



**International Social Theory Consortium**

**INSECURITY AND THE ECLIPSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

# **ABSTRACTS**



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ISTC

Raymond Aron's Concept of Liberty

Christopher Adair-Toteff

The term "liberty" is the only word that is found in American motto of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and in the French motto of "liberty, equality, and fraternity." As one of the foundational ideas of the Enlightenment, "liberty" is one of the most important concepts in modern history, and it continues to serve as an ideal. It is also a key concept in Raymond Aron's political philosophy. As the French motto indicates, "liberty" and "equality" are often considered together. However, Aron took issue with that connection in the Thomas Jefferson Lectures that he gave at Berkeley in 1963. Aron's title of these lectures was "An Essay on Liberty" and it reflected his focus on freedom. The first of the three lectures centered on the fundamental tension between liberty and equality. Aron further discussed that tension in the second lecture with his distinction between formal and real freedom. Aron's critique of Hayek's negative definition of liberty was the focus of the third lecture. There have been several recent books which have attempted to explicate Aron's concept of liberalism; however, those authors have mostly neglected Aron's notion of liberty. The purpose of this paper is to explore Raymond Aron's concept of liberty and to show that it was one of, if not the, fundamental concept in his political thought. It is to Aron's credit that he continued to concentrate on one of the fundamental ideas of the Enlightenment.

Kevin S. Amidon  
Fort Hays State University  
31 August 2023

Abstract for ISTC 2023: Insecurity and the Eclipse of Enlightenment

Paper Title:

Insecurity, Authenticity, and Artificial Intelligence: Queer Critique and Epistemic Instability

Critical Theory – in its embranchments derived from the Frankfurt School’s critique of Enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno), the philosophical discourse of modernity (Habermas), and the critique of power (Honneth) has never achieved a comfortable conceptual relationship with queerness. Since it emerged as a discursive field around 1990, queer theory has foregrounded the unstable relationships between identity, equality, and epistemic processes, and enabled emergent identities and subjectivities. Nonetheless as queer people began to emerge from often-forced invisibility, powerful reactionary forces grounded in discourses of surveillance, epistemic intrusion, and ideological purity have sought to create in queer people new senses of insecurity.

Beginning in the foundational work of Eve Sedgwick onward through the recent ideas of thinkers like Jack Halberstam, queer writers have developed additional critical vocabulary that addresses problems of visibility, performativity, and agency that expand and enrich the classical foundations of Critical Theory. Scholars like Judith Butler have demonstrated how those classical foundations still provide meaningful grounding for thought about ethics, equality, and social justice. Taken together, these arguments advance a dialectic of agency and descent in the emergence of queer identity and subjectivity that throws into high relief the ongoing critical discussion about the dialectic of enlightenment.

Recent advancements in artificial intelligence have rapidly heightened anxieties around economic insecurity, authenticity, agency, and epistemic grounding. These issues map onto the problems of queer identity in ways that can advance the conceptual scaffolding of contemporary critical theory. I suggest that the training of AI models takes places in a kind of dialectical process that parallels the emergence of queer identity: a dialectic between endowment (descent) and constraint (agency). Discourses of “Constitutional AI” map onto the politics of agency. They thereby sometimes ignore the issues emerging from endowment-descent concepts, which themselves can iterate into layers of reaction. A careful mapping of these concepts, it is hoped, may demonstrate that AI models must be understood as a technological extension of the epistemic instability that characterizes queer lives and subjectivities.

## *A Constellation for Political Ecology*

Thomas F. Bechtold

The long delay of political ecological thought as recollection of a planetary society is the topic of this short socio-analysis of four political ecological themes, raised by Noam Chomsky at a lecture (public program during the Summer program for the *Institute for Social Inquiry*) at the New School in 2021, reiterating that thinkers points on: *epistemicide*, *anti-democracy*, *atomic war*, and *climate change*. These themes in their decisively 21<sup>st</sup> century iteration have an older provenance in the work of Frankfurt School scholars—Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer—whose work on ‘nature’ and positivism have only been de-visibility—eclipsed—in academic and non-academic reception. This socio-analysis briefly recounts some of these themes in a critique of political ecology in this late constellation, seeking to raise into relief that historical gap and onto-genetic mode of forgetting. Above all the social structure of observation that performs this act of historicist oblivion and contextualist obviation is the theoretic purpose of this study.

21st Annual Conference International Social Theory Consortium  
INSECURITY AND THE ECLIPSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

October 26-28, 2023 - Bressanone – Italia

Adele Bianco<sup>1</sup>

**Eclipse of Enlightenment and Decivilization**  
**The case of work**

The proliferating and accelerating eclipse of enlightenment today is the outcome of the changes that have been characterized since decades the contemporary society. The impact of increasing insecurity affects particularly work because of technological innovation as well as flexibilization and precarization processes due to the structure and functioning of global capitalism. Both trends push work into decivilization.

The term “decivilization” (*Entzivilisierung*) is according to Elias the reverse of the civilising process (*Zivilisationprozeß*) (Id. 2006), i.e., a regression of the civilisation level (Id. 1990). Nevertheless, Elias uses the term decivilization also to express the need to build new structural and cultural forms following change processes (Id. 2006b). Today an example could be technology that will shape many tasks, a new work organization and the employment relationship.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section analyses the term decivilization according to Elias' use. Then, starting from his point of view, we're going to examine the decivilization of employment as well as the hypothesis we're now at the beginning of a new kind of employment civilization.

In fact, assuming Elias' theory on civilization and decivilization, we're now witnessing the loss of the social order and institutions due to destroying drivers.

However, the set of changes we're experiencing and characterizing the contemporary society requires at the same time new rules and institutions for the 21st century working world. It means consequently a sociogenetic and psychogenetic adjustment, i.e., a new process of civilization.

Decivilization, therefore, appears on the one hand in terms of worsening living conditions and on the other as the beginning of the 21st century working and industrial civilization.

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## Legitimation Crisis and Ecological Crisis

Roderick Condon  
Trinity College Dublin

Blending the conference theme of insecurity with the panel consideration of *Legitimation Crisis* fifty years on, this paper will consider Habermas's theory with regard to the problem of planetary ecological crisis today. The central question directing this inquiry is: what are the implications of ecological crisis for the legitimation crisis of democratic capitalism at the contemporary conjuncture? From this question can be differentiated two sets of concerns.

The first is the relation of planetary ecological crisis to the system of capitalist society. The problem of ecological balance is considered very briefly by Habermas in terms of an absolute limit to economic growth. This short passage has renewed relevance today. Substantively, it is shaped by wider debate in the early 1970s on limits to growth. Theoretically, it poses the question of system-environment relations in conceptual terms worthy of reconsideration in light of later work by both Habermas and Luhmann.

The second concern is the relation of ecological crisis to political legitimation. On one hand, the societal consequences of environmental degradation further the possibility of a legitimation crisis of the neoliberal form of democratic capitalism, based on an increase in demands for binding decisions. On the other hand, this demand need not of necessity be satisfied by democratic means and may in fact further authoritarianism, as has been recently suggested by Ross Mittiga in *American Political Science Review*. Here, Habermas's central theoretical-cum-political question in *Legitimation Crisis* remains pertinent today: whether communicative organization can be dissolved by system complexity.

## **Sociopsychological Dynamics of the Higher Education Crisis**

*Joel Crombez*

The crisis of higher education is often decried as a problem of inefficiency. Inefficiency is anathema to the logic of capital, and by identifying it as the cause of soaring tuition and courses of study that are out of sync with the needs of the labor market, higher education is ripe for outside interference. Equating the goals of higher education to those of the logic of capital has expanded the sphere of groups claiming stakeholder status and harm from this crisis. Meanwhile the two groups at the center—academics (economics and business faculty notwithstanding) and students—are marginalized in the conversation through a paternalistic campaign of infantilization. Psychologically and socially, the effect of equating maturity and knowhow with capital, as society and the minds of those effected feed off each other, exacerbates the problem by submerging it ever deeper from view and increases the likelihood of catastrophic reconfigurations that will amplify rather than unwind the crisis. Using a recent series of responses published in *The Independent Review* as a launching point, in this paper I offer a diagnoses and an examination of the dynamic way that the psychological and social characteristics of the higher education crisis are exacerbated by these economically reductive and proliferating approaches. Instead, I counter their reasoning with one rooted in critical theory to illuminate the missing element of the subjects most impacted by the crisis and sketch out an alternative approach that centers psychological and social wellbeing.



## Jean-Louis Fabiani -- Rationalism is Here to Stay

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the social sciences have largely consisted of a founding enterprise: theories and methodologies converged on the production of rules and criteria aimed at distinguishing them from other types of discourse about the social world. The radical critique of the sciences that has been imposed since the 1970s undermines the very foundations of a relatively detached view of the world as defined by the Weberian notion of *Wertfreiheit* - to distance oneself, at least for the time of an *époque*, from one's own values in order to construct the appropriate tools for describing the world. On the contrary, it is the situation (positionality) and subjectivity that are valued to account for social issues. The notion of situated knowledge, developed by Donna Haraway in 1987, is central here: some people are more capable of developing knowledge because of their social location: women, the colonized, the subaltern.

The logic of denouncing the vices of the white colonial male has earned its instigators great audience success. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* is arguably the most serious in its project. The book is a seminal text in postcolonial studies, which seeks to examine how Western intellectual history continues to shape the agendas and expectations of less developed countries. Chakrabarty argues that Western theories are both 'indispensable and inadequate'. The author criticizes the evolutionary model through which all societies would pass, which also happens to be Europe's. However, nothing really significant has emerged from the call for de-centering knowledge production in our disciplines. Postcolonial theory is an unkept promise.

What should we do once we have accepted the post-colonial revision of our ambitions as well as its inability to provide us with novel analytical frames? In his famous commentary on Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung*, Michel Foucault considers the debate 'for' or 'against' the Enlightenment to be meaningless as such, and calls for a new space of research that would take into account our own determination as subjects by the Enlightenment and make it the object of a new history, yet to come.

In dismissing the criticisms against the tyrannies of rationalism that have become commonplace in the late 20th century, Foucault invites us to contribute to the archaeology of a 'moment' or an 'event', which led to the empowerment of reason as a continuous process that goes far beyond the historical circumstances of its outbreak. I argue that we should disentangle the obviously 'local' elements of the process, which identify the *Aufklärung* with a very narrow European time and space, from the epistemological consequences of the process. As Foucault reminds us after Kant, the autonomy of reason does not imply the notion of absolute reason, nor does it imply the universalization of local principles.

Jean-Louis Fabiani  
Central European University (Vienna)

## The *Non-Liberal Subject*:

### Challenging ‘Ontological Security’ in Refugee and Displacement Studies

Lara Farah

Seeking refuge is not a modern phenomenon. Yet twentieth century modalities of displacement have become governed by a world system of North-South relationships (Castles, 2003:17) that enables Western policies to determine population movements elsewhere (*remote control*) while practicing border-crossing deterrence (*border control*) (Arar and FitzGerald, 2023). This functions through entrenching a migration system rooted in a binary between ‘economic migrant’ and ‘refugee’ which assumes the former to be a ‘liberal subject’ enjoying freedom warranted through democratic state belonging, while the latter lacks the autonomy, and authority, to act entitled through citizenry (Turton, 2003). Critical scholarship challenges the ‘liberal subject’ which is embedded in Cartesian binaries. For example, Giddens’ concept of ‘ontological security’ (1984) which all *rational* subjects ought to pursue, is deployed in refugee studies to demonstrate the existential *insecurity* experienced by refugees. Despite this, Giddens’ subject is critiqued as a “stable subject in tacitly liberal democratic state” (Hyndman and Giles, 2017:16), while those who experience ontological *insecurity* are the exceptions to this. I argue this approach falls short in Southern contexts – which host more than 85 percent of the world’s refugees – where national belonging, through citizenship, is rarely attainable and where “refugeeness is [a] complex and rather a nonrational phenomenon” (Black, 2001:66). As such, I demonstrate how the Global South challenges Western conceptions of humanitarianism that renders people as ‘objects of rescue’ (Malkki, 1995) overshadowing *human* agency and experiences that transcend the ‘liberal subject’ and dismantle the over-reliance on *force* in *forced (involuntary)* migration (Mandić, 2021).

*Proposal for the conference*  
*“Insecurity and the eclipse of enlightenment”*  
*October 26-28, 2023.*

Dániel Havrancsik<sup>1</sup>:  
Insecurity and social complexity

The study surveys the relationship between societal and individual level insecurity by applying the concepts of complexity and contingency on both levels of analysis. Social systems and individuals maintain stability by giving appropriate responses for the internal and external stimuli threatening their orderly state. I conceive complexity as the complication arising from the multitude of challenges posed against the established order of the social or individual unit, and the interconnected diversity of possible responses. By the term contingency I refer to the singular and causally untransparent nature of the complex and intertwined constellations of the challenges and the potential responses of the threatened social or individual unit.

By relying mostly on the work of Niklas Luhmann I claim that insecurity and uncertainty are necessary consequences of social evolution. Functionally differentiated societies maintain order by reducing the complexity of challenges at the expense of the reproduction of complexity in form of novel challenges. The specific form of insecurity, observed on both societal and individual levels, is related to the rupture of the social mechanisms responsible for complexity management. The elevated influence of human decisions on our lives (Luhmann), the increased presence of risk (Beck), and the pervasive process of “disembedding” (Giddens) can all be considered as both causes and consequences of the accumulation of social complexity.

Individual level uncertainty is largely caused by the insufficient complexity reducing capacity of social subsystems, which are unable to process the surplus of complexity resulting from ongoing social evolution. Thus, the complexity of challenges not channeled by them “trickle down” to lower-level social systems (organizations, protest movements and interactions), and finally, to individual actors. For individuals, “descending” complexity occurs in the form of personalized challenges filtered by their specific social and biographic conditions. Unlike societal level complexity managing mechanisms relying on the automatic functioning of symbolically generalized media, individual actors are forced to continuously make *decisions*, that is, to maintain a reflexive and proactive attitude in their conduct, even if the full range of the consequences of their activity remains beyond the horizon. On societal level, complexity reduction follows the path of parallel processing (functional differentiation). Due to anthropological conditions, individuals remain bound to a serial and strictly temporalized manner of problem resolution. For individuals, contingency and complexity have an additional existential dimension. Individuals do not “process” complexity: they are doomed to *experience* it, and to respond to it in a specifically human “pragmatic” manner.

With the attempt to clarify these issues I hope to contribute to the understanding of the specificity of late modern human condition and its social aspects.

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### **Ontological Insecurity in the Social Domain. A Taxonomy**

Huge fields in the social domain present themselves as well-ordered and codified by strict rules, laws, and contracts. Social ontology has often focussed on these well-ordered areas, be they established by constitutive rules (Searle) or joint commitments (Gilbert). Important aspects of social interactions, however, are permeated by insecurity. In this paper, I try to distinguish different varieties of insecurity in the social domain and to discuss how they relate to each other.

Going beyond typical social-constructivist accounts, I first distinguish ontological insecurity from epistemic insecurity. While ontological insecurity is a possible cause of epistemic insecurity, our lack of knowledge can exceed what is caused by ontological insecurity. If ontology concerns the question of what there is, ontological insecurity is an insecurity with respect to the answer to this question. Ontology does, however, not only discuss the existence of things, but as well their essence. We can thus distinguish between these two aspects of ontological insecurity, even if these two aspects are closely interrelated.

As I will detail, ontological insecurity with respect to these two aspects can have various sources. One important source of ontological insecurity is vagueness, which comes as intensional and extensional vagueness. Another source of insecurity is the possibility of variability (and tension) between different social contexts, be they legal or cultural, and with the resulting problem of translation between these contexts. I will discuss these varieties of ontological insecurity using, among others, the examples of marriage, friendship, and war.

**“WHERE ARE WE IN HISTORY?”:  
THEOLOGY, “TRANSCENDENCE” AND CRITICAL ONTOLOGY OF  
REPRESENTATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Reha Kadakal (\*)

Abstract:

This paper is a part of larger research that engages theology and theological forms of thought in the 21st century from the standpoint of critical ontology as a form of social theory. More specifically, the paper critically engages the idea of the Axial Age, its motivating questions (“Where are we in history?”), and the notion of “transcendence” as it figures into the Axial Age argument that ensues in the mystification of religious experience. As an alternative, the paper outlines an analyses through representations in theology as these disclose the transformation in the historical and normative structures of collective life and offer a critical scrutiny of theology and theological forms of thought in the historical present.

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**Abstract:**

## **Toward a 'Better Society?'**

**Lauren Langman**

Influenced by the humanism of Erasmus, More (1516) imagined a progressive society, *Utopia* that was radically free, democratic, equalitarian and fulfilling for all. His vision would influence Rousseau, Hegel & Marx, whose dialectical theories of history, suggested a progressive/utopian future. Indeed, despite the adverse conditions of early industrialization, the Marxist critique was optimistic, the contradictions of capital, moments of the dialectic, foretold its demise. But that was not to be—at least yet. The rise of nationalism obscured class and class identity as all citizens were rendered “equal”. Between benefits, entitlements, and better wages, workers were transformed into consumers and privatized hedonism eroded progressive concerns. After WW 2, with economic growth, mobility, and seeming security, there was little revolutionary fervor. And then came neo liberalism, and while some would become uber rich, many, especially the young, faced precarity, gig jobs and as hope waned, we have witnessed a variety of progressive movements. However, these adverse economic conditions, precarity, inequality and in turn insecurity bred fear and anxiety. Meanwhile, progressive social mobilizations that have challenged hierarchical, essentialist identities, conjoined with economic anxiety, have fostered a variety of reactionary backlash movements to stop social change and restore a “Golden age”. Given the current conditions, we now live in a time of great uncertainty, anxiety and indeed, fearing economic collapse, social disorder, and devastating climate change, we see a more anxious, more pessimistic society. But all is NOT hopeless, recent events have suggested the telos of progress, spearheaded by youth articulating new expressions of collective identity, with democratic social characters, what Marcuse called a “new sensibility”. Character might be seen as the switchman on the tracks of history, will we move left and create a more humanistic world, or continue to move the right. If we don't go left, there will be nothing left.

## **Exploring the in/security dimension of inequality: Niklas Luhmann's concept of career**

*Proposal for the 21<sup>st</sup> annual conference of ISTC, October 26-29, 2023*

Bettina Mahlert

Social inequalities do not figure prominently in Niklas Luhmann's oeuvre. Yet his conceptual proposals can help engage with some of the issues raised in the call.

Luhmann argued that we must theorize social inequalities in a process perspective, particularly when addressing differentiated societies. To this end, he proposed to use the concept of career and to apply it to the whole life course, rather than to specific trajectories like professional or educational careers. Life is thought of as a chain of events, each of which makes certain subsequent events possible and renders others impossible. Each event is contingent. Moreover, in each event, self-selection and selection by others are involved. The individual her- or himself as well as others contribute to making a possible career event become real. Adversely, they can interfere to prevent its occurrence.

By emphasizing process and contingency, Luhmann foregrounds in/security as a key dimension of inequality. People are not only unequal in terms of which resources they can access in what amounts. They are also unequal in how reliably resources are available.

By incorporating both self-selection and selection by others, Luhmann's approach alerts its users to the dangers of an "eclipse of enlightenment". Many inequality theories, like that of Bourdieu, frame individuals and society in terms of self-interest and conflict only. In contrast, Luhmann's career concept turns equal attention to (mutual or one-sided) support, cooperation and responsibility. With this, it foregrounds the achievements attacked by anti-humanist regimes, as well as their underlying bases.

**Paper abstract for ISTC 2023 conference**  
**INSECURITY AND THE ECLIPSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT**  
**Egor Novikov, Heidelberg, Aug 2023**

On Moral Ambiguity in Humanitarianism (Refusal to Face Contradictions)

In this paper, I tackle the discrepancy between the Enlightenment-inspired moral discourse of humanitarian aid and the inevitable moral ambiguity, known well to the professionals and volunteers working in the field. Humanitarian interventions are always entangled in political struggles, their long-term consequences are only partially predictable, they are limited, insufficient, and burdened with problematic moral choices of the triage kind. Moreover, the very logic of non-reciprocal giving, which is the basis of all aid, inevitably creates hierarchical relations (Mauss 1925) and, consequently, resentment between the givers and the receivers. The mainstream humanitarian discourse does not possess tools to process meaningfully these realities, as they do not resonate with the core moral imagery of the universal abstract humanism. Humanitarianism, imagined as a moral mission to reduce suffering and bring all humans to 'normality' through education, infrastructure and public health, is thus trapped in a major *aporia* (Fassin 2010) between the abstract morality of the discourse pursuing clarity, and the practical dirty ethics of the field embracing the ambiguity. Within the existing humanitarian discourse, the inevitable ambiguities can be understood only as errors, which theorists and policy makers try to solve methodologically through further bureaucratization and quantification of the aid (see Shusterman 2019). Spearheading this tendency is the Effective Altruism movement, particularly popular among the new generation of charity funds, which promotes radical utilitarianism and quantification of the aid through randomized controlled trials.

Using data from my own research of charity in Calcutta and an overview of other ethnographies of humanitarianism, I discuss how the tacit ethics of the field dismantle both the technocratic logic of utilitarian quantification and the abstract humanistic morals of the mainstream humanitarian imagination. In conclusion, I suggest a different way to see humanitarian work that would reconcile practice with the discourse by looking into the pre-modern genealogy of charity and applying the logic of virtue ethics instead of the utilitarian and deontological approaches dominating modern humanitarian imagination.



## **International Social Theory Consortium**

### **Abstract**

#### **Patrick O'Mahony -- Epistemic Insecurity, Critical Theory, and Communicative Reasoning**

The theme of insecurity in the context of the 'eclipse of enlightenment' is perhaps a deliberate echo of the classic Horkheimer text on the eclipse of reason (noting also Martin Jay's recent text of the same title) but in any case resonating with it. Viewed in terms of the specific term 'epistemic insecurity' and adjusting accordingly, Horkheimer reveals how the goal of epistemic security for powerful actors actually leads to epistemic insecurity for the dominated. Horkheimer crystallises a major intellectual theme both of his day and our own, the crisis of reason. The very title of the eclipse of reason suggests the necessity of realizing reason but at the same time such realisation must allow for the internal tendency of the self-destruction of reason. For Horkheimer, the search within subjective reason for epistemic security (or certainty) of the means dangerously and with high consequences ignored the ends that reason should serve, requiring the revival of the classical goal of aligning subjective and objective reason. Other major thinkers, Adorno, Toulmin, Habermas, have taken up this theme as variously critiques of reason's dominant form, thus its formalism, its absorption by the powerful as ideology, its diminishing of participating publics (including informational manipulation), and nominalist positivism as a logic of inquiry. Such a form, where reason is determined from beyond itself, remains dominant on texts on epistemic security today, reflecting the continuing need to advance the ongoing shift in socio-logical thinking. The paper will therefore follow two steps: the first will examine the continuing crisis of reason as a dialectic of epistemic security and insecurity; and the second will explore those kinds of logic that point beyond the hegemony of subjective reason and deduction, especially taking inspiration from Peirce's distinction between liberty and security in communicative reasoning and placing it within a participatory democratic frame.

Philipp Seeber

### **Manufacturing Consent in Germany**

Herman and Chomsky developed the propaganda model (PM) against the backdrop of the Cold War in the USA. They attributed the systematic bias of U.S. war reporting to a network of political-economic constraints known as the five filters.

My presentation is about the extent to which the PM can explain the current conditions in Germany. The reporting on the Russian-Ukrainian war serves as an example.

Firstly, I will use examples to discuss to what extent the reporting corresponds to the expectations of the PM and secondly, to what extent the five filters are applicable to German conditions and what modifications they would require.

**21st Annual Conference - ISCT**

**INSECURITY AND THE ECLIPSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

**October 26-28, 2023**

Abstract Submission

**Title:** Meta-Modeling of Techno-Social Routines as (In)Security Praxes: From ‘Entitarian’ Participation to ‘Plural Performativity.’

**Format:** Individual Paper

**Presenter:** Patrizia Sergio, Ph.D. Candidate.

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# Meta-Modeling of Techno-Social Routines as (In)Security Praxes:

## From ‘Entitarian’ Participation to ‘Plural Performativity’

In an age in which new technological artifacts are becoming even more sociable and participative in private and public life, techno-social routines challenge existing structures of power and control. This presentation explores the micropolitical dimensions of techno-social routines through the prism of Felix Guattari’s notion of ‘entitarian’ participation and Judith Butler’s concept of ‘plural performativity.’ We argue that techno-social routines, as material-discursive practices, express a key aspect of contemporary (digital) capitalism: the problematic constitution of social perception of fear and threat in light of modes of power and modes of signification which have the performative at their core. If Integrated World Capitalism (IWC), as Guattari argues, changes conditions of signification and discursive mechanisms that constitute us as political subjects, this surely has important implications for how social meanings of (in)security and participation are, or might be produced and signified across the spectrum of Human/Machine intra-actions. The focus on meta-modeling systems is aimed to outline the semiotic components and pragmatic operations around which the neoliberal redrawing of the social fabric acts upon affective structures of control and performative power relations. Devising a Guattarian-Butlerian methodology, we show how meta-modeling systems should be considered foundational analytical tools to capture the complex dynamics of ‘gentle’ tactics of exploitation and alienation, which belong to the hegemonic logic at stake in digitally networked societies. Notably, meta-modeling systems confront us with specific discursive mechanisms that muddle important distinctions between participation and control, security and coercion.

*Keywords:* control, digital capitalism, meta-modeling, participation, techno-social routines

# Climate Change in the Anthropocene: A Problem of and for Higher Education

Working Paper (9/15/2023)

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## **Abstract**

This article explores the Boyer Report's 'world readiness' provocation by focusing on one of the most urgent twenty-first century problems, namely, climate change in the Anthropocene. My argument is that the reduction of higher education to its income-generating promises reproduces the economic growth imperative, and therefore, is inconsistent with world-readiness in the Anthropocene. I begin by discussing the linkage between the imperative of economic growth and the climate crisis before examining how higher education reproduces the growth imperative. Following William Leiss, I emphasize the economization of science and the uneven relationship between the technological mastery of nature and the mastery of human irrationality. I then incorporate insights from Theodor W. Adorno's critique of identity thinking and negative dialectics to address the commodification of education. The latter half of the paper examines this situation at the individual level of reality, including that of the individual student. As I endeavor to demonstrate, the tension between students' desire to confront climate change meaningfully and effectively, on the one hand, and the profit-orientation of contemporary higher education, on the other hand, is a result of the commodity form of social relations, which militates against ecological care.

*Keywords:* Anthropocene, Climate Change, Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Education, Higher Education, Undergraduate Education, Pedagogy

## **Liminality, States of Exception, and the Problem of Enlightenment**

Arpad Szakolczai

### **Abstract**

This presentation will introduce the perspective of Political Anthropology in order to make sense of the perplexing (hyper-modern rather than post-modern) times we are living through. Political Anthropology, as understood in this paper, following the journal *International Political Anthropology* and the Routledge series *Contemporary Liminality*, is not an area of anthropology as a discipline, rather a genuinely inter-disciplinary field, combining Nietzsche-Weber-Foucauldian genealogy and comparative historical sociology (see also Elias, Borkenau, Mumford, Voegelin and Koselleck, among others), classical philosophical anthropology (especially Plato and Aristotle) and certain key concepts by maverick anthropologists (liminality, trickster, imitation, schismogenesis, gift-relations and participation), while also incorporating comparative archaeology, mythology, and art. The focus will be on liminality, which is increasingly becoming a master concept in social understanding, though encountering a marked hostility from mainstream rationalism and critique. The significance of the term lies in the way it brings together transition, transformation, and crisis, but also the ‘out of ordinary’ (Weber) and ‘states of exception’ (Schmitt, Agamben). The presentation will extend the use of the term from the study of rituals (especially rites of passage) to historical analysis, arguing that the turning points of history, in any culture or civilisation, can be conceived of as liminal moments. The added value of such an application is huge, as in this way the empirically-experientially based term liminality can be used to capture the actual, formative and transformative character of such historical moments, beyond considering them as mere transitions within a broad process of history whose outcome is as if given in advance, in the sense of ‘evolution’ or ‘progress’. This helps to offer a new interpretation of the Enlightenment, as a misunderstanding of the ongoing crisis of European civilisation as progress (particularly visible in Kant’s characterisation of the Enlightenment as gaining ‘maturity’ – a typical rite of passage); and of modernity as a paradoxical, even absurd state of permanent liminality, that increasingly and at the same time produces anguishing uncertainty and utter, chronic boredom.

## **From Class Structure to Ontological Insecurities: Toward the Phenomenologization of Critical Theory**

In three steps, I will differentiate three forms of critical theory, from the Early Frankfurt School via late twentieth-century Critical Theory to recent theories. While capitalism changed from monopoly and late capitalism via its neoliberalization to its contemporary, still evolving explosive form, critical theory has transformed from focusing class structure via focusing exclusionary inequalities to perceiving insecurities phenomenologically. Finally, the analytical distinction of critical theories will be followed by discussing how far the changes in the social inquiry methods parallel the social world changes or how far they themselves foster the eclipse of "reason" in social analysis.

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The State, Normativity, Experts and the Political

Two important books by Philip Pettit, *The State* (Princeton) and Stephen Turner and George Mazur, (who co-authored some of the articles in this volume): *Making democratic theory democratic: democracy, law, and administration after Weber and Kelsen* (Routledge) were published in early 2023.

Both works formulate projects and contain analyses of the functioning of the institutions of the state, its organization in various dimensions, and assume a certain form of normativity flowing from the ontological and epistemological visions adopted.

The problem I have in mind has been formulated by Jan Zielonka (Oxford and Venice) Polish-Italian political scientist in his book *The Lost Future: And How to Reclaim it*, just published by Yale University Press.

“I find this sovereigntist vision of the future misguided and dangerous. This is not because I dismiss the significance of military might, ridicule national identity, or cheer the demise of states. I simply believe that we should not, willy-nilly, accept a world in which those with money and weapons can ignore laws and moral norms. In other words, we should strive for the rules-based world order envisaged by Grotius and Kant and not reconcile ourselves with the chaotic and conflict-ridden world described by Machiavelli and Hobbes. It matters what kind of future we embrace. Do we want to preserve or destroy our planet? Do we believe in the rule of law or the rule of force? Is the future an option only for some ‘chosen’ nations, classes or ethnic groups?” (Zielonka 2023: 17-18).

Zielonka contrasts two fundamental approaches that, in his view, define contemporary depictions of state functioning. The legal one, which is founded on the observance of norms and rules, and the state of chaos, in which there is a battle of everyone against everyone - between different actors in political and social life. It can be said that such an interpretation of the classics of political thought is not infrequently cited by defenders of liberal demoralization who argue with its critics. On the other hand, however, we can cite the voices of such authors as John P. McCormick *Machiavellian Democracy* (2011) or Josh Ober *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (1998) draw attention to the role of the category of class or group conflict between the people and the elites in understanding democracy. So, along with rules, we have the category of dispute in the face of domination. In this context, it is not Kant, but Machiavelli who is the patron of the reading of the actual mechanisms of



the function of the polis (republic). By the same token, one can question whether Zielonka's suggestion is not too one-sided. Consideration of conflict (chaos) does not necessarily exclude norms supported by rules, but with some interpretation it can be an element without which these regulations cannot be socially implemented.

In further consideration of this problem, I will try to find some clues in the works of Pettit and Turner - including the earlier ones, in which they take up ontological and normative questions.

Both authors in their earlier works devoted analyses of the fundamental categories of social action in both individual and collective dimensions. Pettit presented a solution to Kripke's sceptical dilemma by proposing a fallible reading of rules (articles 1990 and "The Common Mind" 1993), an interpretation that became part of his proposed social ontology (Holistic Individualism, Social Holism - 2002). At the same time, the dimension of corrective reading of rules (they are always *sub iudice conversationis*) was developed in later work referring to the linguistic dimension of social interaction in the context of Hobbes' interpretation (2008). This solution was enriched by a third dimension of ontology (antisingularism) (2011, 2014), in which the author considers the epistemic autonomy of social group functioning. The distinguished ontological levels are central to Pettit's project of a social democratic state, which is guided by the principle of political freedom as the non-domination. This freedom consists in limiting domination by the state ('imperium') as well as promoting non-domination in the social space (family, labour, cultural relations – 'dominium'). An important element of the project formulated in this way is the postulate of contestation of the law by citizens if it violates the category of the common good, understood as the common avowable interests of all citizens.

In the context of the outlined political project, it seems most legitimate to draw attention to the issue of the implementation in the structures of political, economic and social institutions of the category of rule-following and the conversational framework of the functioning of subjects, both individuals and social groups. The importance of the relationship between the ontological project and the political project was emphasized by Pettit not only in his early work (1987), but also reaffirmed in his book published at the beginning of March (2023).

The fundamental aim of the proposed analysis is to try to identify the role of corrective dialogue taking place between subjects in the context of rule misrecognition in the context of civic contestation, whether in relation to legislated law, the functioning of state institutions or the rules determining economic action, not to mention social and cultural relations. In this perspective, it seems interesting to confront conversationalism (social holism) with an anti-singularist discursive

dilemma (groups with minds of their own), in which the elaboration of group interests may depend on the consultation of experts, auditors and conciliators (condominium model as a metaphor for the functioning of state institutions).

In this context, I refer to Turner and Mazur's considerations in their most recent work (2023), while at the same time having Turner's earlier work from the one dedicated to the question of understanding and translation (1980), through the 'anti-holistic' conception of social practices in opposition to Bourdieu (1994) and the Good Bad Theories approach to normativity (in opposition to Brandom) (2010).

In the context of citing Turner's earlier work, I wonder about two issues, the first being to what extent his understanding of practical normativity operates in terms of a conception of democratic theory that focuses on analyzing, among other things, the practices of democratic institutions and, above all, the apparatus of the democratic state (administrative state). The second issue is to what extent Turner's proposed taxonomy of experts (2003, 2013) can be useful in analyzing a Pettitian mechanism for correcting the functioning of the state, as the ideal of civic contestation within the structures of a democratic rule of law can be considered.

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**Title:** Freedom of Scientific Inquiry and Democracy – In the Search for Proper Balance

**Abstract:**

There is a quite long of history of arguments advocating for a freedom of scientific research originating from the Enlightenment up to nowadays (Brown, Guston, 2009; Wilholt, 2010). A reliable evidence pursued by scientists is solid ground for a proper decision making concerning diverse issues, insecurities and challenges, as well as to define political preferences. Thus it is vastly important that knowledge generating institutions, organizations, and individuals are free of pressures of political powers which may interfere in research process (Wilholt, 2010). This freedom should be conceived in the twofold manner: as *freedom of ends*, exclusive rights of scientists to select topics of research, paradigm, theoretical approach, methodological design, analytical procedures, and as a *freedom of means*, to be granted by funds needed for conducting planned research (Wilholt, 2010). The two types of freedom are tightly interconnected as likeliness that a desired projected would not be funded may lead towards certain 'self-censorship' in order to meet sponsor's expectations (Statunato, 2022, 203).

On the other hand, some authors (Brown, Guston, 2009) argue that freedom of scientific inquiry should not be conceived in absolute terms since right to research is part of a broader social environment. In the line of this, some scholars (Douglas, 2005) advocate for citizens-expert interaction and public participation in evaluation of scientific findings as basis for decision making especially regarding contentious values and situations of uncertainties since policy decisions have impact on entire population. Collaboration between citizens and experts is not just possible, but it is needed for quality decision making in democratic societies (Douglas, 2005). Hence, though it is relevant to ensure freedom of science inquiry, it is also important to avoid absolute domination of science as that might be harmful for democracy (Feyerabend, 1982, 76).

Inevitable question within this complex debate which might appear is to which types of social stakeholders or social domains science should 'serve': 1) economy/business sector (echoed by numerous authors and policy documents highlighting the need of economic utilization of knowledge); 2) politics in a narrow sense what might lead towards 'technocracy'; 3) NGO sector (what, for instance, Burawoy would advocate for); 4) science itself – position linked with scientific exclusivism and, once

again, technocratic elitism. Perhaps the 'right' answer(s) would be for 'all' of them and 'none' of them, as finding proper balance (in suitable proportion) in contributing to 4 types of stakeholders/domains is probably the most desirable goal, or at least the least bad one. However, open discussion on all tackled questions at the meta level should be a part of public debates in truly democratic societies.

**Key Words:** epistemic democracy, freedom of inquiry, political democracy, scientific isolationism