users are every bit as imaginary as the content hungry viewers of the pivot-to-video. [Even Metaâ€™s own employees are totally indifferent to it](#). Mark Zuckerberg wants to build another walled garden.... If it fails, at least the majority of the pain will be felt by the suckers who bought Zuckerbergâ€™s latest lie.... The words are different, but this is the same tune Zuckerberg started warbling in 2003: â€œZuck: Yeah so if you ever need info about anyone at Harvard. Just ask. I have over 4,000 emails, pictures, addresses, SNS. [Redacted Friendâ€™s Name]: What? Howâ€™d you manage that one? Zuck: People just submitted it. I donâ€™t know why. They â€œtrust meâ€ Dumb fucksâ€...

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