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# Representations/Language Critiques

Policymaking Should Precede Discourse

Focusing on discourse trades off with material change—the consequences of our plan are more important than our rhetorical choices.

Churchill 96 — Ward Churchill, Professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Colorado, 1996 (“Semantic Masturbation on the Left: A Barrier to Unity and Action,” *From A Native Son: Selected Essays in Indigenism*, 1985-1995, Published by South End Press, ISBN 0896085538, p. 460)

There can be little doubt that matters of linguistic appropriateness and precision are of serious and legitimate concern. By the same token, however, it must be conceded that such preoccupations arrive at a point of diminishing return. After that, they degenerate rapidly into liabilities rather than benefits to comprehension. By now, it should be evident that much of what is mentioned in this article falls under the latter category; it is, by and large, inept, esoteric, and semantically silly, bearing no more relevance in the real world than the question of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Ultimately, it is a means to stultify and divide people rather than stimulate and unite them. Nonetheless, such “issues” of word choice have come to dominate dialogue in a significant and apparently growing segment of the Left. Speakers, writers, and organizers of all persuasions are drawn, with increasing vociferousness and persistence, into heated confrontations, not about what they’ve said, but about how they’ve said it. Decisions on whether to enter into alliances, or even to work with other parties, seem more and more contingent not upon the prospect of a common agenda, but upon mutual adherence to certain elements of a prescribed vernacular. Mounting quantities of progressive time, energy, and attention are squandered in perversions of Mao’s principle of criticism/self-criticism – now variously called “process,” “line sharpening,” or even “struggle” – in which there occurs a virtually endless stream of talk about how to talk about “the issues.” All of this happens at the direct expense of actually understanding the issues themselves, much less *doing* something about them. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the dynamic at hand adds up to a pronounced avoidance syndrome, a masturbatory ritual through which an opposition nearly paralyzed by its own deeply felt sense of impotence pretends to be engaged in something “meaningful.” In the end, it reduces to a tragic delusion at best, cynical game playing or intentional disruption at worst. With this said, it is only fair to observe that it’s high time to get *off* this nonsense, and on with the real work of effecting positive social change.

Policy analysis should precede discourse—it’s the most effective way to challenge power.

Taft-Kaufman 95 — Jill Taft-Kaufman, Professor in the Department of Speech Communication And Dramatic Arts at Central Michigan University, 1995 (“Other ways: Postmodernism and performance praxis,” *The Southern Communication Journal*, Volume 60, Issue 3, Spring, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via ProQuest Research Library)

If the lack of consistency between postmodernism's self-styled allegiance to the oppositional and its collaboration with the existing state of academic practice were its only shortcoming, it should be enough to prevent us from unquestioningly embracing it as a theory. More disquieting still, however, is its postulation of the way the world around us works. Theory that presumes to talk about culture must stand the test of reality. Or, as Andrew King states, "culture is where we live and are sustained. Any doctrine that strikes at its root ought to be carefully scrutinized" (personal communication, February 11, 1994). If one subjects the premise of postmodernism to scrutiny, the consequences are both untenable and disturbing. In its elevation of language to the primary analysis of social life and its relegation of the de-centered subject to a set of language positions, postmodernism ignores the way real people make their way in the world. While the notion of decentering does much to remedy the idea of an essential, unchanging self, it also presents problems. According to Clarke (1991): Having established the material quality of ideology, everything else we had hitherto thought of as material has disappeared. There is nothing outside of ideology (or discourse). Where Althusser was concerned with ideology as the imaginary relations of subjects to the real relations of their existence, the connective quality of this view of ideology has been dissolved because it lays claim to an outside, a real, an extra-discursive for which there exists no epistemological warrant without lapsing back into the bad old ways of empiricism or metaphysics. (pp. 25-26) Clarke explains how the same disconnection between the discursive and the extra-discursive has been performed in semiological analysis: Where it used to contain a relation between the signifier (the representation) and the signified (the referent), antiempiricism has taken the formal arbitrariness of the connection between the signifier and signified and replaced it with the abolition of the signified (there can be no real objects out there, because there is no out there for real objects to be). (p. 26) To the postmodernist, then, real objects have vanished. So, too, have real people. Smith (1988) suggests that postmodernism has canonized doubt about the availability of the referent to the point that "the real often disappears from consideration" (p. 159). Real individuals become abstractions. Subject positions rather than subjects are the focus. The emphasis on subject positions or construction of the discursive self engenders an accompanying critical sense of irony which recognizes that "all conceptualizations are limited" (Fischer, 1986, p. 224). This postmodern position evokes what Connor (1989) calls "an absolute weightlessness in which anything is imaginatively possible because nothing really matters" (p. 227). Clarke (1991) dubs it a "playfulness that produces emotional and/or political disinvestment: a refusal to be engaged" (p. 103). The luxury of being able to muse about what constitutes the self is a posture in keeping with a critical venue that divorces language from material objects and bodily subjects. The postmodern passwords of "polyvocality," "Otherness," and "difference," unsupported by substantial analysis of the concrete contexts of subjects, creates a solipsistic quagmire. The political sympathies of the new cultural critics, with their ostensible concern for the lack of power experienced by marginalized people, aligns them with the political left. Yet, despite their adversarial posture and talk of opposition, their discourses on intertextuality and inter-referentiality isolate them from and ignore the conditions that have produced leftist politics—conflict, racism, poverty, and injustice. In short, as Clarke (1991) asserts, postmodern emphasis on new subjects conceals the old subjects, those who have limited access to good jobs, food, housing, health care, and transportation, as well as to the media that depict them. Merod (1987) decries this situation as one which leaves no vision, will, or commitment to activism. He notes that academic lip service to the oppositional is underscored by the absence of focused collective or politically active intellectual communities. Provoked by the academic manifestations of this problem Di Leonardo (1990) echoes Merod and laments: Has there ever been a historical era characterized by as little radical analysis or activism and as much radical-chic writing as ours? Maundering on about Otherness: phallocentrism or Eurocentric tropes has become a lazy academic substitute for actual engagement with the detailed histories and contemporary realities of Western racial minorities, white women, or any Third World population. (p. 530) Clarke's assessment of the postmodern elevation of language to the "sine qua non" of critical discussion is an even stronger indictment against the trend. Clarke examines Lyotard's (1984) The Postmodern Condition in which Lyotard maintains that virtually all social relations are linguistic, and, therefore, it is through the coercion that threatens speech that we enter the "realm of terror" and society falls apart. To this assertion, Clarke replies: I can think of few more striking indicators of the political and intellectual impoverishment of a view of society that can only recognize the discursive. If the worst terror we can envisage is the threat not to be allowed to speak, we are appallingly ignorant of terror in its elaborate contemporary forms. It may be the intellectual's conception of terror (what else do we do but speak?), but its projection onto the rest of the world would be calamitous....(pp. 2-27) The realm of the discursive is derived from the requisites for human life, which are in the physical world, rather than in a world of ideas or symbols.(4) Nutrition, shelter, and protection are basic human needs that require collective activity for their fulfillment. Postmodern emphasis on the discursive without an accompanying analysis of how the discursive emerges from material circumstances hides the complex task of envisioning and working towards concrete social goals (Merod, 1987). Although the material conditions that create the situation of marginality escape the purview of the postmodernist, the situation and its consequences are not overlooked by scholars from marginalized groups. Robinson (1990) for example, argues that "the justice that working people deserve is economic, not just textual" (p. 571). Lopez (1992) states that "the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present existential, concrete situation" (p. 299). West (1988) asserts that borrowing French post-structuralist discourses about "Otherness" blinds us to realities of American difference going on in front of us (p. 170). Unlike postmodern "textual radicals" who Rabinow (1986) acknowledges are "fuzzy about power and the realities of socioeconomic constraints" (p. 255), most writers from marginalized groups are clear about how discourse interweaves with the concrete circumstances that create lived experience. People whose lives form the material for postmodern counter-hegemonic discourse do not share the optimism over the new recognition of their discursive subjectivities, because such an acknowledgment does not address sufficiently their collective historical and current struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic injustice. They do not appreciate being told they are living in a world in which there are no more real subjects. Ideas have consequences. Emphasizing the discursive self when a person is hungry and homeless represents both a cultural and humane failure. The need to look beyond texts to the perception and attainment of concrete social goals keeps writers from marginalized groups ever-mindful of the specifics of how power works through political agendas, institutions, agencies, and the budgets that fuel them.

Discourse Doesn’t Shape Reality

Discourse doesn’t shape reality—translation proves it’s the other way around.

Fram-Cohen 85 — Michelle Fram-Cohen, freelance translator and interpreter between Hebrew and English that has published articles on literature, translation theory, and philosophy, 1985 (“Reality, Language, Translation: What Makes Translation Possible,” Paper presented at the American Translators Association Conference, Available Online at http://enlightenment.supersaturated.com/essays/text/michelleframcohen//possibilityoftranslation.html, Accessed 07-31-2010)

The idea that language is created inside one's mind independently of outside experience eliminates the possibility that the external world is the common source of all languages. But a common source of all languages underlies any attempt to explain the possibility of translation. Chomsky suggests that the common basis of all languages is universal phonetics and semantics, with the result that "certain objects of human thoughts and mentality are essentially invariable across languages." (13) To the best of my knowledge Chomsky did not develop this idea in the direction of explaining the possibility of translation. In contrast, linguist Eugene Nida insists that outside experience is the common basis of all languages when he writes that "each language is different from all other languages in the ways in which the sets of verbal symbol classify the various elements of experience." (14) Nida did not provide the philosophical basis of the view that the external world is the common source of all languages. Such a basis can be found in the philosophy of Objectivism, originated by Ayn Rand. Objectivism, as its name implies, upholds the objectivity of reality. This means that reality is independent of consciousness, consciousness being the means of perceiving reality, not of creating it. Rand defines language as "a code of visual-auditory symbols that denote concepts." (15) These symbols are the written or spoken words of any language. Concepts are defined as the "mental integration of two or more units possessing the same distinguishing characteristic(s), with their particular measurements omitted." (16) This means that concepts are abstractions of units perceived in reality. Since words denote concepts, words are the symbols of such abstractions; words are the means of representing concepts in a language. Since reality provides the data from which we abstract and form concepts, reality is the source of all words--and of all languages. The very existence of translation demonstrates this fact. If there was no objective reality, there could be no similar concepts expressed in different verbal symbols. There could be no similarity between the content of different languages, and so, no translation. Translation is the transfer of conceptual knowledge from one language into another. It is the transfer of one set of symbols denoting concepts into another set of symbols denoting the same concepts. This process is possible because concepts have specific referents in reality. Even if a certain word and the concept it designates exist in one language but not in another, the referent this word and concept stand for nevertheless exists in reality, and can be referred to in translation by a descriptive phrase or neologism. Language is a means describing reality, and as such can and should expand to include newly discovered or innovated objects in reality. The revival of the ancient Hebrew language in the late 19th Century demonstrated the dependence of language on outward reality. Those who wanted to use Hebrew had to innovate an enormous number of words in order to describe the new objects that did not confront the ancient Hebrew speakers. On the other hand, those objects that existed 2000 years ago could be referred to by the same words. Ancient Hebrew could not by itself provide a sufficient image of modern reality for modern users.

Apologies Solve The Impact To Bad Language

Retribution is unnecessary—accepting our apology for the use of objectionable language is a superior remedy.

Latif 1 — Elizabeth Latif, Law Clerk with the United States District Court of Connecticut, 2001 (“Apologetic Justice: Evaluating Apologies Tailored Toward Legal Solutions," *Boston University Law Review*, Volume 81, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Lexis-Nexis)

In tandem with the above uses of apology, many legal scholars have been singing the praises of apologies in legal fora. Wagatsuma and Rosett compare apologies in Japan, and the United States, and argue that greater incorporation of apology into American legal culture would reduce litigation and shrink court dockets. n66 They maintain that there are some injuries, such as defamation, insult, degradation, loss of status, and emotional distress, "that can only be repaired by an apology."n67 "To the extent that a place may be found for apology in the resolution of such conflicts," Wagatsuma and Rosett assert, "American law would be enriched and better able to deal with" them. n68 Indeed, "society at large might be better off and better able to advance social peace if the law, instead of discouraging apologies in such situations by treating them as admissions of liability, encouraged people to apologize to those they have wronged and to compensate them for their losses."n69 David Hoffman, a partner at the Boston-based law firm of Hill & Barlow, stated in a recent lecture that "the need for apology is ubiquitous in our lives and in our work."n70 Hoffman argues that apologies are essential in mediation, [\*300] because "virtually all disputes have emotional components" and apologizing "can overcome emotional barriersto settlement" such as anger, betrayal and mistrust. n71 Apology is powerfulin a legal setting, Hoffman further asserts, because "when we apologize, we are simultaneously affirming two things[: w]e are affirming that we share the same values and beliefs as the other party and that we care about them."n72

A2: Your Apology Is Not Genuine

Yes it is.

Even if our apology is coerced or feigned, it still has value—our action still engages in the power transfer that is key to rectifying the wrong.

Latif 1 — Elizabeth Latif, Law Clerk with the United States District Court of Connecticut, 2001 (“Apologetic Justice: Evaluating Apologies Tailored Toward Legal Solutions," *Boston University Law Review*, Volume 81, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Lexis-Nexis)

While an apology is certainly not most effective when ordered or feigned, it may still be of some value. In this case, the apology may not be a "success" in the sense that it leads to forgiveness by the victim and a restoration of the moral order, but it nonetheless may heal the victim and/or the community in some way. Even a coerced apology can mitigate anger, shame or educate the offender, or improve prospects for settlements. A coerced apology can mitigate anger even if it is perceived as insincere, and regardless of the offender's level of responsibility. Two studies support this assertion. In a study by psychologists Mark Bennett and Christopher Dewberry, subjects were asked to indicate how they would respond in a hypothetical situation in which they received an unconvincing apology for a moderately serious transgression. n159 Though Bennett and Dewberry drafted the apology to be disingenuous, all of the subjects nonetheless indicated that they would accept it. n160 In another, related study, Bennett and Deborah Earwaker sought to fill the gaps to Bennett and Dewberry's study by identifying the conditions under which an apology is accepted or rejected. n161 [\*312] The experimenters found that the degree to which the apology would dissipate anger had no relation to the offender's degree of responsibility for the offense - though it was significantly related to the severity of the offense. n162 In both the high and the low responsibility conditions, subjects indicated that an apology would substantially mitigate their anger. n163 Furthermore, though the degree of responsibility did have an effect on whether the subjects would ultimately accept the apology, the "likelihood that an apology [would] be rejected is remarkably small, even when there is considerable provocation." n164 Indeed, coerced or ordered apologies can be valuable in their capacity to mitigate anger and move the victim and community closer to the resolution of a crime. As part of the remedy for the arson of a church in Kentucky founded by freed slaves, the district judge in the case ordered the offenders (all white) to apologize to the church's current congregation. n165 Bill Sircy, one of the arsonists, bowed his head in front of the congregation and exclaimed, "We're sorry, but I know that's not enough." n166 The congregation responded, "Amen!" n167 After each of the four persons involved gave an apology, the congregation responded with a round of applause. One member remarked, "I think what they did was a fantastic gesture." n168 Additionally, acourt-ordered or insincere apology can be effective as a shaming sanction. "Say your boss wrongfully accused you in front of the whole office. A fair reparation would require an apology – in front of the whole office. His questionable sincerity might be of secondary importance."n169 A punitive atmosphere surrounding an apology may force an exchange of shame and power between offender and victim, thus achieving what is at the heart of a successful apologetic ritual**.** n170 To be sure, several judges who have ordered apologies have done so in order to shame the offenders in front of their victims or their community. n171

Rejecting Bad Words Is Bad

To call into question the status of a term is not to demand its rejection—their criticism is simply a foundation upon which to reconstruct rather than discard the contaminated language.

Butler 98 — Judith Butler, Professor of Comparative Literature & Rhetoric at the University of California-Berkeley, 1998 (“Left Conservatism, II,” *Theory & Event*, Volume 2, Issue 2, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Project Muse)

I also want to make just a few remarks about Chris's introduction. He said that Left conservatism was an act and not an identity. I appreciated the citation of queer theory there. But I think that if that is true, then probably we ought not to be so concerned with the names of those who are exemplary of those concerns. Name-calling runs the risk of collapsing a complex body of scholarship and political work into a symptom, and I don't want to do that. On the other hand, it struck me coming in here that whereas I don't particularly like that part of the way in which this event is framed, I also thought that this interesting flyer that we received [from protesters of the workshop] was equally problematic. The flyer implies that if the organizers had their way, those who remain disinclined to accept poststructuralism, or rather, those who remain disinclined to be incorporated within something called "the postmodernist paradigm," would be excommunicated from the left, or denied tenure or job possibilities by those who work within such paradigms. This charge strikes me as off-base, offensive and sad, sad for all of us. If what worries those who wrote the flyer is that certain kinds of premises on the Left are being opened to inquiry, are being questioned, are being called into question, and are thus not being understood as foundational, does that mean that such terms are useless? To call into question the foundational status of such terms is not to claim that they are useless or that we ought not to speak that way, that terms like "objectivity," "rationality," "universality" are so contaminated that they ought not to be uttered any longer. A serious misunderstanding has taken place. Calling the foundational status of a term into question does not censor the use of the term. It seems to me that to call something into question, to call into question its foundational status, is the beginning of the reinvigoration of that term. What can such terms mean, given that there is no consensus on their meaning? How can they be mobilized, given that there is no way that they can be grounded or justified in any kind of permanent way. What is the task for politics when it invariably must use terms, must use the language of universality, for instance, precisely when the conventional usages of the term do not include the radical democratic uses of the term one has in mind for the term? Anybody who has worked in gay and lesbian human rights arenas knows that--you're stuck with the language of universality--you can't stay in a place where you're too pure to use the word. It seems to me that one is indeed inevitably contaminated by a language that is also invariably useful and invariably important. And then the question is: what is the strategic operation of such terms? How can they continue to be mobilized when they are no longer being supported by a foundationalist justification. I think that Gayatri Spivak puts this well. I paraphrase here: To deconstruct a category is not to eliminate it, it is precisely to make an inquiry into a category that we cannot do without. An inquiry into a category that we cannot do without--so it is something we absolutely need and we cannot do without, and yet it is open to a certain kind of inquiry that also is not finally suppressible. If we were to say there is a certain point at which intellectual interrogation of a category must stop because we must use it, what have we done? We have, at that moment, premised our politics on anti-intellectualism. We've paralyzed ourselves at that moment, because we make use of a category that we cannot possibly believe in, that we cannot possibly discuss, that we may not radically interrogate. That kind of self-censoriousness is a terrible, terrible move. And I'm afraid that sometimes anti-foundationalism is either figured as that censoriousness or subject to that very censoriousness. In any case, I would think that if the impulse, as I understand it, is to call things into question, then calling into question a vulgar formulation like "a postmodernist paradigm" would be fabulous. And that would be one of the things that a "postmodernist" would presumably most celebrate. It would be consistent with the principled inquiry that guides that self-critical enterprise. So I welcome it. Along the way, it will become possible, then, to distinguish forms of postmodernism and to distinguish postmodernism from poststructuralism. For what it is worth, I'm allied with the latter and not the former.

Rejecting Bad Words Is Bad

Criticism alone is worthless—fighting about phrases trades off with material change.

Cloud 1 — Dana L. Cloud, Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas, 2001 (“The Affirmative Masquerade," *American Communication Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 3, Spring, Available Online at http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol4/iss3/special/cloud.htm, Accessed 07-31-2010)

In this context of a real (and clearly bipolar) class divide in late capitalist society, the postmodern party is a masquerade ball, in which theories claiming to offer ways toward emancipation and progressive critical practice in fact encourage scholars and/as activists to abandon any commitment to crafting oppositional political blocs with instrumental and perhaps revolutionary potential. Instead, on their arguments, we must recognize agency as an illusion of humanism and settle for playing with our identities in a mood of irony, excess, and profound skepticism. Marx and Engels’ critique of the Young Hegelians applies equally well to the postmodern discursive turn: "They are only fighting against ‘phrases.’ They forget, however, that to these phrases they themselves are only opposing other phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are merely combating the phrases of this world" (1976/1932, p. 41).

Their counterplan/alternative cannot contest dominant power relations—only material change solves.

Schram 95 — Sanford F. Schram, Associate Professor of Political Science at Macalester College, former Visiting Professor at the La Follette Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin and Visiting Affiliate at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, 1995 (“Discourses of Dependency: The Politics of Euphemism,” *Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and The Social Science of Poverty*, Published by The University of Minnesota Press, ISBN 0816625778, p. 21-23)

The deconstruction of prevailing discursive structures helps politicize the institutionalized practices that inhibit alternative ways of constructing social relations.5 Isolated acts of renaming, however, are unlikely to help promote political change if they are not tied to interrogations of the structures that serve as the interpretive context for making sense of new terms.6 This is especially the case when renamings take the form of euphemisms designed to make what is described appear to be consonant with the existing order. In other words, the problems of a politics of renaming are not confined to the left, but are endemic to what amounts to a classic American practice utilized across the political spectrum.7 Homeless, welfare, and family planning provide three examples of how isolated instances of renaming fail in their efforts to make a politics out of sanitizing language. [end page 21] Reconsidering the Politics of Renaming Renaming can do much to indicate respect and sympathy. It may strategically recast concerns so that they can be articulated in ways that are more appealing and less dismissive. Renaming the objects of political contestation may help promote the basis for articulating latent affinities among disparate political constituencies. The relentless march of renamings can help denaturalize and delegitimate ascendant categories and the constraints they place on political possibility. At the moment of fissure, destabilizing renamings have the potential to encourage reconsideration of how biases embedded in names are tied to power relations.8 Yet isolated acts of renaming do not guarantee that audiences will be any more predisposed to treat things differently than they were before. The problem is not limited to the political reality that dominant groups possess greater resources for influencing discourse. Ascendant political economies, such as liberal postindustrial capitalism, whether understood structurally or discursively, operate as institutionalized systems of interpretation that can subvert the most earnest of renamings.9 It is just as dangerous to suggest that paid employment exhausts possibilities for achieving self-sufficiency as to suggest that political action can be meaningfully confined to isolated renamings.10 Neither the workplace nor a name is the definitive venue for effectuating self-worth or political intervention.11 Strategies that accept the prevailing work ethos will continue to marginalize those who cannot work, and increasingly so in a post­ industrial economy that does not require nearly as large a workforce as its industrial predecessor. Exclusive preoccupation with sanitizing names overlooks the fact that names often do not matter to those who live out their lives according to the institutionalized narratives of the broader political economy, whether it is understood structurally or discursively, whether it is monolithically hegemonic or reproduced through allied, if disparate, practices. What is named is always encoded in some publicly accessible and ascendent discourse. 12 Getting the names right will not matter if the names are interpreted according to the institutionalized insistences of organized society.13 Only when those insistences are relaxed does there emerge the possibility for new names to restructure daily practices. Texts, as it now has become notoriously apparent, can be read in many ways, and they are most often read according to how prevailing discursive structures provide an interpretive context for reading them.14 The meanings implied by new names of necessity [end page 22] overflow their categorizations, often to be reinterpreted in terms of available systems of intelligibility (most often tied to existing institutions). Whereas renaming can maneuver change within the interstices of pervasive discursive structures, renaming is limited in reciprocal fashion. Strategies of containment that seek to confine practice to sanitized categories appreciate the discursive character of social life, but insufficiently and wrongheadedly. I do not mean to suggest that discourse is dependent on structure as much as that structures are hegemonic discourses. The operative structures reproduced through a multitude of daily practices and reinforced by the efforts of aligned groups may be nothing more than stabilized ascendent discourses.15 Structure is the alibi for discourse. We need to destabilize this prevailing interpretive context and the power plays that reinforce it, rather than hope that isolated acts of linguistic sanitization will lead to political change. Interrogating structures as discourses can politicize the terms used to fix meaning, produce value, and establish identity. Denaturalizing value as the product of nothing more than fixed interpretations can create new possibilities for creating value in other less insistent and injurious ways. The discursively/structurally reproduced reality of liberal capitalism as deployed by power blocs of aligned groups serves to inform the existentially lived experiences of citizens in the contemporary postindustrial order.16 The powerful get to reproduce a broader context that works to reduce the dissonance between new names and established practices. As long as the prevailing discursive structures of liberal capitalism create value from some practices, experiences, and identities over others, no matter how often new names are insisted upon, some people will continue to be seen as inferior simply because they do not engage in the same practices as those who are currently dominant in positions of influence and prestige. Therefore, as much as there is a need to reconsider the terms of debate, to interrogate the embedded biases of discursive practices, and to resist living out the invidious distinctions that hegemonic categories impose, there are real limits to what isolated instances of renaming can accomplish.

Renamings/Euphemisms Are Bad

Sanitizing language backfires—renaming neutralizes language, reifying the harm.

Schram 95 — Sanford F. Schram, Associate Professor of Political Science at Macalester College, former Visiting Professor at the La Follette Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin and Visiting Affiliate at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, 1995 (“Discourses of Dependency: The Politics of Euphemism,” *Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and The Social Science of Poverty*, Published by The University of Minnesota Press, ISBN 0816625778, p. 24-25)

Renaming not only loses credibility but also corrupts the terms used. This danger is ever present, given the limits of language. Because all terms are partial and incomplete characterizations, every new term can be invalidated as not capturing all that needs to be said about any topic.22 With time, the odds increase that a new term will lose its potency as it fails to emphasize neglected dimensions of a problem. As newer concerns replace the ones that helped inspire the terminological shift, newer terms will be introduced to address what has been neglected. Where disabled was once an improvement over handicapped, other terms are now deployed to make society inclusive of [end page 24] all people, however differentially situated. The "disabled" are now "physically challenged" or "mentally challenged." The politics of renaming promotes higher and higher levels of neutralizing language.23 Yet a neutralized language is itself already a partial reading even if it is only implicitly biased in favor of some attributes over others. Neutrality is always relative to the prevailing context. As the context changes, what was once neutral becomes seen as biased. Implicit moves of emphasis and de-emphasis become more visible in a new light. "Physically" and "mentally challenged" already begin to look insufficiently affirmative as efforts intensify to include people with such attributes in all avenues of contemporary life.24

The counterplan/alternative reifies the dominant discourse—renaming trades off with structural change.

Schram 95 — Sanford F. Schram, Associate Professor of Political Science at Macalester College, former Visiting Professor at the La Follette Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin and Visiting Affiliate at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, 1995 (“Discourses of Dependency: The Politics of Euphemism,” *Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and The Social Science of Poverty*, Published by The University of Minnesota Press, ISBN 0816625778, p. 34-35)

The politics of renaming highlights the relationships of discourse to structure and ideology to power.87 The limits of euphemisms suggest that these renamings often reinforce a broader, institutionalized, and structural context that is supported through the daily actions of aligned groupings exercising power to effect outcomes consistent with their interests. Yet the power plays reinforcing prevailing structures also operate to encourage selected interpretations of a wide variety of acts of signification. These structures help create a "social logic" that constrains interpretation of even the most imaginative of renamings. Whereas the structural conditions that constrain policy discourse are themselves discursively constituted, they in turn produce [end page 34] material constraints that limit notions of what is feasible and practical under the existing arrangements. Therefore, displacing the self-sufficiency of the "breadwinner" will not on its own make "dependents" more worthy. Even if "bread" itself is shown in good part, if not the whole loaf, to be symbolic, that will not by itself lead people to eat some other symbol. Gaining leverage for political change involves appreciating not just how material structures can be denaturalized. Political change comes with also appreciating how material practices serve to constrain seriously the extent to which discursive moves will have any tractability in public settings. Only when the power plays supporting such structural conditions are resisted can alternative discursive moves gain political salience.88 Action to improve the lives of poor people involves instituting changes in institutional practices so that people will be motivated to think more inclusively or be willing to entertain the idea that it is rational for them as well-meaning, if not self-interested, individuals to promote the well-being of marginal groups. The existing institutional infrastructure currently works against such thinking.

# Ontology Critique Answers

Permutation

Permute: Do Both

The plan is not mutually exclusive with the alternative. The permutation is best—pursuing an emancipatory agenda while placing ontological questioning in the background is key to meaningful change.

Cochran 99 — Molly Cochran, Assistant Professor of International Affairs at the Georgia Institute of Technology, 1999 (*Normative Theory in International Relations: A Pragmatic Approach*, Published by Cambridge U. Press, ISBN 0521639654, p. 272)

To conclude this chapter, while modernist and postmodernist debates continue, while we are still unsure as to what we can legitimately identify as a feminist ethical/political concern, while we still are unclear about the relationship of discourse and experience, it is particularly important for feminists that we proceed with analysis of both the material (institutional and structural) as well as the discursive. This holds not only for feminists, but for all theorists oriented towards the goal of extending further moral inclusion in the present social sciences climate of epistemological uncertainty. Important ethical/political concerns hang in the balance. We cannot afford to wait for the meta-theoretical questions to be conclusively answered. Those answers may be unavailable. Nor can we wait for a credible vision of an alternative institutional order to appear before an emancipatory agenda can be kicked into gear. Nor do we have before us a chicken and egg question of which comes first: sorting out the meta-theoretical issues or working out which practices contribute to a credible institutional vision. The two questions can and should be pursued together, and can be, ***via*** moral imagination. Imagination can help us think beyond discursive and material conditions which limit us, by pushing the boundaries of those limitations in though and examining what yields. In this respect, I believe international ethics as pragmatic critique can be a useful ally to feminists and normative theorists generally.

Theoretical Objection

The desirability of the plan should be evaluated before questions of ontology:

Ontological questioning is not competitive with the plan and is not a predictable framework for evaluating the debate.

1. Infinite Regression – there are an infinite number of ontological assumptions that the affirmative would be required to defend under their framework. The 1AC would have to prove that the world exists and that existence exists and would have to define what “is” is – this would be the death of debate – no one would participate in this kind of useless and unfair navel-gazing.
2. Resolutional Context – the resolution is a proposition of policy – ontological questions are not relevant to a debate about what the USFG should do. Preserving fairness and competitive equity comes before their substantive arguments about the importance of ontology – they need to win that ontology disproves the desirability of the plan, not just that it affects the way we approach the world.
3. Falsifiability – questions of ontology are fundamentally irresolvable and do not disprove the desirability of the plan.

Solt 4 — Roger E. Solt, Debate Coach at the University of Kentucky, 2004 (“Debate’s Culture of Narcissism,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate*, Volume 25, September, Available Online via Communication & Mass Media Complete, p. 45-46)

Indeed, the things that we assume are those which it is most difficult, if not impossible, to convincingly establish. This is especially true of such basic ontological [end page 45] issues as the existence of an external world, of other minds, and of causal relationships. Because of this, in most cases, the affirmative can neither prove, nor the negative disprove, many of the assumptions at play in a given debate. Nor, in most cases, is this necessary to establish the desirability of the affirmative plan. The chance that an assumption may be true (i.e., causation may exist) will be enough to justify endorsing a certain course of action.

Political Responsibility Good

Turn—Political Responsibility:

A. Public policy-making requires suspension of academic unconstrained search for truth—if they want their ontological arguments to matter, they have to play the policy-making game.

Brock 87 — Dan W. Brock, Professor of Philosophy and Biomedical Ethics at Brown University, 1987 ("Truth or Consequences: The Role of Philosophers in Policy-Making," *Ethics*, Volume 97, July, Available Online via JSTOR, p. 787)

When philosophers become more or less direct participants in the policy-making process and so are no longer academics just hoping that an occasional policymaker might read their scholarly journal articles, this scholarly virtue of the unconstrained search for the truth--all assumptions open to question and follow the arguments wherever they lead--comes under a variety of related pressures. What arises is an intellectual variant of the political problem of "dirty hands" that those who hold political power often face. I emphasize that I do not conceive of the problem as one of pure, untainted philosophers being corrupted by the dirty business of politics. My point is rather that the different goals of academic scholarship and public policy call in turn for different virtues and behavior in their practitioners. Philosophers who steadfastly maintain their academic ways in the public policy setting are not to be admired as islands of integrity in a sea of messy political compromise and corruption. Instead, I believe that if philosophers maintain the academic virtues there they will not only find themselves often ineffective but will as well often fail in their responsibilities and act wrongly. Why is this so? The central point of conflict is that the first concern of those responsible for public policy is, and ought to be, the consequences of their actions for public policy and the persons that those policies affect. This is not to say that they should not be concerned with the moral evaluation of those consequences—they should; nor that they must be moral consequentialists in the evaluation of the policy, and in turn human, consequences of their actions—whether some form of consequentialism is an adequate moral theory is another matter. But it is to say that persons who directly participate in the formation of public policy would be irresponsible if they did not focus their concern on how their actions will affect policy and how that policy will in turn affect people. The virtues of academic research and scholarship that consist in an unconstrained search for truth, whatever the consequences, reflect not only the different goals of scholarly work but also the fact that the effects of the scholarly endeavor on the public are less direct, and are mediated more by other institutions and events, than are those of the public policy process. It is in part the very impotence in terms of major, direct effects on people's lives of most academic scholarship that makes it morally acceptable not to worry much about the social consequences of that scholarship. When philosophers move into the policy domain, they must shift their primary commitment from knowledge and truth to the policy consequences of what they do. And if they are not prepared to do this, why did they enter the public domain? What are they doing there?

B. A focus on ontological questions condemns real people to death—their fascination with Being trades off with a focus on the human beings effected by government policies.

Caputo 93 — John D. Caputo, David R. Cook Professor of Philosophy at Villanueva University, 1993 (*Against Ethics: contributions to a poetics of obligation with constant reference to deconstruction*, Published by Indiana University Press, ISBN 0253208165, p. 70)

That would mean you cannot have an obligation to Being or the Spirit or the People, nor can Being or the Spirit oblige anything. Being, Spirit, History, Man: the playthings of Greco-German mythophilosophizing, which is my somewhat free translation of *die Sache des Denkens* (which I claim, as a translation, is *wahr* if not *richtig*). Nothing happens in or to Being and Spirit. What happens happens to beings that bear up or bend under what is happening. Being cannot suffer a disaster, or suffer oblivion, because it does not suffer at all. Being and Spirit are mytho-super-Subjects, the upshot of totalizing attempts to describe what is happening, which end up abandoning what is happening, leaving those of us with proper names to face the worst. History and Being, History and Spirit, the History of Being, the History of Spirit: so many tall tales and meta-narratives, gigantic6 stories that forsake the *minima moralia* of damaged lives,7 the minute scraps and remnants Being leaves behind. A disaster is a damaged life, damaged beyond repair. Being shows no interest in damaged lives; they are none of Being's business (*Sache*).8 Indeed, many bleeding bodies may well be a sign that Being or the Spirit is on the mend, or on the march, healing itself and making itself Whole or Holy, getting ready for the Other Beginning, while the dead are left to bury the dead.9 Forget Being. There is nothing to remember. Replace it with a mnemo-technique for remembering proper names.

Survival Outweighs Ontology

Survival comes first – questioning must stop in the face of human suffering.

Davidson 89 — Arnold I. Davidson, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School, 1989 (“Questions concerning Heidegger: Opening the Debate,” *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 15, Number 2, Winter, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via JSTOR, p. 424-426)

I understand Levinas' work to suggest another path to the recovery of the human, one that leads through or toward other human beings: The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face. . . . Hence metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted—[end page 424] in our relations with men. . . . The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed. It is our relations with men . . . that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of.35 Levinas places ethics before ontology by beginning with our experience of the human face; and, in a clear reference to Heidegger's idolatry of the village life of peasants, he associates himself with Socrates, who preferred the city where he encountered men to the country with its trees.36 In his discussion of skepticism and the problem of others, Cavell also aligns himself with this path of thought, with the recovery of the finite human self through the acknowledgment of others: As long as God exists, I am not alone. And couldn't the other suffer the fate of God? . . . I wish to understand how the other now bears the weight of God, shows me that I am not alone in the universe. This requires understanding the philosophical problem of the other as the trace or scar of the departure of God. [CR, p. 47013' The suppression of the other, the human, in Heidegger's thought accounts, I believe, for the absence, in his writing after the war, of the experience of horror. Horror is always directed toward the human; every object of horror bears the imprint of the human will.38 So Levinas can see in Heidegger's silence about the gas chambers and death camps "a kind of consent to the horror."39 And Cavell can characterize Nazis as "those who have lost the capacity for being horrified by what they do.”40 Where was Heidegger's horror? How could he have failed to know what he had consented to? Hannah Arendt associates Heidegger with Pad Valery's aphorism, " *'Les henements ne sent que l'kcume des choses'* ('Events are but the foam of things').”41 I think one understands the source of her intuition. The mass [end page 425] extermination of human beings, however, does not produce foam, but dust and ashes; and it is here that questioning must stop.

Social Change Turn

Turn—their infatuation with ontology is politically debilitating – focusing on ontology divests politics of its emancipatory potential and devolves into a self-justifying cycle of never-ending critique.

Yar 2k — Majid Yar, Ph.D. in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University, 2000 (“Arendt's Heideggerianism: Contours of a `Postmetaphysical' Political Theory?,” *Cultural Values*, Volume 4, Issue 1, January, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete)

Similarly, we must consider the consequences that this 'ontological substitution' for the essence of the political has for politics, in terms of what is practically excluded by this rethinking. If the presently available menu of political engagements and projects (be they market or social liberalism, social democracy, communitarianism, Marxism, etc.) are only so many moments of the techno-social completion of an underlying metaphysics, then the fear of 'metaphysical contamination' inhibits any return to recognisable political practices and sincere engagement with the political exigencies of the day. This is what Nancy Fraser has called the problem of 'dirty hands', the suspension of engagement with the existing content of political agendas because of their identification as being in thrall to the violence of metaphysics. Unable to engage in politics as it is, one either [a] sublimates the desire for politics by retreating to an interrogation of the political with respect to its essence (Fraser, 1984, p. 144), or [b] on this basis, seeks 'to breach the inscription of a wholly other politics'. The former suspends politics indefinitely, while the latter implies a new politics, which, on the basis of its reconceived understanding of the political, apparently excludes much of what recognizably belongs to politics today. This latter difficulty is well known from Arendt's case, whose barring of issues of social and economic justice and welfare from the political domain are well known. To offer two examples: [1] in her commentary on the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1950s, she argued that the politically salient factor which needed challenging was only racial legislation and the formal exclusion of African-Americans from the political sphere, not discrimination, social deprivation and disadvantage, etc.(Arendt, 1959, pp. 45-56); [2] Arendt's pronounceraent at a conference in 1972 (put under question by Albrecht Wellmer regarding her distinction of the 'political' and the 'social'), that housing and homelessness were not political issues, that they were external to the political as the sphere of the actualisation of freedom as disclosure; the political is about human self-disclosure in speech and deed, not about the distribution of goods, which belongs to the social realm as an extension of the oikos.[20] The point here is not that Arendt and others are in any sense unconcerned or indifferent about such sufferings, deprivations and inequalities. Rather, it is that such disputes and agendas are identified as belonging to the socio-technical sphere of administration, calculation, instrumentality, the logic of means and ends, subject-object manipulation by a will which turns the world to its purposes, the conceptual rendering of beings in terms of abstract and levelling categories and classes, and so on; they are thereby part and parcel of the metaphysical-technological understanding of Being, which effaces the unique and singular appearance and disclosure of beings, and thereby illegitimate candidates for consideration under the renewed, ontological-existential formulation of the political. To reconceive the political in terms of a departure from its former incarnation as metaphysical politics, means that the revised terms of a properly political discourse cannot accommodate the prosaic yet urgent questions we might typically identify under the rubric of 'policy'. Questions of social and economic justice are made homeless, exiled from the political sphere of disputation and demand in which they were formerly voiced. Indeed, it might be observed that the postmetaphysical formulation of the political is devoid of any content other than the freedom which defines it; it is freedom to appear, to disclose, but not the freedom to do something in particular, in that utilising freedom for achieving some end or other implies a collapse back into will, instrumentality, teleocracy, poeisis, etc. By defining freedom qua disclosedness as the essence of freedom and the sole end of the political, this position skirts dangerously close to advocating politique pour la politique, divesting politics of any other practical and normative ends in the process.[21]

Weak Ontology FYI

This is a good explanation of weak ontology from the introduction to White’s book.

White 2 — Stephen K. White, James Hart Professor of Political Theory at the University of Virginia, 2002 (*Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, Published by Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691050325, p. ix-x)

Imagine yourself standing by a vacant lot watching children play. Debris lies about, for a building once stood here, until its foundation gave way. Chunks of the building remain here and there, as does the gaping hole left from the foundation. As the children clamber over the remains and jump in and out of the hole, you begin to think that they are playing a game, but it is one with which you are unfamiliar. In fact, the rules still seem to be emerging, and the children themselves are sometimes uncertain how to proceed. It would be pretty difficult, accordingly, to give a decent account of this game. Despite your doubts, you venture a speculation about the rules. But immediately your uncertainty increases again when another adult passes and, with an air of authority, informs you, “That's not really a game. Not enough coherence.” A second passerby curtly announces that the children ought not, in any case, to be playing in such a dangerous lot. A third passerby eyes you with some impatience before offering the rebuke, “Must one always try to foist some underlying structure onto what should be simply free play?” What to do? Aware of the risks, you decide to go ahead and reflect further about what still looks to you like a game, and a good one at that. A plausible start might be to focus on three or four kids who seem to be the most comfortable with the game, the closest to being competent in their negotiation of the still somewhat amorphous rules. Your hope is that in attending carefully to that competence, you can make the rules more palpable. If this can be done well, you will be satisfied for the moment. That, anyway, is what I have tried to do in this book. The new game being played is not, of course, children in a vacant lot, but contemporary ways of entwining ontological reflection with political affirmation. Call the game “weak ontology.” It is taking place on the terrain of what used to be called the “foundations” of ethics and politics, the sources from which affirmative gestures gain their strength. 1 Now obviously not every affirmation of a specific value or practice has to be traced back to such a source. A particular, discrete argument may be all that is necessary to defend our preference for, say, a given democratic practice. We are nevertheless sometimes pushed to articulate more extensively how we [end page ix] justify that affirmation. At those moments, we think of ourselves as enriching the persuasiveness of our claims. Political theory has traditionally understood this activity as one of having recourse to foundations. My aim in this book is to help rethink this “having recourse to,” both in terms of how one does it and the character of that to which recourse is had. My strategy is to clarify the coherence of the new game of “weak ontology” a bit further with the help of some philosophical players who have ventured onto the vacant lot. The four players I examine occupy, in conventional terms, very different perspectives: liberal, communitarian, feminist, and poststructuralist or postmodern. Without denying the importance of the differences, I want to draw out certain commonalities that emerge when one asks how each thinker configures the background that sustains his or her affirmative political gestures. Methodologically, I am continually engaged in the hermeneutically circular activity of using these participants to learn about the emergent rules, but then turning and using those rules to criticize one or another aspect of their play. I am painfully aware that some readers will remain deeply skeptical, like the bystanders in my story, concluding that there is nothing coherent enough in these gestures for a real game; or that if there is one, it is being played incorrectly; or that perhaps it should not be played at all. Finally, some will be irritated that my players make starkly different ethical-political claims, and yet I don't say much in regard to who, after all, is ultimately right. All I can say in my defense is that my main intention in this book is to give a taste of what good or felicitous play looks like; it is not to declare winners.

Weak Ontology Good

Turn—Weak Ontology:

### A. Their calls for a *strong* ontology should be rejected in favor of *weak* ontology—we can contingently adopt an ontological foundation without resolving every underlying metaphysical question.

White 2 — Stephen K. White, James Hart Professor of Political Theory at the University of Virginia, 2002 (*Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, Published by Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691050325, p. 6-8)

The first commonality emerges around the question: how is one to understand the epistemological status of such contemporary efforts at fundamental conceptualization of human being? Here I want to begin by drawing a distinction between two ideal types of ontology: strong and weak. The late modern ontologies in which I am interested typically exhibit at least some of the characteristics I refer to as “weak,” whereas premodern and modern ones have more typically exhibited the characteristics I refer to as “strong.” Strong are those ontologies that claim to show us “the way the world is,” or how God's being stands to human being, or what human nature is. It is by reference to this external ground that ethical and political life gain their sense of what is right; moreover, this foundation's validity is unchanging and of universal reach. For strong ontologies, the whole question of passages from ontological truths to moral-political ones is relatively clear. Some proponents do not, of course, assume that political [end page 6] principles or decisions can be strictly derived from their ontology; for example, there may be substantial discretionary space for the exercise of judgment. However, in contrast to weak ontologies, strong ones carry an underlying assumption of certainty that guides the whole problem of moving from the ontological level to the moral-political. But this very certainty—both about how things are and how political life should reflect it—allows such ontologies to provide what seem today (at least to some of us) to be answers to our late modern problems that demand too much initial forgetfulness of contingency and indeterminacy. Although terminology is extremely variable here, this last point could be stated thus, that strong ontologies involve too much “metaphysics.” Since World War II, there have been a number of prominent proponents of different forms of strong ontology in political theory. Such thinkers as Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, as well as adherents to the natural law tradition, have drawn on classical Greek or Christian models in order to contest the dominant modern ontology. Contemporary philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre have developed novel ways of carrying some of these sorts of arguments forward. 9 But the recent ontological turn that is the primary focus of my attention has taken place largely outside of this immediate sphere of influence. My term weak ontology is intended to highlight what is distinctive about this new phenomenon. 10 The thinking I am interested in resists strong ontology, on the one hand, and the strategy of much of liberal thought, on the other. The latter has generally ignored or suppressed ontological reflection, sometimes tacitly affirming the Teflon [end page 7] self, sometimes expressing neutrality toward it. Weak ontology finds the costs of such strategies to outweigh the claimed benefits. One might object that the distinction between strong and weak ontology is merely a relabeling of the familiar distinction between metaphysical and antimetaphysical or postmodern views, or between foundationalist and antifoundationalist ones. This suspicion is true to a degree. But I would claim that this relabeling serves a useful philosophical purpose. My intention in developing the notion of weak ontology is to call greater attention to the kind of interpretive-existential terrain that anyone who places herself in the “anti” position must explore at some point. In short, I want to shift the intellectual burden here from a preoccupation with what is opposed and deconstructed, to an engagement with what must be articulated, cultivated, and affirmed in its wake. My delineation of the characteristics of felicitous, weak ontologies is intended as a contribution toward this goal. Weak ontologies respond to two pressing concerns. First, there is the acceptance of the idea that all fundamental conceptualizations of self, other, and world are contestable. Second, there is the sense that such conceptualizations are nevertheless necessary or unavoidable for an adequately reflective ethical and political life. The latter insight demands from us the affirmative gesture of constructing foundations, the former prevents us from carrying out this task in a traditional fashion. One aspect of constructing such contestable foundations involves the embodiment within them of some signaling of their own limits. Felicitous weak ontologies cannot simply declare their contestability, fallibility, or partiality at the start and then proceed pretty much as before. The reason for this is that an ontology figures our most basic sense of human being, an achievement that always carries a propensity toward naturalization, reification, and unity, even if only implicitly. A weak ontology must possess resources for deflecting this propensity at some point in the unfolding of its dimensions. Its elaboration of fundamental meanings must in some sense fold back upon itself, disrupting its own smooth constitution of a unity. In a way, its contestability will thus be enacted rather than just announced.

### B. This takes out and turns their impact—the negative’s *vertical* image of ontology should be replaced with a *horizontal* one that recognizes its own limitations.

White 2 — Stephen K. White, James Hart Professor of Political Theory at the University of Virginia, 2002 (*Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, Published by Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691050325, p. 11-12)

How precisely do weak ontologies constitute a “foundation” of ethical-political life? Since such ontologies can make no strong claim to reflect the pure truth of being, one cannot derive any clear and incontestable principles or values for ethics and politics. The fundamental conceptualizations such an ontology provides can, at most, prefigure practical insight or judgment, in the sense of providing broad cognitive and affective orientation. Practice draws sustenance from an ontology in the sense of both a reflective bearing upon possibilities for action and a mobilizing of motivational force. If a critic presses for justification of a particular action or norm adopted in light of a weak ontology, the appropriate response is not a simple and conclusive recourse to the “foundation.” Vertical, one-way images of justification are misleading here (whether the path of justification is imagined as leading up to a skyhook or down to a foundation). An ontology certainly articulates our most fundamental intimations of human being, but it is best to think of such intimation as always part of a horizontal circuit of reflection, affect, and argumentation. The circuit is a three-cornered one, with critical energy and discrimination flowing back and forth to each corner. One corner is formed by the judgments and norms relevant to specific contexts of action; these, as I have said, receive a prefiguring influence from ontological concepts, which in turn constitute a second corner. But, as I also noted, such concepts are themselves not immune from pressures for revision arising out of insights gleaned from specific action contexts. [end page 11] And these two corners are in a similar, two-way relation with the third corner, which is constituted by one's broadest historical “we” claims and narratives. 13 Think for a moment about Lyotard's well-known notion that the “grand narratives” or “metanarratives” (focused around God, Nature, or Progress) of the modern West have increasingly lost their power to convince. 14 He extols instead a proliferation of “petits récits,” or “small narratives,” for our postmodern times. But perhaps this dichotomy is somewhat misleading. Lyotard is right in his critique of generalizing narratives fixed upon an unshakable philosophical foundation. But the simple image of proliferating small narratives neglects the unavoidable pressures toward generalization in a world where my or our narrative sooner or later runs up against yours. As Clifford Geertz has so nicely put it, “now … nobody is leaving anybody alone and isn't ever again going to.” 15 What sort of engagement there will be between one small narrative and another only takes shape within the construction, however implicit, of a “grand” or at least grander narrative.

### Weak ontologies have superior explanatory potential – comparatively superior to the negative’s insistence on knowing for sure.

White 2 — Stephen K. White, James Hart Professor of Political Theory at the University of Virginia, 2002 (*Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, Published by Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691050325, p. 8-10)

I have suggested that one quality evident in the ontological turn is resistance to the “disengaged self.” 11 One of the key notions in weak ontology is that of a stickier subject. This notion can take a variety of specific forms, [end page 8] as the following chapters will show, but I want to suggest that within this variety a certain style of argument is apparent. Weak ontologies do not proceed by categorical positings of, say, human nature or telos, accompanied by a crystalline conviction of the truth of that positing. Rather, what they offer are figurations of human being in terms of certain existential realities, most notably language, mortality or finitude, natality, and the articulation of “sources of the self.” 12 These figurations are accounts of what it is to be a certain sort of creature: first, one entangled with language; second, one with a consciousness that it will die; third, one that, despite its entanglement and limitedness, has the capacity for radical novelty; and, finally, one that gives definition to itself against some ultimate background or “source,” to which we find ourselves always already attached, and which evokes something like awe, wonder, or reverence. This sense of a background that can be both empowering and humbling is misconstrued when grasped either as something with a truth that reveals itself to us in an unmediated way or as something that is simply a matter of radical choice. I am borrowing the notion of sources from Charles Taylor, whose work is taken up in chapter 3. While this might appear to give the idea of weak ontology a necessarily theistic cast from the start, since Taylor is indeed a theist, such a conclusion would be incorrect. Perhaps the simplest way to demonstrate the philosophical richness of Taylor's notion of sources is to show how it helps in the interpretation of nontheistic thinkers, something I will try to do throughout the book. When I speak of “existential realities,” I mean to claim that language, finitude, natality, and sources are in some brute sense universal constitutives of human being, but also that their meaning is irreparably underdetermined in any categorical sense. There is, for example, simply no demonstrable essence of language or true meaning of finitude. Weak ontologies offer figurations of these universals, whose persuasiveness can never be fully disentangled from an interpretation of present historical circumstances. Fundamental conceptualization here thus means acknowledging that gaining access to something universal about human being and world is always also a construction that cannot rid itself of a historical dimension. For weak ontology, human being is the negotiation of these existential realities. But when this negotiation is imagined in the fashion of a Teflon self powering itself through the world, there has been an unacceptable impoverishment of figuration. Accepting such an image implies, for example, a figuration of language as, in essence, an instrument: in effect we always “have” language; it never “has” us. Of course, as I just emphasized [end page 9], such a claim of impoverishment can never be disentangled from historical claims; in this case, claims regarding, say, the various “costs” that Western modernity has had to pay for such a tight embrace of the disengaged self. So it is through their renewed figuration of these existential universals that weak ontologies compose portraits of human being that are “stickier”; ones, for example, that are more attuned to how language “has” us, and more attentive to vivifying our finitude.

### Weak ontologies allow constant cultivation of new knowledges – comparatively superior.

White 2 — Stephen K. White, James Hart Professor of Political Theory at the University of Virginia, 2002 (*Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, Published by Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691050325, p. 10-11)

To speak of “portraits” of human being and “figuration” is to begin calling attention to another characteristic of weak ontologies. They are not simply cognitive in their constitution and effects, but also aesthetic-affective. They not only reflect something that is the case about the reality of human being, but also engender a certain sensibility toward that reality. They disclose the world to us in such a way that we think and feel it differently than we might otherwise. Their appeal turns partially on how well they allow us to cope with the pressures and challenges of late modern life. Weak ontologies have an aesthetic-affective quality in another way as well. This relates to the issue of embracing or adopting them. Since such ontologies do not reflect clear, crystalline truth about the world, they do not entice us with any knockdown power to convince or convert. Within the ontological turn the notion of “cultivation” is continually evoked. The embrace of a weak ontology has a tentative, experimental aspect; one must patiently bring it to life by working it into one's life. In this sense, it is at least somewhat different from conversion (on some accounts) to a religious faith or the rational conviction that such and such is the categorically correct moral rule or code. Yet this emphasis on tentativeness does not imply that one's relation to an ontology is like that to a suit of new clothes taken home on approval. The cognitive and affective [end page 10] burdens entailed in revisioning the world ensure that when one seriously embraces an ontology, one does not do so in a “light and transient” way. The process of adoption is the initiation of a process of cultivation of oneself and one's disposition to the world. This cultivation unfolds through the measured pursuit of an array of related practices and selfdisciplines. In this sense, weak ontologies share similarities with traditional notions of cultivating virtues. But in the case of the latter, the framework of truth, or the telos, within which the virtues acquire their significance is the unshakable foundation on the basis of which the cultivation proceeds. Such is not the case with weak ontologies. The framework itself is never fully immune from the work of cultivation. Pressures for reconceptualizing or further articulating aspects of it continually arise in the ongoing activity of making specific ethical and political judgments and constructing historical interpretations of who “we” are.

Ontological Pluralism Good

### Their insistence that ontology is a prior question creates artificial metaphysical hurdles to effective action-in-the-world—ontological pluralism provides a sufficient justification for the adoption of the plan.

Owen 2 — David Owen, Reader on Political Theory at the University of Southampton, 2002 (“Re-orienting International Relations: On Pragmatism, Pluralism and Practical Reasoning,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Volume 31, Number 3, p. 655-657)

Commenting on the 'philosophical turn' in IR, Wæver remarks that '[a] frenzy for words like "epistemology" and "ontology" often signals this philosophical turn', although he goes on to comment that these terms are often used loosely.4 However, loosely deployed or not, it is clear that debates concerning ontology and epistemology play a central role in the contemporary IR theory wars. In one respect, this is unsurprising since it is a characteristic feature of the social sciences that periods of disciplinary disorientation involve recourse to reflection on the philosophical commitments of different theoretical approaches, and there is no doubt that such reflection can play a valuable role in making explicit the commitments that characterise (and help individuate) diverse theoretical positions. Yet, such a philosophical turn is not without its dangers and I will briefly mention three before turning to consider a confusion that has, I will suggest, helped to promote the IR theory wars by motivating this philosophical turn. The first danger with the philosophical turn is that it has an inbuilt tendency to prioritise issues of ontology and epistemology over explanatory and/or interpretive power as if the latter two were merely a simple function of the former. But while the explanatory and/or interpretive power of a theoretical account is not wholly independent of its ontological and/or epistemological commitments (otherwise criticism of these features would not be a criticism that had any value), it is by no means clear that it is, in contrast, wholly dependent on these philosophical commitments. Thus, for example, one need not be sympathetic to rational choice theory [end page 655] to recognise that it can provide powerful accounts of certain kinds of problems, such as the tragedy of the commons in which dilemmas of collective action are foregrounded. It may, of course, be the case that the advocates of rational choice theory cannot give a good account of why this type of theory is powerful in accounting for this class of problems (i.e., how it is that the relevant actors come to exhibit features in these circumstances that approximate the assumptions of rational choice theory) and, if this is the case, it is a philosophical weakness—but this does not undermine the point that, for a certain class of problems, rational choice theory may provide the best account available to us. In other words, while the critical judgement of theoretical accounts in terms of their ontological and/or epistemological sophistication is one kind of critical judgement, it is not the only or even necessarily the most important kind. The second danger run by the philosophical turn is that because prioritisation of ontology and epistemology promotes theory-construction from philosophical first principles, it cultivates a theory-driven rather than problem-driven approach to IR. Paraphrasing Ian Shapiro, the point can be put like this: since it is the case that there is always a plurality of possible true descriptions of a given action, event or phenomenon, the challenge is to decide which is the most apt in terms of getting a perspicuous grip on the action, event or phenomenon in question given the purposes of the inquiry; yet, from this standpoint, 'theory-driven work is part of a reductionist program' in that it 'dictates always opting for the description that calls for the explanation that flows from the preferred model or theory'.5 The justification offered for this strategy rests on the mistaken belief that it is necessary for social science because general explanations are required to characterise the classes of phenomena studied in similar terms. However, as Shapiro points out, this is to misunderstand the enterprise of science since 'whether there are general explanations for classes of phenomena is a question for social-scientific inquiry, not to be prejudged before conducting that inquiry'.6 Moreover, this strategy easily slips into the promotion of the pursuit of generality over that of empirical validity. The third danger is that the preceding two combine to encourage the formation of a particular image of disciplinary debate in IR—what might be called (only slightly tongue in cheek) 'the Highlander view'—namely, an image of warring theoretical approaches with each, despite occasional temporary tactical alliances, dedicated to the strategic achievement of sovereignty over the disciplinary field. It encourages this view because the turn to, and prioritisation of, ontology and epistemology stimulates [end page 656] the idea that there can only be one theoretical approach which gets things right, namely, the theoretical approach that gets its ontology and epistemology right. This image feeds back into IR exacerbating the first and second dangers, and so a potentially vicious circle arises.

Meditative Thought Causes Fascism

### The pursuit of authenticity and the insistence on letting the world reveal itself results in fascist politics.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 128-132)

There is no explaining the "pure" experience. There is only the completely unwarranted presupposition that others should somehow "understand" that it has taken place. But the judgment of whether a "pure" rather than a secondary "experience" has actually occurred can, by definition, only be self-referential. And that would be in order if, simultaneously, there were not the presumption that something objectively meaningful about phenomenal reality had been illuminated. Or, putting it another way, the problem is not what James Joyce termed the "epiphany," the momentary glimpse of [end page 128] meaning experienced by an individual, but rather the refusal to define its existential "place" or recognize its explanatory limits. Within the existential tradition, Kierkegaard had probably the best appreciation for the paradoxical character of truth associated with the subjectivity of the subject. His rendering of the story about Abraham and Isaac in Fear and Trembling makes this clear. Kierkegaard describes how—having inwardly heard the word of God—the father stood ready to sacrifice his son. But intention was apparently enough for the Lord and so, just as Abraham was ready to strike down Isaac, He intervened. A lesser thinker would have left the matter at that. But Kierkegaard had a feeling for the ironic: he wrote for the individual in search of authentic experience and he knew the difficulties involved. But he also implicitly recognized the difference between public and private, and perhaps unintentionally the need for drawing that distinction, when he went on to ask what would have happened had Abraham actually struck down his son. He would then have had to bring the body back to his community, and tell its elders that the Lord had spoken to him and asked for a sacrifice. Here the more concrete experience of "fear and trembling" occurs: what the individual experiences as a "sacrifice" demanded by God can only be understood as "murder" by society. It becomes evident from Kierkegaard's discussion that, no matter what the good faith of the person hearing the divine word, the community cannot simply take the inner experience of the individual at face value. The discursive "truth" required by society is not the intense inner "truth" sought by the experiencing individual. Harboring a belief in the absolute character of revelatory truth obviously generates a division between the saved and the damned. There arises the simultaneous desire to abolish blasphemy and bring the heathen into the light. Not every person in quest of the "pure experience," of course, is a religious fanatic or obsessed with issues of identity. Making existential sense of reality through the pure experience, feeling a sense or belonging, is a serious matter and a legitimate undertaking. But the more the preoccupation with the purity of the experience, it only follows, the more fanatical the believer. In political terms, therefore, the problem is less the lack of intensity in the lived life of the individual than the increasing attempts by individuals and groups to insist that their own, particular, deeply felt existential or religious or aesthetic experience should be privileged in the public realm. Indeed, this runs directly counter to the Enlightenment. Its intellectuals did not insist that all should share the same religious, cultural, and personal interests and goals. Nor did cosmopolitans like Locke, [end page 129] Voltaire, or Kant offer a single road to truth. Few of the more important philosophes actually believed in the existence of a "truth"—mathematical or otherwise—capable of informing all the different realms of knowledge; but even if Helvetius did harbor such a belief,31 for example, he surely presupposed the right of others to challenge it. Most philosophes maintained that a diversity of interests and goals would enrich the public discourse and expand the possible range of experiences open to individuals. Agreement was demanded only on the right of each to pursue his or her beliefs or experiences and the need for institutions capable of guaranteeing that right. Different ideas have a different role in different spheres of social action. Subjectivity has a pivotal role to play in discussing existential or aesthetic experience while the universal subject is necessary for any democratic understanding of citizenship or the rule of law. From such a perspective, indeed, the seemingly irresolvable conflict between subjectivity and the subject becomes illusory: it is instead a matter of which should assume primacy in what realm. When it comes to political power, unfortunately, even the best believers in the "pure experience" are usually blinded by the light while the worst use their trans-historical categories to obscure the workings of social reality. That a tension exists between the experience of the particular, whose specific identity is grounded in empirical attributes and unique historical traditions, and the universal is undeniable: W.E.B. DuBois, for example, spoke of African-Americans retaining a "double consciousness" while Lion Feuchtwanger in his Josephus trilogy highlighted the conflict between ethnic loyalty and cosmopolitanism. From the standpoint of a socially constructed subjectivity, however, only members of the particular group can have the appropriate intuition or "experience," to make judgments about their culture or their politics. That is the sense in which Michel Foucault sought to substitute the "specific" for the "universal" intellectual.32 But this stance now embraced by so many on the left, however, actually derives from arguments generated first by the Counter-Enlightenment and then the radical right during the Dreyfus Affair. These reactionaries, too, claimed that rather than introduce "grand narratives" or "totalizing ambitions" or "universal" ideas of justice, intellectuals [end page 130] should commit themselves to the particular groups with whose unique discourses and experiences they, as individuals, are intimately and existentially familiar. The "pure"—or less contaminated—experience of group members was seen as providing them a privileged insight into a particular form of oppression. Criticism from the "outsider" loses its value and questions concerning the adjudication of differences between groups are never faced. Maurice Barrès, had already linked what he called the "cult of the self" with a fear of les déracinés. He and his comrades saw genuine interaction as taking place less between strangers confronting one another in a public sphere than between "brothers" or "sisters" or any group whose members shared a common background and "destiny." Only those experiencing themselves as members of the French community, for example, were considered capable of fully understanding why Dreyfus must be guilty: his defenders were simply deluded by universal notions of justice that derived— and this is crucial for the present discussion—more from the intellect and the democratic tradition than from the "experience" of being French. "Intellectuals" could now be derided for their critical rationalism and universalistic ambitions and for placing reason above experience, evidentiary truth above tradition, and human rights above the national community. "Authenticity" and cultural "roots"—what a genuine fascist, Mercea Eliade, termed the "ontological thirst" for primordial belonging—thus became the crucial criteria for judgment. Not every person who believes in the "pure experience"—again—was an anti-Semite or a fascist. But it is interesting how the "pure experience," with its vaunted contempt for the "public" and its social apathy, can be manipulated in the realm of politics. Utopia doesn't appear only in the idea of a former "golden age" located somewhere in the past or the vision of a future paradise. 33 Freedom also shimmers in the "pure experience" whether in the sophisticated critical version offered by Adorno or the revelatory unveiling of Being in the late Heidegger or the experiential insight of Nishida. Each expresses the longing for that moment untainted by the evils of reification or modernity. But history has shown the danger of turning "reason" into an enemy and condemning universal ideals in the name of some parochial sense of "place" rooted in a particular community. Or, put another way, [end page 131] where power matters the "pure" experience is never quite so pure and no "place" is sacrosanct. Better to be a bit more modest when confronting social reality and begin the real work of specifying conditions under which each can most freely pursue his or her existential longing and find a place in the sun.

Calculative Thought Key To Justice

### Calculation is inevitable and good—their ethics justify the worst crimes against humanity.

Campbell 99 — David Campbell, Professor of International Politics at the University of Newcastle (England), 1999 (“The Deterritorialization of Responsibility: Levinas, Derrida, and Ethics after the End of Philosophy,” *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics*, edited by David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro, Published by the University of Minnesota Press, ISBN 0816632758, p. 45-46)

That undecidability resides within the decision, Derrida argues, "that justice exceeds law and calculation, that the unpresentable exceeds the determinable cannot and should notserve as alibi for staying out of juridico-political battles, within an institution or a state, or between institutions [end page 45] or states and others."91 Indeed, "incalculable justice requires us to calculate." From where does this insistence come? What is behind, what is animating, these imperatives? It is both the character of infinite justice as a heteronomic relationship to the other, a relationship that because of its undecidability multiplies responsibility, and the fact that "left to itself, the incalculable and giving (*donatrice*) idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst, for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation."92 The necessity of calculating the incalculable thus responds to a duty, a duty that inhabits the instant of madness and compels the decision to avoid "the bad," the "perverse calculation," even "the worst." This is the duty that also dwells with deconstruction and makes it the starting point, the "at least necessary condition," for the organization of resistance to totalitarianism in all its forms. And it is a duty that responds to practical political concerns when we recognize that Derrida names the bad, the perverse, and the worst as those violences "we recognize all too well without yet having thought them through, the crimes of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, religious or nationalist fanaticism."93

### Calculation is key to justice—without engaging in political calculations, we cannot access the Other’s suffering.

Santilli 3 — Paul C. Santilli, Professor of Philosophy at Siena College, 2003 (“Radical Evil, Subjection, and Alain Badiou's Ethic of the Truth Event,” World Congress of The International Society for Universal Dialogue, May 18-22, Available Online at http://www.isud.org/papers/pdfs/Santilli.pdf, Accessed 12-05-2005)

From the standpoint of an ethics of subjection there is even something unnecessary or superfluous about the void of suffering in the subject bearers of evil. For Levinas, the return to being from the ethical encounter with the face and its infinite depths is fraught with the danger the subject will reduce the other to a "like-me," totalizing and violating the space of absolute alterity. As Chalier puts it, "Levinas conceives of the moral subject's awakening, or the emergence of the human in being, as a response to that pre-originary subjection which is not a happenstance of being."28 But if there really is something inaccessible about suffering itself, about the 'other' side of what is manifestly finite, subjected, and damaged, then to a certain extent it is irrelevant to ethics, as irrelevant as the judgment of moral progress in the subject-agent. Let me take the parent-child relation again as an example. Suppose the child to exhibit the symptoms of an illness. Are not the proper "ethical" questions for the parent to ask questions of measure and mathematical multiples: How high is the fever? How long has it lasted? How far is the hospital? Can she get out of bed? Has this happened before? These are the questions of the doctor, the rescue squads and the police. They are questions about being, about detail, causes and effects. Ethically our response to the needs of must be reduced to a positivity simply because we have access to nothing but the symptoms, which are like mine. Our primary moral responsibility is to treat the symptoms that show up in being, not the radically other with whom I cannot identify. Say we observe someone whose hands have been chopped off with a machete. How would we characterize this? Would it not be slightly absurd to say, "He had his limbs severed and he suffered," as though the cruel amputation were not horror enough. Think of the idiocy in the common platitude: "She died of cancer, but thank God, she did not suffer", as though the devastating annihilation of the human by a tumor were not evil itself. For ethics, then, the only [end page 20] suffering that matters are the visible effects of the onslaught of the world. All other suffering is excessive and inaccessible. Therefore, it is in being, indeed in the midst of the most elemental facts about ourselves and other people, that we ethically encounter others by responding to their needs and helping them as best we can. It is precisely by identifying being and not pretending that we know any thing about suffering, other than it is a hollow in the midst of being, that we can act responsibly. What worries me about Levinas is that by going beyond being to what he regards as the ethics of absolute alterity, he risks allowing the sheer, almost banal facticity of suffering to be swallowed in the infinite depths of transcendence. Indeed, it seems to me that Levinas too often over emphasizes the importance of the emergence of the subject and the inner good in the ethical encounter, as though the point of meeting the suffering human being was to come to an awareness of the good within oneself and not to heal and repair. I agree with Chalier's observation that Levinas's "analyses adopt the point of view of the moral subject, not that of a person who might be the object of its solicitude."29 Ethics has limits; there are situations like the Holocaust where to speak of a moral responsibility to heal and repair seems pathetic. But an ethics that would be oriented to the vulnerabilities of the subjected (which are others, of course, but also myself) needs to address the mutilation, dismemberment, the chronology of torture, the numbers incarcerated, the look of the bodies, the narratives, the blood counts, the mines knives, machetes, and poisons. Evil really is all that. When the mind does its work, it plunges into being, into mathematical multiples and starts counting the cells, the graveyards, and bullet wounds. Rational practical deliberation is always about the facts that encircle the void inaccessible to deliberation and practical reason.30

Problem-Solution Framework Good

### Our problem-solution framework is good—their ontological criticism does nothing to confront the real harms of the status quo.

Jarvis 2k — Darryl S. L. Jarvis, Director of the Research Institute for International Risk and Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Sydney, 2000 (*International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism: Defending the Discipline*, Published by the University of South Carolina Press, ISBN 1570033056, p. 128-129)

Perhaps more alarming though is the outright violence Ashley recommends in response to what at best seem trite, if not imagined, injustices. Inculpating modernity, positivism, technical rationality, or realism with violence, racism, war, and countless other crimes not only smacks of anthropomorphism but, as demonstrated by Ashley's torturous prose and reasoning, requires a dubious logic to make such connections in the first place. Are we really to believe that ethereal entities like positivism, modernism, or realism emanate a "violence" that marginalizes dissidents? Indeed, where is this violence, repression, and marginalization? As self-professed dissidents supposedly exiled from the discipline, Ashley and Walker appear remarkably well integrated into the academy—vocal, published, and at the center of the Third Debate and the forefront of theoretical research. Likewise, is Ashley seriously suggesting that, on the basis of this largely imagined violence, global transformation (perhaps even revolutionary violence) is a necessary, let alone desirable, response? Has the rationale for emancipation or the fight for justice been reduced to such vacuous revolutionary slogans as "Down with positivism and rationality"? The point is surely trite. Apart from members of the academy, who has heard of positivism and who for a moment imagines that they need to be emancipated from it, or from modernity, rationality, or realism for that matter? In an era of unprecedented change and turmoil, of new political and military configurations, of war in the Balkans and ethnic cleansing, is Ashley really suggesting that some of the greatest threats facing humankind or some of the great moments of history rest on such innocuous and largely unknown nonrealities like positivism and realism? These are imagined and fictitious enemies, theoretical fabrications that represent arcane, self-serving debates superfluous to the lives of most people and, arguably, to most issues of importance in international relations. More is the pity that such irrational and obviously abstruse debate should so occupy us at a time of great global turmoil. That it does and continues to do so reflects our lack of judicious criteria for evaluating theory and, more importantly, the lack of attachment theorists have to the real world. Certainly it is right and proper that we ponder the depths of our theoretical imaginations, engage in epistemological and ontological debate, and analyze the sociology of our knowledge.37 But to suppose that [end page 128] this is the only risk of international theory, let alone the most important one, smacks of intellectual elitism and displays a certain contempt for those who search for guidance in their daily struggles as actors in international politics. What does Ashley's project, his deconstructive efforts, or valiant fight against positivism say to the truly marginalized, oppressed, and destitute! How does it help solve the plight of the poor, the displaced refugees, the casualties of war, or the emigres of death squads? Does it in any way speak to those whose actions and thoughts comprise the policy and practice of international relations? On all these questions one must answer no. This is not to say, of course, that all theory should be judged by its technical rationality and problem-solving capacity as Ashley forcefully argues. But to suppose that problem-solving technical theory is not necessary—or is in some way bad—is a contemptuous position that abrogates any hope of solving some of the nightmarish realities that millions confront daily. As Holsti argues, we need ask of these theorists and their theories the ultimate question, "So what!" To what purpose do they deconstruct, problematize, destabilize, undermine, ridicule, and belittle modernist and rationalist approaches? Does this get us any further, make the world any better, or enhance the human condition? In what sense can this "debate toward [a] bottomless pit of epistemology and metaphysics" be judged pertinent, relevant, helpful, or cogent to anyone other than those foolish enough to be scholastically excited by abstract and recondite debate.38 Contrary to Ashley's assertions, then, a poststructural approach fails to empower the marginalized and, in fact, abandons them. Rather than analyze the political economy of power, wealth, oppression, production, or international relations and render an intelligible understanding of these processes, Ashley succeeds in ostracizing those he portends to represent by delivering an obscure and highly convoluted discourse. If Ashley wishes to chastise structural realism for its abstractness and detachment, he must be prepared also to face similar criticism, especially when he so adamantly intends his work to address the real life plight of those who struggle at marginal places.

Technology Inevitable/Good

### Technology is inevitable and good—the way we *use* technology is up to us–technological thought is needed to determine our technology future.

Feenberg 96 — Andrew Feenberg, Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of Technology in the School of Communication and Director of the Applied Communication and Technology Lab at Simon Fraser University, 1996 (“From Essentialism to Constructivism: Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads,” Available Online at http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/talk4.html, Accessed 07-31-2010)

Essentialist theories of technology define the technical in terms of the primary instrumentalization alone. At that level it seems possible to abstract technology from society, while the secondary instrumentalizations are transparently social, with the exception of some types of systematization. They lie at the intersection of technique and the other action systems with which it is inextricably linked insofar as it is a social enterprise. As a result, socially specific configurations of the secondary instrumentalizations are as variable as the contexts to which technique is integrated, subject to transformations corresponding to distinct eras in the history of technical systems and technical rationalities. For example, a dimension of technology such as vocation may be central to technical life in one era and eliminated as much as possible through deskilling in another. From this anti-essentialist standpoint, our form of modern society cannot be the untranscendable horizon of technical possibilities, defining for modernity in general. But neither can we conceive of a general deglobalization of modern societies, a splitting up of modernity into incommunicable varieties. The shared technical heritage provides what might be called a "practical universality" that has imposed itself on a planetary scale. No modern society can forego basic technical discoveries such as antibiotics, plastics or electricity, and none can withdraw from worldwide communication networks. The cost of an entirely independent path of development is just too high. But both in the advanced and the developing countries, significant innovations are possible with respect to what has been the main line of progress up to now. The terrain of practical universality is accessible from many standpoints for many purposes. It is not a destiny, but the place on which destinies can be worked out. It first emerged in the capitalist West around a particular panoply of technologies and rational systems. These intentionally deemphasized most secondary instrumentalizations with consequences we now experience as cultural homogenization, social anomie and environmental crisis. The threat of technology is due to this particular realization of its potential. This conclusion invites us to consider the possibility of an alternative form of technical rationality that would integrate the secondary instrumentalizations more fully through new concretizations. On this basis, I have argued elsewhere for a reform of modern technology to incorporate workers' skills, human communication, and environmental limits into its very structure (Feenberg, 1991: chap. 8). Similar arguments could be made with respect to the possibility of culturally specific technological configurations (Feenberg, 1995: chap. 9). The scope and significance of such change is potentially enormous. Technical choices establish the horizons of daily life. These choices define a "world" within which the specific alternatives we think of as purposes, goals, uses, emerge. They also define the subject who chooses among the alternatives: we make ourselves in making the world through technology. Thus fundamental technological change is self-referential. At issue is becoming, not having. The goal is to define a way of life, an ideal of abundance, and a human type, not just to obtain more goods in the prevailing socio-economic system. As Terry Winograd argues, technological designing is ontological designing (Winograd and Flores, 1987: 163). Unexpected struggles over issues such as nuclear power, access to experimental treatment for AIDS patients, and user participation in computer design remind us that the technological future is by no means predetermined. To the extent that such struggles spread, we can hope to inhabit a very different future from the one projected by essentialist critique. In that future technology is not a fate one must chose for or against, but a challenge to political and social creativity.

A2: Technology Destroys Human Essence

### Their argument is a caricature—Enlightenment values are not an attempt to remake human nature but to free individuals from oppressive forces.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 38)

Traditionalists have tended to understand progress as a linear development in terms of which humanity advances steadily in a definite and desirable direction.53 That made it easy for them to then identify the Enlightenment with unbounded optimism, teleological determinism, and a utopian belief in human perfectibility. But this is a caricature. It was generally assumed by the philosophes—for without such an assumption any serious notion of either moral development or democracy is impossible—that individuals can act responsibly and employ both "common sense" and critical reflection. But the Enlightenment did not seek to bring about a change in human nature, only in the judgment of human behavior. Its leading intellectuals refused to sanction any institutional attempts to impose belief by fiat or exercise power in an arbitrary fashion. They were concerned with expanding the realm of freedom, the range of choices available for the individual, and it was in order to mitigate the drudgery of existence that they stressed the liberating affects of technology.54

A2: Technology Dominates Nature

### This is not intrinsic to technology.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 160-161)

Enlightenment thinking is not intrinsically committed to treating nature as an object for technical manipulation. But, if it were, the need would exist for a philosophical corrective. This would allow nature to be treated as a subject in its own right or, better, with pressing needs that underpin our own as a species. Revising narrow definitions of "evidence" will prove necessary to bring that about and it will prove necessary to revise existing standards of accountability for dealing with conditions in which human interaction [end page 160] with nature is becoming ever more specialized, bureaucratic, and complex. In theoretical terms, it may even be necessary to move a step further. Ernst Bloch, for example, sought to counter an unreflective mechanical materialism—empiricism and positivism—by making reference to what he considered the repressed tradition of the "Aristotelian left" that reaches back over Schelling, Spinoza, and Leibniz to Giordano Bruno and then to Avicenna, Averroes, and Plotinus.8 This philosophical tendency posits the existence of a "life-force" (natura naturans) beyond the stratum of nature (natura naturata) that vulgar materialists reduce to its constituent parts. With this vital and "living" notion of nature, which suggests that the whole is more than the sum of its empirical parts, the idea of an ecosystem takes on new meaning. Such a stance, in principle, is less a rejection than a logical outgrowth of Enlightenment thought. It is the same when considering cruelty to animals and other sentient beings.

# Epistemology Critiques

Truth Exists And Is Good

### The real world exists and so does Truth—their rejection of evidence and logic surrenders hope for effectively confronting all major impacts.

Sokal 96 — Alan Sokal, Professor of Physics at New York University, 1996 (“A Physicist Experiments With Cultural Studies,” *Lingua Franca*, May/June, Available Online at http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9605/sokal.html, Accessed 07-31-2010)

Why did I do it? While my method was satirical, my motivation is utterly serious. What concerns me is the proliferation, not just of nonsense and sloppy thinking per se, but of a particular kind of nonsense and sloppy thinking: one that denies the existence of objective realities, or (when challenged) admits their existence but downplays their practical relevance. At its best, a journal like Social Text raises important issues that no scientist should ignore--questions, for example, about how corporate and government funding influence scientific work. Unfortunately, epistemic relativism does little to further the discussion of these matters. In short, my concern about the spread of subjectivist thinking is both intellectual and political. Intellectually, the problem with such doctrines is that they are false (when not simply meaningless). There is a real world; its properties are not merely social constructions; facts and evidence do matter. What sane person would contend otherwise? And yet, much contemporary academic theorizing consists precisely of attempts to blur these obvious truths. Social Text's acceptance of my article exemplifies the intellectual arrogance of Theory--postmodernist literary theory, that is--carried to its logical extreme. No wonder they didn't bother to consult a physicist. If all is discourse and "text," then knowledge of the real world is superfluous; even physics becomes just another branch of cultural studies. If, moreover, all is rhetoric and language games, then internal logical consistency is superfluous too: a patina of theoretical sophistication serves equally well. Incomprehensibility becomes a virtue; allusions, metaphors, and puns substitute for evidence and logic. My own article is, if anything, an extremely modest example of this well-established genre. Politically, I'm angered because most (though not all) of this silliness is emanating from the self-proclaimed Left. We're witnessing here a profound historical volte-face. For most of the past two centuries, the Left has been identified with science and against obscurantism; we have believed that rational thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality (both natural and social) are incisive tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful—not to mention being desirable human ends in their own right. The recent turn of many "progressive" or "leftist" academic humanists and social scientists toward one or another form of epistemic relativism betrays this worthy heritage and undermines the already fragile prospects for progressive social critique. Theorizing about "the social construction of reality" won't help us find an effective treatment for AIDS or devise strategies for preventing global warming. Nor can we combat false ideas in history, sociology, economics, and politics if we reject the notions of truth and falsity.

### The fact that people say things that are wrong doesn’t mean that science and logic can’t bring us closer to the Truth—their criticism is the worst form of anti-intellectual relativism.

Sokal 96 — Alan Sokal, Professor of Physics at New York University, 1996 (“A Plea for Reason, Evidence and Logic,” Talk Presented at a Forum at New York University, October 26th, Available Online at http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/nyu\_forum.html, Accessed 07-31-2010)

I didn't write the parody for the reasons you might at first think. My aim wasn't to defend science from the barbarian hordes of lit crit or sociology. I know perfectly well that the main threats to science nowadays come from budget-cutting politicians and corporate executives, not from a handful of postmodernist academics. Rather, my goal is to defend what one might call a scientific worldview -- defined broadly as a respect for evidence and logic, and for the incessant confrontation of theories with the real world; in short, for reasoned argument over wishful thinking, superstition and demagoguery. And my motives for trying to defend these old-fashioned ideas are basically political. I'm worried about trends in the American Left -- particularly here in academia -- that at a minimum divert us from the task of formulating a progressive social critique, by leading smart and committed people into trendy but ultimately empty intellectual fashions, and that can in fact undermine the prospects for such a critique, by promoting subjectivist and relativist philosophies that in my view are inconsistent with producing a realistic analysis of society that we and our fellow citizens will find compelling. David Whiteis, in a recent article, said it well: Too many academics, secure in their ivory towers and insulated from the real-world consequences of the ideas they espouse, seem blind to the fact that non-rationality has historically been among the most powerful weapons in the ideological arsenals of oppressors. The hypersubjectivity that characterizes postmodernism is a perfect case in point: far from being a legacy of leftist iconoclasm, as some of its advocates so disingenuously claim, it in fact ... plays perfectly into the anti-rationalist -- really, anti-thinking -- bias that currently infects "mainstream" U.S. culture. Along similar lines, the philosopher of science Larry Laudan observed caustically that the displacement of the idea that facts and evidence matter by the idea that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is -- second only to American political campaigns -- the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our time. (And these days, being nearly as anti-intellectual as American political campaigns is really quite a feat.) Now of course, no one will admit to being against reason, evidence and logic – that's like being against Motherhood and Apple Pie. Rather, our postmodernist and poststructuralist friends will claim to be in favor of some new and deeper kind of reason, such as the celebration of "local knowledges" and "alternative ways of knowing" as an antidote to the so-called "Eurocentric scientific methodology" (you know, things like systematic experiment, controls, replication, and so forth). You find this magic phrase "local knowledges" in, for example, the articles of Andrew Ross and Sandra Harding in the "Science Wars" issue of Social Text. But are "local knowledges" all that great? And when local knowledges conflict, which local knowledges should we believe? In many parts of the Midwest, the "local knowledges" say that you should spray more herbicides to get bigger crops. It's old-fashioned objective science that can tell us which herbicides are poisonous to farm workers and to people downstream. Here in New York City, lots of "local knowledges" hold that there's a wave of teenage motherhood that's destroying our moral fiber. It's those boring data that show that the birth rate to teenage mothers has been essentially constant since 1975, and is about half of what it was in the good old 1950's. Another word for "local knowledges" is prejudice. I'm sorry to say it, but under the influence of postmodernism some very smart people can fall into some incredibly sloppy thinking, and I want to give two examples. The first comes from a front-page article in last Tuesday's New York Times (10/22/96) about the conflict between archaeologists and some Native American creationists. I don't want to address here the ethical and legal aspects of this controversy -- who should control the use of 10,000-year-old human remains -- but only the epistemic issue. There are at least two competing views on where Native American populations come from. The scientific consensus, based on extensive archaeological evidence, is that humans first entered the Americas from Asia about 10-20,000 years ago, crossing the Bering Strait. Many Native American creation accounts hold, on the other hand, that native peoples have always lived in the Americas, ever since their ancestors emerged onto the surface of the earth from a subterranean world of spirits. And the Times article observed that many archaeologists, "pulled between their scientific temperaments and their appreciation for native culture, ... have been driven close to a postmodern relativism in which science is just one more belief system." For example, Roger Anyon, a British archaeologist who has worked for the Zuni people, was quoted as saying that "Science is just one of many ways of knowing the world. ... [The Zunis' world view is] just as valid as the archeological viewpoint of what prehistory is about." Now, perhaps Dr. Anyon was misquoted, but we all have repeatedly heard assertions of this kind, and I'd like to ask what such assertions could possibly mean. We have here two mutually incompatible theories. They can't both be right; they can't both even be approximately right. They could, of course, both be wrong, but I don't imagine that that's what Dr. Anyon means by "just as valid". It seems to me that Anyon has quite simply allowed his political and cultural sympathies to cloud his reasoning. And there's no justification for that: We can perfectly well remember the victims of a horrible genocide, and support their descendants' valid political goals, without endorsing uncritically (or hypocritically) their societies' traditional creation myths. Moreover, the relativists' stance is extremely condescending: it treats a complex society as a monolith, obscures the conflicts within it, and takes its most obscurantist factions as spokespeople for the whole. My second example of sloppy thinking comes from Social Text co-editor Bruce Robbins' article in the September/October 1996 Tikkun magazine, in which he tries to defend -- albeit half-heartedly -- the postmodernist/poststructuralist subversion of conventional notions of truth. "Is it in the interests of women, African Americans, and other super-exploited people," Robbins asks, "to insist that truth and identity are social constructions? Yes and no," he asserts. "No, you can't talk about exploitation without respect for empirical evidence" -- exactly my point. "But yes," Robbins continues, "truth can be another source of oppression." Huh??? How can truth oppress anyone? Well, Robbins' very next sentence explains what he means: "It was not so long ago," he says, "that scientists gave their full authority to explanations of why women and African Americans ... were inherently inferior." But is Robbins claiming that that is truth? I should hope not! Sure, lots of people say things about women and African-Americans that are not true; and yes, those falsehoods have sometimes been asserted in the name of "science", "reason" and all the rest. But claiming something doesn't make it true, and the fact that people – including scientists – sometimes make false claims doesn't mean that we should reject or revise the concept of truth. Quite the contrary: it means that we should examine with the utmost care the evidence underlying people's truth claims, and we should reject assertions that in our best rational judgment are false.

Epistemological Pragmatism Good

### The fact that “capital T truth” doesn’t exist doesn’t deny the necessity of logic and evidence—Incomplete knowledge is still a useful to guide action.

Sil 2k — Rudra Sil, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, 2000 (“Against Epistemological Absolutism: Toward a 'Pragmatic' Center?,” *Beyond Boundaries?: Disciplines, Paradigms, and Theoretical Integration in International Studies*, Edited by Rudra Sil and Eileen M. Doherty, Published by SUNY Press, ISBN 0791445976, p. 161)

In the end, there may be no alternative to relying on the judgment of other human beings, and this judgment is difficult to form in the absence of empirical findings. However, instead of clinging to the elusive idea of a uniform standard for the empirical validation of theories, it is possible to simply present a set of observational statements—whether we call it "data" or "narrative"—for the modest purpose of rendering an explanation or interpretation more plausible than the audience would allow at the outset. In practice, this is precisely what the most committed positivists and interpretivists have been doing anyway; the presentation of "logically consistent" hypotheses "supported by data" and the ordering of facts in a "thick" narrative are both ultimately designed to convince scholars that a particular proposition should be taken more seriously than others. Social analysis is not about final truths or objective realities, but nor does it have to be a meaningless world of incommensurable theories where anything goes. Instead, it can be an ongoing collective endeavor to develop, evaluate, and refine general inferences—be they in the form of models, partial explanations, descriptive inferences, or interpretations—in order to render them more "sensible" or "plausible" to a particular audience. In the absence of a consensus on the possibility and desirability of a full-blown explanatory science of international and social life, it is important to keep as many doors open as possible. This does not require us to accept each and every claim without some sort of validation, but perhaps the community of scholars can be more tolerant about the kinds of empirical referents and logical propositions that are employed in validating propositions by scholars embracing all but the most extreme epistemological positions.

### Epistemological pragmatism creates the best chance for dialogue and accurate knowledge – their criticism results in devastating academic balkanization.

Sil 2k — Rudra Sil, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, 2000 (“Against Epistemological Absolutism: Toward a 'Pragmatic' Center?,” *Beyond Boundaries?: Disciplines, Paradigms, and Theoretical Integration in International Studies*, Edited by Rudra Sil and Eileen M. Doherty, Published by SUNY Press, ISBN 0791445976, p. 166)

In the final analysis, it may be best to regard the entire process of social research as an ongoing collective search for meanings by a community of scholars. This search may not result in any definitive answers to theoretical or practical questions given the diverse foundations informing the puzzles, texts, and models that preoccupy members of this community. Nevertheless, thanks to the mediating role played by those subscribing to a pragmatic epistemological middle-ground, the process can still yield valuable insights, partial explanations, and even modest "lessons" and that can be judged as more or less convincing in the eyes of one's audience whether this audience consists of academic peers, the lay public at large, or the policy-making community. In an era of increasingly divided disciplines, scholars adopting a more pragmatic epistemological "middle ground," by virtue of their agnosticism, are likely to make the most critical contributions to whatever cumulation of knowledge is possible in the social sciences. These scholars are in a better position than those at the extreme ends for the purpose of generating and sustaining greater dialogue across different disciplines, theoretical approaches and intellectual movements precisely because their assumptions prevent them from hastily dismissing a study on grounds that are only meaningful to a subgroup within the wider community of scholars. In the absence of meaningful dialogue across different intellectual communities—whether delimited by disciplines, paradigms or methodological schools—the social sciences risk becoming permanently "balkanized" with scholars passing up opportunities to glean valuable insights from intellectual products developed on the basis of different foundational assumptions.

Social Constructionism Bad

### Their critique of Truth is self-evidently wrong—acknowledging the social context of knowledge does not mean that anything goes—their authors commit the genetic fallacy.

Bauerlein 1 — Mark Bauerlein, Professor of English at Emory University, 2001 (“Social Constructionism: Philosophy for the Academic Workplace,” *Partisan Review*, Volume LXVIII, Number 2, Available Online at http://www.bu.edu/partisanreview/archive/2001/2/bauerlein.html, Accessed 07-31-2010)

One can prove the institutional nature of social constructionism by noting how easy it is to question. The weakness of social constructionism as an epistemology lies in the fact that one can agree with the bare premise that knowledge is a construct, but disagree with the conclusion that objectivity is impossible and that the contents of knowledge are dependent upon the social conditions of the knower. Of course, knowledge is constructed. It must be expressed in language, composed methodically, conceived through mental views, all of which are historically derived. Constructionists extend the fact that knowledge materializes in cognitive and linguistic structures which have social determinants into the belief that knowledge has no claim to transcend them. That knowledge cannot transcend the conditions of its origination stems from the notion that cognition is never innocent, that cognition has designs and desires shaping its knowledge-building process, that knowing always has an instrumental purpose. This human dimension is local and situational, constructionists argue, a historical context for knowledge outside of which the knowledge has no general warrant. Even the most ahistorical kinds of knowledge, the principles of logic, mathematics, and science, have a social basis, one obscured by thinkers who have abstracted that knowledge from its rightful setting and used it for purposes of their own. Thus Martin Heidegger claims in a well-known illustration, "Before Newton’s laws were discovered, they were not ‘true’. . . .Through Newton the laws became true" (Being and Time). We only think the laws preceded Newton’s conception because, Heidegger explains, that is how entities "show themselves." But even though Newton’s laws arose at a particular historical moment, in one man’s mind, why assume that the laws are inextricable from that moment? There is abundant evidence for believing that the truth of Newton’s laws is independent of Newton’s mind, language, class, education, etc. The simple fact that persons of different languages and cultures implement those laws effectively implies their transhistorical and cross-cultural capacity. Engineers and physicists confirm the laws daily without any knowledge of Newton’s circumstances. Three hundred years of experimentation and theory have altered Newton’s laws only by restricting their physical purview. In short, Newton’s laws have been justified in vastly different times and places. Yes, scientists and engineers have de-historicized Newtonian knowledge, pared it down to a few set principles (nobody actually reads the Principia). But though abstract and expedient, the laws of Newtonian physics still have a truth-value, and that value is related not to Newton’s world, but to how well the laws predict outcomes, how reliably they stand up to testing, how useful they are in physical domains. To think otherwise is to deny the distinction between the contents of knowledge and the context of their emergence. This is an old logical mistake, namely, the genetic fallacy: the confusion of a theory’s discovery with its justification. Social constructionists overlook this distinction between discovery (the circumstances of a theory’s origin) and justification (the establishment of its truth). To them, the idea of separating truth from origin depletes thought of its historical reality, and ultimately smacks of formalist methods and mandarin motives. Constructionists grant that the discovery/justification point may be logically correct, but in slighting historical context, it can lead to a kind of neglect, whereby the abstract consideration of theories like Newton’s laws allows us to forget, say, the race, class, and gender privileges that freed Newton to excogitate upon falling bodies. Epistemologists counter by saying that historical inquiry is one thing, truth-determination is another, but for scholars raised on Foucault and Rorty, the division is never so neat and clear. The history of scholarship itself reveals too many instances of ideas once thought to be true later exposed as alibis for social inequities, as having more institutional-use value than abstract-truth value. Only a punctual inventory of a theory’s historical entanglements has saved scholars from misusing the theory, from fomenting its implicit and perhaps malignant politics. That is the real animus behind social constructionist commitments–not a philosophical belief about knowledge, but a moral obligation to social justice.

### Their skepticism is just an excuse not to do the required research—prefer our scholarly evidence to their postmodern jive.

Bauerlein 1 — Mark Bauerlein, Professor of English at Emory University, 2001 (“Social Constructionism: Philosophy for the Academic Workplace,” *Partisan Review*, Volume LXVIII, Number 2, Available Online at http://www.bu.edu/partisanreview/archive/2001/2/bauerlein.html, Accessed 07-31-2010)

This is the bare and banal advantage of social constructionism: it saves time. Truth, facts, objectivity–those require too much reading, too many library visits, too much time soliciting interlibrary loan materials, scrolling through microfilm records, double-checking sources, and looking beyond academic trends that come and go. A philosophy that discredits the foundations of such time-consuming research is a professional blessing. It is the belief-system of inquirers who need an alibi for not reading the extra book, traveling to the other archives, or listening to the other point of view. This is why constructionism is the prevailing creed in the humanities today. It is the epistemology of scholarship in haste, of professors under the gun. As soon as the humanities embraced a productivity model of merit, empiricism and erudition became institutional dead ends, and constructionism emerged as the method of the fittest. Scholars may have initially embraced constructionism as a philosophical position, but the evolution of constructionism into a brash institutional maneuvering indicates that it now functions as a response to a changing labor environment. How unfortunate that humanities faculty did not fight back against the productivity standard as soon as it arose and insist that scholars need time to read, time to reflect, time to test ideas in the classroom and at conferences if they are to come up with anything lasting. What a shame that they were able to concoct a mode of thought that cooperated with the quantification system, a plan of survival that now stands as the academic wisdom of the age.

### Just because something is social constructed doesn’t mean we don’t have to act politically – the plan is still a good idea.

Jarvis 2k — Darryl S. L. Jarvis, Director of the Research Institute for International Risk and Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Sydney, 2000 (*International Relations and the Challenge of Postmodernism: Defending the Discipline*, Published by the University of South Carolina Press, ISBN 1570033056, p. 129-130)

If the relevance of Ashley's project is questionable, so too is its logic and cogency. First, we might ask to what extent the postmodern "emphasis on the textual, constructed nature of the world" represents "an unwarranted extension of approaches appropriate for literature to other areas of human practice that are more constrained by an objective reality."39 All theory is socially constructed and realities like the nation-state, domestic and international politics, regimes, or transnational agencies are obviously [end page 129] social fabrications. But to what extent is this observation of any real use? Just because we acknowledge that the state is a socially fabricated entity, or that the division between domestic and international society is arbitrarily inscribed does not make the reality of the state disappear or render invisible international politics. Whether socially constructed or objectively given, the argument over the ontological status of the state is of no particular moment. Does this change our experience of the state or somehow diminish the political-economic-juridical-military functions of the state? To recognize that states are not naturally inscribed but dynamic entities continually in the process of being made and reimposed and are therefore culturally dissimilar, economically different, and politically atypical, while perspicacious to our historical and theoretical understanding of the state, in no way detracts from its reality, practices, and consequences. Similarly, few would object to Ashley's hermeneutic interpretivist understanding of the international sphere as an artificially inscribed demarcation. But, to paraphrase Holsti again, so what? This does not make its effects any less real, diminish its importance in our lives, or excuse us from paying serious attention to it. That international politics and states would not exist without subjectivities is a banal tautology. The point, surely, is to move beyond this and study these processes. Thus, while intellectually interesting, constructivist theory is not an end point as Ashley seems to think, where we all throw up our hands and announce there are no foundations and all reality is an arbitrary social construction. Rather, it should be a means of recognizing the structurated nature of our being and the reciprocity between subjects and structures through history. Ashley, however, seems not to want to do this, but only to deconstruct the state, international politics, and international theory on the basis that none of these is objectively given but fictitious entities that arise out of modernist practices of representation. While an interesting theoretical enterprise, it is of no great consequence to the study of international politics. Indeed, structuration theory has long taken care of these ontological dilemmas that otherwise seem to preoccupy Ashley.40

Expert Testimony Good

### Expert testimony is good—complex issues require sophisticated solutions grounded in technocratic analysis.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 77-78)

But praise for the amateur also has its limits. To ignore the need for critical disciplinary intellectuals with various forms of scientific expertise is to [end page 77] abdicate responsibility for a host of issues involving knowledge of fields ranging from physics and genetics to electronics and even environmentalism. There is surely an overabundance of jargon and mystification and, as has been mentioned before, the need exists for a new sensitivity to the vernacular.39 But it is also the case that complex issues sometimes require complex language and, often for good reasons, fields generate their own vocabularies. A judgment is undoubtedly necessary with respect to whether the language employed in a work is necessary for illuminating the issue under investigation: that judgment, however, can never be made in advance. There must be a place for the technocrat with a political conscience as surely as for the humanist with a particular specialty. The battle against oppression requires a multi-frontal strategy. Best to consider the words of Primo Levi who understands the critical intellectual as a "person educated beyond his daily trade, whose culture is alive insofar as it makes an effort to renew itself, and keep up to date, and who does not react with indifference or irritation when confronted by any branch of knowledge, even though, obviously, he cannot cultivate all of them."40

Instrumental Scientific Rationality Good

### Instrumental scientific rationality is a prerequisite for subverting arbitrary authority and fostering political equality—verification and falsifiability are key to effective resistance.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 159-160)

Much has been written about the need for a "new science" no longer defined by instrumental rationality and incapable of reifying the world. But these new undertakings always seem to ignore the need for criteria of verification or falsification; science without such criteria is, however, no science at all. Contempt for "instrumental" scientific rationality, moreover, undermines the possibility of meaningful dialogue between the humanities and the sciences. And that is a matter of crucial importance: popular debates are now taking place on issues ranging from the eco-system to cloning, the assumptions of western medicine to the possibilities of acupuncture, using animals for experiments to state support for space travel. This shows ethical progress, again perhaps not in the sense that people have become more "moral," but surely in the sense that more questions of everyday life have become open to moral debate. Science has not eroded ethics. The Frankfurt School misjudged the impact of science from the beginning. It is still the case that the science plays a crucial role in subverting religious authority, and fostering political equality by enabling each to judge the veracity of truth claims. There is also nothing exaggerated in the claim [end page 159] that "the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century was perhaps the single greatest influence on the development of the idea that political resistance is a legitimate act."6

### Technological solutions based on scientific rationality are vital – the alternative is like using an umbrella to defend against a hurricane.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 160)

Critics of the Enlightenment may have correctly emphasized the price of progress, the costs of alienation and reification, and the dangers posed by technology and scientific expertise for nature and a democratic society. Even so, however, this does not justify romantic attempts to roll back technology. They conflate far too easily with ideological justifications for rolling back the interventionist state and progressive legislation for cleaning up the environment. Such a stance also pits the Enlightenment against environmentalism: technology, instrumental rationality, and progress are often seen as inimical to preserving the planet. Nevertheless, this is to misconstrue the problem. Technology is crucial for dealing with the ecological devastation brought about by modernity. A redirection of technology will undoubtedly have to take place: but seeking to confront the decay of the environment without it is like using an umbrella to defend against a hurricane. Institutional action informed by instrumental rationality and guided by scientific specialists is unavoidable. Investigations are necessary into the ways government can influence ecologically sound production, provide subsidies or tax-benefits for particular industries, fund particular forms of knowledge creation, and make "risks" a matter of public debate. It is completely correct to note that: "neither controversial social issues nor cultural concerns can be settled simply by scientific fiat, particularly in a world where experts usually disagree and where science can be compromised by institutional sponsors. No laboratory can dictate what industrial practices are tolerable or what degree of industrialization is permissible. These questions transcend the crude categories of technical criteria and slide-rule measurements."7

Rejection Of Science Bad

### Rejection of science and instrumental rationality is disastrous—it leaves us without grounds to choose between competing theories, it justifies racism, and it conflates the method of science with the context in which it is carried out.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 162-163)

Reclaiming the Enlightenment calls for clarifying the aims of an educated sensibility in a disenchanted world. But this requires science. The assault upon its "instrumental" character or its "method" by self-styled radicals trained only in the humanities or social sciences is a self-defeating enterprise. Criticizing "bourgeois" science" is meaningful only with criteria for verification or falsification that are rigorous, demonstrable, and open to public scrutiny. Without such criteria, the critical enterprise turns into a caricature of itself: creationism becomes as "scientific" as evolution, astrology as instructive as astronomy, prayer as legitimate a way of dealing with disease as medicine, and the promise of Krishna to help the righteous a way of justifying the explosion of a nuclear device by India.10 Striking is how the emphasis on "local knowledge"—a stance in which all science is seen as ethno-science with standards rooted in a particular culture11—withdraws objectivity, turns the abdication of judgment into a principle of judgment, [end page 162] and recalls what was once a right-wing preoccupation with "Jewish physics," "Italian mathematics," and the like. Forgotten is that those who do physics or biology or mathematics all do it the same way or, better, allow for open scrutiny of their own way of doing it. The validity of science does not rest on its ability to secure an "absolute" philosophical grounding, but rather on its universality and its salience in dealing with practical problems. There is a difference between the immanent method of science and the external context in which it was forged. The sociology of science is a completely legitimate endeavor. It only makes sense to consider, for example, how an emerging capitalist production process with imperialistic aspirations provided the external context in which modern science arose. But it is illegitimate to reduce science to that context or judge its immanent workings from the standpoint of what externally inspired its development.12

A2: Critiques Of Scientific Progress

### Science is not characterized by a grand march to progress – their caricature of Enlightenment values gets it exactly backward.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 21-23)

Something will always be missing: freedom will never become fully manifest in reality. The relation between them is asymptotic. Therefore, most [end page 21] philosophes understood progress as a regulative ideal, or as a postulate, rather than as an absolute or the expression of some divine plane or the foundation for a system.14 Even in scientific terms, progress retained a critical dimension insofar as it implied the need to question established certainties. In this vein, it is misleading simply to equate scientific reason with the domination of man and nature.15 All the great figures of the scientific revolution—Bacon, Boyle, Newton—were concerned with liberating humanity from what seemed the power of seemingly intractable forces. Swamps were everywhere; roads were few; forests remained to be cleared; illness was rampant; food was scarce; most people would never leave their village. What it implied not to understand the existence of bacteria or the nature of electricity, just to use very simple examples, is today simply inconceivable. Enlightenment figures like Benjamin Franklin, "the complete philosophe,"16 became famous for a reason: they not only freed people from some of their fears but through inventions like the stove and the lightning rod they also raised new possibilities for making people's lives more livable. Critical theorists and postmodernists miss the point when they view Enlightenment intellectuals in general and scientists in particular as simple apostles of reification. They actually constituted its most consistent enemy. The philosophes may not have grasped the commodity form, but they empowered people by challenging superstitions and dogmas that left them mute and helpless against the whims of nature and the injunctions of tradition. Enlightenment thinkers were justified in understanding knowledge as inherently improving humanity. Infused with a sense of furthering the public good, liberating the individual from the clutches of the invisible and inexplicable, the Enlightenment idea of progress required what the young Marx later termed "the ruthless critique of everything existing." [end page 22] This regulative notion of progress was never inimical to subjectivity. Quite the contrary: progress became meaningful only with reference to real living individuals. Enlightenment thinking did not mechanically identify progress with the chronological passing of time or, usually, mere technological development. It was instead always seen as entailing a moral commitment to expanding self-awareness and the possibilities for exercising judgment. This was as true for Immanuel Kant, who viewed progress from the standpoint of the species, as for Moses Mendelssohn, who identified it with the increasing capacities for self-reflection by the individual. Both saw the root of progress in the growing possibilities for criticism and the development of human capacities. Progress thus became the rallying cry for attacking the privileges and dogma associated with the status quo. It was undoubtedly what led Diderot to exclaim that freedom would only be realized when the last aristocrat had been strangled with the entrails of the last priest. The outburst was revealing but so were the words of Tom Paine who probably best expressed the general position of the philosophes when he noted in 1795 that "the vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man, neither has one generation a property in the generations that are to follow."

A2: Examples Of Bad Science

### Our defense of science does not preclude criticism of specific applications of science—they conflate the sociology of science with science itself.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 163-164)

Too much time has already been wasted on "deconstructing" the scientific method for what Foucault termed its "dogmatic approach" and its supposedly hermetic character. That is the case not simply because the "scientific revolution" was directed against a scholastic view of nature that constrained the possibilities of inquiry but because, in political terms, the issue is not the "method" of science but the type of scientific research that demands funding and, ultimately, the ends to which science is put. Again defined by what they oppose, ironically, those principally concerned with the scientific method reflect the establishmentarian tendency to isolate science from politics. Whatever the connection between this method and metaphysics, or the status of its original commitment to benefit humanity, there is no reason to believe that science in the age of globalization has lost its ability to question previous claims or established authority: neither from the standpoint of science nor ethics is it legitimate to maintain that "the enlightenment has lost any trace of its own self-consciousness."13 Critical theory in the future must, once again, become more modest: it needs to specify the practices to which its categories apply. The difference between history and nature, wrote Vico in The New Science, is that humanity has created one and not the other. His famous statement, which looked back to Kant and forward to Lukacs and the beginnings of critical theory, has serious implications. Science cannot be expected to meet either metaphysical [end page 163] or politically correct expectations: such concerns bring to mind the communist believers who in the 1920s attacked Einstein for promoting relativism. The point is not to get entangled in the immanent workings of science, which most critical theorists do not even understand, but instead illuminate the institutional complexes with their particular balance of forces wherein "science" receives its direction and its aims. The Enlightenment notion of science, in the main, mirrored the more general philosophical rejection of closure and absolute knowledge. Bacon and Boyle, with their concern for methodological flexibility and provisional truth, already projected less the obsession with positive certainty than the emphasis upon "falsifiability" advocated by Sir Karl Popper. But it was surely Lessing who best expressed this general trend within Enlightenment thinking when he wrote the famous words: "if God held the truth in his right hand and in his clenched left fist the quest for it, along with all my future errors, and then told me to choose, I should point to the left and humbly say: 'Father give! The pure truth belongs to You alone!' "14

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# Progress Good

Progress Results In A Better World

### Abandoning Enlightenment notions of progress makes liberation impossible—their criticism forecloses the possibility of productive challenges to power.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 39-40)

Easy enough to criticize the pretensions of "progress," but without it the prospect for determining any liberating notion of social change vanishes.56 Walter Benjamin was surely correct when he noted that there is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism. But this only begs the question: what is the degree to which any such document expresses the civilized in contrast to the barbaric and how is it possible to distinguish the one from that of another. Progress enables us to differentiate between ideologies and policies, expose the limits of each, and illuminate the interests they serve. It need not become enmeshed in utopian dogma or condone what [end page 39] Kierkegaard termed the "teleological suspension of the ethical." But it must reject the romantic yearning for simplicity, the organic, and the traditional. Progress shows its value when confronting the new existential and practical problems that history presents. It receives expression in the refinement of human sentiments: the disgust caused by cruelty to the infirm, to animals, to the weak, and the downtrodden. Progress appears in the growing recognition that there is something wrong about the arbitrary exercise of power and that there is something legitimate about contesting it. The Enlightenment showed how progress can both foster critique and serve a productive function. That is perhaps its greatest legacy. 57 The Enlightenment idea of progress militated against closure and perfection. It existed as a possibility, never a certainty, and—until Hegel—it lacked ontological foundations. Progress was always coupled with an attack on the refusal to question or judge change in terms of the freedom it might provide. That change is endless and that freedom can never be fully achieved does not invalidate progress. Quite the contrary: it renders the idea more important than ever.

Rejecting Progress Causes Hell On Earth

### Denying progress leads to hell on earth.

Tallis 97 — Raymond Tallis, Professor of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Manchester, 1997 (*Enemies of Hope: A Critique of Contemporary Pessimism*, Published by Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 0312173261, p. 407-409)

If we deny or rubbish the progress that mankind has already made, and at the same time are aware of the huge efforts mankind have made to ameliorate the human condition, we shall inevitably conclude that no progress is possible. Such 'principled' despair will be a thousand times worse in terms of quietism than the most arrant care-nothing, do-nothing conservatism. An attitude wavering between fatalism, cynicism and moral superiority may suit the purposes of humanist intellectuals who prefer the comfort of the seminar room to the relative discomfort of the places where the real work of bringing about a better future must take place. It lets them morally off the hook - just as does the idea that there is no truth (only the dominant rhetoric of particular interpretive communities) and no genuine agency (only passivity in the seas of history, discourse, the unconscious, or whatever). 'Drooping despondency' makes very little demands on one's free time. 60 But we must refute those for whom (to parody Keats) 'the miseries are the world are misery and let them rest.' For, as Medawar has pointed out, 61 although humans have been around for 500,000 years, it is only during the past 5,000 years that they have won any kind of reward for their special capabilities and only during the past 500 years have they begun to be, in the biological sense, a success. 'Only during the past 10 to 15 minutes of the human day has life on earth been anything but precarious.' Technology has been really effective - because driven by science and a fundamental understanding of natural laws - only in the last 50 years. Reason is a comparative newcomer in human affairs and a neonate in the history of living things. 62 Opposition in principle to the idea of progress, based upon assumptions about the nature of mankind - Original Sin, aggressive animal nature (ethology, Social-Darwinism), incurable irrationality (anthropology) - or about society (it is too deep to be understood, a collection of opaque forces rather than the summed actvity of human agents) - simply fails to see the whole story. None of the theoretical reasons for denying the hope of progress is decisive. Nor, it must be admitted, are there irrefutable reasons for assuming that progress is guaranteed or inevitable. One would have to be a Hegelian or a Marxist to be stupid enough to believe that progress will come about of its own accord. If we believe, as I believe, that it has to be brought about by human effort, human beings mobilising the abstract intelligence and universalizing goodwill that they uniquely possess, there is no certainty that the future will be better than the past. So we are left with a secular equivalent of Pascal's wager, which I commend to the reader. As Pascal pointed out, nobody can be absolutely certain that God exists. We are in the position of best-guessing gamblers, making absolute and irreversible decisions in the context of uncertainty. What, then, should we do? Pascal recommends believing in God, for this will place the believer in a no-lose situation. If he is right, then he will be appropriately rewarded when he meets his Maker face to face. If he is wrong, he will not suffer for his credulity in the after-life of total oblivion. If, on the other hand, he wagers on the non-existence of God, his reward, if there is no God after all, is to enjoy the same oblivion as the believer. But if God really does exist, then he will be condemned to Eternal Damnation as punishment for his error. Pascal's wager is not an entirely full or fair statement of the case, if only because there is quite a range of gods to choose from and the result of choosing the wrong one could be persecution on earth and damnation in the after-life. Nor does it take account of the psychology of religious beliefs: the true experience of God should be (as Nijinsky proclaimed) 'a fire in the head' rather than the outcome of a prudent calculation of probabilities. We can, however, usefully transpose Pascal's wager to the secular sphere and use it to think about the hope of progress. If we believe in the possibility of progress, we may or not be successful in bringing it about. But if we deny the possibility of progress, then, since it will not happen of its own accord, we shall ensure that progress shall most definitely not come about. For the sake of the hungry child in the dust, we should not allow those who prophesy doom and gloom to speak unopposed; otherwise their prophecies will help to bring about their own hideous fulfilment. And more hungry children will die in the dust, while the prophets of gloom, of course, continue to enjoy life in the library and the seminar room. And perhaps for our own sake as well. Once you throw away belief in progress and the desire to make progress - the passion to alleviate human suffering here and now and in the future, on a small scale and a large scale, locally and globally (and, as we denizens of the global village are aware, the distinction between these categories is not absolute) - then you have thrown away one of the deepest and most noble and fertile sources of goodness in human beings and, effectively, much of the underpinning of civilisation. For a truly human culture is always - though never exclusively - preoccupied with improving the lot of mankind and in modern times this has taken the form of concern about justice for all, about the rights of the many, about enrichment of the poor and empowerment of the powerless. Great, rich cultures have a generosity that is implicitly on the side of progress (even if it is not Utopian or explicitly progressive). The only question for such cultures is whether progress is pursued well or badly, effectively or ineffectively. As Medawar has said, 'The idea of improvement must be pretty well coeval with human speculative thought. In one form of another it embodies almost the whole spiritual history of mankind.' 63 The enemies of hope have found their own reasons for dismissing the Enlightenment dream, without, perhaps fully realising what they are doing - or what they would be doing if the world took them seriously. Hitherto, those who have rejected earthly happiness have had alternative, next-worldly, futures to look forward to. In the absence of such alternatives, to dispense with the hope of progress, to mock 'the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment', is to lead humanity towards a collective despair perhaps unprecedented in articulate cultures. Or, more likely, since even the most articulate pessimists are not notably lacking in personal ambition and concern for self-advancement, to set an example to the well-heeled sections of the race that will encourage them to pursue their own happiness and forget that of humanity as a whole. For the sake of our humanity, then, as well as for the welfare of those whose lives would otherwise be Hell on earth, we must believe in, and strive for, progress, as did those noble philosophers of the Enlightenment. 64 'To deride the hope of progress', as Medawar says, 'is the ultimate fatuity, the last word in poverty of spirit and meanness of mind.' This book has been written in the hope that such poverty of spirit and meanness of mind will not have the last word.

A2: Progress Causes Technological Domination

### The pursuit of progress is characterized by a commitment to individual freedom—it results in personal liberation, not technological domination.

Bronner 4 — Stephen Eric Bronner, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and a Member of the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature and German Studies at Rutgers University, 2004 (*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Published by Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231126090, p. 29-30)

Again it is a matter of sense and sensibility: Odysseus is not the only, or even necessarily the best, symbol of Enlightenment. There is also Prometheus, who paid dearly for stealing fire from the gods, and Icarus who dared to fly, and crashed to his death when his wings of wax melted in the sun. The Enlightenment identified progress less with some abstract notion of freedom—expressed in the interplay between subjectivity and system—than with fostering the will to know and the fight against prejudice, the insistence upon tolerance and reciprocity, the demand for a democratic public sphere, and the accountability of institutions. Its representatives sought a flowering of freedoms that the individual might actually employ: intellectual freedom and the right to hold views counter to those already established; economic freedom to pursue personal economic advantage beyond the limitations then still determined by birth; and, finally, the political freedom secured in institutions based on the liberal rule of law and popular sovereignty.34 Not to understand the Enlightenment idea of progress in terms of the struggle for these practical freedoms is not to understand it at all. The idea of progress was always—anthropologically as well as historically—less about the eradication of subjectivity and the domination of nature than the possibility of personal liberation, popular empowerment, and overcoming the spell of myth and nature. Progress is an inherently rational idea. But it does not call for belief in the omnipotence of reason, the superfluous character of passion, or the existence of an objective solution to every problem.35 Neither Condorcet nor Kant provided an ontological foundation for progress and even the most rabid believer in progress, an adamant atheist and technological enthusiast, like Holbach could write in his System de la nature that "it is not given man to know everything; it is not given him to know his origins; it is not given him to penetrate to the essence of things or to go back to first principles." The issue for the philosophes was not the discovery of absolute truth but the establishment of conditions in which truth might be pursued. Or, to frame the matter in terms of a new critical theory with [end page 29] some sense of the concrete, the extent to which progress manifested itself was the extent to which claims could be treated as provisional. Reason and knowledge were never the enemies of progress. But their enemies were also the enemies of progress. David Hume, in this vein, liked to say that "ignorance is the mother of devotion." Unreflective passion offers far better support than scientific inquiry for the claims of religion or the injunctions of totalitarian regimes. The scientific method projects not merely the "open society," but also the need to question authority. This was already evidenced in the Meno when Socrates showed that he could teach mathematics to a slave and in The Republic when, exhibiting the frustration of the anti-intellectual, Thrasymachus insisted that justice is the right of the stronger. On one point, however, the most famous adversary of Socrates was right: his position suggested that whether the moral possibilities of progress are realized is not the province of philosophy but of politics. This would have radical implications. Upsetting the divine structure of things marked the Enlightenment notion of progress. Its advocates privileged over liberty rather than order and the communicable power of discourse over the incommunicable experience of grace. These new values would serve as the points of reference for all other values: order would no longer be employed as an excuse to smother liberty, but rather be understood as the precondition for its pursuit.36 Order always preceded liberty for the philosophes: it was seen as providing the rules and procedures for "constituting" the liberty enjoyed by citizens through the protection of the state.37

# Heidegger Was A Nazi

## Extinction DA

### Reject Heidegger’s arguments to prevent human extinction.

Faye 9 — Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor at the University Paris Ouest–Nanterre La Défense, translated into English by Michael B. Smith, Professor Emeritus of French and Philosophy at Berry College and translator of numerous philosophical works into English, 2009 (“Conclusion,” *Heidegger, the introduction of Nazism into philosophy in light of the unpublished seminars of 1933-1935*, Published by Yale University Press, ISBN 0300120869, p. 322)

The völkisch and fundamentally racist principles Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe transmits strive toward the goal of the eradication of all the intellectual and human progress to which philosophy has contributed. They are therefore as destructive and dangerous to current thought as the Nazi movement was to the physical existence of the exterminated peoples. Indeed, what can be the result of granting a future to a doctrine whose author desired to become the "spiritual Fuhrer" of Nazism, other than to pave the way to the same perdition? In that respect, we now know that Martin Heidegger, in his unpublished seminar on Hegel and the state, meant to make the Nazi domination last beyond the next hundred years. If his writings continue to proliferate without our being able to stop this intrusion of Nazism into human education, how can we not expect them to lead to yet another translation into facts and acts, from which this time humanity might not be able to recover? Today more than ever, it is philosophy's task to work to protect humanity and alert men's minds; failing this, Hitlerism and Nazism will continue to germinate through Heidegger's writings at the risk of spawning new attempts at the complete destruction of thought and the extermination of humankind.

\* völkisch is a term for German populism; Heidegger’s Gesamtausgabe is the term for the collected works of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, published by Vittorio Klostermann.

## A2: Nazism Irrelevant

### Yes it *is* relevant.

Cohen 9 — Patricia Cohen, Columnist for the New York Times, 2009 (“An Ethical Question: Does a Nazi Deserve a Place Among Philosophers?,” *New York Times*, November 8th, Available Online at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/09/books/09philosophy.html?pagewanted=all, Accessed 07-23-2011)

Without understanding the soil in which Heidegger’s philosophy is rooted, Mr. Faye argues, people may not realize that his ideas can grow in troubling directions. Heidegger’s dictum to be authentic and free oneself from conventional restraints, for example, can lead to a rejection of morality. The denunciation of reason and soulless modernism can devolve into crude anti-intellectualism and the glorification of “blood and soil.”

Passions about Heidegger have simmered for years. He joined the Nazi party in 1933 when he became rector of Freiburg University and oversaw the dismissal of all Jewish professors. After the war Heidegger was banned by a de-Nazification tribunal from teaching. In the 1950s Arendt re-established ties with him and labored to revive his reputation.

Heidegger was a critic of modern technological society and of the Western philosophical tradition that gave rise to it. He argued that we must overcome this tradition and rethink the very nature of human existence or being.

His prose is so dense that some scholars have said it could be interpreted to mean anything, while others have dismissed it altogether as gibberish. He is nonetheless widely considered to be one of the century’s greatest and most influential thinkers.

Theologians have used his critique of reason to explain the leap of faith; architects have been inspired by his rejection of conventional rules to introduce a buffet of new styles, materials and shapes to building design. His criticism of mechanistic technology has attracted environmentalists and planners.

A verbal brawl over Heidegger’s theories should not be surprising, though. After all, the classic American position on how liberal societies should treat dangerous ideas is worth more discussion.

That is precisely what Mr. Faye says he wants. In his view teaching Heidegger’s ideas without disclosing his deep Nazi sympathies is like showing a child a brilliant fireworks display without warning that an ignited rocket can also blow up in someone’s face.

### Reject the author and the argument.

Faye 6 — Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor at the University Paris Ouest–Nanterre La Défense, translated into English by Alexis Watson and Richard J. Golsan, 2006 (“Nazi Foundations in Heidegger's Work,” *South Central Review*, Volume 23, Issue 1, Spring, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Project Muse)

In conclusion, recall that philosophy has as its vocation to serve the fulfillment of man and not his destruction. But Heidegger, through the völkisch and racist principle which is explicitly his starting point, destroys man in his very being. And in a profoundly perverse manner, he [End Page 65] imputes to philosophy itself the responsibility for the totalitarian aberrations of the modern age. The radically discriminatory and racist principles upon which Heidegger's work rests demand a complete re-evaluation of the status of that work. It is not, in its foundations, a philosophy, but rather an attempt to destroy philosophy. Therefore, it is the role of philosophy to explore, through further research, the real significance of his writings. This is an essential task for contemporary thought.

## A2: Heidegger Made Important Contributions

### No he didn’t—he was a Nazi.

Romano 9 — Carlin Romano, critic-at-large for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Lecturer in Philosophy and Media Theory at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, 2009 (“Heil Heidegger!,” *The Chronicle Review*, October 18th, Available Online at http://chronicle.com/article/Heil-Heidegger-/48806/, Accessed 07-23-2011)

How many scholarly stakes in the heart will we need before Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), still regarded by some as Germany's greatest 20th-century philosopher, reaches his final resting place as a prolific, provincial Nazi hack? Overrated in his prime, bizarrely venerated by acolytes even now, the pretentious old Black Forest babbler makes one wonder whether there's a university-press equivalent of wolfsbane, guaranteed to keep philosophical frauds at a distance.

To be sure, every philosophy reference book credits Heidegger with one or another headscratcher achievement. One lauds him for his "revival of ontology." (Would we not think about things that exist without this ponderous, existentialist Teuton?) Another cites his helpful boost to phenomenology by directing our focus to that well-known entity, Dasein, or "Human Being." (For a reified phenomenon, "Human Being," like the Yeti, has managed to elude all on-camera confirmation.) A third praises his opposition to nihilism, an odd compliment for a conservative, nationalist thinker whose antihumanistic apotheosis of ruler over ruled helped grease the path of Adolf Hitler in the 1930s.

## A2: Separate Author From His Politics

### Heidegger *himself* made the connection—separating him from his politics is naïve.

Rosenbaum 9 — Ron Rosenbaum, journalist and author of *Explaining Hitler*—a book that attempts to explain the rise of Adolph Hitler, 2009 (“The Evil of Banality,” *Slate*, October 30th, Available Online at http://www.slate.com/id/2234010/pagenum/all/, Accessed 07-23-2011)

The new Heidegger material offers further evidence of his slavish devotion to the Fuhrer, not merely in his public speeches but also in his desire to find a philosophical grounding for Hitlerism in the elevated realms of his thought.

Consider this quotation from a delightfully acerbic review essay by Carlin Romano in the Oct. 18 Chronicle of Higher Education, which discusses new revelations about Heidegger's shameless adoption of Nazism.

Next month Yale University Press will issue an English-language translation of Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism Into Philosophy, by Emmanuel Faye, an associate professor at the University of Paris at Nanterre. It's the latest, most comprehensive archival assault on the ostensibly magisterial thinker who informed Freiburg students in his infamous 1933 rectoral address of Nazism's "inner truth and greatness," declaring that "the Führer, and he alone, is the present and future of German reality, and its law."

Faye, whose book stirred France's red and blue Heidegger départements into direct battle a few years back, follows in the investigative footsteps of Chilean-Jewish philosopher Victor Farias (Heidegger et le Nazisme, 1987), historian Hugo Ott (Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu Zeiner Biographie, 1988) and others. Aim? To expose the oafish metaphysician's vulgar, often vicious 1930s attempt to become Hitler's chief academic tribune, and his post-World War II contortions to escape proper judgment for his sins. "We now know," reports Faye, "that [Heidegger's] attempt at self-justification of 1945 is nothing but a string of falsehoods."

Romano's Chronicle piece generated an often-furious comments thread, a spectacle of postmodernists in temper tantrum mode.

I can understand the splenetic attacks on Romano for not taking Heidegger seriously, although the angry Heideggerian academics never explained exactly why we should.

In general, I'm in favor of separating the man (or woman) from the work, but it was Heidegger himself, his defenders don't seem to recognize, who claimed Nazism for his own. He didn't make the separation between man and philosophy that they conveniently claim to excuse his personal racism.

### Heidegger’s philosophy can’t be separated from his ideology.

Faye 6 — Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor at the University Paris Ouest–Nanterre La Défense, translated into English by Alexis Watson and Richard J. Golsan, 2006 (“Nazi Foundations in Heidegger's Work,” *South Central Review*, Volume 23, Issue 1, Spring, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Project Muse)

I want to stress that the guiding thread of my research was not initially that of Heidegger's Nazism, but his conception of man. It was while I was in the process of explaining the very substructure of his work that I was able to gauge the extent to which Nazism was inscribed therein. Since then, it is apparent to me that it is absolutely impossible to separate ideology from philosophy in Heidegger's work. Can we, in effect, seriously endeavor to take the sixty-six volumes in Gesamtausgabe one by one and form two piles: to the right, the works that are pure Nazi ideology, to the left, those which might be considered relevant to philosophy? Heidegger himself conceived of his Gesamtausgabe as a whole. He organized its publication chronologically so that the most overtly Hitlerian and pro-Nazi lectures would appear after his death, so that they should take their place at the heart of the work itself, with no reservation or repentance. It is this whole, this ensemble, which he bequeathed as his legacy, as his complete work, for generations to come.

## Link—*Being And Time*

### *Being and Time* reflects Heidegger’s Nazism.

Faye 6 — Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor at the University Paris Ouest–Nanterre La Défense, translated into English by Alexis Watson and Richard J. Golsan, 2006 (“Nazi Foundations in Heidegger's Work,” *South Central Review*, Volume 23, Issue 1, Spring, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Project Muse)

1. The political significance of Being and Time, in light of recently published lectures

My research also deals with the 1920s, from Heidegger's lectures of 1925 entitled The current conflict for a historical vision of the world to Being and Time, published in 1927. I discovered the importance of intellectual bonds which linked Heidegger to racist authors and proto-Nazis like Erich Rothacker, Alfred Baeumler, Oskar Becker, and even the raciologist Ludwig Clauss, to whom Heidegger would confide: "what I think, I will say once I am a tenured professor." It is necessary to remain aware of this context in order to understand the affirmations of Being and Time such as the famous § 74 on historicity, in which Heidegger declares that existence is not defined as destiny, except through a community and a people. The identification of the authentic Dasein with Gemeinschaft and with the Volk is thus confirmed in 1927 in Being and Time. And I provide, in the first chapter of my book, enough information along those lines for us to proceed with a deeper reexamination of Being and Time.

## Link—Ontology Arguments

### Heidegger’s ontology arguments are a product of his Nazism.

Faye 6 — Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor at the University Paris Ouest–Nanterre La Défense, translated into English by Alexis Watson and Richard J. Golsan, 2006 (“Nazi Foundations in Heidegger's Work,” *South Central Review*, Volume 23, Issue 1, Spring, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Project Muse)

In addition, the lectures currently available from 1933–34 reveal to us that Heidegger, in his book on Kant from 1929, only re-addresses the question "What is man?" so as to transform it in his seminars and writings from the 1930s, into "Who are we?" He responds, "we are the people," the only people who still have a "history" and a "völkisch destiny." In effect, Heidegger understands this people as "völkisch," that is to say according to his own terms, as a race (Rasse). For him, it is necessary to accomplish a "total transformation" of the existence of man, in accordance with "the education for the National Socialist worldview," inculcated in the people through the Führer's speeches (GA 36/37, 225).

Can we seriously believe that for Heidegger these pro-Nazi views are only a fleeting political aberration that can be ignored in assessing the value of Being and Time? This would run counter to the most explicit affirmations of Heidegger himself. In effect in 1934, he explained [End Page 57] to his students that "care—'the most central term of Being and Time'—is the condition in which it is possible for man to be political in essence" (GA 36/37, 218). Heidegger declares at this time—one year after the National Socialist movement came to power—that "we ourselves," that is to say the German people, united under the Hitlerian Führung, are faced with an "even greater decision" than that which served as the origin of Greek philosophy! This decision, he specifies, "was articulated in my book, Being and Time." It concerns, he added, "a belief which must manifest itself through history" and concerns "the spiritual history of our people" (GA 36/37, 255). At the foundation of Heidegger's work, one thus finds not a philosophical idea, but rather a völkisch belief in the ontological superiority of a people and a race; moreover, the term völkisch designates in its Nazi usage the conception of a people as a marriage of blood and race, with "a strong anti-Semitic connotation," according to the Grimm dictionary. Frankly, an attentive reading of key paragraphs in Being and Time on death and historicity, with their celebration of sacrifice, of the choice of heroes and of the authentic destiny of Dasein in the community of the people, shows that this belief was already in place as of 1927.

With Heidegger, the question of man has thus become a völkisch question. It is in this sense that I spoke earlier of Heidegger's intention to introduce Nazism into philosophy. Of course, no true philosophy can align itself with the project of the extermination of human beings, a project to which the Nazi movement was committed. Therefore, I do not wish to say that Heidegger produced a National Socialist philosophy, but rather that he did not hesitate to utilize philosophical expressions such as "truth of Being" or "essence of man" to express something else entirely.

### Heidegger’s ontology arguments were justifications for Nazi domination.

Faye 6 — Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor at the University Paris Ouest–Nanterre La Défense, translated into English by Alexis Watson and Richard J. Golsan, 2006 (“Nazi Foundations in Heidegger's Work,” *South Central Review*, Volume 23, Issue 1, Spring, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Project Muse)

In fact, it is the entirety of Heideggerian doctrine that is implicated in this teaching of Nazi politics: in the lecture he equates, in effect, the ontological relationship between Being and beings with the political relationship between the State and the people! He declares, in fact, that "the State is to its people what Being is to beings." It is a question, he says, introducing the eros of Führer State into the souls of the people. As in State, Movement, People—the most radically Nazi of Carl Schmitt's books—one must bring everything back to "the living bond" of racial essence that unites the Führer and his people. Heideggerian identification of Being with the völkisch State, with the Führer State, is total. He affirms, in effect, in the conclusion of his seminar, that "the State is the most substantive reality that must give a new sense, an original sense, to the totality of Being." Moreover, it would be difficult to find a more radical exaltation of the total domination of Hitlerism over the minds of the people. After having made the tribute to "völkisch destiny" and to the eros of the people for the Führer State, Heidegger describes how "the essence and the superiority of the Führer have inscribed themselves in the Being and souls of the people in order to bind them primordially and passionately to the task." The faith Heidegger manifests in his lectures leads, in fact, to a total possession of the human being, subjugated body and soul, by the Hitlerian Führung.