The Inversion Thesis and the New Illiberalism

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1. The Limits of Interest-Group Politics

Since Madison's defense of the American Constitution in the *Federalist*, liberal democracy has often been conceptualized as a type of polity in which a multiplicity of interest groups—Madison's term is "factions"—compete for power, limit each other's ambitions, and so reduce "instability, injustice, and confusion" to make room for "liberty."[1]   Madison argues that with a multitude of factions "society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority."[2] Thus "In a free government the security for civil rights must be…in the multiplicity of interests."[3] Madison is often understood as the father of the pluralist account of liberal democracy, one that embraces the necessity of, and even celebrates, a plurality of factions or interest groups as the foundation of liberty.

The limitations of pluralist politics are well know and most tellingly articulated in *The Logic of Collective Action* by Mancur Olson, published in 1965. There is no need to go into the details of Olson's critique here. His point is simply that some potential political factions organize much more easily than others and end up exploiting those others. Small, self-aware interest groups whose individual members have much immediately at stake organize more easily than large groups whose individual members have little at stake and are unaware of their interests. Further, such large potential interest groups face a free rider problem as the costs of political organization are high relative to the likely benefits, which accrue to active and inactive alike Thus in pluralist liberal democracies, the special interests benefit at the expense of the general interest and public goods are under produced.

There are three possible responses to this problem. One response focuses on interests. It seeks to reform the Constitution and the policymaking process generally to discourage the formation of factions, reduce their number, and facilitate collective action. Many schemes for constitutional reform aim, not at eliminating factions altogether, but at reducing the role they play in policymaking and weakening interest as a force in politics generally.

A second response focuses on ideas. If all groups had a clear idea of all the stakes involved in a particular public decision, if the demands of special interests could be checked with convincing evidence of the costs they impose on the general interest, the power of interests could be counterbalanced by the strength of ideas and political action based on a sense of public spiritedness would be encouraged.

This paper will not develop either of these responses to the collective action problems of pluralism but rather focus on a third response, one that involves identity. Madison observed that the dangers of faction could be eliminated "by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests."[4] But he concluded this approach was "impracticable" because as long as people are at liberty to exercise their fallible reason, and have a diversity in their faculties, especially in those for acquiring property, there are "insuperable obstacle[s] to a uniformity of interests."[5]

But what if a uniformity of opinions, passions, interests, and faculties *was* practicable? Wouldn't the resulting homogeneity of the citizens result in a non-pluralistic society with a politics rooted

not in factions but in identity? This is precisely the response to the dilemmas of pluralistic politics that is advanced by proponents of identity politics.

2. Identity as a Response to the Limits of Interest-based Politics

2.1 Identity and Unity: Creating a literal uniformity of interests among all citizens is the response of the most radical proponents of what is today called identity politics. But the strategy of overcoming a plurality of interests among the people by fusing them into a unity is old. It can be found in such foundational texts of political theory as Plato's *Republic* and *The Social Contract* by Rousseau. Among modern theorists, Schmitt's work is the most notorious expression of this approach. In the 21st century this position has updated and given fairly sophisticated expression by thinkers of the European New Right (ENR) such as Guillaume Faye with his concept of archeofuturism and Alain de Benoist's ethnopluralism. Therefore, the notion of a radical form of identity politics as solution to the problems of pluralistic interest-group politics needs to be taken seriously and given a response.

2.2 Interest-cum-identity politics and identitarian politics: But before going further, an important distinction needs to be made. There are indeed radical forms of identity politics such as those mentioned above that are incompatible with political pluralism and therefore with liberal democracy. But there are much less radical versions of identity politics that are really extensions, rather than repudiations, of political pluralism and that therefore can be squared with liberal democracy.

Many political phenomena that are loosely called identity politics in fact represent no more than a desire to recognize and politically incorporate new ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, or some other type of groups as distinct interests that can function within a liberal democratic political system. These weak forms of identity politics are not at all of the same character as the radical identity politics espoused by the ENR and other extreme forms of rightist nationalism or populism. Everyday forms of feminist, African-American, and Latino identity politics—such as those of *Ms.* magazine, Black Lives Matter, and La Raza—are, whatever one finally thinks of them, no more than familiar interest-group politics expressed by relatively new interest groups. If women, African-Americans, Latinos, or any other group wants to organize politically to better represent its interests, that amounts to no more than adding a few new interest groups to the already dense swarm that buzz about in American pluralistic politics and as such represents no fundamental challenge to liberal democracy, however much it may complicate the public sphere. On the other hand, this non-radical form of identity politics, precisely because it is really no more than a new flavor of interest-group politics, does not fundamentally address the collective action problems of pluralist politics identified by Olson and others.

Therefore a distinction is in order. The most familiar form of identity politics is really a new extension of interest-group politics and might be called "interest-cum-identity politics." The radical form of identity politics of Faye and other ENR thinkers, and of far-right nationalism and populism generally, can be called *identitarian* politics to distinguish it from less

problematic version. Identitarian politics represents an apparent cure to the maladies of pluralist politics, but one that is worse than the disease, as it is incompatible with liberal democracy.

The rise of interest-cum-identity politics is a result of inevitable shifts in the set of interests that make up American society. This version of identity politics therefore cannot be resisted; indeed such resistance is likely to be harmful in various ways. But more importantly, garden variety identity politics *need not* be resisted as it represents simply the old wine of pluralism in a new or postmodern bottle and as such is no fundamental challenge to liberal democracy.

2.3 Identitarian politics and liberal democracy: However, identitarianism *is* incompatible liberal democracy. Identitarianism posits that every political group is a homogeneous monad with a culture, an entire worldview, alien to and incompatible with those of other political monads. Identitarian monads, it can be said, are windowless. Real communication between different monads is impossible and therefore so are negotiation and ordinary politics. Monads interact only by clashing, that is, by making war on one another. At best, open war is suspended when a temporary equilibrium of power is reached, but no real peace is ever achieved. The problems of interest group formation are "solved" by declaring a permanent state of emergency or war in which all interests save that of the whole must be suppressed and then driving all other monads out of the political environment completely and with no holds barred.

But to make the charge that identitarianism is incompatible with liberal democracy it must be proved that: 1) The basic units of identitarianism really are windowless monads and that real communication between them is impossible, and 2) With no possibility of communication identitarian monads must necessarily make endless war on each other. These questions are addressed in the next two subsections.

2.4 The Windowless Monads of Identitarian Politics: What is meant here by a "monad," and the implications of saying that the basic units of identitarian politics are "windowless monads" have to be explained. The terms are borrowed from Leibniz, one of the great minds of western philosophy and co-developer of the calculus with Newton. According to Leibniz, reality is a collection, not of material atoms occupying positions in space and interacting with each other, but of immaterial monads, each of which is a disembodied mind or soul. Being immaterial, monads cannot bounce off of, connect to, or interact with each other in any way at all.

In identitarian politics, the basic unit of politics can be likened to a monad, that is, a group of people who share a common worldview that dominates every facet of their consciousness. In interest group theory an individual can have several interests and so belong to more than one faction simultaneously. Moreover, interest group theory holds that a particular interest may shape, but need not completely dominate, our political thinking. Different factions usually have at least some overlapping interests and can therefore understand and bargain with other, and be split apart and organized into different coalitions or networks as seems appropriate to different occasions.

Identitarian monads are a quite different type of basic political unit than are factions. Factions are made up of individuals but in identitarianism there really are no individuals. This striking implication is made explicit by some identitarian ideologues. Thus Brad Griffin (who usually writes under the pseudonym of Hunter Wallace), editor of the American Alt-Right web magazine *Occidental Dissent,* explains that one of the "hallmark characteristics" of that ideology is

> **Identity…** The Alt-Right's analysis of history and biology has led us to the conclusion that human beings ARE NOT primarily individuals. On the contrary, we are tribal beings who invariably divide the world into in-groups and out-groups, and those tribes have always been in a primordial struggle for DOMINANCE…The timeless struggle for DOMINANCE between rival groups is why we have POLITICS. [bold and capitalization in the original][6]

A monadic polity is an entire community of people all programed to dream the same dream or dreams that are congruent with each other but not at all with the collective dream of *other* polities. Thus each monadic people has a unique identity—really a unique reality—that is indiscernible or incomparable with those of other peoples because there is no epistemological congruence or harmony between them.

Further, the members of a monad share not just a single particular interest, but an entire weltanschauung that pervades the consciousness of each person. In identitarian theory, there is no such thing as an individual who has more than one weltanschauung, in the way that interest-group theory allows an individual to have more than one interest. A weltanschauung is just that—a *world*view—that dominates every facet of a person's thinking. There is, therefore, no possibility of an individual balancing or playing off one weltanschauung against another. Moreover, since each member of a monad shares the same weltanschauung, and different monads are defined by different weltanschauungs, there is no way for members of one monad to sympathize with or even understand members of another, or of breaking up and reconstructing monads. In identitarian politics monads cannot form coalitions or networks at all. A single monad fills up a given political space entirely, and such a polity is necessarily and completely homogeneous. On the other hand, in interest-group theory a single polity can contain many heterogeneous factions.

3. Radical Identitarianism: Faye

3.1 *Why We Fight* by Faye: The most radical account of this identitarian monadology is found in the writings of the French New Right theorist Guillaume Faye. Faye is a prolific author and journalist whose works have been translated into English and made widely available through Alt-Right sites such as *Counter-Currents Publishing*, *American Renaissance*, and similar outlets. In this way Faye has been a major influence on the thinking of both European and American far rightists, who have adopted much of his very radical brand of identitarianism.

Perhaps the best introduction to Faye's thought is *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance* first published in France in 2001 and then in English in 2011 by the far-right publisher Arktos Media. The work is particularly useful as a guide to far rightist ideas as much of it is devoted to a "Metapolitical Dictionary," that is, a glossary of that ideology's key terms.

Chapter One urges sympathetic readers to "Unite on the Basis of Clear Ideas Against the Common Enemy," and declares "The time has come for identitarianism, in the broadest sense, to reaffirm itself as the most lucid and ambitious form of thought."[7]

What, then is identitarianism? Oddly enough, Faye's "Metapolitical Dictionary" provides no definition, lucid or otherwise, of this central term so one has to be pieced together. "Identity" he defines as follows:

> …A people's identity is what makes it incomparable and irreplaceable. …But **ethnic and cultural identities form a bloc: maintaining and developing the cultural heritage presupposes a people's ethnic commonality…. Look: identity's basis is biological; without it, the realms of culture and civilisation are unsustainable.** Said differently: a people's identity, memory, and projects come from a specific hereditary disposition…The notion of identity obviously refers to **ethnocentrism** and remains incompatible with 'ethnopluralist' cohabitation. [bold in the original][8]

Identity, then, requires a people to be an ethnic and cultural bloc, that is, ethnocentric. The opposite of ethnocentrism is "Chaos, Ethnic," of which Faye writes:

> An ethnically heterogeneous population — a kaleidoscope of communities — becomes an anonymous society, without soul, without solidarity, prone to incessant conflicts for domination…ungovernable because there's no shared vision of the world.[9]

Between ethnically heterogeneous communities there is no shared vision of the world, which results in ungovernability. So the key to governance and ordinary politics is a shared worldview. Faye's term for worldview is "conception-of-the-world," which he defines as:

> The ensemble of values and interpretations of reality — implicitly or explicitly distinct to a specific human group…One speaks, almost indifferently, of a 'worldview.'
>
> The conception-of-the-world transcends—goes beyond—political doctrines, as well as ideologies…A conception-of-the-world comprises the intellectual and spiritual, rational and intuitive facets. It's different from culture, in which several conceptions of the world can coexist within it. A conception-of-the-world implies a political and historical project, along with a specific view of man's nature….[10]

Faye also provides a definition of "ethnocentrism":

> The mobilising conviction, distinct to all long-living peoples, that they belong to something superior and that they must conserve their ethnic identity, if they are to endure in history.
>
> Whether it's 'objectively' true or false doesn't matter: ethnocentrism is the psychological condition necessary to a people's (or nation's) survival. History is not a field in which intellectually objective principles are worked out, but one conditioned by the will to power, competition, and selection. Scholastic disputes about a people's superiority or

inferiority are beside the point. **In the struggle for survival, the feeling of being superior and right is indispensable to acting and succeeding….**

History is above all a field of subjectivity, of struggle between subjectivities….[11]
[bold in the original]

From the above passages, a definition of identitarianism can be derived. That theory holds the political world is made up of peoples with incomparable identities. Those identities are ethnically based, that is, ethnocentric. An ethnocentric people share an all-encompassing worldview or conception-of-the-world. All such conceptions of the world must deeply believe, on pain of paralysis and death, they are superior to all others, whether that belief is objectively true or not. Therefore all peoples that survive encase themselves in the impenetrable sphere of a subjective feeling of its own superiority, which is precisely why they are "incomparable"—"indiscernable" in Leibnizian terms-- that is, share no understanding or ideas that can be compared.

In short, identitarianism as Faye understands it is the theory that the basic unit of politics is an ethnocentric people, each with its own windowless conception of the world rooted in the invincible subjective belief of its own superiority makes objective comparison of these conceptions impossible. The building block of identitarian politics is a people locked in the windowless monad of a subjective belief in its superiority that pervades its entire conception of the world.

3.2. *Why We Fight* on Identitarian Politics: What, then, are Faye's identitarian politics like? That is, how do monadic peoples relate to each other? Faye writes that

> Humanity cannot conceive of itself — this will always be the case — except in terms of the organic juxtaposition of its particularisms — and not as a universalism encompassing and overarching (allegedly secondary) particularities.[12]

Particular peoples are juxtaposed—no overlap or interaction between them is suggested—with nothing encompassing or overarching them. Faye thus rejects the possibility that that there is any universal force or standard above identitarian peoples to establish harmony among them.

But if identitarian peoples can't harmonize, doesn't that imply they must clash? Faye's answer seems to be "yes." He writes:

> A dynamic, identitarian culture, buttressed by its native biological stock, is essential to the survival of a people or a civilisation. All political movements neglecting cultural struggle, all states rejecting a policy of cultural identity, operate in a void.

> Cultural struggle is not restricted to the defence of the patrimony, the maintenance of tradition, or dialogue with the historical memory…we need a counter-offensive….

> **Cultural struggle doesn't entail defending all cultures, only European culture, which it assumes is superior to other cultures"** [bold in the original].[13]

Identitarian peoples, that is, engage in cultural struggle with each other, which is essential to their survival. That struggle involves not only defense but offense and the point at issue is who is superior to whom. It seems, then, that these monadic peoples are locked in an all-fronts competition with each other for domination and survival. That impression is confirmed when we turn to Faye's definition of "Competition, Struggle for Life":

> The clash of living-forms for supremacy and survival.

> Competition, or the struggle for life, constitutes the principal motor force of evolution in everything from bacteria to humans, as well as history

> There's no use complaining about enemies: we should instead take satisfaction in fighting and eliminating them, knowing that **they will always be with us….**

> The enemy is never wrong, if he wins…. One is never 'intrinsically superior' to others. One is superior only in successfully achieving supremacy.

> **It's the law of the strongest, the most capable, the most flexible that always dominates. *Vae Victis,* death to the vanquished, such is the law of life; there has never been born a philosopher who could prove otherwise.** [14] [bold in the original.]

The internal logic of Faye's identitarianism leads to an exceeding dark conclusion: The peoples of the world are locked in an unending war with domination or death being the only possible outcomes. Indeed, Faye himself confirms this will be his conclusion when, early on in *Why We Fight,* he answers the question implicit in his title:

> **The history of the world is a history of the struggle between peoples and civilisations for survival and domination. It's a battleground of wills to power….The base of everything is biocultural identity and demographic renewal….**

> Why do we fight? We don't fight for 'the cause of peoples,' because the identity of every people is its own concern, not ours, and because history is a cemetery of peoples and civilisations**. We fight only for the cause of our own people's destiny.[15]** [bold in the original]

In this passage, too, Faye affirms that the peoples of the world are trapped in a life-or-death struggle for power, but here he provides a ferocious addendum: in this battle each people cares only about its own survival and cares nothing at all about that of other peoples.

Is it possible that monadic peoples can co-exist? It's hard to see how this logic, if taken seriously, results in anything short of a warrant for genocide. Can it be that Faye offers humankind no escape from this dour fate?

At one point Faye tries to back off a bit from this ferocious vision. He has written that history is a battle of the wills to power of different peoples for survival and domination. But when he defines "Will to Power" he seems to offer a qualification:

>This Nietzschean concept has at times been misunderstood and abusively interpreted as 'a tyrannical desire for brutal domination'…. The will to power by no means implies crushing the weak, but rather protecting them. For it defies only the strong.[16]

The suggestion is that out of prudential considerations a strong, victorious people will decline to exterminate a weaker people over whom it has achieved domination. But this apparent limit on the will to power of a superior people in fact amounts to no real limit at all. It allows a dominant nation to exercise its power without any check at all and to the fullest extent possible and to hold back only when, in its own good judgement, going further would be counterproductive and thus not an exercise of power at all. For all peoples vanquished up to the point where the great nation has reached the outer limits of its power the law of Vae Victis applies. o say that the will to power of a dominant people is limited by its own self-discipline is like saying the greed of a burglar is limited by how much swag he thinks he can carry.

In short, radical identitarianism, at least as Faye presents it, turns out to be incompatible, not only with liberal democracy, but with even the slightest bit of international peace. If this is the necessary upshot of identitarianism, that ideology not only offers no solution to the dilemmas of pluralist politics, but needs to be repudiated altogether.

4. **Alain de Benoist: Moderate Identitarianism?**

4.1. Faye vs. Benoist: Faye's *Why We Fight* is an open polemic against just such a less radical vision of identitarian politics that draws back from the vision of history as the cemetery of peoples. Faye is alluding to this watered down iddentitarianism when he rejects "the cause of peoples." The identitarianism with a human face that Faye scorns is "ethnopluralism," developed and most famously articulated by another French writer of the ENR, Alain de Benoist. Before we conclude that identitarian politics leads straight to internecine war between windowless, ethnocentric peoples, we have to consider whether Benoist's ethnopluralism somehow avoids that conclusion while remaining recognizably identitarian.

Alain de Benoist is a prolific French intellectual who is usually thought of as a founder of the European New Right school of thought that originated in the 1960s. He is author of more than 100 books and many articles, most of which have not been translated into English. The account of his thought given here is not meant to be comprehensive. For present purposes, Benoist is of interest because part of his project is to develop a moderate identitarianism that, while it rejects pluralism and liberal democracy, avoids the practically genocidal conclusions of radicals like Faye. Indeed, Faye developed his hard-core identitarianism precisely because he thought Benoist was refusing to face up to the obvious implications of that ideology in order to make it palatable to mainstream audiences. The question of concern here is whether Benoist succeeds in developing a political theory that is genuinely identitarian and coherent but does not lead to the murderous conclusions of radical identitarianism. If Benoist is successful, then perhaps there is more to be said for identitarianism than has so far been granted here. But if Benoist either effectively abandons identitarianism or ends up implying the same grim conclusions that Faye and other radicals do, then the case against identitarianism developed here remains strong.

4.2. Benoist on Universalism: We have seen that it is Faye's embrace of a monadic model of politics, one that sees history as a life-or-death struggle between windowless, ethnocentric subjectivities, that leads to his practically genocidal conclusions. It is, then, very much to Benoist's credit that, at least in some early 21st century work, he specifically rejects this almost solipsistic ontology. Consider, for example, the following excerpts from an interview that Benoist gave to the quarterly review *Éléments* 2005 and that in 2013 were presented in English translation in the American Alt-Right outlets *AlternativeRight* and *Radix Journal*:

> Nationalism led the Right to the metaphysics of subjectivity, this illness of the spirit, systematized by the Moderns. This estranged the Right from the notion of truth….

> It [the Right] sees *politics as the continuation of war by other means*, which totally reverses Clausewitz's aphorism…It doesn't understand that politics is a way to arbitrate between contradictory aspirations stemming from human nature, to arbitrate between the needs of civic coexistence and the necessities of self-interest.[17]

This passage reads almost as if it is a point-by-point rejection of Faye's political ontology. Nations are not each trapped in its own impenetrable, subjective worldview that legitimates any mistreatment of other nations, makes arbitration impossible, and war inevitable. If Benoist holds true to these principles, perhaps he succeeds in producing a moderate identitarianism that avoids Faye's horrific conclusions. To see if Benoist succeeds, we must look at his theory of ethnopluralism, which is what led Faye to break so dramatically with him.

In *Beyond Human Rights: Defending Freedoms*, published in French in 2004 and in English in 2011, Benoist starts off building on his promising rejection of a political ontology of subjectivity. He seems to be accepting the idea that truth is an objective standard that stands above Us and the Others and to which each side can appeal across the fault line that divides them. Benoist appeals to "the notion of objectivity" as follows:

> Everything else flows from this: the idea of the individual and of the freedom of the individual, the common good as it is distinguished from particular interests, justice as the search for equity (that is to say, the opposite of vengeance), the ethics of science and respect for empirical data, philosophical thought insofar as it is emancipated from belief and conserves the power of the thinker to think of the world and question truth by himself, the spirit of restraint and possibility of self-criticism, the capacity for dialogue, and even the notion of truth.[18]

So far, Benoist seems to be accepting the notion of an objective truth that makes dialogue among peoples possible. But things quickly take a bad turn. Immediately after embracing the notion of objectivity Benoist writes:

> Universalism is a corruption of objectivity. Whereas objectivity is achieved from particular things, universalism claims to define particularity from an abstract notion posed arbitrarily….Universalism does not consist in treating things objectively but from

an overarching abstraction from which a knowledge of the nature of things is supposed to flow.[19]

So Benoist rejects "universalism," which he opposes to objectivity, but accepts objectivity because it creates "the capacity for dialogue," fosters the idea of "the common good as…distinguished from particular interests," and enables politics as "a way to arbitrate between contradictory aspirations." It certainly sounds like objectivity involves universalism, at least in the sense that objectivity is some kind of commonality that embraces all the participants in a dialogue, all the particular interests that share a common good, all the parties in an arbitration. So Benoist has fallen into a contradiction.

To sum up, when Benoist opens *Beyond Human Rights* by opposing universalism to objectivity he has muffed at the start his opportunity to develop a moderate identitarianism that recognizes the need for a truth or standard that overarches many peoples, enables dialogue, and promotes peace.

4.3. Benoist on human rights. Why does Benoist make the move of attacking universalism all together? What does he imagine that will accomplish? It quickly turns out that the main universalism he wants to attack is human rights, and that human rights are a problem for him because anything connected with liberal democracy is a problem for him.

Benoist writes that "The ideology of human rights…is universalistic insofar as it wishes to impose itself everywhere without consideration for relationships, tradition, and contexts," and that by this way of thinking, "…Men are everywhere endowed with the same rights because, fundamentally, they are everywhere *the same*. In the final analysis, the ideology of human rights aims at subjecting all of humanity to a particular moral law rehabilitating the ideology of the Same."[20] Benoist then asks, whose particular moral law does human rights ideology seek to impose on all of humanity? His answer is: the West's. He writes:

> The affirmation of the universality of human rights, in this sense, does not represent anything else but the conviction that particular values, those of modern Western civilization, are superior values which must be imposed everywhere.[21]

According to Benoist, the West imposes its ideology of human rights on the world through two mechanisms. One is globalization, of which he writes:

> Associated with the expansion of markets, the discussion of human rights constitutes the ideological armour of globalization. It is above all an instrument of domination, and should be regarded as such.[22]

Further, Benoist tells us that when the West fails to dominate in a particular situation through the relatively soft touch of globalization, it falls back on outright war, which approach is also aided and abetted by the ideology of human rights:

> ….[J]ust as believers once thought they had the duty to convert, by all means, "infidels" and miscreants, the adherents of the credo of human rights consider themselves as legitimately invested with the mission of imposing these principles on the whole world.

> Theoretically founded on a principle of tolerance, the ideology of human rights thus reveals itself to be the bearer of the most extreme intolerance, of the most absolute rejection. The Declarations of Rights are not so much declarations of love as declarations of war.[23]

Benoist is arguing that looking for an ethical standard common among all peoples only facilitates war: as soon as one people thinks another can be judged against a supposedly objective universal standard it will conclude its neighbor is inferior and make war on them in good conscience. By this account, it is safer to accept the reality of a world of juxtaposed ethnocentric monads that leave each other alone, thus achieving an isolationist peace. This account of international relations is developed in Benoist's ideas of ethnopluralism and the right of peoples.

4.4 Ethnopluralism and the Right of Peoples. In the works by Benoist that I am so far familiar with [September, 2018. Mainly *Beyond Human Rights* and *The Problem of Democracy*] Benoist does not offer a direct definition of ethnopluralism. Here is one offered in a British Alt-Right publication, *Revolution Europea*:

> Ethnopluralism is… a theory that doesn't subscribe to the lies of the great 'melting pot' that the establishment have tried to fool us into believing in….

> Different ethnic groups, or tribes, or however you want to refer to them, simply cannot coexist peacefully. What is a source of joy for one culture is dishonourable to another, what is acceptable to one is morally repugnant to another – there are simply too many differences.

> But, these differences are to be respected as true diversity. All ethnic groups should be allowed to develop their own cultures in their own homelands, free from interference or negative influences from outside or in. This is the dignity with which we must build the world, a world where Europeans can be Europeans in their own homelands and Africans can be Africans in their homelands. We must say to the foreign ethnic groups in Europe, go home! Return to your homelands, develop them, enjoy them, live in peace and strive for prosperity. We will do the same…..[24]

Ethnopluralism is based on "the right of peoples," a concept developed by Benoist and others throughout the ENR literature. GRECE was one of the founding organizations of the ENR and the central theme of its 15th national colloquium in 1981was the right of peoples. A contributor to a principle ENR journal had argued that every culture is founded only "on the right to difference, the right to collective difference" and Benoist developed these principles into the "defense of the rights of peoples" as opposed to the rights of the "abstract man."[25] Thus the rights of people is the principle upon which the freedom of all groups from interference and thus peace is based.

One obvious problem with Benoist's right of peoples to difference is that he has devoted an entire book to flinging down and dancing upon the whole idea of universal human rights, but when asked why different peoples should not interfere with each other he invokes just such a right, the right to difference. It is unavailing to argue that the right to difference is rooted in the

individuality of each people while other human rights are based on an abstract human nature. If each distinct people has its own right to difference, then why is the generalization that all peoples have a right to difference invalid? Another obvious problem is that the right to difference gives us no clear criteria for determining which peoples are actually different from each other. Is all of Europe inhabited by a single people, or do the people of each nation constitute different people, or must we drop down to the sub-national, local, or even neighborhood level before we isolate a distinct people with its very own right to difference? Depending on how these ambiguous questions are answered a legitimate defense against interference can be transformed into a an act of aggression and vice versa.

4.6: The Failure of Identitarianism: To sum up, Benoist deserves credit for rejecting Faye's overtly militaristic geopolitics. But his isolationistic ethnopluralism offers no realistic prospect of peace. His denial of universalism, despite his arguments to the contrary, undermines the idea of an objective truth that stands above the ethnocentric world views of otherwise monadic peoples, makes communication and bargaining among them impossible, and sets the stage for interminable war. So in both its radical and moderate forms identitarianism is incompatible with objective truth, human rights, peace, and liberal democracy.

The question now is: how did this illiberal and bellicose ideology develop and achieve a toehold in the international climate of intellectual opinion and American political culture?

5. The Intellectual Origins of 21st Century Identitarianism and Illiberalism

5.1 Early 20th Century Philosophies of Science: The story of how we got to our present pass goes as follows. From the beginning of the 20th century through the early post-war years the philosophy of science developed by pragmatists and modern positivists stressed that scientific objectivity was possible, but also that human values and politics played a role in the process of scientific inquiry itself. Modern positivists such as Neurath recognized that the essential task of choosing hypotheses is always underdetermined by the facts, and that therefore human values come into play at this step of the scientific process. Deweyan pragmatists approached the problem rather differently. They held that since means and ends interact, scientific means of inquiry can be applied to the choice of ends. Therefore choices of what ends to pursue—value and political choices—could be objective, and so there was no sharp break between value-neutral scientific means and value-laden moral or political ends. So either by injecting values into the scientific process, or by applying the scientific process to the choice of values, the dominant philosophies of science of that time insisted that values—including political values very broadly understood—and science were inseparable. Therefore they accepted that inquiry into the political goals science should peruse were not only inevitable but legitimate and indispensable. Inquiry into the social and political goals science was to peruse was not seen as an illegitimate "politicization" of science that would undermine objectivity. There was no sharp distinction between scientific and political inquiry, both of which could be objective.

What then, were the political goals that pragmatists and modern positivists saw as the objectively defensible goals of science? It is a commonplace to say that science achieves progress, and philosophers of science of the mid-twentieth century did say this. But they meant much more

than that over time science piles up more and more discoveries and ideas. Science was progressive in that enabled people to achieve growth, to live broader, more complex, and less constrained lives.

Often this vision of science as politically progressive was expressed in explicitly left-wing rhetoric. Thus modern positivists such as Neurath and Frank were socialists while Mach was to their left and Dewey to their right but still clearly a progressive liberal.

But strictly speaking, the progressive political vision these philosophers saw as implicit in science need only lead to an activist account of collective social action coordinated by a more-or-less limited welfare state. This understanding by philosophical experts of the politics of science was osmotically absorbed by other disciplines, trickled down to intellectuals, and finally crystalized as the public idea that scientific and social progress went hand in hand. Few people were concerned that thinking in this way amounted to a dangerous politicization of science in a purely ideological sense.

Dewey's pragmatism involved denying sharp distinction between traditional binaries such as means and ends or science and values. He held that we simply grapple with experience using whatever tools—including values and ideas—we have at hand. When our efforts and tools allow us to achieve "an active reorganization of the given environment" then whole process is valid and the values and ideas we have employed as tools are true.

Dewey's instrumentalism allows him to explain what ends we should seek to achieve with the powerful means science puts at our disposal. Science can show us how to build a rocket. But, for Dewey, science can also tell us if we should shoot the rocket at London, that is if science is very broadly understood as a rational inquiry into how to remake our environment in a way that promotes human growth. Dewey of course understands that good science can be but to bad ends, but he would argue that in such cases the scientific method has been applied only to the development of technological means and not extended as it could be to consideration of ends. The further sciences is infused through out our thinking, the closer is the Dewyean ideal of "democracy as a way of life" approximated. In this way, Dewey does not allow an inch of sunlight to get between the ideas of science and democracy. Science left to its own devices produces a more democratic environment and when it seems not to, the solution is to extend science still further throughout society.

Other philosophies of science developed in the early 20th century came to political conclusions similar to Dewey's[26] Overall early 20th century philosophy whether in the form of American pragmatism or European positivism saw the political implications inherent in science as emancipatory and democratic.

5.2. Later 20th Century Philosophies of Science: But philosophers of science who came after the pragmatists, and eventually displaced them as the dominant experts on that subject, drove a wedge between science and values that had important consequences for the climate of intellectual opinion in the mid-twentieth century.   Russell, for example, was concerned that if it were admitted that human values are integral to the scientific search for truth, then "[t]he concept of 'truth' as something dependent upon facts largely outside human control" would be undermined, and a "necessary element of humility" and "check upon pride" would be removed

thus "increasing the danger of vast social disaster."[27] Therefore Russell wants to separate values from the scientific process. Science can tell us what means to use to achieve a given end, but it is our values that tell us what ends to pursue. So science is now not necessarily progressive in any social sense. It can be put to bad uses or good uses. Driving values out of the scientific process proper not only deprives science of its progressive credentials but raises the question of how to ensure that science is used to good ends. Russell provides a very problematic answer to this question in his 1931 book *The Scientific Outlook.*

Russell's strategy is "to depict the world which would result if scientific technique were to rule unchecked,"[28] that is, if science were used solely as a means to achieve active reorganization of our social environment. Used in this way science merely seeks power over the world in the absence of any value judgements about the ends to which that power should be put. This picture of a purely "scientific society" is meant to be so shocking as to send the reader screaming into the arms of the values Russell endorses in the final chapter of his book.

How shocking is Russell's vision of the purely scientific society? So shocking that Aldous Huxley used it as the basis for his seminal dystopian novel *Brave New World.*[29] Many of the elements of Huxley's nightmare of a totalitarian technocracy are drawn from *The Scientific Outlook*, but Russell's account includes a detail that is especially relevant for the present argument. Russell does not use the word but his scientific society is clearly racist. In that world, he tells us

> The posts giving most power will presumably be awarded to the ablest men as a result of intelligence tests. For entirely inferior work negros will be employed whenever possible….The society will not be one in which there is equality, although I doubt whether the inequalities will be hereditary except as between different races, i.e. white and coloured labor.[30]

It should not be thought that Russell is endorsing this horrific scenario, although he describes it with disturbing detachment. His point is to warn us of what can happen if science as a powerful means and without any values to direct it towards a positive end is allowed free reign. Science gives us power. Yet, "Power is not one of the ends of life, but merely a means to other ends and until men remember the ends that power should subserve, science will not do what it might to minister to the good life." Indeed, without a sense of those ends, science will create the "cruel tyranny"[31]

In this account of the relation between scientific means and social ends Russell is executing a risky rhetorical strategy. He objects to the Deweyan position that scientific methods can be used to determine ends and that when we do so the ends we achieve will be progressive. Russell wants to sharply distinguish between science, which shows us means, and values, which determine ends. But then what ends should we value?

Russell is very reluctant to answer this question. "I do not think one man has the right to legislate for another on this matter."[32] But he stresses that it is absolutely essential to choose *some* ends or other because failure to do so produces the cruel tyranny of the purely scientific society. So Russell had denied that science is a value-laden enterprise but then, to convince us that values are nonetheless vital, terrified us with the picture of the world a value-free science will produce,

so that we will hold on to some values for dear life. But this leaves us with no account of how to decide what values to hold, of what those values will turn out to be, and of how to incorporate them in the process of changing the world through science. In other words, science has been denuded of its inherently progressive character, without providing an alternative process for directing it. True, in the final chapter of his book Russell tells us what values he hopes will direct science: these are love and "respect for what is best in man." But again, how anyone comes to choose these or any other values is not explained nor is exactly how the scientific process is to be organized so as to not stray from them. Russell has given us a compelling vision of the anti-democratic potential of science but only vague remarks on how to avoid them

Positivist philosophers of science who left Europe and settled in America throughout the thirties and forties followed up on Russell's suggestions. They purged their epistemologies of any taint of pragmatism or any methodology suggesting that the scientific process was in any inherent sense value-laden or had political implications.[33]

The need for philosophers of science to professionalize themselves if they were to institutionalize their discipline in American research universities encouraged them to move away from what were seen as broad brush discussions of the role of science in modern society to a focus on technical analyses that only academic experts could follow.

Institutionalization and other forces had two impacts on the philosophy of science: the overall intellectual quality of work done in the field rose, and its practitioners increasingly shunned non-expert outlets for their work. Particularly exemplary of this retreat from the public sphere is an article published in a professional journal in the mid-fifties:

> Philosophers of science need be neither journalists of science nor acute men of common sense eternally restricted to contemplating the general meaning of such notions as those of mind, free will, cause and determinism. . . . The main purpose of this paper is to outline a partial program for . . . a hard core of studies in the philosophy of science.[34]

Thus expert philosophers of science first drove a wedge between science and democracy and then declared that the ethical question of how to put scientific means to democratic ends was outside their discipline, perhaps even beneath their notice. They thus left open a vital question that scholars of other disciplines, creative artists, and intellectuals, would seek to answer.

5.3. Mid 20th Century Philosophies of Science; Kuhn: Another step resulted when, after the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn in 1962, the arguments of that seminal work seeped into the thinking of intellectuals and had an impact on the climate of opinion. Kuhn's stress on the importance of scientific communities is particularly relevant for present purposes. Consider the following passage from *Structure*:

> The very existence of science depends upon vesting power to choose between paradigms in the members of a special kind of community….What are the essential characteristics of these communities?...The group that shares them may not, however, be drawn at random from society as a whole, but is rather the well-defined community of the scientist's professional compeers…Recognition of the existence of the existence of a uniquely competent professional group and acceptance of its role as the exclusive arbitrator of

professional achievements has further implications. The group's members, as individuals and by virtue of their shared training and experience, must be seen as sole possessors of the rules of the game or of some equivalent basis for unequivocal judgements. [35]

Here Kuhn is stressing, as the modern positivists generally did not, that science is necessarily a social activity, is impossible without a community of scientists, and that it is the judgements of that community that are what pass for truth. Or rather, since Kuhn is skeptical that there is "some one full, objective, true account of nature,"[36] the judgement of the community of scientists that determines what developments in their work provide an "increasingly detailed and refined understanding of nature."[37]

Kuhn says very little about the political implications of science. But some passages of *Structure* that are hardly more than obiter dicta hint that the scientific community he stresses is hardly democratic. He writes:

> …[O]nly the civilizations that descended from Hellenic Greece have possessed more than the most rudimentary science. The bulk of scientific knowledge is a product of Europe of the last four centuries. No other place and time has supported the very special communities from which scientific productivity comes. [38]

So scientific communities have their roots in a particular place and time: the modern West. And what is the relationship between these scientific communities and the rest of the society that supports them? Kuhn takes note of

> …[T]he unparalleled insulation of mature scientific communities from the demands of the laity and of everyday life….Just because he is working only for an audience of colleagues, an audience that shares his own values and beliefs, the scientist can take a single set of standards for granted…. T]he scientist need not choose problems because they urgently need solution…In this respect, also, the contrast between natural scientists and many social scientists proves instructive. The latter often tend, as the former almost never do, to defend their choice of a research problem—e.g. the effects of racial discrimination or the causes of the business cycle—chiefly in terms of the social importance of achieving a solution.[39]

That is, scientific communities not only share a set of values, beliefs, and standards that are supported by Western culture, but they are by design and necessarily insulated from everyday life and almost never choose research problems based on their social importance. It sounds like scientific communities are Eurocentric and politically aloof. And when Kuhn draws an analogy between scientific communities and a particular type of political community he makes a very suggestive choice:

> Inevitably those remarks will suggest that the member of a mature scientific community is, like the typical character of Orwell's *1984*, the victim of a history rewritten by the powers that be. Furthermore, that suggestion is not altogether inappropriate. There are losses as well as gains in scientific revolutions, and scientists tend to be peculiarly blind to the former. On the other hand, no explanation of progress through revolutions may stop at this point. To do so would be to imply that in the sciences might makes right, a

formulation which would again not be entirely wrong if it did not suppress the nature of the process and the authority by which the choice between paradigms is made.[40]

Of course, Kuhn is not saying here that scientific communities establish what counts as scientific knowledge by torturing dissenters. But it is telling that when he searches for a political community that is loosely analogous to scientific communities, the polity he picks is a totalitarian dystopia.

5.4. The Dystopian Vision of Scientific Society: In thinking about the political conceptions that had come into prominence by the mid-1960s it is very striking to note that two of the most influential philosophers of science of the century, Russell and Kuhn, ended up likening the practice of science to the most iconic dystopias in modern literature: *Brave New World* (Russell) and *1984* (Kuhn.) This is in very striking contrast to earlier philosophers of science who typically chose to compare scientific communities with liberal democracies. By the mid-sixties the conception of science that was trickling down to public intellectuals was that science was anti-democratic in the sense that it depended on vesting power in an elite, Eurocentric, politically-insulated community and that if this community were given free reign the result would be a soft, technocratic totalitarianism. This nightmarish vision received its fullest elaboration in Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* published in 1964.

6. **The Drive to Democratize the Philosophy of Science**

6.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory: The pushback against this nearly reactionary description of scientific communities and the societies they build took the form of a search for ways to make those communities more democratic. Among philosophers of science and other academics--especially feminist scholars whose numbers and presence were growing rapidly from the seventies through the nineties—this search went much further than calls for greater inclusion of women and minorities in science, or for science to address pressing social problems such as environmental degradation or issues in women's health. These scholars wanted to democratize, not merely the profession of science, but the epistemology of science.

How then did feminist philosophers and others pursue this more radical goal? They started off from Kuhn, who they believed, as Sandra Harding wrote, had "showed that all of natural science was located within social history."[41] Kuhn had emphasized that the social values and interests allowed to permeate the scientific process need to be, homogeneous throughout the scientific community. As we saw, Khun held that "Just because he [the scientist] is working only for an audience of colleagues, an audience that shares his own values and beliefs, the scientist can take a single set of standards for granted." But what if having a *single, shared* set of values and the problem?

Feminist philosophers, perhaps picking up on Kuhn's hints that scientific communities were Eurocentric and politically detached, wanted to know *whose* values, beliefs and standards are we talking about. Or, as Harding titled her important book published in 1991, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* In that work and elsewhere Harding argued, in effect, that a deep

democratization of science involves democratizing the social values and interests held by members of the community of science:

> Scientific communities that are designed (intentionally or not) to consist only of like-minded individuals lose exactly that economic, political, and cultural diversity that is necessary to enable those who count as peers to detect the dominant culture's values and interests. The main problem here is not that individuals in the comunity are androcentric, Eurocentric, or economically overpriviliged (though that certainly doesn't help), but, instead that the normalizing, routine conceptual practices of power are exactly those that are least likely to be detected by individuals who are trained not to question the social location and priorities of the institutions and conceptual schemes within which their research occurs…..In short, the most critical- "alien and possibly repugnant"-- perspectives, because they conflict with the values and interests that have been conceptualized as neutral are exactly what get dismissed a priori by objectivists. Thus the sciences are left complicitous with the projects of the most powerful groups in society.[42]

Democratizing science requires scientific communities to pay heed to people who are radically outside or marginal to those communities. Doing so is practicing "Standpoint Epistemologies," as Harding explains:

> Standpoint theories argue that if one wants to detect the values and interests that structure scientific institutions, practices, and conceptual schemes, it is useless to frame one's research questions or to pursue them only within the priorities of these institutions, practices, and conceptual schemes. One must start from *outside* them to gain a causal, critical view of them. One important way to do so is to start thought from marginal lives.

> While standpoint theory has been most thoroughly articulated in almost two decades of feminist writing similar arguments appear in the knowledge and policy claims of postcolonials, people of third-world descent in the first world, lesbians and gays, criticisms of the class system, etc.[43]

6.2. Marginal Lives:. Harding and other standpoint theorists argue that their goal is not to ask women or any other special interest groups what they want and then to make sure that science delivers what they ask for. For the values and interests that women or any other outsider group now actually holds may themselves be colored by the assumptions of the dominant culture and so not be able to provide a position outside those assumptions and capable of detecting them and their biases. Thus Harding writes:

> Moreover, to start from marginal lives is not necessarily to take one's problems in the terms in which they are expressed by marginalized people—and this is as true for researchers who come from such groups as for those who do not….[T]he dominant ideology restricts what everyone, including marginalized people, are permitted to see and shapes everyone's consciousness…To start from marginal lives is not to take as incorrigible—as irrefutable grounds for knowledge—what marginal people say or interpretations of their experiences.[44]

So starting a scientific inquiry from outsider or marginal lives does not necessarily involve the scientist being a member of such groups or uncritically accepting what such people say, think, or want. Harding herself asks "What does it mean to 'start thought from marginal lives'?" and then answers:

> "Marginal lives" are determinate, objective locations in the social structure. Such locations are not just accidently outside the center of power and prestige, but necessarily so. It is the material and symbolic existence of such oppositional margins that keep the center in place: the rich can only be rich if there are others who are economically exploited; masculinity can only be an ideal if it is continuously contrasted with a devalued other: femininity.[45]

If marginal lives are "determinate, objective locations in the social structure" then starting an inquiry from that standpoint requires, not necessarily being one of the people who occupy that location, but imaginatively or intellectually putting one's self in that location and then provisionally accepting, not necessarily how such people do in fact see the world, but how they *would or ought to see the world if they were aware of their objective location in the social structure*. It is at this point, after considerable effort to avoid sliding into mere "relativism" or "perspectivalsim" that standpoint theorists run into problems.

6.3. Marginal Lives and the Problem of Dogmatism: The problems begin when we ask what exactly the central injunction "to start from marginal lives" means. C. S. Peirce and the other pragmatists were right to say that that all thinking can start from only one point, "namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do 'set out' . . . laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed."[46] The call to start from marginal lives is no more useful than those to start from Cartesian doubt or from sense data. One of necessity starts where one is. So it is not possible to speak of *starting* from marginal lives. One has to start from the "immense mass of cognition" one already holds and then, if it seems to be a useful move in some sense, *get to* the standpoint of marginal lives. Harding in effect acknowledges that one cannot fundamentally start from marginal lives when she writes that "…a standpoint is an achievement, not an ascription."[47] If a standpoint is an achievement one must first get to it from some other position which is where one really started. Harding acknowledges this too when she writes: "One has to either live as a member of an oppressed group, or do the necessary work to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of what such life worlds are like, in order to think within that group's standpoint." [48] Harding has also noted that even members of oppressed groups may accept the values and assumptions of the oppressors, so even the oppressed will have to "do the necessary work" to achieve the standpoint of their group.

Therefore the standpoint of marginal lives is not a starting point but rather the end point of necessary work that achieves or results in "a rich and nuanced understanding" of those lives. What then is this understanding that standpoint theory enjoins us to start from? It turns out that this necessary work has been done or at least commenced by feminist scholars and intellectuals and that the rich and nuanced understanding of women's objective location in the social structure is the result of that work, that is, feminism. So starting from the standpoint of marginal lives, when it is women's lives we are speaking of, means simply starting from the standpoint of feminism. And indeed, although Harding is careful to avoid this formulation, some standpoint theorists write, not of the standpoint of marginal lives, but of "the feminist standpoint."[49]

Harding's analysis is subtle and her caution is admirable. But in the end her insistence on the privileged epistemological position of marginal lives comes down to an insistence on the privileged epistemological status of feminism. Thus feminist standpoint theory is in danger of turning feminism into a kind of dogma.

6.4. The Political Implications of Feminist Standpoint Theory

The political implications of Harding and standpoint theorists generally are influenced by Marxism. Lukacs, for example, who developed a theory of "the standpoint of the proletariat, was known to them and particularly influential. As a result, standpoint theory incorporates a certain vision of class struggle, or rather social struggle, into its thought.

The claim is marginal lives exist only because dominate lives have pushed them to the margin. Thus Harding tells us "the rich can only be rich if there are others who are economically exploited; masculinity can only be an ideal if it is continuously contrasted with a devalued other: femininity." Perhaps so, but just as there can be—whatever one thinks of them--ways of understanding poverty other than attributing it to economic exploitation, and ways of holding masculinity as "an" ideal (not "the" ideal) that do not necessarily devalue femininity, so to there are ways of understanding social development that do not focus on class struggle. And what might be a way of understanding social development that does not ground itself in class struggle? In a telling comment Harding identifies a particularly significant alternative to class-struggle understandings:

> Standpoint theories, in contrast to empiricist epistemologies, begin from the recognition of social inequality; their models of society are conflict models, *in contrast to the consensus model of liberal political philosophy* assumed by empiricists [italics added].[50]

Thus when standpoint theories privilege conflict models at the expense of consensus models they do so to the detriment of liberal political philosophy. Or put another way, standpoint theories involve privileging non-liberal political philosophy. Of course, the non-liberal political philosophies that Harding has in mind are Marxism, radical feminism, and other leftist schools of thought. But this move will turn out to have opened the door to unforeseen and unfortunate consequences for public ideas and the climate of opinion in the early twenty-first century.

6.5. The Inversion Thesis: it is important to realize that Feminist Standpoint Theorists are *not* arguing merely that women have or can have an epistemological standpoint *different* from that of the dominant society. Their point is that the feminist standpoint is privileged, or offers certain advantages that the dominant standpoint does not. Standpoint theorists claim that unless one examines the assumptions built into one standpoint—say that of men—by at least provisionally accepting the assumptions of another standpoint—say that of women--the assumptions of the politically dominant class will never be challenged or even detected. Harding further argues that the standpoints of marginal groups provide the most distance from the standpoints of dominant groups and thus are most useful in exposing latent biases. She writes:

> To start thought from marginal lives is scientifically and epistemologically preferable for all the reasons historians and social scientists value "stranger," "underclass," and "loser"

perspectives on history and social life. What we do enables and limits the kinds of things we can know about ourselves and the world, and if one starts from the activities of those who are necessarily disadvantaged in a particular kind of social order one can come to understand objectively existing features of it that are much harder to detect when one starts from the activities of those who benefit most.[51]

So then, stranger, underclass, or loser perspectives get a preference relative to mainstream perspectives. This upshot of standpoint theory has been termed the "inversion thesis": "the thesis that certain kinds of epistemic advantage accrue to those who are otherwise (socially, materially) disadvantaged, in this case by systemic gender as well as class differences."[52] This thesis will turn out to have unforeseen and fateful consequences.

6.6. "The Nazi Problem": Those consequences became clearer in the early twenty-first century. A 2011 article by Dan Hicks reviews feminist epistemologies and focuses on the work of Helen Longino who, like other standpoint theorists, argued that strong objectivity is not possible until outsider groups are given a chance to provide alternatives to the assumptions of the dominant community. He quotes Longino as writing: "a community ... must also take active steps to ensure that alternative points of view are developed enough to be a source of criticism and new perspectives. Not only must potentially dissenting voices not be discounted; they must be cultivated." Hicks does not use the term but here and elsewhere Longino is advancing a mild version of the inversion thesis. Hicks then makes a key point:

> ...Longino's account of objectivity requires the active cultivation of historically excluded and marginalized groups.
>
> However, this applies mutatis mutandis to views antithetical to those of feminists and other progressives and leftists: the exclusion of groups who hold misogynist and racist beliefs means certain feminist and anti-racist beliefs will be shared by all (or almost all) members of the community, and hence these beliefs cannot be subject to the critical scrutiny that objectivity requires; to prevent this, active steps must be taken to include members of these misogynist and racist groups. If Longino's account of objectivity requires the active cultivation of women and members of certain racial minorities in the scientific community, it also requires the active cultivation of misogynists and racists.[53]

Hicks calls this unwanted implication of standpoint theory "the Nazi problem" because "…the arguments for the active cultivation of historically marginalized groups apply quite clearly to the… Nazi scientist. Without him and like minded scientists, such background assumptions as the equality of sexes and races would acquire an invisibility that would render them unavailable for criticism. Hence, the community must take active steps to ensure that alternative, Nazi points of view are developed enough to be a source of criticism and new perspectives. Not only must potentially dissenting Nazi voices not be discounted; they must be cultivated.[54]

Hicks' formulation of his critique as "the Nazi problem" is unfortunate. As has been said, it is very seldom useful to compare anything to the Nazis. Yet upon examination the Hicks' problem turns out to be more than just a mere "gotcha" thrust. For what if the standpoint of the dominant group incorporates liberal-democratic values and assumptions? Harding implies this is the case

when she writes that "paternal liberal political theory is challenged by feminist epistemology."[55] Feminist epistemology starts from marginal standpoints and challenges dominant standpoints. Therefore if feminist epistemology challenges liberal political theory, that theory must be part of the dominant standpoint that needs challenging. Further, Harding admits that not only the reactionary values and interests incorporated into a dominant standpoint need challenge but so too do those that are democratic. She writes that "Standpoint epistemology expands the competence of scientific methods so that researchers can detect the values and interests shared over entire social communities or even generations of them --androcentrism, Eurocentrism, race or class values and interests, as well as prodemocratic ones."[56] Once it is admitted that the dominant standpoint does or can incorporate liberal-democratic values and assumptions, and then urged that marginalized standpoints are privileged in that they provide a necessary critical distance on the dominant standpoint, it would seem to follow that marginal illiberal and anti-democratic communities enjoy a certain epistemic advantage over liberal-democratic establishments. Hicks, therefore, despite his unfortunate formulation, has identified a significant problem in standpoint theory.

It is important to understand exactly what this problem is. The formulation that all thought starts out from a particular standpoint, that is, from a "state of mind…laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed" is uncontroversial in modern epistemologies, widely accepted by not only feminist standpoint theory but also pragmatism, and not especially problematic in the present context. Nor does the claim of feminist epistemology that these states of mind or standpoints are to a considerable degree formed by the social context in which a thinker is situated raise issues that are relevant to the issues discussed here. To a considerable extent, feminism can be thought of as saying no more than that the standpoint of women merits, but so far has not yet received, as much consideration as that of men or anyone else. "Feminist empiricism" is the tern generally used to denote this idea. Feminist empiricism can be extended to the realization that a scientific community cannot always start off from just one standpoint. Members of the community must start off from many different standpoints, which will act as checks on each other, with each providing critical distance on the rest so that the narrow biases or unwarranted assumptions of all can be detected. From this non-radical position nothing like the Nazi problem emerges: all standpoints can be starting points, including those of men and women, rich and poor, Nazi, Stalinist, liberal-democratic, etc. All that is being admitted here is the obvious fact that scientists and other thinkers who embrace very obnoxious values can and do make important contributions to inquiry and cannot be excluded a priori from the scientific community.

So far so good. The problems begin when it is asked whether some standpoints are somehow better than others, "epistemologically preferable" or "privileged" as the feminist theorists say. One is tempted to respond, no: all we can do is incorporate into the community as many standpoints as seems useful without making any assumptions about which will turn out to be so. But this answer is apparently unsatisfying, for what if there are an infinity of possible standpoints? How will we know which to incorporate and how many are enough? Feminist standpoint theory seems to offer an answer: start with marginal standpoints because they offer the most critical distance on status quo standpoints. This is the inversion thesis and it is with this plausible idea and not any other point that feminist standpoint theory opens a can of worms.

Don't practitioners of standpoint methodologies have to admit, not only that thinkers working from "alien and possibly repugnant" standpoints may deserve as much of a hearing as anyone else, but that it is precisely *because* some standpoints assume alien and repugnant values that they not only deserve a hearing like any other, but that they should be *privileged* over others?

As the inversion thesis began to spread through academia, and then was reshaped by intellectuals into public ideas suitable for dissemination to broader audiences, some thinkers—who were not necessarily familiar first hand or at all with the feminist literature—became aware of an opportunity. A new rhetorical strategy was now available to intellectual circles that had long been outside the mainstream of public discourse. If marginal or outsider standpoints enjoy an epistemic advantage, are to be privileged and cultivated, why not rush to the margins, declare oneself an outsider, enjoy that privilege, and get the hearing that one had for so long been denied? This was exactly the strategy that was deployed with considerable success by the American Alt-Right and other illiberal ideologies.

7. Illiberal Expropriation of the Inversion Thesis

7.1. Gramsci, Subalternity, and Metapolitics: This is not to say that the Alt-Rightists who twisted the inversion thesis to their own unlovely ends were familiar with and consciously applying the work of the feminist theorists who developed the original concept. Feminist standpoint theory comes up hardly at all in Alt-Right writings. But related schools of thought that also developed versions of the inversion thesis—especially post-modernism, multiculturalism, Critical Theory, and Gramscian Marxism—are mentioned often. One particularly striking example of Alt-Right appropriation of the inversion theory was published in 2013 by *Counter-Currents Publishing*, one of the most philosophically-oriented and radical outlets of the movement. In the article "'We Are the Real Subalterns,'" Mark Dyal discussed his conversations with members of the Italian neofacist organization CasaPound:

> "We are the real subalterns," I was once told by an activist at CasaPound….
>
> A subaltern is someone who exists outside the normalized representational structures of society. ..Subalternity is a chosen political identity for these Romans.
>
> The lessons CasaPound offers the North American New Right are clear: become revolutionary. Become something that cannot be codified by the liberal state. Become something so active, so affirmative, and so different, that liberal sensibility is deterritorialized, never to capture our minds and bodies again. Become not only subaltern but also an enemy of the state.[57]

The term "subaltern" has two important references. One is to Subaltern Studies, a school of socio-political analysis that was usually applied to Indian and Asian history and critiqued modern capitalist development from the point of view of marginal classes such as the peasantry, the lower castes, the extremely poor, rebel movements, and others.

The original source of the term is Gramsci. "Subaltern" was the code word he substituted for "proletarian" in his prison writings in order to disguise the Marxist nature of his work from his guards. In a vein similar to that of Lukacs, Gramsci was arguing that the standpoint of the

proletariat, being outside of the dominant standpoint of the bourgeois thus had a critical distance on the hegemonic culture and values of capitalist society. Or rather, Gramsci argued that the proletariat *could* develop such a counter-hegemonic standpoint if it took advantage of its marginal status and developed its own "organic intellectuals" who would construct a revolutionary or counter-hegemonic cultural outlook to challenge the dominance of the bourgeois. Gramsci believed that the revolutionary potential inherent in the economically exploited position of the subalterns would never come to fruition unless a set of organic intellectuals arose within that class and developed a revolutionary cultural consciousness that truly reflected their class position. Just as the Harding and other theorists held that a feminist standpoint was an achievement, not an ascription, Gramsci believed that a counter-hegemonic revolutionary culture was not ready at hand in whatever actual proletarians happened to think or feel, but had to be thought through and built up by organic proletarian intellectuals. So Gramscian Marxism, like feminist standpoint theory, deploys the inversion thesis: a marginal or subaltern point of view, precisely because it is outside the dominant of hegemonic point of view is given a privileged epistemological status, that is, makes possible an understanding of the world that is hidden from status quo groups who cannot see their own biases and distortions.

But while feminist standpoint theory is rarely mentioned in Alt-Right and other illiberal circles, Gramsci is invoked often. Thus Roman Bernard, a French New Right author who worked as a fund raiser and writer for Richard Spenser's Alt-Right web magazine, *Radix Journal*, correctly notes that "In the New Right in continental Europe and the Alternative Right in the Anglosphere, there has been much talk on 'right-wing Gramscism,' i.e. the need to first wage the metapolitical battle before winning the political war"[58] "Metapolitics" is a key term for both the European New Right and the American Alt-Right. It refers to the strategy of developing a set of ideas among an intellectual elite that are slowly disseminated throughout the political culture and pave the way for more concrete political victories in the future. As I documented in my earlier book, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, representatives of that movement frequently declare that their main political strategy is that of metapolitics, that is changing political culture by dissemination of new ideas.

But, since Alt-Right metapolitics are rooted in Gramsci's articulation of the inversion thesis, metapolitics involves much more than simply communicating new ideas. The trick is to develop an entire counter-hegemonic culture that is an effective revolutionary tool because it authentically reflects the standpoint of the subalterns.

7.2.: How Do you Prove You Are Marginal?: Any intellectual current that makes use of the inversion thesis is basing its validity on its marginal status and therefore has to answer the question: how do you know you are marginal? As we have seen the inversion thesis admits that the thinking or culture of any given, actual, marginal group may in fact not have freed itself from the intellectual hegemony of the dominant group. Therefore a thinker or analyst cannot demonstrate marginality just by noting that most workers, or women, or whomever agree with him or her. Of course, Marxists and feminists could point to a good deal of scholarly work that documented the marginal status of the proletariat and women. But there are many variations on these schools of thought, some of which deny that others are the genuine article. And anyone can pick up a particular label. Therefore, any school of thought that invokes the inversion thesis has to provide some objective standard beside its practitioners' mere say so to document that its thinking really does come from the margins.

Feminist standpoint theorists have no good answer to this question, which turns out to be a strength for, as we shall see, the most obvious solutions are not pretty. Lukacs argues that the determination of which ideas truly stem from the standpoint of the proletariat is accomplished by "The Vanguard Party of the Proletariat."[59] At one point in his intellectual development Gramsci thought that factory workers councils could perform this task. This Leninist answer had well-known disastrous results and so is no longer a possible response How, then, do the illiberal ideologues of the early twenty-first century manage to certify their marginal status and thus make a claim to epistemological privilege under the inversion thesis?

7.3. Immoderation as a Virtue: Their answer is quite simple. Here are some expressions of it found in various Alt-Right outlets:

> ►If you feel angry and disenfranchised, good! You rage will be instrument of our salvation…. There are millions of Whites who are just as fed up and tired of a country where we, the architects of this nation, are marginalized and discounted….We need merely to reawaken, because when we do, we will take the world by storm.[60]

> ► Rejectionism is…suitable for what Antonio Gramsci called a war of position, in which the ruling elite has basic popular legitimacy and we are far removed from any positions of power that would allow us to carry on an open struggle against it. In such circumstances…**we should lead with a negative critique of the ruling elite and try to push most of our people into a state of radical disillusionment**.

> Leading with negative attacks on the elite (i.e. before trying to convert our people to positive alternatives) widens the impact of our efforts, as more people can be converted to these positions….

> We want our people to associate all resistance against the current system with our movement, and for the elite to believe this and react in paranoid ways to all public discontent, so that their tame cuckservatives and Pepsi Rebels™ can no longer hope to co-opt such sentiment.[61]

> ►Non-aggression is the triumph of weakness….

> We no longer accept the left's authority to decide who is and isn't a good person…. Want to win? Stop caring what they call you and start opposing them at every turn….

> The alt-right is a safe space for crimethink. I recognize certain groups are double plus ungood, but as someone who's already at least ungood plus, I don't see any value in signaling that they're too extreme and hateful for me. The purpose of purges is to maintain respectability…. To be a safe space for crimethink, it means no purges…. The fact is, speaking within the left's moral framework has failed, so we're going to hang out down here in the pits with the rabble where we can speak freely. [62]

►…we must move away from the judgementalism of the "political spectrum" towards a concept based purely on the facts of hegemony and marginalization, namely that of *center* and *periphery*…

Let us imagine the "political terrain" as a fertile and well-cultivated expanse of land… In the centre of the lands within the wall stands a ruling **Citadel**; on these inner lands from the Citadel to the wall subsist the teeming masses of the **People**; and on the marginal outlands beyond the wall there are various tribes of **Barbarians….**

...given that a frontal attack through the voting system is still not possible in most of the West *the model for political action should be the Barbarian raid*: cheap, easy, negative attacks, which spread doubt about the Citadel and Tame Barbarians in the popular mind while winning notoriety for us…*the main thing is to hammer the anti-Citadel message into the People's minds, a task in which repetition trumps finesse.*[63]

►In a society that considers all genuine *ideas* to be subversive…the main goal must be to awaken people's consciences, raising traumatising problems and sending ideological electroshocks: *shocking ideas*….Some people may regard many of my suggestions as *ideologically delinquent* in the context of the ruling ideology and pseudo-virginal chorus of the self-righteous. Well, they are.[64]

To summarize, the strategy developed by the Alt-Right and other illiberal ideological movements for establishing their marginal status in order to lay claim to epistemic privilege is to loudly declare their political adversaries are an oppressive status quo and then hurl abuse at them in the most offensive terms possible. The mainstream or status quo then responds with shock and rejection, thus pushing the illiberals to the margin, which is exactly where they think they need to be in order to claim epistemological privilege.

This strategy turned out to be more effective than one might think. Illiberal abuse of the inversion thesis validated their position *in their own eyes*, and indeed set up a self-reinforcing epistemic feedback loop. Illiberals reasoned to themselves: the more shocking our ideas are, the more disgust and rejection they elicit from the mainstream, the more marginal our position must be, the greater our epistemic advantage must be, and therefore the more true what we have to say is. So even if the illiberal abuse of the inversion thesis didn't win them many converts from the left, it steeled the spine of far-rightists and told them that the more disgust they provoked, the more correct they must be. In short, the illiberal right came to believe that even if it accepted the main premises of its adversaries' thought—indeed, precisely *because* it accepted its adversaries' premises—and offended everyone it communicated with, it must be right. The premise that the illiberals felt they were now justified in using can be summed up as follows: immoderation is a virtue.

7.4. Resources for Justifying Immoderation: Obviously this problematic conclusion does not necessarily follow from the iterations of the inversion thesis that were developed by feminist standpoint theorists. But other versions of left-oriented oppositional thought were less cautious

and offered the illiberal celebration of immoderation a certain degree of colourability. The Alt-Rightists who declare "we're going to hang out down here in the pits with the rabble" sound rather like Marcuse who saw considerable revolutionary potential in groups related to the *Lumpenproletariat* and in "a spread not only of discontent and mental sickness, but also of inefficiency, resistance to work, refusal to perform, negligence, indifference…."[65] Postmodern thinkers generally put great store in the inversion theory and can be incautious in doing so. Seyla Benhabib correctly notes that "If there is one commitment which unites postmodernists from Foucault to Derrida to Lyotard it is this critique of western rationality as seen from the perspective of the margins, from the standpoint of what and whom it excludes, suppresses, delegitimizes, renders mad, imbecilic, or childish."[66] If western rationality—and the liberal democratic world it helped create—can be usefully critiqued from the standpoints of the mad, the imbecilic, or the childish, why shouldn't critiques from standpoint of the barbarians, the rabble, and the delinquents also have some legitimacy? Why can't the *right-wing* margins—the perspectives of the trolls and shitlords—also provide a standpoint for effective criticism? Later we will consider whether postmodernism can answer these questions. The point here is that postmodern deployment of the inversion thesis *raised these questions without seeing the bad use to which they could be put*. Very presciently, Benhabib found

> …[B]affling…the lightheartedness with which postmodernists simply assume or even posit those hyper-universalist, and superliberal values of diversity, heterogeneity, eccentricity and otherness. In doing so they rely on the very norms of the autonomy of subjects and the rationality of democratic procedures which otherwise they seem to so blithely dismiss….as sons of the French revolution they have enjoyed the privileges of the modern to the point of growing blasé vis a vis them.[67]

In this way, Marcusean sympathy for the moral viewpoint of the *Lunpenproletariat* and postmodern appreciation for the mad, imbecilic and childish, combined with an insufficient appreciation for the liberal-democratic heritage, gave the denizens of the right-wing margins an excuse to legitimate their own form of immoderation.

7.5: "Politics is War": There was another key premise that the immoderate right now felt it had justified. Above it was mentioned that in their accounts of the standpoint of the proletariat Lukacs and Gramsci had designated political organizations—the Leninist party and the workers' councils—as the arbitrators of which ideas truly embody the revolutionary consciousness of that class. Of course, they recognized that these organizations could lose touch with the proletarian base and degenerate into cadres of professional ideologues or trade unionists. How, then, was one to know when these organizations really represented the standpoint of the proletariat and when they did not? Lukacs answers this question as follows:

> But does not the danger then exist that these 'professional revolutionaries' will divorce themselves from their actual class environment and, by thus separating themselves, degenerate into a sect?... This…misses the core of Lenin's concept of party organization simply because…*Lenin's concept of party organization presupposes the fact - the actuality - of the revolution.*[68]

That is, the party can't be separate from the consciousness of the proletariat because the party is presupposed to be an instrument of revolutionary class struggle, that is, actually engaged in revolution. If the party is not an instrument of actual revolution, then, it has left the validating standpoint of the proletariat and is not a party at all. The party is correct then when it is an instrument of revolution.

Thus when the party is actively engaged in a revolution it embodies subaltern consciousness, otherwise it does not. This response only pushes the question off a step since it gives no clear criterion for determining when the party is truly revolutionary and when it is not. But it makes revolutionary rhetoric and subversive activity the sine qua non of authentic subaltern status and therefore of epistemological validity. Marxist versions of standpoint theory in effect weaponize Deweyan instrumentalism: ideas are true not when they are useful tools in remaking the environment, but when they are effective weapons in an attack on hegemonic forces.

Since there is no independent standard for determining which ideas are effective weapons in a revolutionary attack this test cannot serve as a decisive measure of political activity, but it does have clear implications for political rhetoric. We should expect that any marginal group wanting to validate its status as such will loudly proclaim that it is at war with the status quo. More importantly, a group that wants to invoke the inversion thesis to *convince itself* of the rightness of its ideas will *think of itself*, and present itself to others, as being at war with the status quo, and at war with liberal democracy if such is the nature of the status quo. In short, movements at the right-wing margins of a liberal democracy can justify their thinking—at least to themselves—if they accept the premise that *politics is war*. And this maxim is, in fact, often invoked, not only by the Alt-Right and similar illiberal movements, but also by less radical rightists, including the Alt-Lite, *Breitbart, Fox News*, advocates of Donald Trump, and right-wing populists generally.

7.6. GamerGate and the Crystalization of Illiberal Rhetorical Strategies: One of the purest examples of rightist rhetoric based on these two principles derived from the inversion thesis is the book by Vox Day *SJWs Always Lie: Taking Down the Thought Police.* Vox Day is a science fiction writer and reviewer of video games. He was a central figure in the #GamerGate affair, which was a heated controversy about sexism in the communities of science fiction followers and the video game industry. Day loudly defended himself and others so charged, which lead the *Wall Street Journal* to designate him "the most despised man in science fiction," a title proudly displayed on the cover of his book. Milo Yiannopoulus, an Alt-Right provocateur who disseminated that school of thought on the popular right-wing outlet *Breitbart News*, provided a forward to Day's book. One might think that such a dust up at the margins of American popular culture would have no relevance to an account of recent intellectual history. But in fact #GamerGate is frequently considered to be one of the formative events in the development of the American Alt-Right. According to one analyst of the Alt-Right "Gamergate showed that an army of anonymous activists and trolls can have a substantial and lasting mipact on real-world organizations…The method of persistent, coordinated trolling has since been embraced by the Alt-Right and helped it break into the mainstream discussion."[69] And Andrew Anglin, editor of perhaps the most radical and obnoxious Alt-Right outlets, *the Daily Stormer*, believes "The Gamergate provided a direct entry-point to what is now called the Alt-Right, as it was made-up of young White men who realized they were being disenfranchised by feminism and political

correctness when aggressive SJWs began invading their space and making demands of them…"[70]   "SJW," which stands for "social justice warrior," is the label #GamerGaters pinned on their critics. Day's book provides a detailed account of the rhetorical tactics he and other proto Alt-Rightists deployed against their detested adversaries and so exemplifies the thought patterns and style of argumentation that soon spread through the American illiberal right generally.

Day explains his central point as follows:

> The basic idea is that if you can make the other person feel small or angry, you are winning at SJW rhetoric….[I]t doesn't matter what you actually say, and in fact, resorting to straight-up name-calling, the more ridiculous the better, is often the fastest and most efficient way to get through the conversational process with an SJW….You know your rhetoric is effective when they block you online, or in person if their eyes widen with shock and their jaw drops. You will know you have mastered the art of rhetoric if you can make an SJW retreat in tears or cause a room full of people to gasp in disbelief before bursting out laughing at the SJW.[71]

Day's basic idea turns out to be the first premise the illiberal right pulled out of the inversion thesis: immoderation is a virtue. "Straight-up name-calling, the more ridiculous the better," is recommended as likely the best way to converse. What better way to immediately demonstrate that you are have been marginalized and so can claim epistemological privilege than if you "cause a room full of people to gasp in disbelief" at what you have just said?

But if you persistently marginalize yourself by offending everyone won't you end up simply ostracized? Yes, but not to worry for Day advises:

> *Accept your fate.*
>
> It is psychologically much easier to survive an SJW attack if you accept early on in the process that you are probably going to lose your job or be purged from your church, your social group, or your professional organization….
>
> This doesn't mean that you should despair or give up. Quite the contrary! It's only that you will be able to defend yourself much more effectively if you are not overly worried about the outcome. Ideally, you want to maintain the stoic state known as "Zero Fucks Given," or to put it in less vulgar terms, a state of total indifference as to the consequences.[72]

This passage marks an extraordinary turn in the conception of common sense on offer in American political culture. From one end of the political spectrum the progressive Dewey famously counseled his readers to "…follow the pragmatic rule and in order to discover the meaning of the idea ask for its consequences."[73] At the other end, the central premise of the conservative Richard Weaver was *Ideas Have Consequences* and are to be judged by those

consequences. But the rhetorical strategy of Alt-Rightism calls for "total indifference as to the consequences" of what one says. If this principle is taken seriously how can I judge if what I am saying has any meaning at all?[74] Won't I, in the end, simply drift into meaninglessness?

But then, meaning turns out to be unimportant in the Alt-Rightist form of expression. Day tells us when dealing with SJWs

> *Don't try to reason with them.*
>
> …there is no way you are going to be able to reason your way out of the situation. Most people who come under SJW attack have the causality backwards. They think the attack is taking place due to whatever it is that they did or said. That's not the case. The attack is taking place because of who you are and what you represent to the SJWs: a threat to their Narrative.
>
> …The most important thing to accept here is the complete impossibility of compromise or even meaningful communication with your attackers. SJWs do not engage in rational debate because they are not rational and they do not engage in honest discourse because they do not believe in objective truth.[75]

"Meaningful communication" with SJWs is a "complete impossibility." They are not interlocutors at all but "attackers." And why are they attacking you? Not because of what you said but "because of who you are." They are locked in their own "Narrative," which you threaten precisely because you are who you are.

This passage represents a retreat into a radically monadic identitarianism with a vengeance. Simply because the others are who they are, they have their own Narrative. I claim to base my own thought on "objective truth" but doubtless from the point of the others what my group has is merely its own Narrative. There is no hope of settling whose claim to objective truth is correct because no communication is possible. Therefore we have two groups each locked in their own windowless Narratives. With the possibility of rational debate and compromise foreclosed the groups can interact in one way only: attack. In this way Day ends up with the premise that politics is war, or perhaps more exactly politics is impossible and war is inevitable.

Day does not use the term identitarianism but his account of discourse leads him to the same general vision that Faye's version of that ideology paints. Groups locked in windowless monads are fated to attack each other. To his credit, Day does not draw the dismal conclusions that Faye does. Faye's groups are racially defined peoples; Day's groups are ideologically based. Faye concludes that, more likely than not, monadic peoples will engage in war to extermination with each other. Day's ideological groups only hurl abuse and seek to drive each other to tears or unemployment.

7.7. Illiberalism Lite: The illiberal right's bad use of the inversion thesis comes in a spectrum of intensities. Radical identitarianism represents the genocidal hard core. Ethnopluralism offers an isolationistic version. Alt-Right and Alt-Lite outlets range themselves between these two points. Day retains the irrationalist epistemology, but drops the explicit racialism and presents a world

not of endless war but constant verbal abuse. Fox News commentators and similar pundits do not articulate the most untelegenic implications of identitarianism and stick to dishing out shrill polemics.

Two notable practitioners of such lite illiberal rhetoric are Ann Coulter and David Horowitz. In a 2004 book tellingly entitled *How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must)* Coulter offers a set of simple rules on how to argue with a liberal that include her own formulation of the principle that immoderation is a virtue:

> …[Y]ou must outrage the enemy. If the liberal you're arguing with doesn't become speechless with sputtering, impotent rage, you're not doing it right…If you are not being called outrageous by liberals you're not being outrageous enough. Start with the maximum assertion about liberals and then push the envelope, because, as we know, their evil is incalculable….Nothing too extreme can be said about liberals, because it's all true.[76]

Here the whole point is to be as outrageous, extreme, outside the envelope, in short, as marginal, as possible.

Horowitz emphasizes the other premise illiberals derive from their misuse of the inversion thesis, ie: that politics is war. Horowitz insists on this point in a 1999 handbook distributed to Republican candidates *The Art of Political War: How Republicans Can Fight to Win* that was incorporated it its entirety in his 2014 book *Take No Prisoners: The Battle Plan for Defeating the Left.* In both publications he presents "The Six Principles of Political Warfare," the first two of which are:

1. Politics is war conducted by other means
2. Politics is a war of position [77]

Horowitz's first principle is a clear statement of the politics-is-war premise. His second principle suggests that he derives his conception of political warfare from Gramscian political theory. For Gramsci frequently analogized his revolutionary strategy of developing a subaltern culture to challenge the hegemony of bourgeois culture to a war of position in which entrenched enemy camps besiege each other over the long term. Horowitz advises Republicans to recast themselves as "underdogs" and make their war against the dominant left from that strategic position.[78]

Of course Coulter and Horowitz do not invoke the open racialism, contempt for human rights, and irrationalism of Faye, Benoist, Day and other illiberals and Alt-Rightists. Such fare cannot be offered to major political parties and mainstream publishers. But illiberalism lite passes as suitable for mass dissemination.

7.8. The Utility of Illiberal Rhetoric: Thus by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, various schools of far-right thought had seized on the articulations of the inversion thesis by Gramsci, Marcuse, the postmodernists, and other left-oriented thinkers, distorted them and indeed weaponized them to justify their extreme illiberalism. Lite versions of this ideology trickled down from these elite groups to broader audiences.

Of course, few sensible people—certainly no feminists, Marxists, or progressives—were now persuaded that the Alt-Right, neo-fascists, and other reactionaries deserved a new hearing. The illiberal right expropriated the inversion thesis to justify their anti-democratic ideologies *to themselves*. This was no small benefit. Throughout the late twentieth century extreme rightists had been subject to well-deserved disgust and ridicule. All but the hardiest souls found this distain too much to bear and so the appeal of the movement, even to anyone with latent extremist propensities, was limited. Such people had to express at least perfunctory support for democratic institutions, political egalitarianism, and human rights and not seem to venture out to the rightist fringe too obviously.

When the illiberal extremists distorted the inversion thesis to their unlovely purposes, they developed what amounted to a highly effective stigma-management strategy. If one moves far enough to the margin, sets up a feedback loop that transforms any and all criticism into confirmation, pays heed only to others on the margin, one has retreated into a windowless ideological monad. And being that it is the right-wing margin we are discussing this monadic ideology will of course take on a racialist cast. In his way, the small extremist remnant was given heart to endure and redouble its efforts and greater appeal to fence sitters. The extreme right now had new rhetorical strategies to deploy, new vocabulary to express itself with, new talking points to raise, and thus more resources of protective coloration and self-justification.

All this is to say that the misuse of the inversion thesis was effective, not at converting millions of citizens to decamp from the mainstream political spectrum and settle down on the extremist right. Rather, what this intellectual maneuver facilitated was the crystallization of a more resourceful, less defensive, more radical, better organized, and somewhat larger elite group of anti-democratic rightist intellectuals than post-war America had ever seen. The formation of such an elite group is crucial for any political ideology that seeks to penetrate a political culture. Such a group formulates the rich mixture of ideas and arguments that J.S. Mill called "intellectual pemmican" that, in increasingly diluted versions, can be fed to publics further and further removed from the elite. In this way, long brewing developments in specialized literatures, concepts familiar at first only to academic audiences, debates among intellectual networks of only a few thousand people, can finally have an impact on mass media, broad publics, and even elected officials.

8. Can Identity Politics Have Any Good Use?

8.1. Identity Politics in *The Possessed:* So far we have seen that interest-cum-identity politics is not about identity at all, and that no version of identitarianism—whether radical, moderate, Alt-Right, Alt-Lite or otherwise—serves any positive purpose. Is it possible, then, for any sense of collective identity to function as a useful corrective to propensities toward fragmentation and the resulting collective action problems inherent in pluralistic liberal democracies? What would such a positive form of identity politics look like?

It is notable that Faye's identitarianism is in some ways similar to the political theory hinted at by one of the characters in *The Possessed* by Dostoyevsky. In what is perhaps the greatest of all political novels, the author has Shatov, a former serf who briefly joins a nihilistic revolutionary cell and then in horror tries to flee from it, deliver the following words:

> ...[N]ot a single nation has ever been founded on principles of science or reason… Nations are built up and moved by another force which sways and dominates them…The object of every national movement, in every people and at every period of its existence is only the seeking for its god, who must be its own god, and the faith in Him as the only true one. God is the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end.…

> …The people is the body of God. Every people is only a people so long as it has its own god and excludes all other gods on earth irreconcilably; so long as it believes that by its god it will conquer and drive out of the world all other gods…If a great people does not believe that the truth is only to be found in itself alone (in itself alone and in it exclusively); if it does not believe that it alone is fit and destined to raise up and save all the rest by its truth, it would at once sink into being ethnographical material, and not a great people. A really great people can never accept a secondary part in the history of Humanity, nor even one of the first, but will have the first part. A nation which loses this belief ceases to be a nation. But there is only one truth, and therefore only a single one out of the nations can have the true God, even though other nations may have great gods of their own.[79]

Shatov speaks in theological terms, not in the vocabulary of contemporary political theory used by Faye and other illiberal thinkers. Nonetheless, up to a point, the similarities of their thought are striking. Dostoyevsky's character says that the members of a nation share, not a pervasive conception of the world, but a "god who is the synthetic personality of the whole people." Faye holds that a nation's history is not a field of "intellectually objective principles" and similarly Shatov claims that nations are not "founded on principles of science or reason." Faye argues that every nation or people must have an invincible conviction of its ethnocentric superiority while Shatov says that every nation must have "its own god" that "excludes all other gods on earth irreconcilably" and believe "that by its god it will conquer and drive out of the world all other gods."

That is, Shatov and Faye both advance a vision of politics in which the basic unit is peoples or nations each encased in its own seemingly windowless monad of the subjective conviction of its right to dominate. But there are crucial differences.

First of all, in Faye, the conceptions of the world that distinguish each monadic people are rooted in their biologically-defined ethnicity. Shatov says nothing of biology and disparages ethnicity. For him the synthetic personality of a people is religious; it is the god they believe in. At some points, Shatov implies that a people's religion or god has nothing to do with ethnicity. He says that if a people no longer believes in its god "it would at once sink into being ethnographical material, and not a great people." Ethnicity then, in Dostoyevsky's novel, far from being the indispensable foundation of national identity, is merely the residue left behind when a nation

loses its identity. Significantly, Shatov affirms that "an atheist at once ceases to be a Russian" and that "a man who was not orthodox could not be Russian." These statements imply that religious belief is at least an indispensable part of what defines ethnicity, rather than ethnicity being the ground of a conception of the world. For Shatov, identity is based on religion, not biology.

Further, it is important to note that Shatov uses the words "religion" and "god" quite broadly, such that they may, but do not necessarily, refer to anything supernatural. He remarks that

> The Jews lived only to await the coming of the true God and left the world the true God. The Greeks deified nature and bequeathed the world their religion, that is, philosophy and art. Rome deified the people in the State, and bequeathed the idea of the State to the nations. France throughout her long history was only the incarnation and development of the Roman god…Roman Catholicism.[80]

Thus Judaism and Roman Catholicism count as religions in this context and have their own gods, but philosophy and art were the religion of the Greeks, and the State was that of Rome. Therefore Shatov's brand of identitarianism, though he often expresses it in theological terms, can be interpreted broadly such that what are usually considered non-religious ideas and values can be the god that is the unifying force that fuses together "the body of the people."

Second, Dostoyevsky's character acknowledges there is "the true God" that is quite different from the "great gods" of individual nations. The suggestion is that history is the story of the peoples of the world learning to put aside their great but false national gods and all coming to accept "the true God." So in Dostoyevsky, as in Leibniz, there is a grand clock master—God—who eventually harmonizes the worldviews of the monadic peoples and establishes a peace among them. In *The Possessed,* after Shatov has sketched out his vision, his interlocutor asks him a pointed question that leads to a crucial exchange:

> "I only wanted to know, do you believe in God, yourself?"

> "I believe in Russia.... I believe in her orthodoxy.... I believe in the body of Christ.... I believe that the new advent will take place in Russia.... I believe..." Shatov muttered frantically.

> "And in God? In God?"

> "I…I will believe in God."[81]

The point seems to be that while Shatov believes in the god of Russia, he is still struggling to accept the true God who transcends all national gods and in whom the hope for world peace rests. Without this final belief in something universal Shatov's thought, as he himself admits, amounts to hardly more than "the rotten old commonplaces that have been ground out in all the Slavophil mills in Moscow."[82] If Shatov were to despair and abandon his struggle to accept the true God, he would end up either with the latest grind from Moscow's Slavophile mills, that is,

Alexander Dugin's Eurasianism, or with Faye's identitarianism. (Interestingly Faye's call for a transcontinental superpower he calls "Eurosiberia" sounds very much like Dugin's Eurasianism.)

Without necessarily recommending the brand of identity politics suggested by Shatov, we can see it has certain merits that identitarianism does not. First, a tolerable identity politics must reject rooting identity entirely in biologically-defined ethnicity. Collective identity must have at least a strong ideational element derived from sources such as religion, philosophy, culture, or overall social and historical situation of a given group. Such an ideational basis for collective identity might be thought of as a standpoint.

8.2 Egalitarian Standpoint Theory: Identity politics of this type would conceive of collective identity as being the shared bundle of already-formed cognition largely shaped by the social situation of the community and that serve as the epistemic starting point of collective deliberation. Feminist epistemologists approached this position but an acceptable iteration of identity politics would have to differ from their standpoint theory is some crucial ways.

Feminist standpoint theory took a bad turn when it invoked the inversion thesis to identify marginal standpoints as privileged standpoints, which unintentionally facilitated extremism and illiberalism. The inversion thesis must be abandoned as must *any* effort to privilege a priori some standpoints over others. *In principle* all standpoints must be regarded as *potentially* equally legitimate points of departure. What is needed is not feminist standpoint theory but egalitarian standpoint theory.

To some extent egalitarian standpoint theory simply makes a virtue of necessity since no group can start its deliberations from anywhere other than where it actually is and different groups are situated in different standpoints. More importantly, egalitarian standpoint theory removes the incentive of groups to make a claim to privileged standpoints and enforce that claim by hook or by crook.

Egalitarian standpoint theory acknowledges that every community has a set of assumptions and values already built into its standpoint that can be hard to detect without the critical distance on that standpoint possible from another standpoint. But instead of the overly simple model of a single dominant standpoint open to critique only from marginal standpoints, an egalitarian epistemology sees all standpoints *potentially capable* of providing critical distance on each other. Which standpoints provide the most useful critical distance on which others is an empirical matter to be judged not a priori but based on the fruitfulness of a given inquiry starting off from a particular standpoint relative to other inquiries with other starting points.

Egalitarian standpoint theory has the merit of acknowledging the reality of collective identities while nonetheless leaving open the possibility of truths or values that are universal in the sense of being valid across all collective identities or standpoints. Universal truths or values are those that have withstood critique from multiple standpoints and can be accepted from the identity groups that work from those standpoints. That is, egalitarian standpoint theory meets the first requirement of a moderate identitarianism: it acknowledges the reality of truths and values that

overarch multiple identity groups and make possible communication and political cooperation between them.

8.3. The Ideational Nature of Group Identities: Egalitarian standpoint theory also meets the second requirement of a useful identity politics: it defines the nature of identity groups, not in racial or ethnic terms, but in ideational terms. The standpoint that the members of an identity group share is not a set of reflexes hardwired into their nervous systems by their DNA, but the bundle of cognition they have come to share as a result of their common social position and history. The ideas, values, and assumptions making up that bundle can be shared with other identity groups much more easily than can genetic material and are open to debate in a way that biological realities are not.

We can sketch out in more detail how communication and debate across identity groups is possible and how truths and values overarching different standpoints is possible.

Group identities are based on standpoints that are bundles of cognition that, although deeply rooted are, being ideational, none the less capable of being communicated. Further, these cognitive bundles, in cases where groups have similar but not identical social and historical situations, can overlap. So identity groups can share common cognitive ground that provides warrants to their arguments and makes rational debate possible.

Further, since which particular cognitions get incorporated into a standpoint are socially and historically determined, they do not all necessarily logically imply each other. Standpoints are more like conglomerates of heterogeneous cognitive material than perfectly consistent and reinforcing ideas. Which means that the critical distance needed to critique the assumptions built into a standpoint can be found, not only from other standpoints, but also, potentially, *from within a given standpoint itself.* When the American colonists searched through the standpoint they shared with the British, tapped into the revolutionary potential of the Lockean political theory they found there, and used it to make a convincing case for independence, they were using one aspect of a dominant but conglomerate standpoint to critique others.

If, then, group identities are conceptualized as standpoints, and standpoints as potentially overlapping and internally heterogeneous bundles of cognition, then identity groups are not necessarily windowless monads, nor must they be adamant and invisible thought systems that offer their members no purchase for self-criticism.

Of course, in a given situation there can be no guarantee that communication between standpoints is possible because overlap exists between them. Nor is it necessary that self-criticism from within a standpoint is possible because it has sufficient internal variation. When different identity groups meet, or a members of a single identity group reflect all they can do is look for the communicative and critical possibilities available and hope for the best. But given the dangers of war and stagnation, hope is a reasonable presumption, and to be rebutted with strong evidence before it is abandoned.

[In Progress]

Endnotes

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[30] Russell, *The Scientific Outlook*, p 242,

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[41] "After the Neutrality Ideal: Science, Politics, and 'Strong Objectivity'"
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[73] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 132.

[74] One wonders if Day has given any serious thought at all to his rhetorical principle of "total indifference to the consequences." For earlier he has told us that rhetoric is effective when its consequences are tears, shock, and gasps from the audience. Perhaps Day means we should be indifferent to the consequences of our rhetoric for ourselves. In that case, not only loss of a job, but self-destruction, infantilism, or madness should be a matter of indifference to us. So once again the total indifference principle involves a descent into meaninglessness.

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