Occupy Liberalism!
Or, Ten Reasons Why Liberalism Cannot Be Retrieved for Radicalism (And Why They're All Wrong)

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Abstract: The "Occupy Wall Street!" movement has stimulated a long listing of other candidates for radical "occupation." In this paper, I suggest the occupation of liberalism itself. I argue for a constructive engagement of radicals with liberalism in order to retrieve it for a radical egalitarian agenda. My premise is that the foundational values of liberalism have a radical potential that has not historically been realized, given the way the dominant varieties of liberalism have developed. Ten reasons standardly given as to why such a retrieval cannot be carried out are examined and shown to be fallacious.

The "Occupy!" movement, which has made headlines around the country, has raised the hopes of young American radicals new to political engagement and revived the hopes of an older generation of radicals still clinging to nostalgic dreams of the glorious '60s. If the original and still most salient target was Wall Street, a long list of other candidates for "occupation" has since been put forward. In this essay, I want to propose as a target for radical occupation the somewhat unusual candidate of liberalism itself. But contrary to the conventional wisdom prevailing within radical circles, I am going to argue for the heretical thesis that liberalism should not

be contemptuously rejected by radicals but retrieved for a radical agenda. Summarized in bullet-point form, my argument is as follows:

- The "Occupy Wall Street" movement provides an opportunity unprecedented in decades to build a broad democratic movement to challenge plutocracy, patriarchy, and white supremacy in the United States.

- Such a movement is more likely to be successful if it appeals to principles and values most Americans already endorse.

- Liberalism has always been the dominant ideology in the United States.

- Liberalism in the United States has historically been complicit with plutocracy, patriarchy, and white supremacy, but this complicity is a contingent function of dominant group interests rather than the result of an immanent conceptual logic.

- Therefore progressives in philosophy (and elsewhere) should try to retrieve liberalism for a radical democratic agenda rather than rejecting it, thereby positioning themselves in the ideological mainstream of the country and seeking its transformation.

Let me now try to make this argument plausible for an audience likely to be aprioristically convinced of its obvious unsoundness.

Preliminary Clarification of Terms

First we need to clarify the key terms of "radicalism" and "liberalism." While of course a radicalism of the right exists, I mean to refer here to radicals who are progressives. But "progressive" cannot just denote the left of the political spectrum, since the whole point of the "new social movements" of the 1960s onwards was that the traditional left-right political spectrum, predicated on varying positions on the question of public vs. private ownership, did not exhaust the topography of the political. Issues of gender and racial domination were to a significant extent "orthogonal" to this one-dimensional trope. So I will use "radicalism" broadly, though still in the zone of progressive politics, to refer generally to ideas/concepts/principles/values endorsing pro-egalitarian structural change to reduce or eliminate unjust hierarchies of domination.

"Liberalism" may denote both a political philosophy and the institutions and practices characteristically tied to that political philosophy. My focus will be on the former. The issue of how bureaucratic logics may prove refractory to reformist agendas is undeniably an important one, but it does not really fall into the purview of philosophy proper. My aim is to challenge the radical shibboleth that radical ideas/concepts/principles/values are incompatible with liberalism. Given the deep entrenchment of this

assumption in the worldview of most radicals, refuting it would still be an accomplishment, even if working out practical details of operationalization are delegated to other hands.

In the United States, of course, "liberalism" in public parlance and everyday political discourse is used in such a way that it really denotes left-liberalism specifically ("left" by the standards of a country whose center of gravity has shifted right in recent decades). In this vocabulary, right-liberals are then categorized as "conservatives"—in the market sense, as against the Burkean sense. On the other hand, some on the right would insist that only they, the heirs to the classic liberalism of John Locke and Adam Smith, are really entitled to the "liberal" designation. Later welfarist theorists are fraudulent pretenders to be exposed as socialist intruders unworthy of the title. Rejecting both of these usages, I will be employing "liberalism" in the expanded sense typical of political philosophy, which links both ends of this spectrum. "Liberalism" then refers broadly to the anti-feudal ideology of individualism, equal rights, and moral egalitarianism that arises in Western Europe in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries to challenge the ideas and values inherited from the old medieval order, and which is subsequently taken up and developed by others elsewhere, including many who would have been explicitly excluded by the original conception of the ideology. Left-wing social democrats and right-wing market conservatives, fans of John Rawls on the one hand and Robert Nozick on the other, are thus both liberals.[1]

From this perspective, it will be appreciated that liberalism is not a monolith but an umbrella term for a *variety* of positions. Here are some examples—some familiar, some perhaps less so:

Varieties of Liberalism

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Left-wing (social democratic) vs. Right-wing (market conservative)
Kantian vs. Lockean
Contractarian vs. Utilitarian
Corporate vs. Democratic
Social vs. Individualist
Comprehensive vs. Political
Ideal-theory vs. Non-ideal-theory
Patriarchal vs. Feminist
Imperial vs. Anti-imperial
Racial vs. Anti-racial
Color-blind vs. Color-conscious
Etc.

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1. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), orig. ed. 1971; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

It is not the case, of course, that these different species of liberalism have been equally represented in the ideational sphere, or equally implemented in the institutional sphere. On the contrary, some have been dominant while others have been subordinate, and some have never, at least in the full sense, been implemented at all. But nonetheless, I suggest they all count as liberalisms and as such they are all supposed to have certain elements in common, even those characterized by gender and racial exclusions. (My motivation for making these last *varieties* of liberalism rather than *deviations* from liberalism is precisely to challenge liberalism's self-congratulatory history, which holds an idealized Platonized liberalism aloft, untainted by its actual record of complicity with oppressive social systems.) So the initial question we should always ask people making generalizations about "liberalism" is: What particular variety of liberalism do you mean? And are your generalizations really true about *all* the possible kinds of liberalism, or only a subset?

Here is a characterization of liberalism from a very respectable source, the British political theorist, John Gray:

> Common to all variants of the liberal tradition is a definite conception, distinctively modern in character, of man and society. . . . It is *individualist*, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity; *egalitarian*, inasmuch as it confers on all men the same moral status and denies the relevance to legal or political order of differences in moral worth among human beings; *universalist*, affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms; and *meliorist* in its affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements. It is this conception of man and society which gives liberalism a definite identity which transcends its vast internal variety and complexity.[2]

What generate the different varieties of liberalism are different concepts of *individualism*, different claims about how *egalitarianism* should be construed or realized, more or less inclusionary readings of *universalism* (Gray's characterization sanitizes liberalism's actual sexist and racist history), different views of what count as desirable *improvements*, conflicting normative balancings of liberal *values* (freedom, equality) and competing *theoretical prognoses* about how best they can be realized in the light of (contested) *socio-historical facts*. The huge potential for disagreement about all of these explains how a common liberal core can produce such a wide range of variants. Moreover, we need to take into account not merely the spectrum of actual liberalisms but also hypothetical liberalisms that could be generated through novel framings of some or all of the above. So one would need to

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2. John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), x.

differentiate dominant versions of liberalism from oppositional versions, and actual from possible variants.

Once the breadth of the range of liberalisms is appreciated—dominant and subordinate, actual and potential—the obvious question then raised is: Even if actual dominant liberalisms have been conservative in various ways (corporate, patriarchal, racist) why does this rule out the development of emancipatory, *radical* liberalisms?

One kind of answer is the following (call this the *internalist* answer): Because there is an immanent conceptual/normative logic to liberalism as a political ideology that precludes any emancipatory development of it.

Another kind of answer is the following (call this the *externalist* answer): It doesn't. The historic domination of conservative exclusionary liberalisms is the result of group interests, group power, and successful group political projects. Apparent internal conceptual/normative barriers to an emancipatory liberalism can be successfully negotiated by drawing on the conceptual/normative resources of liberalism itself, in conjunction with a revisionist socio-historical picture of modernity.

Most self-described radicals would endorse—indeed, reflexively, as an obvious truth—the first answer. But as indicated from the beginning, I think the second answer is actually the correct one. The obstacles to developing a "radical liberalism" are, in my opinion, primarily externalist in nature: material group interests, and the way they have shaped hegemonic varieties of liberalism. So I think we need to try to justify a radical agenda with the normative resources *of* liberalism rather than writing off liberalism. Since liberalism has always been the dominant ideology in the United States, and is now globally hegemonic, such a project would have the great ideological advantage of appealing to values and principles that most people already endorse. All projects of egalitarian social transformation are going to face a combination of material, political, and ideological obstacles, but this strategy would at least reduce somewhat the dimensions of the last. One would be trying to win mass support for policies that—and the challenge will, of course, be to demonstrate this—are justifiable by *majoritarian* norms, once reconceived and put in conjunction with facts not always familiar to the majority. Material barriers (vested group interests) and political barriers (organizational difficulties) will of course remain. But they will constitute a general obstacle for *all* egalitarian political programs, and as such cannot be claimed to be peculiar problems for an emancipatory liberalism.

But the contention will be that such a liberalism cannot be developed. Why? Here are ten familiar objections, variants of internalism, and my replies to them.

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Ten Reasons Why Liberalism Cannot Be Radicalized (And My Replies)

1. Liberalism Has an Asocial, Atomic Individualist Ontology

This is one of the oldest radical critiques of liberalism; it can be found in Marx's derisive comments, for example in the *Grundrisse*, about the "Robinsonades" of the social contract theory whose "golden age" (1650–1800) had long passed by the time he began his intellectual and political career:

> The individual and isolated hunter or fisher who forms the starting-point with Smith and Ricardo belongs to the insipid illusions of the eighteenth century. They are Robinson Crusoe stories . . . . no more based on such a naturalism than is Rousseau's *contrat social* which makes naturally independent individuals come in contact and have mutual intercourse by contract. . . . Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society. Production by individuals outside society . . . is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another.[3]

But several replies can be made to this indictment. To begin with, even if the accusation is true of contractarian liberalism, not all liberalisms are contractarian. Utilitarian liberalism rests on different theoretical foundations, as does the late nineteenth-century British liberalism of T. H. Green and his colleagues: a Hegelian, social liberalism.[4] Closer to home, of course, we have John Dewey's brand of liberalism. Moreover, even within the social contract tradition, resources exist for contesting the assumptions of the Hobbesian/Lockean version of the contract. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1755) (nowhere given proper credit by Marx[5]) rethinks the "contract" to make it a contract entered into *after* the formation of society, and thus the creation of socialized human beings. So the ontology presupposed is explicitly a social one. In any case, the contemporary revival of contractarianism initiated by John Rawls's 1971 *A Theory of Justice* makes

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3. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, excerpted in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edition, ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 380–81.

4. See T. H. Green, *Lectures in the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Harris and John Morrow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). I am indebted to Derrick Darby's *Rights, Race, and Recognition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for alerting me to the significance of Green's work as an alternative strain within the liberal tradition.

5. Christopher Brooke observes: "Nowhere . . . is Marx's debt to the spirit and substance of the *Second Discourse* properly acknowledged, though it remained both deep and lifelong." "Rousseau's Political Philosophy: Stoic and Augustinian Origins," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (New York: Cambridge University Press 2001), 118.

the contract a thought experiment, a "device of representation," rather than a literal or even metaphorical anthropological account. The communitarian/contractarian debates of the 1980s onwards recapitulated much of the "asocial" critique of contractarian liberalism (though usually without a radical edge). But as Rawls pointed out against Michael Sandel, for example, one needs to distinguish the figures in the thought experiment from real human beings.[6] And radicals should be wary about accepting a communitarian ontology and claims about the general good that deny or marginalize the dynamics of group domination in actual societies represented as "communities." The great virtue of contractarian liberal individualism is the conceptual room it provides for hegemonic norms to be critically evaluated through the epistemic and moral distancing from *Sittlichkeit* that the contract, as an intellectual device, provides.

2. Liberalism Cannot Recognize Groups and Group Oppression in Its Ontology—I (Macro)

The second point needs to be logically distinguished from the first, since a theory could acknowledge the social shaping of individuals while denying that group oppression is central to that shaping. (So #1 is necessary, but not sufficient, for #2.) The Marxist critique, of course, was supposed to encapsulate *both* points: people were shaped by society and society (post– "primitive communism") was class-dominated. The ontology was social and it was an ontology of class. Today radicals would demand a richer ontology that can accommodate the realities of gender and racial oppression also. But whatever candidates are put forward, the key claim is that a liberal framework cannot accommodate an ontology of groups in relations of domination and subordination. To the extent that liberalism recognizes social groups, these are basically conceived of as voluntary associations that one chooses to join or not join, which is obviously very different from, say, class, race, and gender memberships.

But this evasive ontology, which obfuscates the most central and obvious fact about all societies since humanity exited the hunting-and-gathering stage—viz., that they are characterized by oppressions of one kind or another—is not a definitional constituent of liberalism. Liberalism has certainly recognized some kinds of oppression: the absolutism it opposed in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the Nazism and Stalinism it opposed in the twentieth century. Liberalism's failure to systematically address structural oppression in supposedly liberal-democratic societies is a contingent

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6. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), orig. ed. 1982; John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 22–28.

artifact of the group perspectives and group interests privileged by those structures, not an intrinsic feature of liberalism's conceptual apparatus.

In the preface to her recent *Analyzing Oppression*, Ann Cudd makes a striking point: that hers is the first book-length treatment of the subject in the analytic tradition.[7] Philosophy, the discipline whose special mandate it is to illuminate justice and injustice for us, has had very little to say about injustice and oppression because of the social background of the majority of its thinkers. In political theory and political philosophy, the theorists who developed the dominant varieties of liberalism have come overwhelmingly from the hegemonic groups of the liberal social order (bourgeois white males). So it is really not surprising that, given this background, their socio-political and epistemic standpoint has tended to reproduce rather than challenge group privilege.

Consider Rawls, famously weak on gender and with next to nothing to say about race. Rawlsian "ideal theory," which has dominated mainstream political philosophy for the last four decades, marginalizes such concerns not contingently but structurally. If your focus from the start is principles of distributive justice for a "well-ordered society," then social oppression cannot be part of the picture, since by definition an oppressive society is not a well-ordered one. As Cudd points out, *A Theory of Justice* "leaves injustice virtually untheorized," operating on the assumption "that injustice is merely the negation of justice."[8] But radically unjust societies—those characterized by major rather than minor deviations from ideality—will be different from just societies not merely morally but *metaphysically*. What Cudd calls "non-voluntary social groups" will be central to their makeup, so that a conceptualization of such groups must be central to any adequate account of social oppression: "without positing social groups as causally efficacious entities, we cannot explain oppression." Contra the conventional wisdom in radical circles, however, she is insistent that the ontology of such groups can be explained "[using] current social science, in the form of cognitive psychology and modern economic theory, and situat[ing] itself in the Anglo-American tradition of liberal political philosophy."[9] Identifying "intentionalist" and "structuralist" approaches as the two broad categories of competing theorizations of social groups, she recommends as the best option

> a compatibilist position, holding that while all action is intentionally guided, many of the constraints within which we act are socially determined and beyond the control of the currently acting individual; to put a slogan on it, intentions dynamically interact within social structures. . . . My theory

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7.   Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), vii–ix.
8.   Ibid., viii.
9.   Ibid., 26.

of nonvoluntary social groups fits the description of what Philip Pettit calls "holistic individualism," which means that the social regularities associated with nonvoluntary social groups supervene on intentional states, and at the same time, group membership in these and voluntary social groups partly constitutes the intentional states of individuals.[10]

   If Cudd is right, then, such a theorization can indeed be developed within a liberal framework, using the resources of analytic social and normative theory. But such a development of the theory is not merely permissible, but should be seen as *mandatory*, given liberalism's nominal commitment to individualism, egalitarianism, universalism, and meliorism. These values simply cannot be achieved unless the obstacles to their realization are identified and theorized. Social-democratic (left) liberalism, feminist liberalism, black liberalism, all historically represent attempts to take these structural realities into account for the purposes of rethinking dominant liberalism.[11] They are attempts to get right, to map accurately, the *actual* ontology of the societies for which liberalism is prescribing principles of justice. What Cudd's book demonstrates is that it is the *ignoring* of this ontology of group domination that is the real betrayal of the liberal project. A well-ordered society will not have nonvoluntary social groups as part of its ontology. So the path to the "realistic utopia" Rawls is supposedly outlining would crucially require normative prescriptions for eliminating such groups. That no such guidelines are offered is undeniably an indictment of ideal-theory liberalism, which is thereby exposed as both epistemologically and ontologically inadequate. But that does not rule out a reconceptualized liberalism, a nonideal-theory liberalism that, starting from a different social metaphysic, requires a different normative strategy for theorizing justice.

3. Liberalism Cannot Recognize Groups and Group Oppression in Its Ontology—II (Micro)

But (it will be replied) liberalism suffers from a deeper theoretical inadequacy. Even if it may be conceded that liberal theory can recognize oppression at the macro-level, it will be argued that its individualism prevents it from recognizing how profoundly, at the micro-level, individuals are shaped *by* structures of social oppression. Class, race, and gender belongings penetrate deeply into the ontology of the individual in ways rendered opaque (it will be claimed) by liberalism's foundational individualism.

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10. Ibid., 34–37.
11. Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2005); Lisa H. Schwartzman, *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press); Bernard Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), orig. ed. 1984.

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But what those seeking to retrieve liberalism would point out is that we need to distinguish different senses of "individualism." The individual-ism that is foundational to liberalism is a *normative* individualism (as in the Gray quote above), which makes individuals rather than social collectivities the locus of *value*. But that does not require any denial that individuals are shaped in their *character* (the "second nature" famously highlighted by left theory) by oppressive social forces and related group memberships. Once the first two criticisms have been refuted—that liberal individuals cannot be "social," and that the involuntary group memberships central to the so-cial in oppressive societies cannot be accommodated within a liberal frame-work—then this third criticism collapses with them also. One can without inconsistency affirm both the value of the individual and the importance of recognizing how the individual is socially molded, especially when the environing social structures are oppressive ones. As already noted, domi-nant liberalism tends to ignore or marginalize such constraints, assuming as its representative figures individuals not merely morally equal, but *so-cially recognized* as morally equal, and equi-powerful rather than group-differentiated into the privileged and the subordinated. But this misleading normative and descriptive picture is a function of a political agenda com-plicit with the status quo, not a necessary implication of liberalism's core as-sumptions. A revisionist, radical liberalism would make the analysis of group oppression, the denial of equal standing to the majority of the population, and their impact on the individual's ontology, a theoretical priority. Thus Cudd's book, after explicating the ontology of involuntary groups, goes on to detail the various different ways, through violence, economic constraint, discrimination, group harassment, and the internalization of psychological oppression, that the subordinated are shaped by group domination.[12] But nothing in her account is meant to imply either that they thereby cease to be *individuals*, or that their involuntary group memberships preclude a norma-tive liberal condemnation of the injustice of their treatment.

4. Liberal Humanist Individualism Is Naïve about the Subject

A different kind of challenge is mounted by Foucault (though arguably originating in such earlier sources as the "anti-humanism" of Althusserian Marxism).[13] Here, as John Christman points out, in contrast to the "thick" conception of the person advocated by communitarianism, in critique of liberalism, we get the theoretical recommendation that "the notion of a

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12. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, chaps. 3–6.
13. See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 2010 [orig. pub. 1969]), and, for a classic critique, E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

singular unified subject of any sort, however thin the conception, [must be] abandoned."[14] As Foucault writes:

> How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a sub-ject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.[15]

The subject is not merely *molded* by power, but *produced* by power, and, in effect, vanishes.

I agree that liberalism cannot meet such a challenge, but I think the premise of the challenge should be rejected. Here I am in sympathy with Christman, who, reviewing various critiques of the classic liberal humanist conception of the self, argues for a socio-historical conception that concedes the absurdity of the notion of people springing from their own brow ("origi-nators") while nonetheless making a case for "degrees" of self-creation:

> [S]elves should be seen as to a large extent formed by factors not under the control of those reflective agents themselves. . . . This will help accom-plish two things: to provide grounds for the rejection of models of agency and citizenship that assume Herculean abilities to fashion ourselves out of whole cloth; and to force us to focus more carefully on what powers of self-shaping we therefore are left with. . . . The point must be that the role of the self's control of the self (and the attendant social elements of both 'selves') will be circumscribed by the ways in which our lives are shaped *for* us and not *by* us.[16]

A commitment to humanism does not, as pointed out above, require the denial of the obvious fact that human beings—especially the oppressed—are constrained in what they can accomplish by material structures and so-cial restrictions, nor that, as products of particular epochs and group mem-berships, their consciousness will have been shaped by dominant concepts and norms. Marx emphasized long ago that though people make history, they do not make it under conditions of their own choosing, that agency is constrained by structure and circumstance. But, contra Althusser, this was never intended as a rejection of the claim that it is still people who ultimate-ly assert their personhood in struggle.

And in my opinion, the retort applies to the Foucauldian version of the thesis also. To make the familiar left critiques: such an analysis not only de-prives us of a normative basis for indicting structures of oppression, not

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14. John Christman, *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-Historical Selves* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 48.
15. Michel Foucault, cited in Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 55n14.
16. Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 10.

only deprives the subject of agency, but is flagrantly inconsistent with the actual history of people's resistance to the systems that have supposedly "produced" them as subjects. The anti-colonial struggle, the anti-Fascist and anti-Stalinist struggles, the civil rights struggles of white women, people of color, gays, the recent and ongoing "Arab spring," all give the lie to such a diagnosis. Radical liberalism is capable of recognizing both the extent of our socialization by the existing oppressive social order and the ways in which, nonetheless, many people resist and struggle against this oppressive social order.

5. Liberalism's Values (Independently of the Ontology Question) Are Themselves Problematic

Even if the ontological challenge can be beaten back, though, another front remains open. It will be argued that liberal humanist values are themselves problematic in nature, and incapable of advancing a radical agenda. But the obvious reply is: which values? And what exactly is the problem supposed to be: (i) that the values are *intrinsically* problematic? (ii) that the values involved have historically been extended in an *exclusionary* discriminatory way? (iii) that the values have been developed in a fashion that is predicated on the experience of the *privileged*? These are all different claims.

Start with the first. Admittedly, some values associated with the liberal tradition could be judged to be intrinsically problematic, such as the "possessive individualism" C. B. Macpherson famously attributed to Hobbes and Locke.[17] But this is a value specific to right-wing liberalism, not liberalism in general (it does not appear on Gray's list), and would be opposed by left-wing/social democratic liberalism. Such values as "freedom," "equality" (moral egalitarianism), and "fraternity/sorority" classically emblematic of the liberal tradition have not usually been seen as problematic by radicals, and have indeed been emblazoned on radical banners. Freedom from oppression, equal rights/equal pay/equal citizenship (I AM A MAN), fraternity/sorority with the subordinated ("Am I not a man and a brother? Am I not a woman and a sister?")—have all served as the inspiration for progressive movements seeking social emancipation.

To be sure, it is a familiar point to radicals, if somewhat less so to the non-radical majority, that the population as a whole has not historically been recognized as deserving the entitlements of these norms, so that the opponents of emancipation have all too often *themselves* been liberals. Freedom has been construed as justifiably resting on the enslavement of others; equality has been restricted to those deemed worthy of it; fraternity has been an all-boys' club. The Italian philosopher Domenico Losurdo's

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17. C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011 [orig. pub. 1962]).

recently-translated *Liberalism: A Counter-History* provides a devastating ex-posé of "liberal thought [not] in its abstract purity, but liberalism, and hence the liberal movement and liberal society, in their concrete reality." It is an illuminatingly sordid history of the ideology's complicity with racial slav-ery, white working-class indentureship, colonialism and imperialism ("A 'Master-Race Democracy' on a Planetary Scale," in one chapter's title), and the conceptual connection between the Nazi "final solution" and Europe's earlier extermination programs against indigenous peoples.[18]

Yet it is noteworthy that in his concluding pages, Losurdo still affirms the "merits and strong points of the intellectual tradition under examina-tion." His "counter-history" has been aimed at dispelling the "habitual ha-giography" that surrounds liberalism, and the related "myth of the gradual, peaceful transition, on the basis of purely internal motivations and impulses, from liberalism to democracy, or from general enjoyment of negative liberty to an ever wider recognition of political rights."[19] In reality, he emphasizes, "the classics of the liberal tradition" were generally hostile to democracy; the "exclusion clauses" required "violent upheavals" to be overcome; prog-ress was not linear but a matter of advances and retreats; external crisis of-ten played a crucial role; and white working-class and black inclusion came at the cost of their participation in colonial wars against native peoples.[20] Nonetheless, his final paragraph insists:

> [H]owever difficult such an operation might be for those committed to overcoming liberalism's exclusion clauses, to take up the legacy of this intellectual tradition is an absolutely unavoidable task. . . . [L]iberalism's merits are too significant and too evident for it to be necessary to credit it with other, completely imaginary ones. Among the latter is the alleged spontaneous capacity for self-correction often attributed to it. . . . Only in opposition to [such] pervasive repressions and transfigurations is the book now ending presented as a "counter-history": bidding farewell to hagiogra-phy is the precondition for landing on the firm ground of history.[21]

So for Losurdo one can accept the indictment of actual historic liberalism, and its failure to live up to its putative universalism, without going on to conclude either that liberalism must therefore be abandoned, or that lib-eralism's own internal dynamic will naturally correct itself. Rather, the ap-propriate conclusion is that liberalism can be retrieved, but that it will take political struggle to do so.

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18. Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2011) (Italian ed. 2006), vii–viii.
19. Ibid., 340–41.
20. Ibid., 341–43.
21. Ibid., 344.

Finally, even when the "exclusion clauses" are formally overcome, their legacy may well remain in the form of values now *nominally* extended to everybody, but in reality articulated in such a fashion as to continue to reproduce group privilege. For example, a "freedom" that repudiates caste status but does not recognize illicit economic constraint as unfairly limiting liberty, or an "autonomy" that does not acknowledge the role of female caregiving in enabling human development, or a "justice" resolutely forward-looking that blocks issues of rectification of past injustices. But what such tendentious conceptual framings arguably call for is a critique and a rethinking of these values and principles in the light of these exclusions (as with left, feminist, and black liberalism). That does not refute their normative worth; it just underlines the necessity for taking the *whole* population into account in revising them and developing a blueprint of their internal architecture adequately sensitized to the differential social location and social history of different groups, particularly those traditionally oppressed.

6. Liberalism's Enlightenment Origins Commit It to Seeing Moral Suasion and Rational Discourse as the Societal Prime Movers

Liberalism is often associated with a historical progressivism, but a belief in the possibility and desirability of meliorism (see Gray) certainly does not commit one to Whiggish teleologies. One can oppose conservative fatalism and pessimism in its different versions—Christian claims about original sin, Burkean distrust of abstract reason, biological determinism in its ever-changing and ever-renewed incarnations—without thinking that there is any inevitability about the triumph of progress and reason. A liberalism that is "radical" will necessarily need to draw on the left tradition's demystified analysis of the centrality of group domination to the workings of the social order.[22] As earlier noted (sections #2 and 3 above), a revisionist ontology that recognizes as key social players nonvoluntary social groups in structural relations of domination and subordination will perforce have a more realistic view of the (in)efficacy of moral suasion than an ontology of atomic individuals.

Such a revisionist liberalism will acknowledge the role of hegemonic ideologies and vested group interests in the preservation of the status quo, and their refractoriness to appeals to reason and justice. Indeed, it will often

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22. Admittedly, Marxism has its own "radical Enlightenment" version of Whiggery, the technological-determinist version of historical materialism revived by G. A. Cohen that vests explanatory primacy in the putative autonomous tendency of the forces of production to develop. See G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, exp. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), orig. ed. 1978. But alternate interpretations of Marxism existed even at the time that would reject such a reading, and certainly in today's "post-Marxist" world, technological inevitabilism has no credibility.

be precisely in the names of a "reason" and "justice" shaped by the norms and perspectives of group privilege—of class, gender, and race—that egalitarian social change is resisted. As Losurdo makes clear, no immanent developmentalist moral dynamic drives liberalism's evolution. It is not at all the case that an endorsement of democratized liberal norms implies any corollary belief that the democratic struggle for a more egalitarian social order is guaranteed to be successful. Progress is possible; defeat and rollback are also possible. In general, a radical liberalism should, in some sense, be "materialist," recognizing the extent to which both people and the social dynamic are shaped by material forces, and not over-estimating the causal role of rational argumentation and moral suasion on their own. Radical liberalism takes for granted that political and ideological struggle will be necessary to realize liberal values against the opposition of those who all too frequently think of themselves as the real liberals. Radical liberalism can be descriptively realist (realizing the centrality of interest-based politics) without being normatively realist (abandoning morality for realpolitik).

7. Liberalism Is Naïve in Assuming the Neutrality of the State and the Juridical System

Mainstream liberalism tends to assume the juridico-political neutrality of the liberal-democratic state, but such naivety need not be true of all varieties of liberalism. (Note that nowhere in Gray's characterization is any such assumption made.) The neutrality of the juridico-political system is really a liberal *ideal*, a norm to be striven for to reflect citizens' equal moral status before the law and entitlement to equal protection of their legitimate interests. To represent it as a *sociological* generalization of liberal theory about actual political systems, including systems self-designated as liberal, would be to confuse the normative with the descriptive. Liberalism has certainly historically had no trouble in seeing the illicit influence of concentrated group power in the sociopolitical systems it *opposed* (see section #2). The original critique of "feudal" absolutism, the twentieth-century critique of "totalitarianism," relied in part on the documentation and condemnation of the extent of legally-backed state repression in curbing individual freedom. Liberalism's blind spot has been its failure to document and condemn the enormity of the historic denial of equal rights to the majority of the population ruled by self-styled "liberal" states: the "absolutism" and "totalitarianism" directed against white women and white workers, and the nonwhite enslaved and colonized. Patriarchal democracy, bourgeois democracy, *Herrenvolk* democracy have all been represented as "democracy" simpliciter, with no analysis of the mechanisms of structural subordination that have characterized such polities, or the ideological sleights-of-hand that have rationalized them. But to claim a necessary conceptual connection between such evasions and liberal assumptions is to confuse the *contingent* necessities of the discourse of

hegemonic liberalism—aimed at preserving, whether by justifying or obfuscating, patriarchal, bourgeois, and racial power—with what is taken to be some kind of transworld essence of liberalism. In recent decades, a large body of literature has developed that investigates the impact of class, race, and gender dynamics in the actual functioning of the state and the legal system.[23] Radical liberalism would draw on this body of literature in seeking to put in place the safeguards necessary for guaranteeing equal protection not merely on paper but in reality.

8. Liberalism Is Necessarily Anti-Socialist, so How "Radical" Could It Be?

"Socialism" is used in different senses. Assuming that a romanticized return to pre-industrial communal systems is not on the cards for a globalized world of 7 billion people, there are three main alternatives so far (two tried, one theorized about): state-commandist socialism, social democracy, market socialism. State-commandist socialism, aka "communism," is indeed incompatible with liberalism, but would seem to have been refuted as an attractive ideal by the history of the twentieth century.[24] Social democracy is just left-liberalism, whether in Rawls's version or in versions further left, like Brian Barry's, more worried about the inequalities Rawls's two principles of justice leave intact.[25] Market socialism is yet to be implemented on a national level, but many of the hypothetical accounts of how it would work emphasize the importance of respecting liberal norms.[26] In other words, market socialism's putative superiority to capitalism is not defended by invoking distinctively socialist values, but by showing how such uncontroversial and traditional liberal values as democracy, freedom, and self-realization are not going to be achievable for the majority under the present system. (Or through the appeal to more recent values like sustainability, generated by awareness of the impending ecological disaster, which the present order will make achievable for *nobody*!) Other possibilities are not ruled out, but

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23. See, for example, G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America? Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2009), orig. ed. 1967; Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

24. See, for example, Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

25. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters*.

26. John E. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); John E. Roemer, ed. *Equal Shares: Making Market Socialism Work* (New York: Verso, 1996); David Schweickart, *After Capitalism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), orig. ed. 2002.

their proponents would have to explain how their models have learned the lessons of the past in both (a) being economically viable (b) respecting human rights, the common global moral currency of the postwar epoch, which is best developed in the liberal tradition. Criticism of the existing order is not enough; one has to show how one's proposed "socialist" alternative will be superior (and in more than a vague hand-waving kind of way).

9. The Discourse of Liberal Rights Cannot Accommodate Radical Redistribution and Structural Change

Marxism's original critique of liberalism, apart from deriding its (imputed) social ontology, represented liberal rights as a bourgeois concept. But that was a century and a half ago. Lockean rights-of-non-interference centered on private property, "negative" rights, are indeed deficient as an exclusivist characterization of people's normative entitlements, but such a minimalist view has been contested by social democrats (some self-identifying as liberal) for more than a century. A significant literature now exists on "welfare" rights, "positive" rights, "social" rights, whose implementation would indeed require radical structural change. The legitimacy of these rights as "liberal" rights is, of course, denied by the political right. But that's the whole point, with which I began—that liberalism is not a monolith but a set of competing interpretations and theorizations, fighting it out in a common arena.[27] The U.S. hostility to such rights is a manifestation of the historic success of conservatives in framing the normative agenda in this country, not a necessary corollary of liberalism as such. As earlier emphasized: liberalism must not be collapsed into neo-liberalism. Nor is it a refutation to point out that having such rights on paper does not guarantee their implementation, since this is just a variation of the already-discussed imputation to liberalism of a necessarily idealist conception of the social dynamic (section #6), in which morality is a prime mover. But such a sociological claim is neither a foundational nor derivative assumption of liberalism.

Moreover, in the specific case of the redress of racial injustice, one does not even need to appeal to such rights, since the situation of, e.g., blacks in the United States is arguably the result of the historic and current violation of traditional *negative* rights (life, liberty, property), which are supposed to be the uncontroversial ones in the liberal tradition, as well as the legacy of such practices as manifest in illicitly accumulated wealth and opportunities. Here again the hegemony of Rawlsian "ideal theory" over the development of the mainstream political philosophy of the last forty years has had pernicious consequences, marginalizing such issues and putting the focus instead on principles of distributive justice for an ideal "well-ordered" society.

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27. Felicia Ann Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

But an emancipatory liberalism would be reoriented from the start towards *non-ideal* theory, and would correspondingly make rectificatory justice and the ending of social oppression its priority.[28]

10. American Liberalism in Particular Has Been so Shaped in Its Development by Race that Any Emancipatory Possibilities Have Been Foreclosed

Liberalism in general (both nationally and internationally) has been shaped by race, but that does not preclude reclaiming it.[29] Moreover, it is precisely such shaping that motivates the imperative of recognizing the multiplicity of liberalisms, not merely for cataloging purposes but in order to frame them as *theoretical objects* whose dynamic requires investigation. The conflation of all liberalisms with their racialized versions obstructs seeing these ideologies as historically contingent varieties of liberalism, which could have developed otherwise. A Brechtian "defamiliarization" is necessary, a cognitive distancing that "denaturalizes" what is prone to appear as the essence of liberalism. Jennifer Pitts's *A Turn to Empire*, for example, which is subtitled *The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*, and Sankar Muthu's *Enlightenment against Empire*, both seek to demarcate within liberalism the existence of anti- as well as pro-imperialist strains, thereby demonstrating that liberalism is not a monolith.[30] Admittedly, other scholars have been more ambivalent about some of their supposed exemplars; see, for example, Losurdo, already cited, and John Hobson's recent *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, which develops a detailed and sophisticated taxonomy of varieties of Eurocentrism and imperialism that demonstrates the *compatibility* of racism, Eurocentrism, and anti-imperialism.[31] (For instance, many European liberal theorists were anti-imperialist precisely because of their racism—their fears that the white race would degenerate as a result of miscegenation with inferior races and the deleterious consequences of prolonged residence in the unsuitable tropical climates of colonial outposts.) But the mere fact of such a range of positions illustrates that a liberalism neither Eurocentric nor imperialist is not a contradiction in terms.

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28. See Michael T. Martin and Marilyn Yaquinto, eds., *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States: On Reparations for Slavery, Jim Crow, and Their Legacies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
29. See John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
30. Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
31. Losurdo, *Liberalism*; Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception*.

In the United States in particular, as Rogers Smith has demonstrated, liberalism and racism have been intricately involved with one another from the nation's inception, a relationship Smith conceptualizes in terms of conflicting "multiple traditions," racism versus liberal universalism, and which I see as a conflict between "racial liberalism" and non-racial liberalism.[32] My belief is that formally identifying "racial liberalism" as a particular evolutionary (and always evolving) ideological phenomenon better enables us to understand the role of race in writing and rewriting the most important political philosophy in the nation's history, from the overtly racist liberalism of the past to the nominally color-blind liberalism of the present. From the eighteenth-century/nineteenth-century accommodation to racial slavery and aboriginal expropriation to the twentieth-century tainting of welfare and social democracy on this side of the Atlantic,[33] race has refracted crucial terms, concepts, and values in liberal theory so as to remove any cognitive dissonance between the privileging of whites and the subordination of people of color. Correspondingly, the shaping of white moral psychology by race, and the distinctive patterns of uptake of abstract liberal values ("equality," "individualism") in such a psychology, then become legitimate objects of investigation for us.[34] In this revisionist framework, one begins from the assumption that crucial norms will be color-coded in their actual operationalization, so that any efficacious framing of an interracial political project will need to anticipate and correct for this differential understanding, rather than being naively surprised by it. But such racialization (as popular interpretation and reception) is going to be a common problem for *any* American ideology with emancipatory pretensions. Liberalism is certainly not unique in that respect, as the history of the white American left and socialist movements illustrates. As Jack London famously put it at a meeting of the Socialist Party in San Francisco "when challenged by various members concerning his emphasis on the yellow peril": "What the devil! I am first of all a white man and only then a Socialist!"[35] *Herrenvolk* socialism existed no less than *Herrenvolk* liberalism. — • —

32. Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Charles W. Mills, "Racial Liberalism," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 123.5 (October 2008): 1380–97. See also Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

33. Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Deborah E. Ward, *The White Welfare State: The Racialization of U.S. Welfare Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

34. David O. Sears, Jim Sidanius, and Lawrence Bobo, eds., *Racialized Politics: The Debate about Racism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

35. Cited in Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception*, 107.