I am not a prisoner. As a high school student, I cannot truly speak in place of the prisoners who are the subject of the topic. One’s perspective does not merely define where they speak from but has a direct relation to the epistemic credibility of what is being said. **Alcoff 91**[[1]](#footnote-1)

The recognition that there is a problem in speaking for oth- ers has arisen from two sources. First, there is a growing recogni- tion that **where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus** that **one cannot** assume an ability to **transcend one's location.** In other words, a speaker's location (which I take here to refer to their social location, or social identi- ty) has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech. **The creation of women's** studies **and African-American studies departments was founded on this very belief:** that both the study of and the **advocacy for the oppressed must** come to **be done principally by the oppressed themselves**, and that we must finally acknowledge that systematic divergences in social location be- tween speakers and those spoken for will have a significant effect on the content of what is said. The unspoken premise here is simply that **a speaker's location is epistemically salient.** I shall ex- plore this issue further in the next section. The second source involves a recognition that, not only is location epistemically salient, but certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous.4 In particular, the practice of **privileged persons speaking** for or **on behalf of less privileged persons has** actually **resulted** (in many cases) **in increasing** or reinforcing the **oppression of the group spoken for.** This was part of the argu- ment made against Anne Cameron's speaking for Native Cana- dian women: Cameron's intentions were never in question, but the effects of her writing were argued to be counterproductive in regard to the needs of Native women. Thus, **the work of privileged authors who speak on behalf of the oppressed is coming** more and more **under criticism from** members of those **oppressed groups** themselves**. As philosophers** and social theorists **we are authorized** by virtue of our academic positions **to develop theories that express** and encompass **the** ideas, **needs**, and goals **of others.** However, **we must** begin to **ask ourselves whether this is** a **legitimate authority.** Is the discursive practice of speaking for others ever a valid prac- tice, and, if so, what are the criteria for validity? In particular, is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than me?

Interrogating the purported objectivity of discourse requires recognizing that while it is impossible to completely abstract from a site of privilege, we have an ethical imperative to examine the latent effects of our topical discourse. **Alcoff 91**[[2]](#footnote-2)

The impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed and, in many cases (certainly for academics!), fought against. This may seem an odd way to begin discussing how to speak for, but the point is that **the impetus** to always be the speaker and **to speak in all situations must be seen for what it is: a desire for mastery and domination.** If one's immediate impulse is to teach rather than listen to a less-privileged speaker, one should resist that impulse long enough to interrogate it carefully. Some of us have been taught that by right of having the dominant gender, class, race, letters after our name, or some other criterion we are more likely to have the truth. Others have been taught the opposite, and will speak haltingly, with apologies, if they speak at all.12 **At the same time, we have to acknowledge that the** very **decision to "move over"** or retreat **can occur only from a position of privilege. Those who are not in a position of speaking at all cannot retreat from an action they do not employ.** Moreover, making the decision for oneself whether to retreat is an extension or appli- cation of privilege, not an abdication of it. **Still, it is** sometimes **called for.** 2. **We must** also **interrogate the bearing of our location and context on what** it is **we are saying, and this should be an explicit part of every** serious **discursive practice we engage in.** Construct- ing hypotheses about the possible connections between our loca- tion and our words is one way to begin. This procedure would be most successful if engaged in collectively with others, by which aspects of our location less highlighted in our own minds might be revealed to us.13 One deformed way in which this is too often carried out is when speakers offer up in the spirit of "honesty" autobiographical information about themselves usually at the beginning of their discourse as a kind of disclaimer. **This is** meant **to acknowledge** their own understanding **that they are speaking from a specified, embodied location without pretense to a transcendental truth.** But as Maria Lugones and others have forcefully argued, such an act serves no good end when it is used as a disclaimer against one's ignorance or errors and is made without critical interrogation of the bearing of such an autobiography on what is about to be said. It leaves for the listeners all the real work that needs to be done. For example, if a middle-class white man were to begin a speech by sharing with us this autobiographical information and then using it as a kind of apologetics for any limitations of his speech, this would leave those of us in the audience who do not share his social location to do the work by ourselves of translating his terms into our own, appraising the applicability of his analysis to our diverse situation, and determining the substantive relevance of his location on his claims. This is simply what less-privileged persons have always had to do when reading the history of philosophy, literature, etc., making the task of appropriating these discourses more difficult and time-consuming (and more likely to result in alienation). Simple unanalyzed disclaimers do not improve on this familiar situation and may even make it worse to the extent that by offering such information the speaker may feel even more authorized to speak and be accorded more authority by his peers. 3. Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says. To whom one is accountable is a political/epistemological choice contestable, contingent, and, as 26 Linda Alcoff Donna Haraway says, constructed through the process of discur- sive action. What this entails in practice is a serious and sincere commitment to remain open to criticism and to attempt actively, attentively, and sensitively to "hear" (understand) the criticism. A quick impulse to reject criticism must make one wary. 4. Here is my central point. In order **to evaluate attempts to speak for others in particular instances, we need to analyze the** prob- able or actual **effects of the words on the discursive and material context.** One cannot simply look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak, nor can one look merely at the proposi- tional content of the speech; one must also look at where the speech goes and what it does there. Looking merely at the content of a set of claims without looking at effects of the claims cannot produce an adequate or even meaningful evaluation of them, partly because the notion of a content separate from effects does not hold up. The content of the claim, or its meaning, emerges in interaction between words and hearers within a very specific historical situation. Given this, we have to pay careful attention to the discursive arrangement in order to understand the full meaning of any given discursive event. For example, **in a situation where a** well-meaning **First World person is speaking for** a person or group in **the Third World, the very discursive arrangement may reinscribe** the "**hierarchy** of civilizations" view **where the U**nited **S**tates **lands** squarely **at the top. This effect occurs because the speaker is positioned** as authoritative and empowered, **as the knowledgeable subject, while** the group in **the Third World is reduced**, merely because of the structure of the speaking practice, **to** an object **a**nd **victim that must be championed from afar, thus disempowered.** Though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard.'4 This shows us why **it is** so **important to reconceptualize discourse, as Foucault recommends, as an event**, which includes speaker, words, hearers, location, language, and so on.

Focusing directly on the perspectives of the oppressed is the only way to promote liberation. **Freire 70**[[3]](#footnote-3)

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. **The oppressors**, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, **cannot** find in this power the strength to **liberate** either **the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from** the weakness of **the oppressed will** be sufficiently strong to **free both.** Any attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. **In order to have the** continued **opportunity to express their "generosity," the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well.** An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this "generosity," which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. That is why the dispensers of false gen­ erosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source. True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life," to extend their trembling hands. **True generosity** lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individ­ uals or entire peoples—need be extended less and less in supplica­ tion, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world. This lesson and this apprenticeship **must come**, however, **from the oppressed themselves and** from **those** who are **truly solidary with them.** As individuals or as peoples, by fighting for the restoration of their humanity they will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. **Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer** the effects of oppression **more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?** They will not gain this libera­ tion by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. And this fight, be­ cause of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually consti­ tute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors violence, lovelessness even when clothed in false generosity.

Narratives are key to understanding the perspectives of the oppressed.

**Rowland 5**[[4]](#footnote-4)

The important rhetorical point about setting in **narrative** is that stories **can transport us out of our here and now and put us in places very different from our own world.** As i write this chapter, I am sitting in Lawrence, Kansas, a progressive (for Kansas) college town in the American Midwest. But through Narrative, a skillful rhetor could transport me to Auschwitz, the battle of Gettysburg, or any other place or time in our human history. As a consequence, **narrative can be** used to **break down barriers to human understanding. It is difficult for** early **twenty-first-century Americans to understand the horrors of the Holocaust. But through narrative,** Elie **Wiesel and others have taken us to Auschwitz and made us see the horrors of the death camps.**

Ignoring narratives creates serial policy failure. Narratives are required for policymaking. **McDonough 6**[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Why is narrative so central to policymaking? Because it is central to life. We live our lives** crafting, **telling, and receiving stories.** We tell our loved ones stories from our day. We catch up with old friends by sharing tales from our lives. We receive, from all forms of the media, stories to help make sense of our world. In constructing our stories, we are necessarily selecting in choosing and editing details to drive home a lesson; to engage our audience; or to meet time, space, and other constraints. This is true for the hardest sciences. “So much of science proceeds by telling stories,” writes Harvard naturalist Stephen Jay Gould in Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History. He sees us as “vulnerable to the constraints of this medium” because we are unaware of our tale telling in observing the natural world. “**We think that we are reading nature by applying** rules of **logic** and laws of matter **to our observations**,” he says, “**but we are often telling stories.**” **Policymakers**, like scientists, **are as human as the rest of us. Part of our uniquely human heritage involves telling stories to find meaning from the** events, **data**, and stimuli **in our lives.** Most policymakers, and especially legislators, have not had training in research methods and thus share the layperson’s suspicion of statistical analysis. The adage “Lies, damn lies, and statistics” makes more sense to most of them than does the value of the r-square.

Empirically proven. Narratives are key to Congressional action. **Rowland 5**[[6]](#footnote-6)

Consequently, great literature often fails as rhetoric because the theme is too complex for the mass audience. On the other hand, great rhetorical narratives often are inferior literature. Harriet Beecher **Stowe's novel about the horrors of slavery, Uncle Tom’s Cabin,**is generally not considered to be great literature. The characters are based on simple stereotypes and show little subtlety. But there is no question that Stowe'snovel **had an immense rhetorical impact on popular attitudes about** slavery in the North in the years **leading up to the Civil War.** Similarly, Upton **Sinclair's attack on the meat packing industry, The Jungle,** may not be thought of as one of the greatest American novels, but the very lack of subtlety that a literary critic might decry, **helped** it **influence Congress to regulate the industry.**

Thus the **Plan**: The USFG ought to provide Pell Grants to eligible prisoners in the United States criminal justice system. I reserve the right to clarify, so no theory violations until he checks in CX. No legal violations link because affirming means amending the laws to make the aff world consistent with them.

Seth **Ferranti** explains his story as an inmate denied Pell Grants[[7]](#footnote-7)

In 1995 when I first entered the Bureau of Prisons, I heard a lot about Club Fed and the country club environment. When I was at the Alexandria County jail, all the Virginia state prisoners looked on me with envy, "You going to the Feds, Joe." They thought it was something special. Still today in 2002, people coming in have the impression that the Feds are special or different, that it is the top line of prisons. Well, I'm here to tell you that it's not. Prison sucks and as our society turns into a police state, the BOP mirrors every move. During my nine years of incarceration in the feds, things have only got worse and more restrictive. After getting sentenced at the Alexandria federal courthouse, I was designated to FCI Manchester, a medium-to-high security level prison in the hills of Kentucky. It was a brand new prison built in 1992. So, in effect, I was opening it up along with 800 other prisoners. Half of the population had come down from the USP's (federal penitentiaries), a lot from Terre Haute, and some from Atlanta or Lewisburg. FCI Manchester was new and clean, resembling a fortified college campus. Welcome to Club Fed, I thought. But like most rumors you hear in prison, the jokers who spread the country club line were full of shit. When I think of a country club, I imagine pools, tennis courts, and golf courses. I imagine exquisite food and luxuries. FCI Manchester had none of that, though at the time they had prison staples: weights, no top of the line like Gold's Gym, but adequate, laid out in the recreation yard like you would see in any prison movie. They had band rooms with electric guitars, drums, amps; everything you needed to have a rock, blues, Latin, reggae, jazz, or R & B band. There was an inmate organization that sponsored banquets, prize bingos, and weekly movies. In the unit you could watch the institutional movies, HBO, or Showtime. Plus they showed the pay-per-view boxing and wrestling events. All of this was paid for by the inmate organization and the inmate trust fund. There were many recreational activities and plenty to keep you busy. You could order recreational equipment, shoes, or sweats from Eastbay catalogs or Glenn's Sporting Goods through recreation. Dudes in prison would be decked out in the latest kicks from the street and would be styling Champion sweat suits with hoods in a variety of colors. Prisoners had Diadora shorts, Nike socks, Addidas shirts and hats or whatever they could or wanted to order. **Education sponsored a college program through the University of Eastern Kentucky, funded by Pell grants**; prisoners were getting their college degrees. It wasn’t Club Fed, but at least we were living a little. At one point in FCI Manchester, I had an acoustic guitar, a Sony Walkman, cassette tapes, and a typewriter in my room. I had all name brand sweats, shoes, shirts, and shorts in multiple styles and colors. As my time went on, I would look back on these days longingly because **at that time the BOP let us have an identity.** There was an effort to keep us occupied, and **we had a chance for rehab**ilitation. And all the prisoners who had been anywhere else in the system said that FCI Manchester sucked. They talked of FCI "Dream" Mckean where you could get packages from the street, have family days in the yard, July 4th cookouts, and order pizza from Dominos once a month. They talked about FCI Fort Dix where you could get anything you wanted from the street. They talked about the USP's with the all-you-can-eat chow halls boasting ice cream machines and steaks. I heard all this talk, and I wanted to live a little more also. I was trying to transfer to FCI Fort Dix, which was a low, when my security level dropped. **I was taking college courses, occupying my time, and trying to rehabilitate myself. But then around ‘95** things took a turn for the worse. The **crack riots erupted in federal prisons** nationwide, **and the BOP enforced a system wide lockdown** and weeded out the instigators, shipping them to "who knows where," diesel therapy, and all that shit. The BOP was unprepared for the riots, and congress was outraged. **Instead of looking into the real reasoning for the riots, the crack cocaine- powder cocaine disparity, the feds decided to** lock it down and **make prison more restrictive.** A succession of changes occurred after that. First was the No Frills Prison Act or the Zimmerman Bill, which said prisoners were living in luxury. This bill, which didn't even pass in congress, was adopted by the BOP verbatim as policy. This was in ‘96, and it was the beginning of the end for human rights in prison and foreshadowed the changes happening in society today. **Pell grants were abolished for federal prisoners, thus there were no post secondary** or college educational **programs because most dudes couldn’t afford to pay for their educations.** Weights and electronic music equipment were prohibited. Whatever existed was grandfathered in, but no new equipment of this type could be purchased. There were severe restrictions put on personal property; no more personal musical instruments, name brand or colored clothing items, or excessive recreational equipment were allowed. I remember the prison staff coming around to every cell that year and telling you what you could and couldn't keep. They literally stripped prisoners of everything they had such as guitars, keyboards, shoes, socks, sweat suits, shorts, and racquetball rackets, anything that was considered excess or contraband, and made them send it home. . The inmate organizations were abolished. Movie stations like HBO and Showtime were cancelled. Only basic cable was kept. All of a sudden the BOP told us, grown adults, that we couldn't view R rated movies anymore. It was crazy. So much for Club Fed or even for Club Motel Six. At the end of ’96, I was transferred to FCI Beckley in West Virginia. A brand new, just built federal correctional institution that was totally in compliance with the No Frills Prison Act. There were no weights, no musical instruments, no inmate organizations, no college programs, and no R-rated movies. What was a prisoner to do? You could run the track, do bar work, play sports, and watch TV. **They had vocational training courses, but** let me tell you, **most of them were a joke. As was the GED program. The education department just wanted bodies to make their programs look good and to justify their jobs.** In reality, **hardly anyone was learning anything or graduating.** This was the first big strip of rights and individual liberties in the federal system. **It was** sort of **like a test run for the locking down of America.** Out went the spring-bunk beds and in came the metal ones. Out went the wooden doors and in came the metal. Bars were placed over every window. Metal detectors were at every entryway. The BOP fortified the prisons. They would not get caught unprepared again. There would be no more crack riots like ’ 95. Nationwide the BOP made their prisons lockdown ready, riot proof. And just to show the prisoners who the boss was, they took away every so-called luxury item. They said that in prison you only deserved the bare necessities. **It didn't matter that they already took decades of your life away from your family,** away from **your friends,** away from **society.** Now **they wanted to strip your individuality, too.** No one would stick out. All would be the same. Grey clothes, white shoes, no colors, to go along with the brown khaki institution issued uniforms: nondescript, monotonous, boring. Did somebody mention Club Fed? More like prison. And **I don't mean the Wise Guy's prison either. That shit is out the window. It's all cruel and unusual punishment now. I'm talking Alcatraz.** What is happening in today’s society mirrors what has happened in federal prison; the tightening up of security, the restriction of rights, the constant surveillance and scrutiny. **Everything I do in federal prison is monitored. Kind of like the real world. Yes?** And I don't mean MTV. Granted **you have more freedoms, but how much has been taken away? In here it seems that every day they take away something else. Is that happening to you also?** Around 1999 the BOP started throttling federal prisoners more. It's almost getting hard to breathe now. I guess oxygen will be the next restriction. The Ensign Amendment was passed that year and made publications like Hustler, Club, Playboy, and Private illegal for government employees to handle. So prisoners in the BOP can't receive those types of magazines anymore. Crazy, yes? You have hundreds of thousands of men locked up for decades of their lives, and they can't look at pictures of naked women. I hope you have a vivid and lasting memory of that last night you spent with your girlfriend. Also the BOP has put the clamps on outside communication by limiting phone calls to 300 minutes per month, which is exactly 20 15-minute calls a month. And don’t say something that the prison administrators don't like on the phone because if you do, they will take your phone privileges away for six months or maybe years even if it is your first mistake or violation. **These feds are not playing around. They want total and absolute control. There is no Club Fed - there never was - but at least before you could live a little.** Now it is nothing but frustration. The BOP has their prisoners walking a tightrope. **It’s eerily similar to what is happening in the real world with** the **checkpoints, airport security, homeland defense team, and the** ongoing **war on drugs. You tell me what is the difference? It seems we are all locked up now; me in my fortified prison and you in your police state. I am trapped by** fences, barbed razor wire, **locked doors, and armed guards, and you are trapped in the free world by your job, car payments, house payments, and credit card bills. Every aspect of both of our lives is monitored.** There are security cameras here, everywhere, except in my cell, and now in the police state of America, there are security cameras everywhere except in your house. But who knows, maybe your dad is watching, or your mom, or your husband, or wife, or even your kids. Maybe they are reporting all your activities to the government. I'm just saying to be careful, or you might end up in here like me on 25 lockdown with one phone call a month and breakfast in bed and all that. Maybe if I were a model inmate who worked in Unicor and watched Jerry Springer, I could go back to the compound, but because I write and have an opinion about life, the BOP is afraid of me. Terrified, really. So be careful with your opinions out there because the constitution is on shaky grounds. **Like me, your rights are dwindling, and it’s all in the name of freedom** and safety. Be careful because Big Brother is watching you.

Michael **Santos in 2012** explains his experience in prison education after receiving the Pell Grant[[8]](#footnote-8)

**I was 23 years old when I began** serving **my** lengthy **prison sentence in 1987.  I had been a mediocre student in high school, but** I seized upon opportunities to educate myself while I was in prison.  **During that era, prisoners could** still **apply for Pell grants, and because prisoners lived without an income, most all of the prisoners applying could qualify** for the government grant. The prison where I began serving my sentence was a high-security penitentiary, and education was not a priority among prison staff members.  As I wrote in my book [Earning Freedom: Conquering a 45-Year Prison Term](http://michaelsantos.com/earning-freedom/), in order to educate myself, I had to research opportunities.  I discovered a correspondence program at **Ohio University**.  When I applied to that program, the school **sent me info**rmation **on how to apply for a Pell grant.  I completed the same app**lication process **as any other** American **citizen** who would’ve applied for a Pell grant.  Since the grants were based on income, and I did not have an income, I received the Pell grant. **The grant covered** the cost of **my tuition and books.  Ohio U**niversity **received the funds directly from the** issuing **government** agency, **and I received the coursework and books from the university.  I was immensely grateful** to have found the program at Ohio University, and I later supplemented my education by enrolling at Mercer University.  **The Pell grant covered my entire tuition** through undergraduate school and Mercer awarded my bachelor’s degree in 1992. **It changed my life.**  I went on to study at Hofstra University, and Hofstra awarded my master’s degree in 1995; since the Pell grant did not cover graduate school, people from my support network paid the tuition for the Hofstra program. **Unfortunately, as the government became more punitive, it stripped away Pell grant funding for people in prison.**  The focus within the criminal justice system at that time went toward warehousing people inside.  In fact, **high-level staff members frequently told me that they did not care anything about what happened to the offender after he emerged from prison.  The primary concern was preserving the institution of confinement.**

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