# Disclosure---Northwestern---Round 2

## 1NC

### OFF

#### Our interpretation is that topical AFFs must affirm the resolution---

#### “The United States federal government” is the three branches.

Black’s Law Dictionary 90 (6th Edition, p. 695)

In the United States, government consists of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches in addition to administrative agencies. In a broader sense, includes the federal government and all its agencies and bureaus, state and county governments, and city and township governments.

#### “Prohibition” requires ending something fully.

Feldman 86 – Member of Procopio's Native American Law practice

Glenn M. Feldman, On Appeal from the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, 1986 U.S. S. Ct. Briefs LEXIS 1221, Supreme Court of the United States, 1986, LexisNexis

In arguing that California's bingo laws are prohibitory rat ther than regulatory, the appeallants have simply misunderstood the fundamental distinction between "prohibition" and "regulation" of conduct. As succinctly put by the Supreme Court of Washington more than 50 years ago, after noting that the prohibition and regulation of the sale of liquor are entirely different things: "To prohibit the liquor traffic implies the putting a stop to its sale as a beverage, to end it fully, completely, and indefinitely." In contrast, regulation "implies that the sale of intoxicating liquor shall go on within the bounds of certain prescribed rules, restrictions, and limitations." Ajax v. Gregory, 32 P.2d 560, 563 (Wash. 1934). Because regulation of conduct involves prescribing limitations, regulation, by definition, necessarily involves some degree of prohibition. Blumenthal v. City of Cheyenne, 186 P.2d 556, 566 (Wyo. 1947). The two concepts, however, are analytically distinct. Therefore, when courts have been faced with statutory schemes similar to California's bingo laws, they have consistently held them to be regulatory and not prohibitory.

#### The phrase “business practice” requires a pattern of conduct.

Lucas 88 – Judge, California Supreme Court

Malcolm Millar Lucas, Cal. ex rel. Van De Kamp v. Texaco, 46 Cal. 3d 1147, Supreme Court of California, October 1988, LexisNexis

\*\* Italics in original.

The statute defines "unfair competition" to mean, as relevant here, "unlawful, unfair or fraudulent *business practice* . . . ." ( Bus. & Prof. Code, § 17200, italics added.) In so doing it effectively requires what the court variously described in the leading case of Barquis v. Merchants Collection Assn. (1972) 7 Cal.3d 94 [101 Cal.Rptr. 745, 496 P.2d 817], as "a 'pattern' . . . of conduct" ( id. at p. 108), "ongoing . . . conduct" ( id. at p. 111), "a pattern of behavior" ( id. at p. 113), and, "a course of conduct" (ibid.).

What the Attorney General challenges in this action is the Texaco-Getty merger. Under the Barquis court's construction of the statute, however, the merger itself cannot be characterized as "a 'pattern' . . . of conduct," "ongoing conduct," "a pattern of behavior," "a course of conduct," or anything relevantly similar: it is rather a single act. That the complaint, under the Attorney General's reading, alleges that Texaco engaged in certain unlawful, unfair, or fraudulent business practices in the past and may engage in other such practices in the future is simply not enough: the complaint attacks not those past or future practices, but only the merger.

#### The “core antitrust laws” are sections 1 and 2 of the Sherman Act and section 7 of the Clayton Act.

The Antitrust Division 07 – Law enforcement agency that enforces the U.S. antitrust laws

“Antitrust Division Statement Regarding the Release of the Antitrust Modernization Commission Report,” The Antitrust Division, Department of Justice, April 2007, https://www.justice.gov/archive/atr/public/press\_releases/2007/222344.htm

The AMC has made many specific recommendations in its report, and the Division is in the process of reviewing all of them. The Division commends the AMC for its three primary conclusions:

Free-market competition should remain the touchstone of United States' economic policy. The Commission's conclusion in this regard is a fundamental starting point for policy makers. Over a century of experience has shown that robust competition among businesses, each striving to be increasingly successful, leads to better quality products and services, lower prices, and higher levels of innovation.

The core antitrust laws—Sherman Act sections 1 and 2 and Clayton Act section 7—and their application by the courts and federal enforcement agencies are sound and appropriately safeguard the competitiveness of the U.S. economy.

New or different rules are not needed for industries in which innovation, intellectual property, and technological innovation are central features. Unlike some other areas of the law, the core antitrust laws are general in nature and have been applied to many different industries to protect free-market competition successfully over a long period of time despite changes in the economy and the increasing pace of technological advancement. One of the great benefits of the Sherman and Clayton Acts is their adaptability to new economic conditions without sacrificing their ability to protect competition.

#### Two impacts---

#### 1---Value in Community---only predictable limits centered on the resolution create a predictable prep burden for the negative, which is a prerequisite for procedurally fair engagement---unconstrained aff choice creates an untenable research burden for the neg. That’s an impact---people don’t debate for the same reasons, but everybody thinks there’s some value in preserving the activity.

#### 2---Antitrust debates are good---rigorous and iterative research gives us the tools to challenge violent corporate monopolization.

Greer and Rice 21 – Jeremie Greer and Solana Rice are Co-founders and Co-executives of Liberation in a Generation, a national movement-support organization working to build the power of people of color to transform the economy.

Jeremie Greer and Solana Rice, “Anti-Monopoly Activism: Reclaiming Power Through Racial Justice,” *Liberation in a Generation*, March 2021, pp. 3-13, https://www.liberationinageneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Anti-Monopoly-Activism\_032021.pdf.

It is critical that grassroots leaders of color are positioned to lead on anti-monopoly policy, as they are uniquely positioned to understand its impact on people of color at the household, community, and societal levels. This gives them a unique perspective in policy ideation efforts that should be valued and validated. These leaders also possess the unique skills to mobilize the people and public power that are necessary to force the government to reclaim its historic role of reining in runaway corporate monopoly power.

We at Liberation in a Generation believe that the power to change our economic systems rests with the organizers of color who are building the political strength of communities of color. Anti-monopoly research and advocacy need to better quantify, center, and reflect what people of color are experiencing and the ways that they are being harmed by monopoly power’s reach. These efforts should also better connect anti-monopoly policy and advocacy as tools to advance the existing priorities of leaders of color, such as the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, closing the racial wealth gap, and a Homes Guarantee. This paper aims to contribute a major step in the long journey of bridging the divide between anti-monopoly researchers and policy advocates and grassroots leaders of color. The first step on that journey is knowledge.

Recognizing that anti-monopoly work is a new policy issue to many grassroots leaders of color, this paper will serve as a primer to 1) educate grassroots leaders on the issue of corporate concentration, 2) connect the issue to racial justice, and 3) recommend a path forward for grassroots leaders as well as the researchers and advocates who need to embrace them. Our hope is that this paper provides a foundation of knowledge that grassroots leaders of color can use to build race-conscious solutions and mobilize for action to rein in runaway corporate monopoly power. To that end, the paper is organized into six sections.

SECTION 1 Monopoly Power Is Corporate Power Magnified and Maximized

In 1975, millions flooded theaters to see the blockbuster thriller Jaws. The story follows a police chief in a small resort town as he risks his life to protect beachgoers from a monstrous man-eating great white shark.

Monopolies are a lot like the shark in Jaws. While enormous, ruthless, dangerous, and scary, the movie’s monster is just a shark, and the police chief uses tools and community to defeat it. Comparatively, while also enormous, ruthless, dangerous, and even scary, monopolies are just corporations, and we, together, can confront them. Their massive power controls the wages we earn, the prices we pay, and the actions of the politicians who are supposed to represent us in DC, the statehouse, and city hall. In a representative democracy, we the people are at the top of the food chain, and it is within our power to make these monopolies fear us— and end their existence in the first place.

Grassroots leaders of color are highly experienced and uniquely skilled at challenging corporate power, and these capacities can and should be used to curb monopoly power. For example, the Athena Coalition8 has successfully leveraged grassroots power to challenge the monopoly power of Amazon, and Color of Change9 has effectively used grassroots digital organizing to challenge the monopoly power of social media platforms such as Facebook. Putting monopolies in the crosshairs of organizers is critical because they best understand the real human and structural devastation caused by monopoly power, which is otherwise all too easily neglected.

Though we believe that grassroots leaders of color have the experience and expertise necessary to challenge monopoly power, the question remains: Why should they lead this fight? Grassroots leaders of color are already engaged in high-stakes battles with the forces of corporate power on fundamental issues, including environmental justice, worker justice, housing justice, prison and police abolition, and voter and democratic justice. We believe that these efforts can be bolstered if anti-monopoly policy development and advocacy were incorporated into these existing efforts but then followed the lead of organizers. For example, the primary opponents of prison and police abolition are private prison monopolies, such as GEO Group and CoreCivic, which profit from the arrest and incarceration of Black and brown people. Opponents of the Green New Deal include energy monopolies BP and ExxonMobile, whose profits are derived from polluting Black and brown communities.10 Finally, opponents of the Homes Guarantee, and its call for creating 12 million units of social housing outside of the for-profit housing market, include big banks that profit from the commodification of affordable and low-income housing. Challenging these opponents by diminishing their monopoly power could prove to be a powerful weapon in the fight to dismantle unchecked corporate power and its real-life economic impact on people of color.

How Corporate Monopolies Show Up in Today’s World

The distinguishing features of monopolies, when compared to your run of the mill corporation (large or small), are the reach and intensity of the corporate power that they wield. Monopoly power turbocharges the ills of corporate power and creates a wider impact of the overlapping consequences for people. In many ways, monopolies are created when corporate power becomes governing power.11 Their sheer size and market dominance allow them to govern markets, and their expansive wealth gives them the power to manipulate prices, crush workers, and steamroll governments. Ultimately, monopolies’ extreme economic power—which they use to gain outsized political power and then more economic power—undermines the collective power of workers, consumers, small businesses, local communities, and governments.

It has become difficult, and inadequate, to rely on legal definitions to identify monopolies. The legal definition of monopolization is highly technical and complicated by centuries of conflicting jurisprudence. It's been narrowed to exclusively focus on the negative impact that anticompetitive actions have on consumers.12 This narrower focus intentionally shielded monopolies from any accountability for anticompetitive harm inflicted on workers, the environment, local communities, government, and democracy. Federal enforcement of monopoly power is confined to the highly specialized legal practice of antitrust law enforcement.13 However, centuries of political power wielded by corporate monopolies and their acolytes (e.g., universities, think tanks, trade associations, and major law firms) have rendered much of antitrust law enforcement toothless.14

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the definition of monopoly was much wider and comprehensive. In this paper, we will expand the definition as well. Recognizing that this definitional work is in many ways a work in progress, we offer our definition as a point of discussion and debate for the larger field of anti-monopoly advocates.

In this paper, we define monopoly as a corporate entity (a single corporation or a group of corporations) whose sheer size and anticompetitive behavior grant it disproportionate economic power and governing influence. This negatively affects the well-being of workers, consumers, markets, local communities, democratic governance, and the planet.

Below are a few major industries that reveal how corporate concentration and monopolistic industries harm the economic lives of workers, consumers, and communities of color.

Big Tech

Four corporations comprise what has come to be known as “Big Tech”: Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Alphabet (the parent company of Google). Each of these technology firms dominate an enormous share of their respective technology markets. Google, for example, controls 90 percent of the internet search market, and it controls the largest video sharing platform on the internet through its ownership of YouTube. Apple controls 50 percent of the cellphone market,15 and Amazon controls 50 percent of all ecommerce. Facebook and its many subsidiaries (such as WhatsApp and Instagram) dominate the social media and online advertising marketplace.16 Other technology firms, including Uber, Lyft, Microsoft, and Netflix, also demonstrate monopolistic, anticompetitive behavior in their respective markets. In many ways, these companies, and the people who control them, are the “robber barons” of our time.

Big Pharma

The world's largest pharmaceutical corporations, including Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Merck, Gilead, Amgen, and AbbVie, together comprise “Big Pharma.” These monopolies build their profits by controlling the prices of critical life-saving pharmaceuticals (e.g., insulin, drugs that regulate blood pressure, and critical antibiotics) and life-altering medical devices (e.g., heart stents and joint replacement devices). Between 2000 and 2018, a disproportionately small number of pharmaceutical companies made a combined $11 trillion in revenue and $8.6 trillion in gross profits.17 In 2014, the top 10 pharmaceutical companies had 38 percent of the industry’s total sales revenue.18 Much of these profits were gained driving up the price of critical drugs , extorting research and development (R&D) funding from the government, and leveraging Big Pharma’s political influence to weaken government oversight of the industry.19

Big Agriculture

Big Agriculture, or “Big Ag,” refers to monopolies that control major aspects of the global food supply chain. This includes companies such as Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), Bayer, and John Deere. Though once a diffuse network of small farmers and supply chain companies, recent mergers have created a system comprising a small number of corporations that are crowding out smaller, family-run companies including small farms. Similar to Big Pharma, government subsidies are a massive component of the obscene profits made by Big Ag. Further, as often the largest employer in many small rural towns, these corporations often ruthlessly wield their monopoly power to drive down wages and benefits to workers, skirt government safety regulations, and bully (and even buy out) small farmers.

Big Banks

Known as the “Big Five,” five banks control almost half of the industry’s nearly $15 trillion in financial assets: JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citigroup, and US Bancorp. Their collective importance to the nation’s financial system has led some to consider them “too big to fail.”20 In fact, in response to the financial crisis of 2008, the federal government provided trillions of dollars in relief to ensure that they did not collapse under the weight of the crisis.21 The Big Five have an incredible influence over the flow of money throughout our economy. They finance critical goods and services, such as housing, higher education, infrastructure, and renewable energy. They also finance extractive elements of our economy, such as fossil fuels and private prisons. But, most importantly, they set the rules for who can and cannot access loan capital, and their exclusionary practices have been widely linked to the growth of racial wealth inequality (as described in Section 3).

#### 3---That outweighs --- we’re cognitively biased to cling to preexisting beliefs, which breeds epistemic arrogance that culminates in Trumpism --- only submitting beliefs for reexamination by others and taking a risk of being wrong cultivates scrutiny.

Resnick 19

Brian Resnick, Science Writer for Vox, “Intellectual humility: the importance of knowing you might be wrong,” Vox. January 4, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/1/4/17989224/intellectual-humility-explained-psychology-replication>

\*\*\*Modified with a strikethrough – Raffi

It’s been fascinating to watch scientists struggle to make their institutions more humble. And I believe there’s an important and underappreciated virtue embedded in this process.

For the past few months, I’ve been talking to many scholars about intellectual humility, the characteristic that allows for admission of wrongness.

I’ve come to appreciate what a crucial tool it is for learning, especially in an increasingly interconnected and complicated world. As technology makes it easier [**to lie**](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/4/20/17109764/deepfake-ai-false-memory-psychology-mandela-effect) and spread false information [incredibly quickly](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/3/8/17085928/fake-news-study-mit-science), we need intellectually humble, curious people.

I’ve also realized how difficult it is to foster intellectual humility. In my reporting on this, I’ve learned there are three main challenges on the path to humility:

In order for us to acquire more intellectual humility, we all, even the smartest among us, need to better appreciate our cognitive ~~blind~~ [limitations] spots. Our minds are more imperfect and imprecise than we’d often like to admit. Our ignorance can be invisible.

Even when we overcome that immense challenge and figure out our errors, we need to remember we won’t necessarily be punished for saying, “I was wrong.” And we need to be braver about saying it. We need a culture that celebrates those words.

We’ll never achieve perfect intellectual humility. So we need to choose our convictions thoughtfully.

This is all to say: Intellectual humility isn’t easy. But damn, it’s a virtue worth striving for, and failing for, in this new year.

Intellectual humility is simply “the recognition that the things you believe in might in fact be wrong,” as [Mark Leary](http://people.duke.edu/~leary/), a social and personality psychologist at Duke University, tells me.

But don’t confuse it with overall humility or bashfulness. It’s not about being a pushover; it’s not about lacking confidence, or self-esteem. The intellectually humble don’t cave every time their thoughts are challenged.

Instead, it’s a method of thinking. It’s about entertaining the possibility that you may be wrong and being open to learning from the experience of others. Intellectual humility is about being actively curious about your blind spots. One illustration is in the ideal of the scientific method, where a scientist actively works against her own hypothesis, attempting to rule out any other alternative explanations for a phenomenon before settling on a conclusion. It’s about asking: What am I missing here?

It doesn’t require a high IQ or a particular skill set. It does, however, require making a habit of thinking about your limits, which can be painful. “It’s a process of monitoring your own confidence,” Leary says.

This idea is older than social psychology. Philosophers from the earliest days have [grappled](https://philosophynow.org/issues/53/Socratic_Humility) with the limits of human knowledge. Michel de Montaigne, the 16th-century French philosopher credited with inventing the essay, wrote that “the plague of man is boasting of his knowledge.”

Social psychologists have learned that humility is associated with other valuable character traits: People who score higher on intellectual humility questionnaires are more open to [hearing opposing views](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15298868.2017.1361861). They more readily seek out information that conflicts with their worldview. They pay [**more attention to evidence**](https://www.templeton.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Intellectual-Humility-Leary-FullLength-Final.pdf) and have a stronger self-awareness when they answer a question incorrectly.

When you ask the intellectually arrogant if they’ve heard of bogus historical events like “Hamrick’s Rebellion,” they’ll say, “Sure.” The intellectually humble are less likely to do so. Studies have found that cognitive reflection — i.e., analytic thinking — is [correlated](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51ed234ae4b0867e2385d879/t/5b43b48b03ce6471753c78ba/1531163796071/2018+Pennycook+Rand+-+Cognition.pdf) with being better able to discern fake news stories from real ones. These studies haven’t looked at intellectual humility per se, but it’s plausible there’s an overlap.

Most important of all, the intellectually humble are more likely to admit it when they are wrong. When we admit we’re wrong, we can grow closer to the truth.

One reason I’ve been thinking about the virtue of humility recently is because our president, Donald Trump, is one of the least humble people on the planet.

It was Trump who said on the night of his nomination, “I alone can fix it,” with the “it” being our entire political system. It was Trump who once said, “[I have one of the great memories of all time](http://digg.com/2017/trump-great-memories-of-all-time).” More recently, Trump told the Associated Press, “I have a natural instinct for science,” in [dodging](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/10/trump-i-have-a-natural-instinct-for-science.html) a question on climate change.

A frustration I feel about Trump and the era of history he represents is that his pride and his success — he is among the most powerful people on earth — seem to be related. He exemplifies how our society rewards confidence and bluster, not truthfulness.

Yet we’ve also seen some very high-profile examples lately of how overconfident leadership can be ruinous for companies. Look at what happened to Theranos, a company that promised to change the way blood samples are drawn. It was all hype, all bluster, and it collapsed. Or consider Enron’s overconfident executives, who were often hailed for [their intellectual brilliance](https://awealthofcommonsense.com/2018/05/when-intelligence-fails-miserably/) — they ran the company into the ground with risky, suspect financial decisions.

The problem with arrogance is that the truth always catches up. Trump may be president and confident in his denials of climate change, but the changes to our environment will still ruin so many things in the future.

As I’ve been reading the psychological research on intellectual humility and the character traits it correlates with, I can’t help but fume: Why can’t more people be like this?

We need more intellectual humility for two reasons. One is that our culture promotes and rewards overconfidence and arrogance (think Trump and Theranos, or the advice your career counselor gave you when going into job interviews). At the same time, when we are wrong — out of ignorance or error — and realize it, our culture doesn’t make it easy to admit it. Humbling moments too easily can turn into moments of humiliation.

So how can we promote intellectual humility for both of these conditions?

In asking that question of researchers and scholars, I’ve learned to appreciate how hard a challenge it is to foster intellectual humility.

First off, I think it’s helpful to remember how flawed the human brain can be and how prone we all are to intellectual blind spots. When you learn about how the brain actually works, how it actually perceives the world, it’s hard not to be a bit horrified, and a bit humbled.

We often can’t see — or even sense — what we don’t know. It helps to realize that it’s normal and human to be wrong.

It’s rare that a viral meme also provides a surprisingly deep lesson on the imperfect nature of the human mind. But believe it or not, the great [“Yanny or Laurel” debate](https://www.vox.com/2018/5/16/17358774/yanny-laurel-explained) of 2018 fits the bill.

For the very few of you who didn’t catch it — I hope you’re recovering nicely from that coma — here’s what happened.

An audio clip (you can hear it below) says the name “Laurel” in a robotic voice. Or does it? Some people hear the clip and immediately hear “Yanny.” And both sets of people — Team Yanny and Team Laurel — are indeed hearing the

Hearing, the perception of sound, ought to be a simple thing for our brains to do. That so many people can listen to the same clip and hear such different things should give us humbling pause. Hearing “Yanny” or “Laurel” in any given moment ultimately depends on a whole host of factors: the quality of the speakers you’re using, whether you have hearing loss, your expectations.

Here’s the deep lesson to draw from all of this: Much as we might tell ourselves our experience of the world is the truth, our reality will always be an interpretation. Light enters our eyes, sound waves enter our ears, chemicals waft into our noses, and it’s up to our brains to make a guess about what it all is.

“THE FIRST RULE OF THE DUNNING-KRUGER CLUB IS YOU DON’T KNOW YOU’RE A MEMBER OF THE DUNNING-KRUGER CLUB”

Perceptual tricks like this ([“the dress”](https://www.vox.com/2015/2/27/8119901/explain-color-dress) is another one) reveal that our perceptions are not the absolute truth, that the physical phenomena of the universe are indifferent to whether our feeble sensory organs can perceive them correctly. We’re just guessing. Yet these phenomena leave us indignant: How could it be that our perception of the world isn’t the only one?

That sense of indignation is called naive realism: the feeling that our perception of the world is the truth. “I think we sometimes confuse effortlessness with accuracy,” [Chris Chabris](http://www.chabris.com/), a psychological researcher who co-authored a book on the [challenges of human perception, tells me](https://go.redirectingat.com/?id=66960X1516588&xs=1&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.amazon.com%2FInvisible-Gorilla-How-Intuitions-Deceive%2Fdp%2F0307459667%2Fref%3Dsr_1_1%3Fie%3DUTF8%26qid%3D1545250306%26sr%3D8-1%26keywords%3Dinvisible%2Bgorilla%2Bbook). When something is so immediate and effortless to us — hearing the sound of “Yanny” — it just [feels true](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/10/5/16410912/illusory-truth-fake-news-las-vegas-google-facebook). (Similarly, psychologists find when a lie is repeated, it’s more likely to be [misremembered as being true](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/10/5/16410912/illusory-truth-fake-news-las-vegas-google-facebook), and for a similar reason: When you’re hearing something for the second or third time, your brain becomes faster to respond to it. And that fluency is confused with truth.)

Our interpretations of reality are often arbitrary, but we’re still [**stubborn**](https://jov.arvojournals.org/article.aspx?articleid=2613309) about them. Nonetheless, the same observations can lead to wildly different conclusions.

For every sense and every component of human judgment, there are illusions and ambiguities we interpret arbitrarily.

Some are gravely serious. White people often perceive black men to be bigger, taller, and more muscular (and therefore [more threatening](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/4/19/17251752/philadelphia-starbucks-arrest-racial-bias-training)) than they really are. That’s racial bias — but it’s also a socially constructed illusion. When we’re taught or learn to fear other people, our brains distort their potential threat. They seem more menacing, and we want to build walls around them. When we learn or are taught that other people [are less than human](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/3/7/14456154/dehumanization-psychology-explained), we’re less likely to look upon them kindly and more likely to be okay when violence is committed against them.

Not only are our interpretations of the world often arbitrary, but we’re often overconfident in them. “Our ignorance is invisible to us,” David Dunning, an expert on human blind spots, says.

You might recognize his name as half of the psychological phenomenon that bears his name: the Dunning-Kruger effect. That’s where people of low ability — let’s say, those who fail to understand logic puzzles — tend to unduly overestimate their abilities. Inexperience masquerades as expertise.

An irony of the Dunning-Kruger effect is that so many people misinterpret it, are overconfident in their understanding of it, [and get it wrong.](https://www.talyarkoni.org/blog/2010/07/07/what-the-dunning-kruger-effect-is-and-isnt/)

When people talk or write about the Dunning-Kruger effect, it’s almost always in reference to other people. “The fact is this is a phenomenon that visits all of us sooner or later,” Dunning says. We’re all overconfident in our ignorance from time to time. (Perhaps related: Some 65 percent of Americans [believe](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0200103) they’re more intelligent than average, which is wishful thinking.)

Similarly, we’re overconfident in our ability to remember. Human memory is extremely malleable, prone to small changes. When we remember, we don’t wind back our minds to a certain time and relive that exact moment, yet many [of us think](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3149610/) our memories work like a videotape.

Dunning hopes his work helps people understand that “not knowing the scope of your own ignorance is part of the human condition,” he says. “But the problem with it is we see it in other people, and we don’t see it in ourselves. The first rule of the Dunning-Kruger club is you don’t know you’re a member of the Dunning-Kruger club.”

In 2012, psychologist Will Gervais scored an honor any PhD science student would covet: a [co-authored paper](http://science.sciencemag.org/content/336/6080/493) in the journal Science, one of the top interdisciplinary scientific journals in the world. Publishing in Science doesn’t just help a researcher rise up in academic circles; it often gets them a lot of media attention too.

One of the experiments in the paper tried to see if getting people to think more rationally would make them less willing to report religious beliefs. They had people look at a picture of Rodin’s [The Thinker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thinker) or another statue. They thought The Thinker would nudge people to think harder, more analytically. In this more rational frame of mind, then, the participants would be less likely to endorse believing in something as faith-based and invisible as religion, and that’s what the study found. It was [catnip](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-critical-thinkers-lose-faith-god/) for science journalists: one small trick to change the way we think.

“HOW WOULD I KNOW IF I WAS WRONG?” IS ACTUALLY A REALLY, REALLY HARD QUESTION TO ANSWER

But it was a tiny, small-sample study, the exact type that is prone to yielding false positives. Several years later, another lab attempted to replicate the findings with a [much larger sample size](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0172636), and failed to find any evidence for the effect.

And while Gervais knew that the original study wasn’t rigorous, he couldn’t help but feel a twinge of discomfort.

“Intellectually, I could say the original data weren’t strong,” he says. “That’s very different from the human, personal reaction to it. Which is like, ‘Oh, shit, there’s going to be a published failure to replicate my most cited finding that’s gotten the most [media attention](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/losing-your-religion-analytic-thinking-can-undermine-belief/).’ You start worrying about stuff like, ‘Are there going to be career repercussions? Are people going to think less of my other work and stuff I’ve done?’”

Gervais’s story is familiar: Many of us fear we’ll be seen as less competent, less trustworthy, if we admit wrongness. Even when we can see our own errors — which, as outlined above, is not easy to do — we’re hesitant to admit it.

But turns out this assumption is [false](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0143723). As [Adam Fetterman](https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/psychology/people/adam-k-fetterman.html), a social psychologist at the University of Texas El Paso, has found in a [few](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0143723) [studies](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886918305336), wrongness admission isn’t usually judged harshly. “When we do see someone admit that they are wrong, the wrongness admitter is seen as more communal, more friendly,” he says. It’s almost never the case, in his studies, “that when you admit you’re wrong, people think you are less competent.”

Sure, there might be some people who will troll you for your mistakes. There might be [a mob on Twitter that converges in order to shame you](https://www.vox.com/2016/2/29/11133822/internet-outrage-explained). Some moments of humility could be humiliating. But this fear must be vanquished if we are to become less intellectually arrogant and more intellectually humble.

Humility can’t just come from within — we need environments where it can thrive

But even if you’re motivated to be more intellectually humble, our culture doesn’t always reward it.

The field of psychology, overall, has been reckoning with a “[replication crisis](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/8/27/17761466/psychology-replication-crisis-nature-social-science)” where many classic findings in the science don’t hold up under rigorous scrutiny. Incredibly influential textbook findings in psychology — like the “[ego depletion”](https://www.vox.com/2016/3/14/11219446/psychology-replication-crisis) theory of willpower or the “[marshmallow test](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/6/6/17413000/marshmallow-test-replication-mischel-psychology)” — have been bending or breaking.

I’ve found it fascinating to watch the field of psychology deal with this. For some researchers, the reckoning has been personally unsettling. “I’m in a dark place,” Michael Inzlicht, a University of Toronto psychologist, [wrote](http://michaelinzlicht.com/getting-better/2016/2/29/reckoning-with-the-past) in a 2016 blog post after seeing the theory of ego depletion crumble before his eyes. “Have I been chasing puffs of smoke for all these years?”

“IT’S BAD TO THINK OF PROBLEMS LIKE THIS LIKE A RUBIK’S CUBE: A PUZZLE THAT HAS A NEAT AND SATISFYING SOLUTION THAT YOU CAN PUT ON YOUR DESK”

What I’ve learned from reporting on the “replication crisis” is that intellectual humility requires support from peers and institutions. And that environment is hard to build.

“What we teach undergrads is that scientists want to prove themselves wrong,” says [Simine Vazire](https://www.simine.com/), a psychologist and journal editor who often writes and speaks about replication issues. “But, ‘How would I know if I was wrong?’ is actually a really, really hard question to answer. It involves things like having critics yell at you and telling you that you did things wrong and reanalyze your data.”

And that’s not fun. Again: Even among scientists — people who ought to question everything — intellectual humility is hard. In some cases, researchers have refused to concede their original conclusions despite the [unveiling of new evidence](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/6/28/17509470/stanford-prison-experiment-zimbardo-interview). (One famous psychologist under fire recently told me [angrily](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/6/28/17509470/stanford-prison-experiment-zimbardo-interview), “I will stand by that conclusion for the rest of my life, no matter what anyone says.”)

Psychologists are human. When they reach a conclusion, it becomes hard to see things another way. Plus, the incentives for a successful career in science push researchers to publish as many positive findings as possible.

There are two solutions — among many — to make psychological science more humble, and I think we can learn from them.

One is that humility needs to be built into the standard practices of the science. And that happens through transparency. It’s becoming more commonplace for scientists to preregister — i.e., commit to — a study design before even embarking on an experiment. That way, it’s harder for them to deviate from the plan and cherry-pick results. It also makes sure all data is open and accessible to anyone who wants to conduct a reanalysis.

That “sort of builds humility into the structure of the scientific enterprise,” Chabris says. “We’re not all-knowing and all-seeing and perfect at our jobs, so we put [the data] out there for other people to check out, to improve upon it, come up with new ideas from and so on.” To be more intellectually humble, we need to be more transparent about our knowledge. We need to show others what we know and what we don’t.

And two, there needs to be more celebration of failure, and a culture that accepts it. That includes building safe places for people to admit they were wrong, like the [Loss of Confidence Project](https://lossofconfidence.com/).

But it’s clear this cultural change won’t come easily.

“In the end,” Rohrer says, after getting a lot of positive feedback on the project, “we ended up with just a handful of statements.”

We need a balance between convictions and humility

There’s a personal cost to an intellectually humble outlook. For me, at least, it’s anxiety.

When I open myself up to the vastness of my own ignorance, I can’t help but feel a sudden suffocating feeling. I have just one small mind, a tiny, leaky boat upon which to go exploring knowledge in a vast and knotty sea of which I carry no clear map.

Why is it that some people never seem to wrestle with those waters? That they stand on the shore, squint their eyes, and transform that sea into a puddle in their minds and then get awarded for their false certainty? “I don’t know if I can tell you that humility will get you farther than arrogance,” says [Tenelle Porter,](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/profile/tenelle_porter) a University of California Davis psychologist who has [studied](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15298868.2017.1361861) intellectual humility.

Of course, following humility to an extreme end isn’t enough. You don’t need to be humble about your belief that the world is round. I just think more humility, sprinkled here and there, would be quite nice.

“It’s bad to think of problems like this like a Rubik’s cube: a puzzle that has a neat and satisfying solution that you can put on your desk,” says [Michael Lynch](https://michael-lynch.philosophy.uconn.edu/), a University of Connecticut philosophy professor. Instead, it’s a problem “you can make progress at a moment in time, and make things better. And that we can do — that we can definitely do.”

For a democracy to flourish, Lynch argues, we need a balance between convictions — our firmly held beliefs — and humility. We need convictions, because “an apathetic electorate is no electorate at all,” he says. And we need humility because we need to listen to one another. Those two things will always be in tension.

The Trump presidency suggests there’s too much conviction and not enough humility in our current culture.

“The personal question, the existential question that faces you and I and every thinking human being, is, ‘How do you maintain an open mind toward others and yet, at the same time, keep your strong moral convictions?’” Lynch says. “That’s an issue for all of us.”

To be intellectually humble doesn’t mean giving up on the ideas we love and believe in. It just means we need to be thoughtful in choosing our convictions, be open to adjusting them, seek out their flaws, and never stop being curious about why we believe what we believe.

### OFF

#### Their affirmation leads to abstraction and hubris as an end in itself – radical democratic politics is the only way to attack underlying logics of power

Smulewicz-Zucker, Editor of Logos and adjunct professor of Philosophy at Baruch College, CUNY, and Thompson, Associate Professor of Political Science at William Paterson University, ‘15

(Gregory and Michael J., “Introduction,” in *Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics*, pg. 1-32)

Radical politics in contemporary Western democracies finds itself in a state of crisis. When viewed from the vantage point of social change, a progressive transformation of the social order, political radicalism is **found wanting**. This would seem to go against the grain of perceived wisdom. As an academic enterprise, radical theory has blossomed. Figures such as Slavoj Žižek openly discuss Marxism in popular documentaries, **new journals have emerged** touting a radical “anti-capitalism,” and whole conferences and subfields are dominated by questions posed by obscure theoretical texts. Despite this, there is a profound lack in substantive, meaningful political**, social, and cultural criticism** of the kind that once made progressive **and rational left political discourse** relevant **to the** machinations of real politics **and the broader culture** . Today, leftist political theory in the academy has fallen under the spell of ideas so far removed from actual political issues that the question can be posed whether the traditions of left critique that gave intellectual support to the great movements of modernity—from the workers’ movement to the civil rights movement—**possess a** critical mass **to sustain future struggles.** Quite to the contrary, **social movements have lost political momentum**; they are generally focused on questions of culture and shallow discussions of class and **obsessed with issues of identity**— racial, sexual, and so on—rather than on the great “social question” **of unequal** economic power, which once served as the driving impulse for political, social, and cultural transformation. As these new radical mandarins spill ink on futile debates over “desire,” “identity,” and illusory visions of anarchic democracy, **economic inequality has ballooned into** oligarchic proportions, working people have been increasingly marginalized, and ethnic minority groups turned into a coolie labor force.

This has been the result, we contend, of a lack of concern with real politics in contemporary radical theory. Further, we believe that this is the result of a transformation of ideas, that contemporary political theory on the Left has witnessed a decisive shift in focus in recent decades—a shift that has produced nothing less than the incoherence **of the tradition of progressive politics in our age.** At a time when the Left is struggling to redefine itself and respond to current political and economic crises, a series of trends in contemporary theory has reshaped the ways that politics is understood and practiced. Older thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, and newer voices like Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, David Graeber, and Judith Butler, among others, have risen to the status of academic and cultural icons while their ideas have become embedded in the “logics” of new social movements. As some aspects of the recent Occupy Wall Street demonstrations have shown, political discourse has become increasingly dominated by the impulses of neo-anarchism, identity politics, **postcolonialism**, and other intellectual fads. This new radicalism has made itself so irrelevant with respect to real politics that it ends up serving as a kind of cathartic space for the justifiable anxieties **wrought by late capitalism,** further stabilizing its systemic and integrative power rather than disrupting it. These trends are the products as well as unwitting allies of that which they oppose.

The transformation of radical and progressive politics throughout the latter half of the twentieth and the early decades of the twenty-first centuries is characterized by both a sociological shift as well as an intellectual one. A core thesis has been that the shift from industrial to postindustrial society has led to the weakening of class politics. But this is unsatisfying. There is no reason why class cannot be seen in the divisions of mental and service labor as it was with an industrial proletariat. There is no reason why political power rooted in unequal property and control over resources, in the capacity for some to command and to control the labor of others as well as the consumption of others **ought not to be a** basic political imperative**.** To this end, what we would call a rational radical politics should **seek not the utopian end of a “post-statist” politics**, but rather to enrich common goods, **erode the great divisions of wealth and class,** **democratize all aspects of society and economy**, and seek to orient the powers of individuals and the community toward common ends. Indeed, only by widening the struggles of labor **and rethinking the ends of the labor movement**—connecting the struggles of labor to issues beyond the workplace, to education, the environment, p**ublic life, issues of** racial **and** gender equality, culture, and the nature of the social order more broadly—can we envision a revitalization of a workers’ movement, one **that would have no need of the** alienated theory **of the new radicals**.1

#### Proactively forwarding truth claims is necessary for effective critique – the alternative is basing politics on opinion, which is untenable and culminates in inequality and violence

Thompson, Associate Professor of Political Science at William Paterson University, ‘15

(Michael J., “Inventing the “Political”: Arendt, Antipolitics, and the Deliberative Turn in Contemporary Political Theory,” in *Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics*, ed. Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael J. Thompson, Chapter 3)

But as I have argued above, this view is untenable as a means to understanding political power. Opinions and the reliance on the “enlarged mentality” that supposedly results from taking in the opinions of others is supposed to support the weightier political claims of a deliberative, localized conception of the “political.” **But it is** truth, not opinion, **that gets us to the real essence of political power** and domination. Opinion, doxa, is trapped within the phenomenological, within the realm of “appearance” **and therefore** misleading **at what is actually true.2**1 The most basic conflict between essence and appearance has no place in Arendt’s thought, instead she asks us to simply take appearance and subjective, particularist views as valid. Any critical form of judgment must advance truth-claims about the prevailing social arrangements and the forms of legitimate authority that are deployed and accepted by members of the community. Truth-claims are therefore distinctly political in the sense that they shape the cognitive foundations for less cognitive frames of thinking (opinion, worldviews, evaluative judgments, and so on). Truth as a criterion in political thought **should not be reduced to the positivistic kind of thinking** that Arendt opposed. Hence, if we think about how certain inequalities are justified, how they can be established in law and within the prevailing ideas of political subjects, it is because they rest on the pretension **of some kind of truth-claim**. Indeed, any enlightened understanding of politics must seek to base legitimate rule and authority on positions that are rationally valid **in some basic sense**. When we ground politics **in opinion**, in the sharing of opinions and subjective perspectives instead of truth-claims, we are not democratizing power, we are instead allowing illusions to guide the convictions of citizens. The educative function of politics does not come from sharing opinions per se. **Opinion can be tamed by facts** only through theory; only by the explanation of how the mechanisms of power operate within the world can opinion—the shallowest form of reflection, and the most tainted by ideological consciousness—migrate into the realm of truth, **into knowledge**. Arendt’s philosophical musings take no consideration of the most basic and consistent findings of social psychology: that facts do not persuade, that opinions do not originate in some arche, some “natality” of phenomenological perception. They are instead the result of socialization, of the permeation of social values and, particularly in mass society, made of ideas embedded in the macro institutions of economy no less than the provincial worldviews of the suburb.

Arendt never provides us with a mechanism for overcoming these deliberative problems. Instead, we are asked to place our trust in ideas about “disclosure” and the innate capacity to reach judgment from a plethora of opinion. But in truth, **opinion cannot serve as the substance of political judgment.**22 Arendt’s deeply flawed notion about “opinion” is that it is generated spontaneously: “Opinions are formed in a process of open discussion and public debate, and where no opportunity for the forming of opinions exists, there may be moods . . . but no opinion.”23 **For it to be critical**, and for it to foster progressive ends, **it must find some validity not simply in agreement or consensus**—for this leads us to the problem identified by Plato where illusory notions about the world are able to govern the forms of thought of participants, indeed, as opinion, as doxa—**but in an** ontological claim **that is valid** in some objective sense **as a truth-claim.** I must be able to make a judgment about the world that in some way is valid for others in the world; not according to my or their opinions—which are subject to the errors of subjectivism—but according to the way that the organization of power, of resources, of the ways that norms orient actions and institutions affect and shape the world we live in together. This does not mean that any valid political principle **must be true in some analytic sense**—such as the form if X then Y—but it must have some kind of ontological refereant in a dialectical sense: where any subject is seen as functionally related to the totality of which it is a part. These are objective judgments—subject to argumentation and debate to be sure—but they are not opinions. They postulate truth-claims about the world, not phenomenologically **spontaneous expressions of experience**, **but claims about the actual structures** and mechanisms that operate and shape our reality.

I cannot simply use **opinion to orient judgments** about abortion, about race, about the distribution of wealth, and so on. Indeed, for persuasion to be genuinely political it would need to grounded in concepts that achieve this kind of truth-validity since without this, deliberative encounters, “action,” in Arendt’s sense, **would devolve into a plethora of value-judgments**, none more valid than the other. We would be cast back into the same problem that Arendt sought to overcome: **the collapse of meaning** and an inertia of political judgment. Perhaps worse, we would be in a situation of relativism where individuals clump into groups and subgroups bounded by their subjective opinion-structures. What is needed is a form of critical judgment that can shatter ideological consciousness, and Arendt’s philosophical pathway is no way to achieve this end. Indeed, since her project sought to place friendship at the core of social solidarity, and of a distinctive understanding of “power,” she ends up placing too much weight on what the Greeks called πει´θειν, or “persuasion,” as opposed to διαλε´γεσθαι, or a more focused form of conversation, which she falsely refers to as “philosophical speaking” thereby misleadingly collapsing it into speculative rationality.24 Instead, she urges us to overturn the privileging of philosophical thinking in favor of persuasion: “Persuasion appears in Aristotle as the opposite of διαλε´γεσθαι, the philosophical form of speaking, precisely because this type of dialogue was concerned with knowledge and the finding of truth and therefore demanded a process of compelling proof.”25 But why should we vest the act of persuasion, of πει´θειν, with any inherent political power? Of course, Arendt is blind to the ways that distorted forms of consciousness and **defective forms of socialization** affect opinions, as I argued above. And if this is the case, then persuasion does not occur for rational reasons, but because I find some affinity—emotional, ideological, or whatever— with others.

This, however, has been welcomed by contemporary political theorists. On one level, with the decline of Marxism, her ideas were well-fashioned to provide a theoretical framework for the logic of the new social movements. The crucial move here was toward an understanding of politics and social power that was distinct from the materialist, class-based forms of realism that was characteristic of Marxism. Arendt’s ideas become attractive in a post–workers’ movement conception of left politics because it now is open to all; it allows, in the most superficial sense, for the inclusion of the other. The problem here, as I began arguing above, is that there is a need for some kind of foundational claim to orient the capacity of critical judgment. Arendt equates judgment with the synthesis of a plurality of perspectives, but there is no way to secure a judgment, nor to anchor it in a systematic way of judging what is good from what is bad.26 By robbing political life of any access to truth, to rationality, to an appeal to rational universals, **she thereby** destroys**, not rejuvenates, critical-political judgment.** Once we collapse *knowledge about the world* into *praxis within the world* we depart from **any ground for proper political judgment**, indeed, for rational critique itself. The thesis that we can somehow achieve a form of thinking about the world through praxic activity makes no sense unless there is some means by which we can judge the content of the opinions being articulated. Although Aristotle was correct in his notion that citizenship was an activity and not a status, something Arendt would accept, his idea about phronesis is not detached from the cognition of the social totality—i.e., from a cognitive and an ontological claim about human beings and the way they live together and live together best. For Aristotle, Book III of his Politics is devoted first to the nature of active citizenship, to πολιτευε´σθαι, the remainder of the book is devoted to the analysis of constitutions. And it is here that the balance between political activity (subsuming the categories of πολιτευε´σθαι, διαλε´γεσθαι, and together through the concept of judgment. For Aristotle’s thesis is that “correct” (ο’´ρθαι) as opposed to “perverted” (η‘μαρτει´μεναι) forms of constitution are to be judged based on whether they serve the common interest of the polis or only a particular part of it. But this judgment is not simply an opinion, a view that is to be accepted through mere persuasion. Rather, it is grounded in the discussion found in Book I where the nature of human beings is found to be social; that all individuals are interdependent on others and, as a result, the most highly evolved form of social organization, the polis, is judged to be the best since all require the thick relations the polis can provide. Hence, the distinction between “correct” and “perverted” forms of political activity—i.e., good and bad citizens—can be judged not on the basis of their action as such, but rather on the basis of whether or not they further the concerns of the public or common good. Aristotle’s basic argument therefore links the concerns of political activity and practical wisdom, phronesis, with the objective postulates about the nature of the good life seen not in mere value terms, but rooted in the material–social conditions of human life.

#### Unreflexive commitments to transgression as moral imperative disavow traditional normative language that makes condemnation of oppression coherent

Ruti, Distinguished Professor of critical theory and of gender and sexuality studies at the University of Toronto, ‘18

(Mari, *Distillations: Theory, Ethics, Affect*, Bloomsbury, pg. 52-53)

In this chapter, I want to consider two attitudes that have become so predictable in contemporary critical theory that it seems legitimate to label them as the field's bad—distracted and therefore largely unreflexive—habits. The first of these habits is the tendency to leap from the (justified) critique of the autonomous and sovereign subject of humanist metaphysics to the (in my opinion preposterous) notion that all efforts at subjective recentering should be discouraged, that, indeed, the more thoroughly pulverized the subject gets, the more "ethical" it will be. The second bad habit is the logical outcome of this pulverization of the subject, namely the idea that radical antinormativity—the blanket rejection of the kind of normative ethics that makes judgments about right and wrong—constitutes an adequate ethical stance.

Regarding the latter of these habits, I admit to a degree of admiration. I have written extensively, and mostly sympathetically, about the Lacanian-Zizekian ethics of the real, Alain Badiou's ethics of the event, and queer theory's ethics of antisocial negativity, all of which start from the premise that antinormativity is the only effective antidote to our society's corrupt normativity (see Ruti 2015b, 2017). As a response to structural violence, this claim—which on some level hearkens back to Benjamin's notion of divine violence—is difficult to contest. Yet it underestimates the degree to which normative judgments hover at the background of antinormative theories. Simply put, the minute we hold values of any kind, we have to have some grounds for holding them.

Let us assume that I want to argue—as I do in "real" life—that racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic inequality are oppressive (i.e., wrong). On what basis do I posit this? On the basis of norms that I have come to accept as valid. To the extent that antinormative theories deny this basic insight, they cannot even begin to approach the core of contemporary ethical dilemmas. As my discussion of Eisenstein and McGowan in the previous chapter implies, I am not interested in resurrecting an ahistorical, transcendent system of normative ethics that would be metaphysically grounded: the Enlightenment notion of universal values is not what I am after. Rather, I believe that inasmuch as we are willing to entertain Eisenstein and McGowan's argument that the universal arises contextually—or more precisely, that the universal as a liberatory force emerges from a rupture that defeats an oppressive context—it should be possible for us to conceptualize historically specific values that nevertheless become universally (and normatively) binding. In the second half of this chapter, I will consider the possibility of such historically specific normative values. The first half of the chapter explains why I think that the habitual slaying of the humanist subject represents a theoretical dead end.

#### Unfettered neoliberalism leads to mass violence and environmental destruction – radical engagements towards institutional change are key

Rees, professor at the University of British Columbia’s School of Community and Regional Planning, originator of “ecological footprint analysis,” founding member and former president of the Canadian Society for Ecological Economics, ‘15

(William, “Economics vs. the Economy,” http://www.greattransition.org/publication/economics-vs-the-economy)

Economic theories, though social constructions, can reflect reality to varying degrees. **In the face of** dire environmental challenges, **adopting a** realistic theory **is key to the** survival of global civilization. The neoliberal emphasis on limitless growth and monetary flows, a relic of nineteenth century thinking, **abstracts away from biological conditions**. By contrast, ecological economics—as distinct from environmental economics, which remains wedded to the neoliberal growth paradigm—understands the economy as a subsystem of the ecosphere and envisions a steady-state economy embedded **within natural constraints**. Achieving this equitably **will require significant redistribution** of wealth and income, reduction of material throughput, and a transition away from fossil fuels. Although the neoliberal paradigm remains dominant, its lack of fitness to current realities gives hope that an ecological alternative could ascend.

Social Constructs and Social Reality

Is there anything we can say about economics that takes us beyond pure “conjecture”? How can we tell whether one theorist’s interpretation of the economic process **is any “better” than another’s?**

These questions are not as simple as they seem. Of the many unique qualities that set Homo sapiens apart from other sentient beings, one of the most important is that we humans tend to create our own “realities.” To be more precise, we make up stories about almost everything, give tenacity to these stories through social discourse and repetition, and then “act out” the stories as if they were reality. Tribal myths, religious doctrines, political ideologies, academic paradigms, and grand cultural narratives are just some of the fabrications that can make or ruin individual lives and set the course for whole societies. Sociologists call the general phenomenon the “social construction of reality” (though it would be more accurate to refer to the social construction of shared perceptions). The fact of “social construction” provides a useful frame through which to assess the relative merits of neoliberal growth economics versus Herman Daly’s steady-state ecological economics for a full world.1

To begin, it is important to distinguish between “the economy” and “economics.” Both are made-up concepts, but with a significant difference. We define the economy as that set of activities by which human agents identify, develop/exploit, process, and trade in scarce resources. It generally encompasses everything associated with the production, allocation, exchange, and consumption of valuable goods and services, including the behavior of various agents engaged in economic activity. Different economies vary considerably in sophistication and organizational structure. However, **all economies are** real phenomena; people in every human society from primitive tribes through modern nation-states engage in economic activities as defined.

“Economics,” by contrast, **is pure abstraction**. It is that academic discipline dedicated to dissecting, analyzing, modeling, and otherwise describing the economy in simplified terms. Academic economists engage in the social construction of formalized models—verbal and arithmetic “paradigms”—about how the real economy works.

In fact, economists have advanced various competing economic paradigms to describe our modern, techno-industrial, mainly capitalist national and global economies. These differ substantially in terms of foundational principles, analytic tools, systemic scope, conclusions, and policy implications, particularly where the biophysical “environment” is concerned. This diversity should be no surprise: whatever their seeming conceptual elegance and analytic rigor, every economic paradigm is, at bottom, a socially-constructed figment of the human imagination, one that necessarily reflects the starting beliefs, values, and assumptions of its authors. And beliefs, values, and assumptions vary a great deal.

These insights should give us pause. Paradigms of all kinds, even those with demonstrably sketchy origins, assert enormous power over expressed human behavior. Indeed, it is truly remarkable that individuals and whole societies live in the real biophysical world guided by the parameters of various myths, paradigms, social norms, and cultural narratives that may have only a tenuous grip on that same reality.

This brings us back to wondering how reasonable people might choose between neoliberal growth economics and steady-state economics, particularly in a time of ecological turmoil. Postmodernists of the extreme relativist persuasion might argue that, **since all knowledge is socially constructed**, **there is no objective reality.** **Competing paradigms are therefore equally valid** (as in “my vision of the economy is as good as yours!”). This is dangerously wrong-headed: humans construct only their beliefs, not reality. **Relativistic equivalence** is itself a constructed fiction. Culture critic Neil Postman astutely observed, “You may say, if you wish, that all reality [i.e., perception] is social construction, but you cannot deny **that some constructions are ‘**truer’ than others**.** **They are not ‘truer’ because they are privileged; they are privileged because they are ‘truer.’**”2

To be clear, we should acknowledge that **many social constructs are pure illusion** with no counterpart in nature (e.g., the tooth fairy or the notion of a fiery hell); others specify entities that actually exist in total indifference to how people conceive of them (e.g., the law of gravity or the biogeochemical **cycling of nutrients**). Postman is referring to constructs in the latter category. All social constructions of real phenomena are conceptual models, **but a “truer” model will be supported by** tangible evidence, not opinion or wishful thinking. “**Truer” constructions are** better maps **that more fully and faithfully represent the real-world landscapes they purport to represent.**

It is also important to recognize that while belief in some illusory constructs (e.g., “the sun rises in the East”) is inconsequential, allegiance to **others can determine the fates of nations**. **How a society conceives of its economy**, for example, really matters. Indeed, operating from a realistic economic paradigm may even be a key to the survival of global civilization.

Neoliberal Mechanics or Eco-thermodynamics?

So, what do we know about real-world economic activities that might guide us in constructing a “true” economic paradigm? By “true,” I mean one that, among other requirements, adequately reflects the energy/material flows and biophysical processes basic to all living things, including human beings. It is not an exaggeration to say that such a paradigm is a matter of survival. After all, the human system functions like a multi-cellular organism except that, in addition to our bio-metabolic demands, we also have to account for humanity’s unique industrial metabolism. Six facts about humanity and the natural world seem particularly relevant:

1. All human economies are confined to planet Earth, i.e., they function within the ecosphere.

2. The entire human enterprise—our physical bodies, our possessions, and the infrastructure needed to maintain the functional integrity of the whole—is made from energy and materials that we extract from ecosystems and inanimate nature (i.e., from self-producing and non-renewable forms of so-called “natural capital”).

3. All energy and material flows/processes associated with economic activity are governed by well-known laws of physics and chemistry.

4. Real economies, societies, and ecosystems **are complex systems characterized** by lags, thresholds, and other forms of nonlinear behavior (complex systems dynamics) that make their trajectories under stress inherently difficult to predict.

5. The energy and material pathways associated with the acquisition of resources and the disposal of wastes require people to interact with both other species (ecosystems) and inanimate nature. In fact, a qualitative and quantitative record of these flows would describe humanity’s material ecological niche; the goods economy roughly maps the human ecosystem.

6. **The ecosphere is a finite entity with variable**, **but ultimately limited, regenerative and waste assimilation capacities.**

The next question is, how well do mainstream economics and Daly’s ecological economics respectively incorporate these framing constraints? The short answer for the neoliberal paradigm is “virtually not at all.” The dominant economics in this twenty-first century of increasing ecological turmoil is a relic of nineteenth century thinking. Its intellectual founders, motivated by the remarkable success of Newtonian physics, set out explicitly to model economics as the “mechanics of utility and self-interest.” The discipline consequently lost sight of the social context and purpose of economies and became totally abstracted from biological reality. Practitioners increasingly based their models on mechanical cause-effect logic and other simplistic assumptions in the service of analytic tractability. Growth through efficiency gradually became its raison d’être.

Analytic mechanics may have been a suitable platform for the design of early automobile engines, but it is grossly inadequate to reflect the lags, tipping points, multiple equilibria, irreversible transformations, and other complex dynamics of industrial economies or of the social and ecological systems within which they are embedded. However, since the scale of human activity relative to “the environment” was initially negligible, neoclassical economists were able to ignore biophysical context with impunity until the 1960s.

As pollution and general eco-dysfunction finally **became embarrassingly visible** (giving birth to modern environmentalism), the mainstream response was “environmental economics,” essentially an extension of the neoclassical growth-based paradigm. If environmental assets were being degraded, the solution was to monetize nature and let free markets do their magic. Put a price on pollution (i.e., “internalize the externalities”) and depend on market and technological efficiency gains to ease resource scarcity. Where that fails, human ingenuity, stimulated by rising prices**, will find substitutes for any failing good or service provided by nature.** As Nobel laureate economist Robert Solow famously wrote, “[t]he world can, in effect, get along without natural resources.”3 There was no perceived need to question the structural premises of the neoliberal model or its goal of unending growth through efficiency and technological progress. There are arguably no constraints on human ingenuity.

### Case

#### Even if entirely objective truth is impossible – we can judge truer ways to view the world and identify certain material points of analysis – they collapse the search for truth into abstraction which doesn’t solve and promotes arbitrary violence

Postman, chairman of the Department of Culture and Communication @ NYU, ‘99

(Neil, *Building a bridge to the 18th century*, Pg. 77-81)

This is a form of radical relativism that would have befuddled many Enlightenment thinkers. If I may be permitted another "thought experiment," I can imagine a synoptic reply by the advocates of reason that would go like this: "There are words that do not seem to refer to anything in the world of non-words. **And there are 'truths' that cannot be verified**, and which gain their authority from other words **that cannot be verified.** But many words are reflections of reality. To be sure, the reflections are at varying levels of abstraction, e.g., 'tree is more abstract than 'oak/ which is more abstract than 'this eight-foot oak which you are leaning against.' **But it is the** key to intelligence, if not sanity, to be able to assess with some accuracy **the extent to which words refer to the world of non-words**. Modern medicine is better than witchcraft **precisely because its language is a more** accurate depiction **of the world of non-words.** 'More accurate1 **means closer to reality**; that is, 'truer' or 'more objective.' You may say, if you wish, that all reality is a social construction, **but you cannot deny that some constructions are** 'truer' than others. They are not 'truer' because they are privileged; **they are privileged because they are 'truer**. As for procedures that are effective, **e.g., inoculations** against smallpox, sending astronauts to the moon and returning them safely to Earth, and two hundred million other procedures executed daily by sane people, they work because they are derived from sets of propositions **whose** 'truths' have been tested **and shown to be in** accord **with our** limited understanding **of the** structure of reality."

Nothing I have said above means to imply that there can be certainty about our knowledge. It is the quest for certainty that the best-known "postmodernist," Jacques Derrida, has found dangerous, and which he suggests is embedded in the Enlightenment tradition. He calls it "logocentrism." There is no doubt that there were some Enlightenment philosophers, inspired perhaps by Descartes, who can fairly be charged with believing in the possibility of certain knowledge. The most notorious expression of this is found in an essay by Pierre-Simon de Laplace published in 1814. He wrote:

A mind that in a given instance knew all the forces by which nature is animated and the position of all the bodies of which it is composed, if it were vast enough to include all these data within his analysis, could embrace in one single formula the movements of the largest bodies of the universe and of the smallest atoms; nothing would be uncertain for him; the future and the past would be equally before his eyes.8

There is, of course, no scientist today who believes this, and there were very few in the eighteenth century. Then, as now, the idea of certainty functions, for most, as a kind of metaphor, reflecting the thrill of discovering something that appears to be true for everyone at all times, e.g., that blood circulates through the body, that the Earth revolves around the sun, that the rights of human beings derive from God and nature, that the market is self-regulating. Enlightenment scientists and political and social philosophers wrote of these ideas "as if" they were immutable and universal. Some of these ideas, e.g., that human rights are derived from God and nature, are highly debatable, and led in the eighteenth century to arguments about the sources of the origin and authority of human rights. One need only read the quarrels between Edmund Burke and Tom Paine to get a sense of the status of such "truths." These quarrels continue to this day, and one may wish to argue that these "truths," if they are such, are applicable only to Western culture. The term "Eurocentric" is sometimes used (always as a pejorative) to suggest that such "truths" are limited in their scope, and, in fact, may be thought of as mere prejudices. Of course, if one does deny the universality of these "truths," one must explain why some of them—for exam-pie, "those who govern must do so by the will of the governed"— appeal to people all over the world, why even the most repressive regimes will call themselves "a people's democracy." Is it possible that there is at least a universal resonance to these ideas? To label an idea "Eurocentric" does not necessarily mean it does not have universal application. After all, the claim that the blood circulates through the body or that the speed of light is 186,000 miles per second is "Eurocentric," at least in origin. Are these "truths" mere prejudice or are we entitled to treat them as if they are universal and immutable?

If postmodernism **is simply** skepticism **elevated to the** highest degree, **we may give it muted applause.** The applause must be muted because even skepticism requires nuance and balance. To say that all reality is a social construction is interesting, indeed provocative, but requires, nonetheless, that distinctions be made between what is an unprovable opinion and a testable fact. And if one wants to say that "a testable fact" is, itself, a social construction, a mere linguistic illusion, **one is moving dangerously close to a kind of** Zeno's paradox. One can use a thousand words, in French or any other language, to show that a belief is a product of habits of language—**and graduate students by the carload can join in the fun**—**but blood still circulates through the body** **and the AIDS virus still makes people sick** and the moon is not made of green cheese**.**

One may also say something like this about the "postmodern" view of texts. Roland Barthes is frequently cited as the originator of the announcement of "the death of the author." He is usually taken to mean that readers create their own meanings of a text irrespective of the author's intentions. Thus, the meanings of texts are always shifting and open to question, depending on what the reader does with the text. If this means that texts (including spoken words) may have multiple meanings, then the idea is a mere commonplace. But if it is taken to mean that there is no basis for privileging any meaning given to a text over any other meaning, then it is, of course, nonsense. You can "deconstruct" Man Kampf until doomsday **and** it will not occur to you **that the text is a paean of praise to the Jewish people**. Unless, of course, you want to claim that **the text can be read as irony,** that Hitler is spoofing anti-Semitism. No one can stop you from doing this. **No one can stop anyone from misreading anything** or rationalizing anything or excusing anything. Derrida, with whom the word "deconstruction" is most commonly associated, gave a superb example of how one may choose to misread, in his defense of Paul de Mans pro-Nazi writings during the German occupation of Belgium. De Man is one of the founders of the postmodern school of "deconstructing" texts, and when his pro-Nazi articles were discovered after the war, he wrote a letter to Harvard's Society of Fellows explaining himself. In such a circumstance, it is convenient, to say the least, to represent the view that all meanings are indeterminate, that there can be no definitive interpretations of any text. In any case, de Man s letter was filled with ambiguities and even outright lies, about which Derrida commented: "Even if sometimes a minimum of protest stirs in me, I prefer, upon reflection, that he chose not to take it on himself to provoke, during his life, this spectacular and painful discussion. It would have taken his time and energy. He did not have very much and that would have deprived us of a part of his work."9 As Anthony Julius puts it in describing the affair: Derrida is saying that telling the truth should be avoided because it is time-consuming.

Derrida, so far as I know, has not argued that any meaning can be attributed to a text, **only that there are wider possibilities** than are usually accepted or expected. Perhaps there are no postmodernists who argue that any meaning can be justified. But in surveying the work of well-known postmodernists, I find no clarity about—indeed, no interest in—**the** standards **by which certain meanings may be** excluded. **The process of making meaning** from a text **involves as much withholding meanings as adding them**, and knowing the rules that govern when it is appropriate to do either is at the core of reasonable interpretation. Derrida, in fact, **knows this as well as anyone,** since his famous analyses of the contradictions in the texts of Plato and Edmund Husserl, among others, are as good a demonstration of how to read deeply as any we have. But there are those who have taken the act of postmodern reading and writing to the edge of absurd^ the case of The Great Postmodern Spoof of 1997. Alan physicist at New York University, submitted a long essay to journal Social Text, noted for its commitment to postmodern thought. After the essay was published, Sokal revealed that it Was complete gibberish from beginning to end. Not error-laden not overstated, not even an exercise in fantasy. Gibberish. Appar-ently, this was not noticed by the editors of Social Text, or if it was, they felt that gibberish is as good as any other form of discourse. Sokal has continued his assault on postmodern writing by joining with John Bricmont, a Belgian physicist, in writing Fashtonabk Nonsense, a devastating critique of the writings of Regis Ddbm Jacques Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard, among others. Of Bau-drillard's theories about "multiple refraction in hyperspace," Sokal (in an interview with the London Times) said: "In physics, the word 'space' exists, as does hyperspace and refraction. But multiple refractions in hyperspace? ... It appears to be scientific, but in fact it is as pompous as it is meaningless."10

Pomposity we can survive. But meaninglessness is another matter. Fortunately, **most of us have not succumbed to the pleasures of meaningless language**. We struggle as best we can to connect **our words with the world of non-words**. Or, at least, to use words that will resonate **with the experiences of those whom we address**. But one worries, nonetheless, that a generation of young people may become entangled in an academic fashion **that will increase their difficulties in** solving real problems—indeed, in facing them. Which is why, **rather than their reading Derrida**, **they ought to read Diderot, or Voltaire**, Rousseau, Swift, Madison, Condorcet, or many of the writers of the Enlightenment period who believed that, **for all of the difficulties** in mastering language, it is possible to say what you mean, to mean what you say, **and to be silent when you have nothing to say**. They believed that it is possible to use language to say things about the world that are true—true, meaning that they are testable and verifiable, that there is evidence for believing. Their belief in truth included statements about history and about social life, although they knew that such statements were less authoritative than those of a scientific nature. They believed in the capacity of lucid language to help them know when they had spoken truly or falsely. Above all, they believed that the purpose of language is to communicate ideas to oneself and to others. Why, at this point in history, so many Western philosophers are teaching that language is nothing but a snare and a delusion, that it serves only to falsify and obscure, **is mysterious** to me. Perhaps it comes as a consequence of our disappointments in the twentieth century. Perhaps some of our philosophers have been driven to a Caliban-like despair: You taught me language and my profit on it is that I know how to kill and be cruel." If so, it is understandable but not acceptable. Can we go into the future believing that gibberish is as good as any other form of language?

#### Their rejection of universalist ethics causes takeover by the Alt-Right by undermining narratives necessary to check the growth of the alt right

Tuttle 16

Ian Tuttle is a National Review Institute Buckley Fellow in Political Journalism, The Racist Moral Rot at the Heart of the Alt-Right, April 5, 2016, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/433650/alt-rights-racism-moral-rot>

Last week, Breitbart writers Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos took it upon themselves to pen an apologia for the “Alternative Right,” or Alt-Right — the grab bag of ostensibly right-wing anti-liberal ideologies whose disciples, of late, are thrilling to the rise of Donald Trump. The Alt-Right has evangelized over the last several months primarily via a racist and anti-Semitic online presence. But for Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, the Alt-Right consists of fun-loving provocateurs, valiant defenders of Western civilization, daring intellectuals — and a handful of neo-Nazis keen on a Final Solution 2.0, but there are only a few of them, and nobody likes them anyways. In other words, anyone familiar with Yiannopoulos’s theatrics, or Breitbart’s self-appointment as Donald Trump’s Pravda, will not be surprised to learn that the article is a 5,000-word whitewash. But it is valuable, in this way: It exhibits, albeit inadvertently, the moral and intellectual rot at the heart of the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right’s origin story will sound familiar: Conservatives, the Breitbart writers say, refused to defend “humanism, liberalism, and universalism” against “black and feminist identity politics” and “left-wing moral relativism.” They “turned a blind eye to the rise of tribal, identitarian movements on the Left while mercilessly suppressing any hint of them on the Right.” (Something like this tale of woe is used by Trump supporters to explain, and to justify, his rise.) This is largely false. It’s simply nonsense to suggest that American conservatism was willfully complicit in the rise of the identity-politics Left. It’s simply nonsense to suggest that American conservatism was willfully complicit in the rise of the identity-politics Left, or that conservatives have wholly forsaken their commitment to constitutional, and generally Judeo-Christian, values. For decades, conservatives have fought against racial favoritism, against the normalization of sexual perversion, against the “Hey, hey, ho, ho! Western Civ has got to go!” ethos that animates so much of progressivism. Furthermore, it’s entirely plausible that, where conservatives have endorsed policies — high levels of immigration, for example — that have ended up undermining certain “core Western values” (the importance of the rule of law, say), it was out of a commitment to other high-minded principles also in keeping with the Western tradition. SHARE ARTICLE ON FACEBOOKSHARE TWEET ARTICLETWEETBut this is not about the Gang of Eight bill. Most on the Alt-Right do not only reject the “conservative Establishment” or some other contemporary bogeyman; they also reject the ideals of classical liberalism as such. That rejection grounds the thinking of Jared Taylor, and Richard Spencer, for instance — representative “intellectuals” of the Alt-Right, according to Bokhari and Yiannopoulos. These men — the founders of the publications American Renaissance and Radix Journal, respectively — have not simply been “accused of racism.” They are racist, by definition. Taylor’s “race realism,” for example, co-opts evolutionary biology in the hopes of demonstrating that the races have become sufficiently differentiated over the millennia to the point that the races are fundamentally — that is, biologically — different. Spencer, who promotes “White identity” and “White racial consciousness,” is beholden to similar “scientific” findings. RELATED: Why White-Nationalist Thugs Thrill to Trump And it’s worth noting that the favorite slur the Alt-Right flings at conservatives they dislike is at bottom about miscegenation: “Cuckservative” refers to a form of sexual fetish in which a man, usually white, is aroused by watching his wife have sex with another man, usually black. As the curator of the “Dark Enlightenment” blog writes: “Among the central principles of neo-reaction — one of the top two, I’d say — is that long-separated human populations differ, innately, in significant ways, and that human cultures, when correctly understood to be part of our extended phenotype, reflect this underlying biological variation.” “The Dark Enlightenment” is the name, first and foremost, of a fuzzily argued manifesto of sorts, penned by Nick Land, formerly a lecturer in continental philosophy at the University of Warwick, and another of Bokhari’s and Yiannopoulos’s go-to “intellectuals.” Land is a more sophisticated thinker than Taylor or Spencer, but his “neo-reaction” is rooted in the same fundamental rejection of egalitarianism. The differences are less important than the similarities; the race realists call on evolutionary biology and cognitive science; Land and his followers invoke postmodern philosophy. Both, with the help of an influential Alt-Right contingent among computer scientists, draw on cognitive science. There is, then, contra Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, continuity on the Alt-Right, from the more interesting thinkers to the “1488ers.” This label comes from 14, for the “14 Words” of neo-Nazism (“We Must Secure the Existence of Our People and a Future for White Children”), and 88, for the eighth letter of the alphabet, H, doubled, HH, ergo “Heil Hitler.” Clever, eh? Some want to put people in ovens; some just want an ability to “exit” multicultural society for an ethno-national arrangement. But they’re all in agreement: “All men are created equal” is not true. What follows is a 21st-century version of Blut und Boden — Blood and Soil — on one hand, or technological apocalypticism, on the other. But the two are not so different, as the Nazis understood. (And to that point, it’s telling that, as Bokhari and Yiannopoulos note, some Alt-Right thought has its roots in the thinking of Giulio Evola, a mid-century Italian philosopher whose apocalyptic vision of the world derived from his own woolly syncretism and eccentric mysticism.) Adherents of the Alt-Right not only conceive of the “Establishment” as traitorous; they also seem to think that liberal democracy itself was an abstraction tyrannically imposed on an unwilling populace. It wasn’t. It was a slowly and painfully forged response to centuries of challenges. The Western, liberal-democratic order is wracked with problems, of course; but it always has been. The question is, Has it been more fruitful, more liberating, more constructive in promoting the common good than have the various orders that came before it? And if so, is there a compelling reason for throwing it over in favor of the ancient belief that some men are, indeed, born with saddles on their backs, and a favored few born booted and spurred, entitled to ride them? This is the question the Alt-Right poses. As it happens, it’s an old question, and one to which our forebears gave powerful answers. But every generation has to relearn them. The larger the Alt-Right grows, the clearer it is that ours hasn’t.

#### Rejection of objectivity leads to absolutism – explanatory critique is an essential part of any radical criticism

Jones, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, ‘04

(Branwen Gruffydd, “From Eurocentrism to Epistemological Internationalism: power, knowledge and objectivity in International Relations,” Paper presented at Theorising Ontology, Annual Conference of the International Association for Critical Realism, University of Cambridge, August, <http://www.csog.group.cam.ac.uk/iacr/papers/Jones.pdf>)

The ‘common-sense’ view pervading recent discussions of epistemology, ontology and methodology in IR asserts that objectivity implies **value-free neutrality**. However, objective social inquiry **has an** inherent tendency to be critical**,** in various senses. To the extent that objective knowledge provides a better and more adequate account of reality than other ideas, **such knowledge is inherently critical** (implicitly or explicitly) **of those ideas30**. In other words critical social inquiry does not (or not only) **manifest its ‘criticalness’ through** self-claimed labels **of being critical** or siding with the oppressed, **but through the** substantive critique of prevailing ideas. Objective social knowledge constitutes a specific form of criticism: explanatory critique. The critique of dominant ideas or ideologies is **elaborated through providing a more adequate explanation of aspects of the world**, and in so doing exposing what is wrong with the dominant ideology. This may also entail revealing the social conditions which give rise to ideologies, thus exposing the necessary and causal relation between particular social relations and particular ideological conceptions.

In societies which are constituted by unequal structures of social relations giving rise to unequal power and conflicting interests, the reproduction of those structured relations is in the interests of the powerful, whereas transformation of existing structured relations is in the interests of the weak. Because ideas inform social action they are casually efficacious either in securing the reproduction of existing social relations (usually as an unintended consequence of social practice), or in informing social action aimed at transforming social relations. **This is why** ideas cannot be ‘neutral’.Ideas which provide a misrepresentation of the nature of society, the causes of unequal social conditions, and the conflicting interests of the weak and powerful, will tend to help secure the reproduction of prevailing social relations. Ideas which provide a more adequate account of the way society is structured and how structured social relations produce concrete conditions of inequality and exploitation **can potentially inform efforts to change those social relations.** In this sense, ideas which are false are ideological and, in serving to promote the reproduction of the status quo and avoid attempts at radical change, are in the interests of the powerful. An account which is objective will **contradict ideological ideas,** implicitly or explicitly criticising them for their false or flawed accounts of reality. The criticism here arises not, or not only, from pointing out the coincidence between ideologies and the interests of the powerful, nor from a prior normative stance of solidarity with the oppressed, **but from exposing the flaws in dominant ideologies through a** more adequate account **of the nature and causes of social conditions31**. A normative commitment to the oppressed must entail a commitment to truth and objectivity, because true ideas are in the interest of the oppressed, false ideas are in the interest of the oppressors. In other words, the best way to declare solidarity with the oppressed is to declare one’s commitment to objective inquiry32. As Nzongola-Ntalaja (1986: 10) has put it:

It is a question of whether one analyses society from the standpoint of the dominant groups, who have a vested interest in mystifying the way society works, or from the standpoint of ordinary people, who have nothing to lose from truthful analyses of their predicament.

The philosophical realist theory of science, objectivity and explanatory critique thus **provides an** alternative response **to the relationship between knowledge and power. Instead of choosing perspectives on the basis of our ethical commitment** **to the cause of the oppressed** and to emancipatory social change, we should choose between contending ideas on the basis of which provides a better account of objective social reality. **This will** inherently provide a critique **of the ideologies which,** by virtue of their flawed account of the social world, serve the interests of the powerful.

Exemplars of explanatory critique in International Relations are provided in the work of scholars such as Siba Grovogui, James Gathii, Anthony Anghie, Bhupinder Chimni, Jacques Depelchin, Hilbourne Watson, Robert Vitalis, Sankaran Krishna, Michel-Rolph Trouillot 33. Their work provides critiques of central categories, theories and discourses in the theory and practice of IR and narratives of world history, including assumptions about sovereignty, international society, international law, global governance, the nature of the state. They expose the ideological and racialised nature of central aspects of IR through a critical examination of both the long historical trajectory of imperial ideologies regarding colonized peoples, and the actual practices of colonialism and decolonisation in the constitution of international orders and local social conditions. Their work identifies the flaws in current ideas by revealing how they systematically misrepresent or ignore the actual history of social change in Africa, the Caribbean and other regions of the Third World, both past and present – during both colonial and neo-colonial periods of the imperial world order. Their work reveals how racism, violence, exploitation and dispossession, colonialism and neo-colonialism have been central to the making of contemporary international order and contemporary doctrines of international law, sovereignty and rights, and how such themes are glaring in their absence from histories and theories of international relations and international history.

Objective social knowledge which accurately depicts and explains social reality **has these qualities by virtue of its** relation to its object, not its subject. As Collier argues, **“The science/ideology distinction is an epistemological one, not a social one**.” (Collier 1979: 60). So, for example, in the work of Grovogui, Gathii and Depelchin, the general perspective and knowledge of conditions in and the history of Africa might be due largely to the African social origins of the authors. However the judgement that their accounts are superior to those of mainstream IR rests not on the fact that the authors are African, but on the greater adequacy of their accounts with respect to the actual historical and contemporary production of conditions and change in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World. The criteria for choosing their accounts over others derives from the relation between the ideas and their objects (what they are about), not from the relation between the ideas and their subjects (who produced them). It is vital to retain explicitly some commitment to objectivity in social inquiry, to the notion that the proper criterion for judging ideas about the world lies in what they say about the world, **not** whose ideas they are.

A fundamental problem which underlies the origin and reproduction of IR’s eurocentricity is the overwhelming dominance of ideas produced in and by the west, and the wilful and determined **silencing of the voices and histories of the colonised**. But the result of this fundamental problem is flawed knowledge about the world. **Eurocentricity is therefore a dual problem concerning both the authors and the** content **of knowledge**, **and cannot be resolved through normative commitments** alone**.** It is not only the voices of the colonised, but the histories of colonialism, which have been glaring in their absence from the discipline of International Relations.

Overcoming eurocentricity therefore requires not only concerted effort from the centre to create space and listen to hitherto marginalised voices, **but also commitment to** correcting the flaws **in prevailing knowledg**e – and **it is** not only ‘the Other’ **who can and should elaborate this critique.** A vitally important implication of objectivity is that it is the responsibility of European and American, just as much as non-American or nonEuropean scholars, **to decolonise IR**. The importance of objectivity in social inquiry defended here can perhaps be seen as a form of epistemological internationalism. **It is not necessary to be African to attempt to tell a more accurate account of the history of Europe’s role** in the making of the contemporary Africa and the rest of the world, for example, **or to write counter-histories of ‘the expansion of international society’** which detail the systematic barbarity of so-called Western civilisation. **It is not necessary to have been colonised to recognise and document the violence, racism, genocide and dispossession** which have characterised European expansion over five hundred years.

## 2NC

### Case

#### Individual actions are context specific have a material impact in spite of the linguistic economy.

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(Michelle, “Rebels Without Causes: Contemporary German Authors Not in Search of Meaning,” Monatshefte Volume 104, Number 2, Summer 2012)

While I find Liesegang’s argument plausible, **there are** other explanations **for this apparent disinterest and disengagement outside of Baudrillard’s theory of the postmodern condition** or a desire to neutralize the German past, although it does have to do with socio-economic status. One of the things that many of us familiar with German culture admire about it is the state’s commitment to creating livable conditions for virtually all of its citizens. The social welfare network in Germany (indeed in Western Europe more broadly) may be under siege in the current economic climate, but from health care to housing the state has managed to offer its citizens a level of basic support that Americans cannot really fathom and—as the most recent health care debate demonstrated—in large numbers appear not to condone. Thus, the glaring need for individual citizens to offer their services to their fellow human beings has remained somewhat underdeveloped in Germany (Wiedermann and Held) and has led to a set of expectations that the government will address the society’s most basic needs. Recent studies of volunteerism in Germany **indicate that this is changing and that a substantive portion of the population** **now gives of its time to myriad social organizations** in ways that would seem entirely futile to the characters in the texts analyzed here.13 Furthermore, sociological and social psychological studies indicate that people who volunteer do feel a greater connection to other people and a greater level of personal satisfaction than those who do not.14 The findings of this research, as mentioned above, [End Page 258] have led me to question whether the literature analyzed in this article reflects the perspective of a highly specific section of German society far more than it offers a broader portrait of central European society today, namely that of a disaffected, disengaged intellectual class that no longer sees itself as called upon to participate in the improvement of society now that the great German political problem of the 20th century appears to have been “solved.” This may have something to do with the specific situation of Germany in the first decades after the fall of the Wall but it may also be a result of the socio-economic structures of the Federal Republic.

I do not wish to present here an overly simplified and naïve argument that Hermann’s characters should go out and get involved in volunteer organizations and that doing so would make the pervasive sense of sadness and ennui vanish. Nor would it necessarily reorient the consumerist attitudes or patterns of consumption of Naters’ group of friends or Regener’s Herr Lehmann into more socially productive outlets. **However, I do question the individual, social, and even aesthetic value of** wallowing in indecision **and isolation and presenting them as representative of a crisis in human subjectivity**. Steven Best describes the world according to Baudrillard **as “an abstract non-society devoid of cohesive relations**, social meaning, and collective representation” (Best 51). The characters of Mau Mau, Herr Lehmann, and the stories of Sommerhaus, später and Nichts als Gespenster inhabit the same or at least a similar world to Baudrillard’s. Thus Baudrillard’s work offers an effective tool in understanding the implications of the world these literary characters inhabit and their creators’ perspective on contemporary German society. Their world, however**, is itself a human projection**, a choice**. It is an** interpretation of reality **that allows individuals to become resigned and passive.** Furthermore, it is a perspective possible only from a position of relative affluence.

I shall not venture to judge whether Baudrillard’s diagnosis of postmodern society is accurate, although it appears that many of Germany’s current writers agree with him or were influenced by postmodern theories of late 20th-century consumerist societies. I can, however**, say in conclusion that it** is not helpful **or productive on either an individual or social level in imagining ways of living in today’s world**. As Steven Best points out:

Baudrillard’s radical rejection **of referentiality is premised upon a one-dimensional,** No-Exit world of self-referring simulacra. But, however, reified and self-referential postmodern semiotics is, signs do not simply move in their own signifying orbit. **They are** historically produced **and circulated and while they may not translucently refer to some originating world, they none the less can** be socio-historically contextualized, **interpreted, and critiqued.**(57)

In other words, **human beings generate the simulacra in specific historical contexts that are** subject to interpretation and challenge. **Regardless of** how pervasively the media spin our reality**,** real people suffer **and**—occasionally [End Page 259] prosper—**because of political decisions made at the local, national, and international level**. **Media images may overpower us, but they** shouldn’t make us lose sight of the real ramifications of political and economic development.

Many critics have suggested that Baudrillard’s chief accomplishment was to serve as an agent provocateur. In an interview with Mike Gane, Baudrillard himself saw his method of reflection as “provocative, reversible, [ . . . ] a way of raising things to the ‘N’th power [ . . . ] It’s a bit like a theory-fiction” (Poster 331). One could argue that this is precisely the function of such novels and short stories as the ones examined here: to provoke us. But to what end? Naters, Regener, and Hermann all write very readable literature, and they challenge us to understand the world of the insipid, self-centered, and myopic characters that they have created. It would indeed be a disservice to the authors to imply that they do not view their own characters with critical distance. Thus, I am not suggesting that they believe their readers should emulate the characters they have created. They have not, however, successfully demonstrated either why we should care about them or—more importantly—what we can learn from them.

## 1NR

### Radical Politics K

#### Obsession with constantly putting truth on trial leads to anxiety and nihilism.

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(John, “Postmodernism and the Corruption of the Critical Intelligentsia,” in *Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics*, ed. Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael J. Thompson, Chapter 3)

The destruction of truth is now so advanced in capitalist culture that it perhaps comes as no surprise that even in the halls of Critical Theory, imagined sanctum sanctorum of independent consciousness and conscience, **truth is now openly profaned and condescended** to by those once charged with sheltering its sacred flame—the intellectuals.1 If, as the Yiddish proverb goes, “the truth never dies, but is made to live as a beggar,” let us note that no intellectual movement of recent memory has so beggared the truth as thoroughly as post-structuralism has.2 With the postmodernist turn, truth became a dirty word, and affirmation of truth came to be seen as a sign not of resistance to power, but of one’s pitiable naivete.

The theoretical tide began to turn against truth in the 1970s, when French historian and philosopher Michel Fou**cault boldly put truth in scare quotes.** “‘Truth,’” he declared, “is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements . . . ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.”3 No longer would “the true” be colloquially understood, as it had for millennia, as that which accords with fact or reality. For an increasingly influential sector of the intelligentsia, truth would now be construed as a problem to be solved. What discourses give rise to the appearance of “truth”? How does “truth,” as a form of power, a system of “constraints,” function and manifest itself? How does knowledge, as power, disguise itself as “truth,” in order to achieve its effects?

Such questions are not uninteresting. The trouble is that poststructuralists have told us that we are entitled to ask only such questions, having conflated the idea of truth with “truth,” (i.e., “truth” **as a discourse**). The origins of this fateful move can be traced to Friedrich Nietzsche, the intellectual forefather of post-structuralism. “There is no pre-established harmony between the furtherance of truth and the well-being of mankind,” Nietzsche wrote.4 Nietzsche identified the preoccupation with truth in Western philosophy with nihilism and the “slave morality” of JudeoChristianity: “Truth” was merely a psychological projection of the thwarted ambitions of the powerless, who had mistaken their own failed “will to power” for universal moral principles or ideals.5 Foucault, who shared Nietzsche’s skepticism toward the possibility or even desirability of universal norms or principles, applied the German philosopher’s genealogical method to his studies of history and humanist thought, radically reshaping the terrain of post-existentialist critical thought in the process. After Foucault’s death in 1984, truth was to be continuously put on trial, interrogated, and found guilty by countless postmodernist academics of being “truth”—i.e., a mere epiphenomenon of power, an artifact of discourse. The effect of this curious repetition compulsion **by a leading segment of the critical intelligentsia** was to gravely damage the critical instruments of not one but several classes of intellectuals, **blunting the critical imagination and eroding the Left’s capacity for truth-telling** **at humanity’s hour of greatest need.** Ironically, **Nietzsche’s thought succumbed at the end of the twentieth century** to the very nihilism he despised, **becoming** institutionalized **by the very bureaucratic, pedantic types he abhorred**.

#### Their propaganda strategy is wrong. It creates a political vacuum that makes it easier to sustain ideological domination.

Schwartz, Associate Professor of Political Science at Temple University, ‘15

(Joseph, “Being Postmodern While Late Modernity Burned: On the Apolitical Nature of Contemporary Self-Defined “Radical” Political Theory,” in *Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics*, ed. Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael J. Thompson, Chapter 7)

In 1995, political theorist Jeffrey Isaac, in an article entitled “The Strange Silence of Political Theory,” posed the following question: “given the historical, political, and seemingly theoretical significance of the Eastern European revolution against Soviet communism, why have American political theorists failed to hardly address the topic?”1 In 2015, one might pose a similar question: given the historical, political, and seemingly theoretical significance of the radical increase in inequality over the past 30 years in the United States, **why have American political theorists** failed **to hardly address the topic?** This essay explores how and why mainstream political theory has largely failed to conceive of the rise of neoliberal capitalism as a major threat to democracy in the United States and the world. Over the past 30 years, the predominant form of work in self-identified “radical” political theory has focused on the ontological and epistemological **issues of “**difference” and “the fiction of the coherent self.”2 Political theory, however, has devoted very little attention to how the right went about constructing a new dominant ideology during this same period. For the past 30 years, post-structuralist and difference theorists have attacked the rational chooser of Rawlsian liberalism **as a “falsely universal” subject**; meanwhile, the center-right consensus in favor of neoliberal capitalism has **succeeded in creating a** new hegemonic universal subject—the entrepreneurial, self-sufficient, competitive individual. A simple gleaning of the titles of the three hundred or so articles published between 1990 and the present in Political Theory, the “cutting-edge” journal of the subdiscipline, reveals less than ten articles that explicitly study the relationship between inequality and democracy.3 By a factor of 30-fold or more the casual observer would find articles on “identity,” “difference,” and “deconstruction.” This is not to deny the importance that “difference” plays within a democratic pluralist society, or the intellectual validity of interrogating how dominant institutional “norms” can constrict identity and choice. But the problem that vexed Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and Marx remains more relevant than ever: How do inequalities in wealth, income, power, and life-opportunity **contradict the formal commitment of liberal democracy** to the equal moral worth of persons? Theorists of “difference” contend that the differential needs of members of particular groups means that one-size-fits-all social policies cannot achieve true equality of life chances for each citizen. But what most theorists of difference have neglected to note **is that a political majority no longer exists in favor of social equality**, whether a pluralist conception of equality or not. While worrying about the “homogenizing” nature of social welfare liberalism, **radical political theory failed to notice that a new “universal” had triumphed** within the popular imaginary: the fair treatment of each and all through competition in the unregulated market. The post-structuralist turn in political theory in part arose as a reaction to fears that “difference politics” “essentialized” and homogenized the status of the self within groups. Post-structuralism rejected not only Rawlsian liberalism’s belief in a coherent, rational chooser, but also the granting of primacy by “identity politics” to the group as the shaper of individual identity. Instead, post-structuralist analysis emphasized the labile, incoherent, shifting nature of a “self ” constituted by “performative discursive iteration” of social norms. Post-structuralist theorists emphasized the agonal nature of politics and the ever-present possibilities that the “discursive self ” could “performatively resist” hegemonic norms.4 Ironically, just as allegedly radical theorists discerned the “radical Nietzschean” possibilities of individual “resistance,” the social and political options of working class and people of color in the United States were being severely constrained by rapidly growing social, economic, and political inequality.5

This essay analyzes how contemporary political philosophy’s primary focus upon epistemological and ontological questions has **hindered the field’s ability to speak forthrightly in favor of** social solidarity and democratic equality. **But this is not an exercise in political nostalgia**. There will be no romantic longing here **for a solidaristic, working class–based “left”** that unequivocally embraced a “universal” politics of social justice. We have had plenty of these rather unsophisticated paeans to the “old” majoritarian left.6 Unlike some who write in that vein, **I am well aware that forms of racial, national, and gender exclusion helped construct past forms of working-class solidarity**. Moreover, the “working class” has never been a truly homogenous and “universal class”; its identity and consciousness is constructed and contested in complex ways that reflect the intersectionality of not only race, class, gender, and sexuality, but also of ideology and culture.

Yet, absent a revival of a pluralist, majoritarian left it is hard to imagine how “difference” (or in old school terms, “pluralism”) **can be** institutionalized in an egalitarian manner. In some ways, the blindness of some theorists of “difference” to the reality that “difference” (or “diversity”) can (and is) being institutionalized on a radically inegalitarian social terrain (in which some “different” groups have much more power and opportunity than others) mimics the intellectual blindspot of the liberal pluralist theorist that dominated political theory in the 1950s and 1960s. Then, radical theorists pointed out that liberal pluralist society failed to be fully democratic because some groups had inordinate economic and political power as compared to their small numbers.7 Today, the same critique of “difference” can be made. “Different” groups certainly do not have power proportionate to their democratic numbers. And the “performative” options of working-class individuals, persons of color, women, and LGBTQ individuals are constrained by the structural distribution of racial, economic, and gendered forms of power.

#### The alt link turns it

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(Mari, *Between Levinas and Lacan: Self, Other, Ethics*, Bloomsbury Publishing, pg. 180-184)

In Chapter 2, I pointed out that Butler's attempt to have it both ways—**to denounce the Enlightenment while simultaneously using its resources**—leads to conceptual contradictions that cannot easily be resolved. The matter is worth revisiting here in greater detail because it highlights my major disagreement with Butler, namely that her wholesale vilification of autonomy reaches the kinds of hyperbolic ideological heights that cannot be theoretically defended. Indeed, **it is in part** the predictability of Butler's stance **on this issue that explains why I have been so critical of her in this book:** that I always know ahead of time how the argument is going to go—autonomy, sovereignty, rationality, normative limits bad; antinormativity, no matter how far-fetched, good—makes me feel the same way I do when I am grading yet another graduate student paper that undertakes the task of "deconstructing" the humanist subject. In the latter instance, it takes all the pedagogical willpower I can conjure up to not write in the margin, "Didn't we already do this circa 1975?" In Butler's case, I suppose I would like some explanation for why the monotonous disparagement of autonomy and related concepts is so important to her.

"This question is worth asking because the problematic of the subject—the question of the proper way to theorize the relationship between autonomy and subjection, agency and abjection, accountability and social determination—has been one of the most divisive issues of contemporary theory. I have already outlined my own position, which is that **either-or solutions to this problematic are** too one-dimensional, that if human beings are not entirely autonomous, they are not entirely subjected either, which is why we need to theorize both poles of the dichotomy simultaneously. This, refreshingly, is what Allen tries to do, which is one reason I have found her arguments so convincing. Allen explains that her goal "is to offer an analysis of power in all its depth and complexity, including an analysis of subjection that explicates how power works at the intrasubjective level to shape and constitute our very subjectivity, and an account of autonomy that captures the constituted subject's capacity for critical reflection and self-transformation, its capacity to be self-constituting" (PS 2-3). Without an account of subjection, Allen adds, critical theory cannot grasp "the real-world relations of power and subordination along lines of gender, race, and sexuality that it must illuminate if it is to be truly critical**"; but without a satisfactory account of autonomy, critical theory "**cannot envision possible paths of social transformation**"** {PS 3). This is why it is important to understand how we can be constituted by power **yet capable of constituting ourselves**, **how we can be limited by our social context yet capable of critical reflection and self-transformation beyond this context**.

Undoubtedly even our capacity for critical reflection and self-transformation is socially constituted, so that it would be possible to posit—with Zizek—**that this capacity merely renders our subordination more livable.** In Zizek's skeptical reading (and this is a possibility I touched on in Chapter 4), **what the system *wants* is** precisely that we rebel against it—that we strive for the kind of self transformation that gives us the illusion of being able to distance ourselves from it—because, in the final analysis, our attempts to defy its power **merely** consolidate this power; as Zizek maintains, in one of his more Foucaultian moments, power thrives on our action of disidentification because it "can reproduce itself only through some form of self-distance, **by relying on the obscene disavowed rules and practices that are in conflict with its public norms.**"2 Yet it is also the case—as Zizek himself repeatedly stresses—that without the capacity for critical reflection and self-transformation our relationship to the big Other would be one of utter subjection.

#### The aff is the exact opposite of the alt – taking a step back to ridicule their politics is essential

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(Gregory and Michael J., “Introduction,” in *Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics*, pg. 1-32)

These four elements of the new radical intellectuals and the movements they have influenced are in direct contradiction to the rational radicalism that we implicitly espouse here. On our reading, there is not only a theoretical but also a deeply political difference between what these theorists search for and the Enlightenment-inspired radical view **of a social order marked by solidarity** around common goods, civic virtue oriented toward the defense of the public welfare, well-ordered political institutions with public purpose as their aim, constitutionalism that secures individual rights, and the democratization of economic life as the criterion of social justice. The alternative move, marked by claims that have given shape to radical and critical thought since the Enlightenment, not to mention the common sense that the thinkers we address have sought to evade. We believe that the success of these thinkers and ideas marks a real and disturbing departure from the more rationalist, more realist **understanding of progressive and radical politics** that marked the more **successful movements** of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century.

The basic thesis that organizes the essays that follow is that these thinkers and their ideas have had a disintegrating effect on the nature of progressive politics, and each chapter in this book shows how this has taken place and, of equal importance, contrasts this with a more lucid, more compelling account of what progressive political and social criticism ought to be able to achieve. **Our purpose is to indict a** style **of theory** and thinking that has become so esoteric and self-referential that it has divorced itself from the historic concerns of progressive politics: from remedying inequality, confronting forces eroding our public goods, **or** challenging **the** entrenched power of political and economic elites. Whether it is a rampant irrationalism, a **rejection of any sense of realism** in politics, naive antistatism, theories of power and oppression that have no empirical basis, or simply an incoherent, confused set of texts upon which one can project and read whatever one wants, these thinkers have been able to seduce a generation **into an understanding of politics that privileges an** abstract, self-regarding “politics” **over the concrete analysis of power and a politics based on the public good.**

We believe that the appeal of these thinkers and ideas is symptomatic of a crisis in progressive politics—a crisis that cannot be simply solved. The essays collected here make no pretense to a comprehensive and systemic critique of the various trends in contemporary radical political theory. Nor do they seek to construct a new radicalism. What they do, however, seek to accomplish is to point to critical problems within the impulses of this new radical theory and to provide this from the point of view of a more rationally informed, more realistic account of the nature and import of real politics. Our fear is that the proliferation of these theories and the ideas that they make common **will penetrate so deeply that an effective, politically relevant Left** will all but collapse. To renew radical political theory along rational lines will require much work, but **we believe it** begins with critique.With this in mind, these essays are offered in the hope that those who encounter these new radical mandarins will reflect more critically on the false self-confidence of their ideas and political prescriptions and realize that another, more satisfying and productive, **tradition of radicalism once existed and is** once again possible.

#### Their unending skepticism is parasitic on the alt - makes grounding democratic politics impossible.

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(Joseph, “Being Postmodern While Late Modernity Burned: On the Apolitical Nature of Contemporary Self-Defined “Radical” Political Theory,” in Radical Intellectuals and the Subversion of Progressive Politics, ed. Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael J. Thompson, Chapter 7)

A politics of radical democratic pluralism cannot be securely grounded by a scorched-earth epistemological critique **of every aspect of “enlightenment rationality**.” In fact, the protection to engage in such a critique is itself parasitic upon the liberal democratic tradition. For implicit to any radical democratic project i**s a belief in the equal moral worth of person**s. Embracing such a position **renders one at least a “critical defender”** of enlightenment values **of equality and justice**, **even if one rejects “enlightenment metaphysics”** and believes that the values of democratic equality exist outside “the West.” Of course, as post-structuralists insist, democratic norms are developed by political practice and struggle rather than by abstract philosophical argument. But this is a sociological and historical reality rather than a trumping philosophical proof of epistemological skepticism (as the only valid form of human understanding). Liberal democratic **publics rarely ground their politics in coherent ontologies** and epistemologies; and even among trained philosophers there is no necessary connection between their **metaphysical and epistemological commitments** and their politics. There have, are, and will be Kantian conservatives (Nozick), liberals (Rawls), and radicals (Joshua Cohen; Susan Okin); teleologists, left, center, and right (Michael Sandel, Alasdair McIntyre, or Leo Strauss); antiuniversalist feminists (Judith Butler, Wendy Brown) and quasi-universalist, Habermasian feminists (Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser).

Post-structuralists try to read off from an epistemology or ontology a politics; such attempts simply replace **enlightenment** meta-narratives with postmodern (allegedly anti-) meta-narratives. Such efforts represent an idealist version of the materialist effort—which post-structuralists explicitly condemn—**to read social consciousness off of the structural position of “the agent.”** An adequate and politically efficacious democratic theory must develop an analysis of a society’s social structure and forms of social conflict, as well as a theory of how particular social agents can work to bring about a more democratic society. In exchanging the gods of Weber and Marx for Nietzsche and Heidegger (or their epigones Foucault and Derrida), **post-structuralist theory has abandoned the institutional analysis** of social theory for the idealism of abstract philosophy.

#### Democratic socialism good solves.

Schwartz, Associate Professor of Political Science at Temple University, and Schulman, editorial board of New Politics and the editor of Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Legacy, ‘12

(Joseph and Jason, “Toward Freedom: Democratic Socialist Theory and Practice,” <http://www.dsausa.org/toward_freedom>)

Transitional Strategy: Strengthening Public Provision and Democratic Control over Production

The strategy outlined above is borne out by sociologist John Stephens’ historical argument that the stronger the “counter- hegemonic” strength of unions and left parties, the stronger the welfare state and the more egalitarian the distribution of economic and political power. There is a reason why health and safety regulations are much stricter in the Scandinavian countries than in the United States; why Sweden and West Germany, under social democratic governments, funneled almost half of their respective GNPs through the public sector while the United States only transfers 25 percent; why social democratic welfare states are financed through progressive taxation while others (the United States and Japan) are financed by regressive taxation. The structure of the welfare state is profoundly affected by **relative trade union and political party strength.** As the fight for reforms usually involves struggle “from below,” in liberal democratic capitalist societies **there is** no radical divergence **between strategies for reforms or revolution.** Welfare state reforms that redistribute income and radical structural reforms that increase workers’ control both necessitate stronger political and union organization.

Young radicals today **often act as though street protest** and direct-action tactics—even confrontation with the police—could bring about revolution. **While direct action has its place** in left politics, **achieving serious social reform**—let alone “full” socialism—requires movement-building and mass action. To refrain from struggles for reform (living wages, union organizing rights, police accountability, defense of reproductive rights and affirmative action) is to ensure marginality.

**Socialists must take part in** concrete struggles **to improve peoples’ living conditions**—and do so in ways that increase their self-organization, political consciousness and capacity for collective action.

Towards a Vision of Democratic Production and Social Provision

When socialists argue for “decommodifying”—taking out of private market provision—such basic human needs as healthcare, childcare, education, transport, and housing, we have in mind a decentralized and more fully accountable welfare state than exists in Western democracies. While state financing of such goods is necessary to insure equity, decentralized social provision through community-based institutions must make welfare provision **more human-scale and accessible**. Democratic control of consumption should be as central to the socialist vision as democratic control over production, particularly given popular mistrust that socialism would be a bureaucratic nightmare which treated people as clients rather than citizens.

While the exact details of a socialist economy are open to debate, it will most likely be a mixture of democratic planning of major investments (e.g., expenditure on infrastructure, investment in natural monopolies such as telecommunications, utilities, transport) and market exchange of consumer goods. Large, concentrated industries such as energy and steel would be publicly owned and managed by worker and consumer representatives. Many consumer-goods industries would be run as cooperatives. Workers would design the division of labor within their workplaces and thus overcome the authoritarianism of the traditional capitalist firm. Economic planning would set a guiding strategy by means of fiscal and monetary policy, with the daily coordination of supply and demand left to the market. But this market would be socialized by rendering it transparent. Enterprises would be obliged to divulge information about the design, production processes, price formation, wage conditions, and environmental consequences of the goods that they make. Publicly supported collectives—consumers’ unions—would analyze this data and propose norms to govern various aspects of these practices. Information about actual production processes and proposed norms would then be disseminated via universal, publicly supported communication networks such as the Internet. This would encourage dialogue between producers and consumers over what is socially needed.

Again, **there is no final blueprint for socialism**. **But only under socialism will fully democratic debate over the use of society’s wealth be possible and the satisfaction of people’s basic needs assured.** Productive activity will become not merely a way to acquire money, but a means to develop the whole creative potential of all working women and men.