

Monetary Reform Requires a New Birth of Democracy

Response to Bruce Rogers-Vaughn

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INTRODUCTION

I want to thank Lucille Eckrich for bringing Bruce Rogers-Vaughn's book, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age* to my attention. I also want to thank Steve Walsh for agreeing immediately when I suggested to him that we invite Bruce to speak this year at the AMI Conference. Working with Steve and Bruce has been a rich learning experience for me. Week after week this year they have stretched my thinking. Both Bruce and Steve are wonderful educators in democracy, as are both AMI and AFJM. In fact, you may feel I am preaching to the choir when I tell you in a minute what I have to say about democracy. I'm in your hands!

What I want to do this morning is to make the case that the post-capitalist project, the new story of money that Bruce calls for, **demands a new birth of democracy**, a demogenesis. We need to reimagine democracy. Why? Because as Bruce has made clear the "**new liberalism**" is anti-democratic to its core. It is all about how a small economic elite control the planet" (citing Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists*). At the same time, it is "the great pretender." It pretends to be democratic. But it has corrupted, and reduced and counterfeited "democracy."

We need to democratize democracy. We need democracies that are local but terrestrial in scope. Bruno Latour, who coined the word "demogenesis," is one of the strongest voices speaking for the **earth scientists** on the ground around the world.¹ Bruce, in his practice as a psychotherapist has acted as a pathologist of individual souls. In *Caring for Souls* Bruce has become a voice speaking for those suffering under the oppression of global neoliberalism, a pathologist of neoliberalism. I suggest that the communities of scientists that Latour represents, are acting as pathologists of the earth. They are doing the work of attending to the signals of the suffering and death coming not just from the climate, but also from the water, the land, and the life of the earth. I will draw on the work of political philosopher Danielle Allen to make this case. Both Allen and Latour believe that a postcapitalist project, reimaged democracy, is the antidote.

When I began reading Bruce's *Caring for Souls* this summer I felt the same steel-like commitment to real democracy that I had found in Allen. Two small examples of their affinity struck me with particular force. First, both make similarly remarkable observations about "**segregation**" **within** us. Bruce points out how inequality can turn into class segregation, and then, how this attitude can be directed toward oneself, suggesting that this "may shed light on why those who seek my counsel are now so filled with shame and self-blame. Perhaps they suffer from **segregation within the soul**" (p. 18).

One of the two exemplars of citizenship in Danielle Allen's *Talking to Strangers* is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Here is what this character realizes, this invisible man: "what is required of citizenship in a corrupt and failing polity in which there are two complementary forms of citizenship, one for the dominators and one for the dominated is

¹ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime*, 2017.

“to kill off the segregationist within any given citizen, in order to allow that citizen to be reborn as a full democrat.”²

The affinity is also suggested by the theme of **invisible citizens** which plays a central role in both authors. For example, in what I just read, Allen is quoting from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Allen again follows Ellison in describing those suffering under political exclusion and domination as “invisible citizens.” The **invisibility** of the suffering of those who don’t count in the neoliberal order is a theme sounded throughout *Caring for Souls*. In a searing example Bruce draws on the Cameroonian scholar, Achille Mbembe, who charges that financialized capitalism is extending and restructuring itself into a “war capitalism,” a “new form of colonialism,” a “necropolitics,” the title of Mbembe’s 2003 book. Those occupying these “death-worlds” are “virtually invisible.” “What passes for life in these areas of the world is, in effect, the new face of slavery” (p. 114, 115).

As Bruce put it what is demanded is a new **story**, a story about money as a **symbol**. A symbol of the well-being of the commonweal. The word “weal,” a symbol of well-being, has been co-opted and **reduced to money as wealth. We must reverse this, by reclaiming the word commonweal to mean the common well-being, public well-being, not money as capital profits for winners at the expense of losers.** In other words, monetary reform must be about **a democratic politics of money**. As Mary Mellor, author of *Money: Myths, Truths, and Alternatives*, puts it, money is “political to the core.” Consequently, we need a “politics of money” (pp. 130, 137), a politics of democratic wealth understood as well-being, **not** wealth as **money. BOTH NEOLIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY ARE ABOUT POLITICS, NOT IN ITS ORDINARY SENSE BUT IN ITS CONSTITUTIONAL SENSE. NEOLIBERALISM IS NOT JUST ABOUT MONEY OR ECONOMICS**

My remarks will be organized into five main parts. **Part I** will introduce the work of Danielle Allen, which will serve as a guide to the post-capitalist project of reimagining democratic politics. In **parts two and three** I will talk about democracy and neoliberal capitalism respectively. Since our politics depends significantly on our notions of human nature, I will focus in each of these first two sections on personhood in relation to politics. In **part four**, having gained a new footing in democracy, I will take a look back

² Allen, an African American, knew from experience that white supremacy as a form of domination poisoned the soul of “imperfect” American democracy from the beginning, accounting for “the segregationist within any given citizen.” It is precisely for this reason that she, like Frederick Douglas and James Baldwin, for example, were so passionately devoted to a new birth of *equality*, a **reimagined** democracy. One inference I draw from Allen’s work is that **the best way to be an anti-racist is to be an advocate of new birth of democracy**. In one of the most important chapters in *Caring for Souls* Bruce Rogers-Vaughn makes clear that today’s neoliberal form of the class divide has “reinstated white supremacy” and reinscribed patriarchy (p. 137). In other words, capitalism today is no less a white supremacist form of domination than it was from the beginning of Western colonial imperialism. See especially Charles Mills’s *The Racial Contract* (1997) which sums up, in a short, matter-of-fact, instant classic, the story of white supremacy. See also his equally lucid, matter-of-fact account of “Global White Ignorance,” available [here](#). See also Mehrsa Baradaran, *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap*, (2017), for an obvious ally for monetary reform. A new study of the nation’s school **textbooks** as a fundamental mechanism by which white supremacy was fed generations of U.S. American children nationwide, is told by Donald Yacovone in his 2022 book, *Teaching White Supremacy: America’s Democratic Ordeal and Forging of Our National Identity*.

at neoliberalism's crusade against government of, by, and for the people. In **part five** I will comment briefly on some implications of a reimagined democracy that are critically important for monetary reform. **In conclusion** I ask, how do we make a change of this magnitude? Is a postcapitalist world possible? Where do we begin? I have added an appendix with the psychologists here in mind.

A word about the name "neoliberalism" Bruce has made it crystal clear that neoliberalism today refers to global capitalism, to a new form of financialized imperialism/colonialism that is anti-democratic. Capitalism has also been called "corporate liberalism." This is the title of R. Jeffrey Lustig's book, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern Political Theory, 1890-1920*. (1982). For more on Lustig's critically important work see my post [here](#).³ Monetary reformers will appreciate Lustig's illuminating chapter on Henry George, "Liberalism in Protest, and the Thought of Henry George," (pp. 57-77). **But how can imperialism, colonialism, or global capitalism be called liberal?** you ask. Isn't that a contradiction in terms? The answer is that **neo-liberalism has no problem with individual rights, as long as they belong to politically powerless individuals**. It is not an exaggeration to say that market liberalism is in love with individual rights, as long as they take the form of differences of style, identity, and taste, and as long as those individuals don't start claiming political rights, citizen power. Make no mistake **this capitalist form of "liberalism" is top-down class domination**.

The journalist Matt Taibbi in Rolling Stone, called it GRIFTOPIA. He pictured it as a giant vampire "wrapped around the face of humanity"

³ <https://demogenesis.org/?p=170>. One of the first to use the expression "corporate liberalism" was Carl Oglesby in a famous speech, October 27, 1965, at the anti-war march on Washington. According to Lustig, Oglesby first identified the "illiberal liberalism" that defended neo-colonialism and opposed revolutionary change. "This is the action of *corporate liberalism*," Oglesby added, "It performs for the corporate state a function quite like what the Church once performed for the feudal state. It seeks to justify its burdens and protect it from change" (Lustig, p. 274, note 84). Oglesby's speech is thrilling and still timely. The *New York Times* republished the speech in 2011, on the occasion of his death. According to the author of the tribute, the speech is considered "a landmark of American political rhetoric." It is available [here](#). Oglesby's memoir is a gem: *Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Antiwar Movement* (2008).



I will suggest that it can be pictured as a global spider-web. Call it that if you want. It secretes money as its honey, in the form of debt, to trap its victims. Michael Hudson pictures it as a monster parasite fish killing its host, the smaller fish.

I shall also refer to neoliberal capitalism as *fundamentalized capitalism*, crusading capitalism following Naomi Klein.⁴ It has fundamentalized freedom. It has fundamentalized liberty. It has fundamentalized liberalism. What I mean by fundamentalizing, in a nutshell, is excess, too much of a good thing. Barry Goldwater notoriously said when running for President in 1964: Excess in defense of freedom is a virtue.” I will say more about what I mean by fundamentalizing later.

I. REIMAGINING DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Danielle Allen

I have said that in the face of capitalist totalitarian politics it is precisely a terrestrial democratic politics that post-capitalism calls for, one that requires re-imagining democracy; a rebirth of democracy on a scale that extends to the terrestrial scale and down to the depths of the soul. But what could that mean? Where might such a political project begin? Across the globe there are voices forming what Naomi Klein calls the voices of Blockadia, a global blockade against the privateers. We could begin, for example, with the Zulu expression, “A person is a person through other people.” Bruce cites Ernst Bloch, author of *The Principle of Hope*: “I am. We Are. That is enough. Now we have to begin.” Both of these short propositions express **the wisdom at the core of the ideal of a democratic polity, namely its understanding of the interrelationship of our individual self and what some have called the “Joint We” of persons.**⁵

One of Danielle Allen’s most important contributions is helping us answer the question of this interrelationship. In other words, I am suggesting she can help us spell

⁴ *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007).

⁵ See Robert Hockett, “Rousseauvian Money,” *Cornell Law School research paper* No. 18-48, 2018. Available [here](#).

out this eight-word expression of political wisdom from South Africa. Her book, *Our Declaration*, together with her earlier book, *Talking to Strangers*, are, I suggest, an invaluable contribution to the question of where to begin in reimagining democracy. *Talking to Strangers* is a profound primer on democratic citizenship, the “I” in Bruce’s question about who we are. *Our Declaration* focuses on the **joint** We, people as a public body, a republic.

I will focus **today** on *Our Declaration*. The full title makes clear why this book is exceptional: *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*. The most important word in the book is *equality*. **The Declaration of Independence, Allen argues, is a passionate defense of democratic equality, as the necessary, the essential, the imperative bedrock of independence.** What did the authors mean by “equality”? That, says Allen, is the central question of the original document. It is the central question of Allen’s book.

The Declaration was, to be sure, a powerful argument for *liberty* from tyranny, *freedom* from domination. But the force of that argument comes from the fact that, as she puts it, the Declaration of Independence was written “*in defense of equality*.” From start to finish she declares, “**We cannot have freedom without equality**” (p. 21). “If we abandon equality, we lose the single bond that makes us a community, that makes us a people with the capacity to be free collectively and individually in the first place” (p. 23). Later, she puts it this way: “Equality is the bedrock of freedom” (p. 108). In the final chapter, she says again, “**equality has precedence over freedom; only on the basis of equality can freedom be securely achieved**” (p. 275).

I suggest that “equality” as spelled out by Allen, is first of all an attitude, an attitude of non-domination, of two-way, reciprocal relationships among equal agents. **It is first of all an attitude, or orientation - to self, to others, to the world, and to time, past, present, and future - that defines democracy.** According to Allen this attitude is exemplified by the Declaration.

More specifically what she means by equality is the unique combination of gifts making up **each distinctive individual person**, each individual “who,” on the basis of which each of us occupies a unique *position* from which to **view** the course of events in the world, and therefore a unique *perspective* from which to **judge** and **act - in response**. “Our names,” she points out, “fix each and every one of us equally as creatures who aspire and can be held responsible” (p. 272). I suggest that, as a consequence, the spirit of democracy, according to Allen, is above all an attitude of gratitude, gratitude for that egalitarian gift of unique, distinctive personhood.

That orientation or attitude toward life is spelled out by Allen as **a series of features that constitute the ideal of equality**, including 1) “**egalitarian access to the tool of government**” - repudiating the crusading attitude of domination that fuels the dreams of empire. 3) It includes an arrangement of reciprocal care based upon **equality of agency**; or, as she puts it, “**reciprocal giving to and receiving benefits from one another.**” (the word “benefits” is not irrelevant to economics and money) 4) It includes an egalitarian approach to **collective intelligence, pooling the multiplicity of distinctive perspectives, what Allen calls a “potluck” approach** to gathering evidence and making judgments upon which to act. 5) It includes an attitude of “**shared ownership of public life.**” I translate this all-important aspect to mean a recognition of the *common, human*

heritage, the rich, deep sources of our existence, those *public* sources, public *resources* of land, water, air, and life, belonging to no one. 6) And it includes a recognition that citizens **share the dignity of being “co-creators of a common world.”**

Allen is insistent that the ideal of democracy and democratic citizenship here spelled out is imperfect **as an** ideal enacted by an imperfect people. In *Talking to Strangers* she spells this out explicitly in a section, significantly entitled, “Imperfect Pearls/Imperfect Ideals.” Two other sections of the same chapter are “Imperfect democracy,” and “Imperfect people.”

Finally, it is important to emphasize that neither the original Declaration nor Allen’s book are simply **theoretical** arguments about equality and freedom. It was much more. It brought a free people into existence by **their mutual pledge, under oath, to each other**, “backing their words with their bodies and their souls” (267). They “acted out this fact of equality” (271). “By pledging themselves to one another, the colonists establish a **bond** (note the word) with real force – with the power of people, money, and passion – that in its material consequence trumps the previous bond that each of them had independently with England. They are building their new country, their peoplehood, on a notion of shared sacrifice” (p. 267).⁶ Another way of saying this is that their foundation, as a new people, a new “we,” a new “public” was mutual trust, their promise to one another.

Allen’s own **book**, like the 1776 document, is **also a declaration**, made in 2014 when it was published. It was **her** act of commitment. It was **her** public intervention. Both are the actions of individuals

- **resisting** tyranny,
- **repudiating** domination
- by acting out of an attitude of commitment to and care for the soul of the body politic,
- and **renouncing** the privatization of the shared space of politics, whether privatization in the form of a king turned tyrant, or a financializing class privatizing a would-be democracy.

Allen’s intervention, her **book**, is an invitation to **join** her in declaring our commitment to a **full-bodied** democracy.

Before leaving Allen’s discussion of the Declaration, it is essential to say a word about the second sentence of that document and the word “happiness” that appears there. The primary significance of Allen’s reading of the second sentence of the Declaration is to **refute the common reading that independence was declared in the name of the right to individual life, liberty, and happiness, the right to be free from government! This reading completely overlooks the role of government in the structure of the argument of this sentence.**

But a second common misunderstanding of this sentence concerns the meaning of the word “happiness.” To many of us today the word “happiness” in the second sentence of the Declaration seems out of place alongside “godwords” like life, and liberty. In *Caring for Souls* Bruce points out how “the happiness industry” of neoliberalism has trivialized the word. Clearly the word in the context of the Declaration must reflect the momentous weight of what is at stake, namely **the well-being, the health, of the people, the body politic. It appears again as the last word of the sentence. There it is**

⁶ On the notion of shared sacrifice, see Allen’s book, *Talking to Strangers*.

explicitly referring to the condition of the people as a body, not simply that of individuals. Happiness constitutes one of the two solemn purposes of government, alongside the safety of the people. In her book on the constitution Danielle Allen points out that the idea of the security and happiness of the people as the purpose of government was understood in 1776 to be a reference to “the health of the people [as] the supreme law,” legitimizing government. The significance of this understanding of **public health**, of **care** for the health and well-being of the **public**, as a primary responsibility of government, a responsibility that must not be privatized, cannot be exaggerated.⁷ Finally, in the face of capitalism’s crusade to erase from its symbolic universe all association with democratic egalitarianism, and yes, “**sociality**” – against Thatcher’s **declaration that** “there is no such thing as society.” (We may not like the word “socialism” but to deny the existence of society is an example of excess). Danielle Allen has done immensely important symbol work, bringing three of the most powerful symbols in the traditions of democracy back to life, the Declaration, the Constitution,⁸ and the flag.



⁷ On the details see *Our Declaration*, chapters 27-31, and the last four pages of the book, pp. 278-282. Also, *Democracy in the Time of Coronavirus*, pp. 9-10.

⁸ See Allen’s article “The Flawed Genius of the Constitution” in *The Atlantic*, 2020/10.

The flag does not stand for capitalism.

The flag stands precisely for a republic. What is a republic? The literal meaning is a **public thing, not a private thing**. It does not stand for a corporatized state, owned and controlled by a ruling class. In her book, *Democracy in the Time of Coronavirus*, Allen reminds us of the constitutionally laden meaning of the word republic.⁹

What does all this have to do with money and monetary reform? I will come back to Allen's answer to this question below, but let me answer in one word here: **predistribution, predistribution down-** rather than redistribution of what has already been predistributed **up**.¹⁰

II. WHO ARE WE: A DEMOCRATIC ANSWER

In his concluding remarks, Bruce poses the question, **what story does money tell us about who we are?**" This is clearly one of the most basic questions we humans ask ourselves. Inside the question of who **we** are is a second question: who am **I**, a particular, unique individual. It is clear from what I have said that our understandings of human nature are one of the most important factors in shaping our **politics**. It is also true as Bruce shows, that one of the most important consequences of our politics is that it in turn plays an inescapable role in shaping our view of **ourselves**

For Allen's understanding of citizen agency the answers to these two questions are absolutely basic. Why? Because the answers have to do with **the source of our powers as citizens to care for and shape or "co-create" the world**. In this she acknowledges Hannah Arendt's account of political life as a matter of "cocreating a way of life" (Danielle Allen, Tanner Lectures, available [here](#).)¹¹ Few, however, have elaborated this concept of citizenship power as has Allen. See, however, the appendix where I discuss Bruce's concept of individual agency as presented in *Caring for Souls*.

We inherit the powers that qualify us for citizenship when we are born. We also refer to these as rights, gifts, capacities. They are the gift of life itself, of personhood, of individuality, of a self, body and soul. We **inherit** that individuality, that gift, each and every one of us, **from the common heritage of life** stretching back beyond the horizon of time. We call that gift by many names, "I," "me," my body, my self, my mind, my heart, my spirit, my soul. We call that heritage by many names: ancestors, tradition, history, the past, culture, society, the cosmos, the whole shebang.

Each of us **equally** brings something unique, original, distinctive, into the world, namely, a perspective, a position, a point of view, that no other single individual, even a twin, occupies exactly. **We each occupy a position from which to view, to judge, and to intervene in the course of events in the world**, no matter how slight that intervention

⁹ The book was published this year based on lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in May of 2020.

¹⁰ See Margaret R. Somers, "Toward a redistributive democracy: Diagnosing oligarchy, dedemocratization, and the deceits of market justice," in: *The Condition of Democracy: Volume I: Neoliberal Politics and Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Jurgen Mackert, Hannah Wolof and Bryan S. Turner, 2021. 56-87.

¹¹ https://www.google.com/url?esrc=s&q=&rct=j&sa=U&url=https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/a/Allen%2520manuscript.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwiOr7HY3M_6AhXuj4kEHbtfAvAQFnoECAAQAg&usg=AOvVaw0xvommkIRtoJj3MfCJjuiP

might be by itself. Even “microscopic forms of care” are “acts of resistance” as Bruce points out (pp. 231, 32). Each of us is a complex “system of relationships in dynamic relation. “The individual is a community, yet manifesting her own agency,” according to Bruce, in *Caring for Souls*, p. 68). See the Appendix for further elaboration of this momentarily important perspective from the psychoanalytic community.

Steve Walsh noted recently that the astronomers seeking to answer the biggest questions about the universe find themselves facing questions about its tiniest particles. If you’ve ever watched a mobile hanging over a baby’s crib, you know that the tiniest touch at any point may eventually affect the entire thing.

I, as one individual, by myself, isolated, on my own, may be insignificant *politically*. One particle of an atom all by itself is nothing. But *collectively* enough particles interacting together can generate enough power to quietly provide warmth and light for a city – or incinerate it, depending upon how those particles are brought into association with one another. We could say that it depends on how they are organized.

Organization matters. To quote Bruce again, neoliberalism “originated in an early twentieth-century crisis about how to organize the whole earth” (Citing Slobodian again).

We are not particles. But in a similar way we can say that there are two ways in which our interactions with one another can be organized. Oversimplifying, we can say that there are two different collective principles for organizing human societies. One is called domination. The other is mutual agreements. One relies on one-way power, or force. The other relies on reciprocal trust, commitments to one another, promises. Domination seems to be the most powerful, secure, and certain. Mutual trust seems totally unreliable, fragile, and fanciful.

As we have seen, for Danielle Allen the choice is this stark. For her the ideal of democracy means, simply, unequivocally, that **neither of two parties can dominate the other**. By parties she means individual relationships as well as groups or collective at any level, and of any kind, gender, race, ethnicity, or class.

III. NEOLIBERALISM’S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE

Global capitalism is as Bruce has shown, is the defining symbolic universe of our age, in the form of a narrative with money – in the form of capital – at its core. But, as he has also shown it is not just about money in all its forms, capital, profits, wages, wealth. It is also a story *about ourselves* that shapes our attitudes towards everything. I want to elaborate on its story about human nature, in contrast to that told by figures like Allen and Arendt (and Latour). **The neoliberal story about human nature is a story about domination and extreme oversimplification.**

Domination in its most extreme forms has many names, totalitarianism, fascism, authoritarianism. We have no lack of examples. Two images will be enough. Both images show individual “masters of the universe” who regard the earth as their plaything.



With Al Gore at his side, Richard Branson announces his \$25 million Virgin Earth Challenge at a geoenvironmental retreat in 2007 (Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 284-85)



The Great DictatorPlaying with the World

This contrast is clearly oversimplified as I have described it in blunt terms. What Bruce describes as the living human web is infinitely *more* complex than what I described earlier, since it *includes* the cosmic energy of those particles, the inexhaustible resources of the earth. But it also includes the astonishing complexity of our relationships to ourselves and to one another as human societies. It has been said that the human brain is the most complex thing in the universe.

We can perhaps visualize the contrast a little better using the image of a spider's web to represent domination and a network such as the Internet to represent non-domination. A spider's web is the perfect metaphor for domination. It is designed for the benefit of one spider and is under its control alone. The Internet, on the other hand, has *no single control center*. It is a network of networks with thousands if not millions of control centers. There are of course spiders out there called Google, Amazon, Facebook, seeking to concentrate all its powers in their own hands.

As with all metaphors this one is not perfect. In fact the Internet is also called the world-wide web, a web with multiple centers of control, each one treated equally, at least up to now.¹² Nevertheless, we can use the simple contrast I have drawn to visualize two starkly different, alternative ways available to us as models for organizing human societies *globally*. It is not an exaggeration, I suggest, to say that the habitability of earth for human life depends upon which one we choose. So, first let me turn briefly to reinforce certain features of neoliberal domination based on its view of human nature.

For example, capitalism tells us that we should all become capitalist entrepreneurs and make as much money as we can, however we can. Capitalism defines our **identity** by our success as private profiteers. Only winners deserve to be counted. Only winners deserve respect and status. Losers don't count.

Here is a neoliberal story about who we are, told by one of the "masters of the universe." An aide to former President Bush Jr. declared, "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."

The "we" referred to by the aide did *not* include the reporter he was talking to, who was there also as a representative of the American people. Here's the full quote:

¹² There are all sorts of combinations of centralized and decentralized networks, and combinations of combinations. Network organization has become an enormously rich and fascinating specialized field of inquiry.

The aide said that guys like me [the reporter] were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, *we create our own reality*. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. *We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.*"¹³

According to this aide "our" nation is divided into two classes, history's agents, actors, on the one hand, and the rest of us. **Instead of basing its politics on a view of individuals as citizen agents, neoliberalism is attempting to strip us of everything except our appetites as consumers in their rawest self-interested form, an infantile view of human nature.** I refer you to the Appendix again, for further elaboration of the notion of "infantile." Our appetites do in fact belong to our heritage as materially embodied souls, our gift of personhood. Our **embodiment** is the deep source of our powers as agents, our capacity to be citizens, to co-create the world.

Neoliberalism's much vaunted market utopia, its invisible hand of free, sovereign, *individualism* strips us precisely of the *individuality*, that which makes each of us unique as persons. It treats us as identical self-seeking clones. It is a *nightmare version of what it dares to call democracy*, a collective of individuals who have been stripped of their gift of individuality *and stripped of all politically powerful relationships with one another*. The consequence is the opposite of responsive care and attention to one another, the world, our shared heritage – we are stripped even of our history - and **ourselves** – we no longer belong to ourselves. Its extreme consequence is to be lost in a "pastless, futureless, contextless void."¹⁴ This begins to suggest the gut-level suffering that bland abstractions like "alienation," and "existential" cannot do justice to and that symbols like "hell" fit.

We have lived through an extremely disturbing foretaste of what that looks like from 2016 to 2020 when it seemed that the attention of the world was fixed on one figure, the occupant of the White House. The U.S. looked something like this very famous image that appeared on the cover of a book published four centuries ago. Many of you will recognize it?

¹³ Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *The New York Times Magazine*, 10/18/2004.

¹⁴ See Eric Alterman, "The American Berserk," *The Nation*, May 4/11, 2020. Alterman is quoting from Alexandra Petri, of *The Washington Post*.



Image of Hobbes's Leviathan

It appeared on the cover of Thomas Hobbes' famous book, *Leviathan*.¹⁵ It is hard to see but the body of the giant is made up of individuals, *all staring up at the face of the giant*. The most shocking and disturbing features of this image is the view of human nature represented by these individuals, as if they are stripped of their individuality as persons, agents, citizens, under the spell of one giant sovereign figure (wearing a crown and holding a sword and the staff of authority). The cosmic body of the figure - shoulders, trunk and arms that we can see is made up of individuals. They have been incorporated into it.

Let me also note here that today, stripping us of individuality includes stripping us of *our privacy*. Individual privacy is being violated on a massive scale both by governments and by the *privatized* masters of the universe. **In fact, the privacy of real persons is being violated in the name of the artificial persons called corporations.** I will come back to that very disturbing fact. NOTE ALSO THAT THE ONLY EQUAL THING ABOUT THIS COLLECTION OF PEOPLE IS THEIR COMMON GAZE UP AT THE LEVIATHAN, HIS FACE, NOT EACH OTHERS. This is a travesty of equality.

We face the insatiable crusade of a form of capitalism that wants to commodify and privatize everything, from the earth itself to the souls of its citizens, what Bruce calls its "viral" appetite to infiltrate *into* the living human web" (chapter 3 of *Caring for Souls*). **Financialized debt capitalism is shaped by an attitude of soul-less indifference, care-less of the hell of suffering, violence, death, waste, and destruction it causes.**

The vestige of "liberalism" in the *new* liberalism is its diabolical "tolerance" for *politically powerless* individuals. **It not only allows but promotes individual sovereign selves, sovereign consumers, as long as they do not threaten the monopoly on political power of the masters of the universe by demanding their public rights as citizens.**¹⁶

¹⁵ The full title was *Leviathan, Or the Matter, Forme and Power of Commonwealth, Ecclesiasticall, and Civil* (1651).

REVIEW OF THE FIRST THREE SECTIONS

In the first section I said that monetary reform demands a new birth of democracy. It must be a political project, political in its constitutional sense. Second, I made the case that Danielle Allen's work; in particular, her understanding of human nature, and the reimagined democratic politics rooted in that understanding, provides a powerful starting point for this project. Third, I then compared that understanding of human nature with the neoliberal view, drawing on Bruce Rogers-Vaughn's presentation and his book to spell out the crusading anti-democratic, anti-constitutional, colonizing "politics" of class domination that is ravaging terrestrial life.

How is all this relevant to monetary reform? I suggest that it raises a very uncomfortable question. If the goal of monetary reform is to end private power over all money creation by placing it back in public hands, where it belongs, how can that happen if the public's political institutions have also been privatized?

I heard more than one participant during the conference raise this question. One person put it this way: "I wouldn't want the current Congress to be in charge of money." Another participant added, "We need a larger movement that addresses this concern" Still another added, "government, yeah, but we don't have democracy, so that's a problem" Still another added, in this context, that's why we need allies."

The purpose of the next two sections is to try to respond to this quandary. Section IV will not sound like that. Its purpose is to leave no doubt that **the only way we are going to be successful is to expand the context within which we frame monetary reform**, as Rogers-Vaughn has done this morning, and to continue building and strengthening alliances, something this conference has succeeded in doing, thanks in particular to the tireless work of Steven and Govert, supported by the whole community of AMI and AFJM. Context changes content.

The final section V is intended to suggest some specific paths we might take in widening our alliances. I will focus on the themes of trust, language, attention, religion, and the earth as examples.

IV DANIELLE ALLEN'S WARNING AGAINST WHAT NEOLIBERALISM IS DOING TO GOVERNMENT

Having gained a sense of neoliberalism's shockingly one-sided understanding of individual human nature, I want to turn to what it is doing to government, to public politics.

If there is one thing that neoliberal power wants to destroy all vestiges of it is a government of, by, and for the people. Here again I turn to Allen. In addition to providing us with a powerful starting point for reimagining a planetary democracy, Allen also sounds a stark warning against what I am calling the fundamentalization of freedom, detaching freedom from equality and turning it, **market freedom**, into the god of the

¹⁶ Neoliberalism seeks to erase local identity—"including the sort of cultural knowledge that provides an epistemic foundation to question the status quo and to imagine alternatives" (Glenn Adams, Sara Estrada-Villalta, Daniel Sullivan, "The psychology of neoliberalism and the neoliberalism of psychology," *Journal of Social Issues*, 75 (1), 2019, 189-216. Thanks to Bruce for this reference.

neoliberal universe. I want to turn to what this does to government, to politics. We are seeing in fact what it is doing right now in the reports on the news of the Congressional investigation into the January 6 insurrection.

To repeat, by “political” I am not referring to politics in the ordinary sense of the word but to **constitutional** politics.¹⁷

It wants to privatize the state.¹⁸ It wants to destroy all vestiges of a public world accessible to its citizens. It wants to replace public politics with an absolute monopoly of political power, by a self-chosen private class, in whose interest it seeks to privatize power over the **world**. Here is how Bruce puts it. I want to quote him at length:

The ‘public’ is itself suffering erosion. We appear to want to ‘go public’ just as the public to which we appeal as a frame for conversation and debate is quickly disappearing. Under the impact of neoliberalization, the area of human life designated as ‘public’ has been diminished, corrupted, and called into question. Whether we speak of public policy, public goods, public interest, or simply the ‘common good,’ we are assuming a **shared space** exists for the voices of individuals and groups to be heard concerning policies and actions that directly impact the quality of their lives. Indeed, this constitutes the very meaning of the word politics” (p. 89).

Allen’s **warning** is the danger of detaching freedom from equality and putting freedom first. As we have seen, she points out repeatedly that freedom is only possible on the basis of equality. From the beginning of the nation’s history, however, it’s as if there were twins struggling in the womb for primacy, a tradition of freedom, or liberty or “liberalism” and a tradition of equality or democracy.

In the last half-century or more we have witnessed, with the emergence of neo-liberal capitalism, just how dangerous absolute market “freedom” can become. It is in the process of tearing the nation in two, a top class growing more and more “free” at the expense of the rest.

The global strategy of neoliberalism at work here is to *fundamentalize the market*. Market freedom, detached from equality has slowly become *universalized*, the explanation for everything. It has become a god. The fundamentalization of the free market has *fundamentalized the words freedom, liberty, and, under the name of neoliberalism, it has fundamentalized liberalism*. Liberalism - of the market, of trade, of the private corporation, of privatization itself – has been elevated to the position of holding the *key to infinite progress, to the secrets of the universe*.¹⁹

Here I want to say more about how I am using the word “fundamentalizing.” It refers to a process that tends toward excess or extremism. In the course of the twentieth century it has become more than an epithet. In its most extreme forms it is a way of referring to any set of beliefs, any ideology, held to be **the** answer to the secrets of the universe that everyone must accept, or perish. It refers to a crusading attitude that seeks total victory. It has been applied by different observers to technology, science,

¹⁷ According to Philip Bobbitt, in *Terror and consent: the wars for the twenty-first century* (2008), “we are entering the transition from one constitutional order to another – from the nation state to the market state” (p. 86).

¹⁸ See Chiara Cordelli, *The Privatized State* (2020). Also “Toward A New Birth of Democracy,” at my website, <https://demogenesis.org/?p=170> for more on Cordelli.

¹⁹ See also Zarlenga’s comparison of the market to the god qualities of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, i.e. the market knows everything, is everywhere, and can decide every issue.

secularism, modernity, the history of Western imperialism as well as religion and the market. Margaret Somers provides the essential starting point for understanding fundamentalism as a useful “analytical category.”²⁰ **She defines fundamentalism generically as an ideology made up of a set of beliefs about the world, that gives rise to a movement of global conversion, and the development of world-building institutions.**²¹

The background of late twentieth-century market fundamentalism in its extreme form is, I suggest, the five century emergence of European imperialism, colonialism, and European capitalist beliefs about the universe, which have been fundamentalized and taken to their extreme form more than once in more than one place. **Now the neoliberal globalization of the debt economy in the name of the capitalist free market is the planetary-wide form of a Western fundamentalization process.** Since the end of European colonialism, it has been led by the U.S., bidding to take the place of the former European empires, becoming militarized in the process, to wage war on whatever it defines as terrorism, at home or abroad.

Fundamentalized capitalism has become the agent of what Naomi Klein in *Shock Doctrine*, calls “disaster capitalism.” The first chapter of her book spells out the framework of her indispensable account of the last half-century of the American market “crusade” to privatize one country after another until it has now come home to us.

“This book,” she says, “is a challenge to the central and most cherished claim in the official story – that the triumph of deregulated capitalism has been born in freedom, that unfettered free markets go hand in hand with democracy. **Instead, I will show that in its fundamentalized form of capitalism has consistently been midwifed by the most brutal forms of coercion, inflicted on the collective body politic as well as on countless individual bodies. The history of the contemporary free market – better understood as the rise of corporatism – was written in shocks.**” (pp. 22, 23, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. (2007).

She urges caution in holding ideologies accountable for the crimes committed by their followers, but, she adds, “**certain ideologies are a danger to the public and need to be identified as such. These are the closed, fundamentalist doctrines that cannot coexist with other belief systems; their followers deplore diversity and demand an absolute free hand to implement their perfect system. The world as it is must be erased to make way for their purist invention.**” **Fundamentalism, she adds, is defined by a logic “that leads ineluctably toward violence” (p. 23).** For Klein, purity is a defining feature of fundamentalism. Purity is another good that can become violent and destructive when taken to an extreme.

V IMPLICATIONS

²⁰ Luca Mavelli, “Neoliberalism as Religion: Sacralization of the Market and Post-truth Politics,” *International Political Sociology*, (2020), 57-76, p. 60. I thank Rogers-Vaughn for bringing this article to my attention.

²¹ Margaret R. Somers, *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness and the Right to Have Rights* (2008). Somers’ notion of citizenship is drawn directly from Hannah Arendt. Somers has also co-authored, with Frank L. Block, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Karl Polanyi’s Critique*, 2014. Quite independently, a book with the title *The Cult of the Market: Economic Fundamentalism and its Discontents*, by the Australian scholar, Lee Boldeman, was published in 2007.

I want to take up further implications of Allen's ongoing work having to do with a series of topics, including trust, attention, language, religion, and the earth. Each of these topics have to do in significant ways with money and monetary reform strategy. Each of them, I believe, are matters that monetary reform must take into account in seeking to imagine and realize a democratic post- world. Each may suggest specific points where we can not only build Blockadia to resist neoliberalism, but also break through the concrete walls that the money masters of the universe are trying to build around our political imagination; our power to imagine what we are capable of as a species.

TRUST MONEY AND DEMOCRACY

What does trust have to do with money? When I first began to talk to people about public banking the inevitable response was, "Are you telling me to trust the politicians? My reply was, do you trust private banking? I don't need to belabor the point; US Americans face a crisis of trust. Neoliberal capitalism has become an engine for tearing down trust across the board. **One of the biggest challenges facing monetary reform is how to win trust or build trust.**

The direct relevance of trust for money has been voiced bluntly by Mary Mellor, who declares in *Money: Myths, Truths, and Alternatives* (2019), that "**money is pure trust, but in modern economics it is shrouded in mist**" (p. 8). The relevance of Danielle Allen's case for democracy for the issue is found in her book *Talking to Strangers*, which is devoted to how a society can cultivate trust, or rebuilt it, or create it where it does not exist. Recall that she writes as an African- American.

Neoliberalism has turned the US into a class polity that directs attention, up and **away from fellow-citizens** to a single concentrated center of power. It is on the verge of destroying trust between citizens and in all its public institutions and turning to force to **compel** consent So far it has been able to maintain a shaky authority and legitimacy by "manufacturing consent," by mass media.²² **The mass media, that is, the deafening voice narrating the story, the narrative, the myth of the neoliberal symbolic universe, is under the excessively concentrated control of a small group that makes up the dominant mass-media firms, whose size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation that has been able to sustain the illusions and maintain the "mist," the veil, shrouding the nature of money, referred to by Mellor, what William Greider called "the secrets of the temple," referring to the Federal Reserve, what monetary reform is committed to making public.**

Let me ask again, what does trust have to do with money? One of the other things I first heard about money from every group I encountered is that more than ninety percent of the money in circulation globally is "fiat" money, not coins or paper currency you can hold in your hands. Fiat money, it was explained, means that it is not created out of gold or silver or any other commodity of value. It was, instead, created "from nothing." But the alternative to some material of value is not nothing, I suggest, but **trust, trust in**

²² I am referring of course to *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. It was published in 1988, four years before the creation of the Internet. The authors identify five "filters" that limit the news that's fit to print, that is, the news that fits the neoliberal market world, and merit the authors' definition of the U.S. media as a "propaganda model." For a recent, short, but powerful update, see *We Need New Stories: The Myths That Subvert Freedom*, Nesrine Malik (2021), especially the first chapter, "The Myth of the Reliable Narrator"

whoever issues the currency. “Fiat” means “decree.” Someone or some institution decrees that the entries in a balance sheet count as money. That is not nothing. Those entries are backed today by an institutional **infrastructure** that must be trusted.²³

To go back to Mellor for a minute, I found the most interesting point she makes is **the basis she gives for her unqualified declaration that money is pure trust, namely, the fact that money, in all its forms, is trusted to be transferable. No form of money is used merely for a simple one-time exchange.** The medium of exchange, whether it be coins, dollars, or electronic entries, **must be accepted as usable in a subsequent exchange by the recipient.** All money, she says, is “an important expression of social interaction and trust. . . . Arguably, money is the most social of phenomena. **Money is a shared recognition of a means of recognizing and transferring value.**” This leads her to make a final crucial point. “For this shared recognition to exist there must be a monetary community. This could be as limited as tokens in a babysitting circle, or a local currency, or as wide as a national or international currency” (pp. 7,8).

ATTENTION

The discussion of trust has touched on **attention**, another fundamental human “resource,” that has been co-opted and monetized by today’s corporate giants of capitalism, Google, Amazon, and Facebook in the form of addiction. I don’t have time to say more, but I would refer you to the Netflix documentary, “Social Dilemma” not only for its dramatic force but also for the sources that appear in it. The film was produced by former employees of the three firms.

Just as trust must be **distributed** between fellow-citizens in a healthy democracy for it to be extended to its institutions, financial and political, according to **Allen**, so must attention, or what she calls “responsiveness,” be a feature of relationships between one another in a healthy society. Bruce describes his method in his work as a psychotherapist, as “a method of attention,” to those who “seek my attention.” It is a practice of “attending” to their suffering, “**hearing**” it (p. 5). Our attention must not be usurped and monopolized upward towards Hobbes’s Leviathan, or the occupant of the White House for four years in Trump’s America.²⁴

Taking this a step further, **attention, responsiveness, concern, care must be directed towards that which matters, that is, the health and well-being of our shared, common life and the terrestrial source of that life.** This astonishing living

²³ See Morgan Ricks, “**Money as Infrastructure**,” 2018, Columbia Business Law Review 757 (2018). Available [here](#).

²⁴ Iain McGilchrist, **Ways of Attending: How Our Divided Brain Constructs the World**, (2019) is a short booklet summary of McGilchrist’s monumental work as a neuroscientist focusing on the kinds of attention we bring to the world. What makes his work highly relevant to neoliberal capitalism is his thesis concerning the way the relationship between the two hemispheres of our brain has played out in Western history in a pathological form that, in one interview, he described as a “debased and perverted form of fundamentalism.” “We seem to have lost the power of religion, except in its most debased and perverted form of fundamentalism, either in fundamentalist Christianity, fundamentalist Islam, **fundamentalist anything**, fundamentalist atheism. The nuances have been lost and the sense of something beyond has been lost.” This interview is available [here](#). This citation appears at (59:14). The booklet, *Ways of Attending*, is an edited version of an article that originally appeared in the Scientific and Medical Network Review. Govert Schuller cites in this connection the pioneering work of Julius Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976).

human web is the **material** reality, the real source of value, represented by the symbolic universe we co-create. The health and well-being of the earth and its life is the measure of value, what matters most, not monetary price. As Oscar Wilde put it, "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."²⁵

LANGUAGE²⁶

In talking about both politics and money we are also talking about language and symbols. Language is, like money, a powerful medium of exchange. Like money, it is a currency. Moreover, it is a far more ancient common heritage of humankind.

Today, in the shadow of Trumpism language is being privatized. Neo-liberalism's stance towards language is Humpty Dumpty's: "When I use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean." Neoliberalism is determined to *privatize* the public currency of language. As with money we are in a conflict over whether language will be controlled publicly or be privatized, a conflict over the coining of new language, a conflict over who gets to define words.²⁷

I have referred to the examples of "privacy" and "liberal." But let me revisit these examples again very briefly. Neoliberalism has turned the word "liberal" into the opposite of liberality, generosity, and open-mindedness. Likewise, with the word "private." **A word that refers to the space of privacy that belongs to us as persons has been stolen by neoliberalism and given to the personhood of global corporations who are selling our individual privacy for profit.** Other examples that have come up are happiness" and "love." All these examples refer to gifts inherited by each human life have been turned into weapons used to take away those gifts. Most importantly the trashing and weaponizing of language applies in crucial ways to the language of money itself. But pursuing that is for another time.

RELIGION

I have said that we are not talking about politics in the ordinary sense of party politics but rather in the sense of *constitutional politics*. **Constitutional politics can force us back to the most basic questions of all, namely, *what matters*.** What do we care about most? What do we value most? We have had a disturbing example of how this is so in the issue at stake in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, Supreme Court case.²⁸

²⁵ See Raj Patel, *The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy*, (2010). Patel is the author of *Stuffed and Starved*. He shows how our faith in prices as a way of valuing the world is misplaced. He argues that the larger failure of the food, climate and economic crisis is a political one. If economics is about choices, then who gets to make those choices is the issue.

²⁶ John Patrick Leahy's 2018 book, *Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism*, is an indispensable guide to capitalism's Orwellian war on language. On the other hand, Charles Taylor's *The Language Animal*, is invaluable on the central place of symbol and figurative language for what Taylor calls the "constitutive" power of language. Charles Taylor's *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (2016).

²⁷ The classic accounts of what happens when language ceases to be the co-creation of a society and instead becomes the creation of a privatized class are Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and George Orwell's *1984*.

When we put it that way we are forced to ask *how we measure* what we treasure most. If it is the living human web, we know that money cannot measure that. But that is neo-liberalism's answer. Money cannot measure the value of *one* soul much less the soul of a people, a neighborhood, a community, a society, time, the earth itself, which is the home of the living human web, **and the source of value**. I am suggesting that in the sense that Bruce and I are talking about religion, there is no such thing as a separation of religion and politics. **I suggest that religion is perhaps best described in terms of attitudes towards what matters most to an individual or to a collective, what is most worthy of attention, of most value, of most concern and care, that which is most worthy of worship.**

This is utterly consistent with Bruce's way of talking about religion in *Caring for Souls*. Faith, he says, following Paul Tillich, has to do with that for which we are ultimately concerned." It is "an **orientation** from which we relate to all that exists, a disposition." "Religious faith," he says, "has to do with how we live in relation to the land, to its creatures, with each other, and with the Eternal."

Bruce's understanding of religion is consistent, I suggest, with that of another figure, Bruno Latour. Care plays the key role in Latour's definition, as it does with Bruce. Here is how Latour speaks about religion in *Facing Gaia*: "To introduce the religious question again is not to embarrass oneself with beliefs in some more or less strange phenomenon, but to become attentive to the shock, the scandal, that the *lack of care* on the part of one collective can represent for another. In other words, to be religious is first of all to become attentive to that to which others cling." (*Facing Gaia*, p. 152).

Latour defines religion as attentiveness on the part of one collective to another. More specifically, it is attentiveness to what other collectives or peoples cling, or care about. It is, furthermore, attentiveness to the *effect* on one collective of the lack of care on the part of another, the shock, or scandal of such *indifference*. Religion, according to this definition, is not, first of all, simply a matter of beliefs, propositions, or creeds about gods or the supernatural. Rather, it is **primarily** a matter of attitudes, attitudes of mutual respect between peoples towards that which matters most to each collective. Nor is it, first of all, an individual matter

A participant at the AMI conference this year described a ceremony of indigenous peoples from different tribes, in the Northwest. It took place outdoors, in a large circle. In the middle of the circle was a large dirt mound called the altar. People from each of the tribes would approach the altar as they gathered, and place sacred symbolic objects on the altar. One year the Aztec people did not appear for the annual ceremony. Afterwards they were asked why they were absent. They explained that the previous year someone in the circle had asked them to remove one of their symbols from the altar. They subsequently returned.

²⁸ Fintan O'Toole's "The Irish Lesson" is a lesson in extremism. (*New York Review of Books* (August 18, 2022), 19-21). In 1983 Ireland pass an amendment to its constitution prohibiting abortion. In 2018, 35 years later, the amendment was erased from the constitution. One of three reasons identified by O'Toole is that the constitutional amendment highlighted the fact "absolutism is both imperative and impossible" for the anti-abortion project. For those who believe that the zygote has the same moral standing, and the same rights in law, as every other human being, especially the mother "*imposes a duty to be extreme*. There is no acceptable moderate response to mass slaughter. . . . **Any shade of gray blurs the black-and-white vision on which the antiabortion argument rests.**" See also his book, *We Don't Know Ourselves*, (2022).

Religion is not in the first place, a matter of belief, creed, or dogma, but rather, a matter of attitude, or stance, towards life on the part of individuals and peoples.²⁹ The primacy of “belief” in the sense of assent to a creed rather than belief in the sense of trust, it seems to me, is a parochial feature of the Christian tradition.³⁰ As far as I have been able to ascertain, the Christian tradition is literally the only religious tradition in the world that has a long history of extensive written creeds containing propositions about reality that one must believe. The two other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, have long traditions of **law** and both declare their “belief” in one god, but neither elaborate in creedal form that single declaration of worship, trust, and devotion. One is faithful to the divine law, one does not ^believe in the law.

What has happened to religious language before our eyes in the last fifty years is that religious language has become *fundamentalized*. The language of *warriors, of crusaders* has taken control of religious language and turned it into the fundamentalized language of extremism, tearing societies to pieces. Fundamentalism, the signature form of religion of neoliberal capitalism, is an *idoltrous* attitude or stance towards life, what Bruce, following Tillich, calls “demonic.” Fundamentalism tends toward what we in the West call idolatry or extremism because it has no place for what I call self-testing against self-delusion, no **accountability** to anyone beyond itself, no “internal criticism to check its idolatrous tendencies,” as Bruce put it in *Caring for Souls* (p. 88).

For example, an article in the July/August issue of *The Atlantic* describes Steve Bannon’s present incarnation as a “televangelist,” who hopes to transform his audience “into an army of the righteous.” His “catechism” uses “drill-sergeant phrases.” His studio, and his show, is called the “War Room.” He uses the martial language of the “order of battle,” of “the posse, the cadre and the vanguard.” He talks about burning it all down.³¹

Freedom, privacy, money, trust, attention, language, symbols, religion, the soul – all have been fundamentalized; that is, put to work in the interests of what I call a monomyth. **A monomyth is a story of human existence told in the service of absolute domination, from a single, exclusive, all-encompassing perspective, a perspective that explains everything and lays claim to absolute truth.** A monomyth is a story told to legitimate totalitarian domination. It claims absolute power. In the process all of these public, shared, common resources of meaning, of what matters, what is of value to all of us become resources that mean everything and nothing. A fundamentalizing monomyth is a form of extreme **concentration** of power, power without appeal. The power to concentrate, to focus attention, is one of the most precious gifts we possess, individually and collectively. But when it is taken to an extreme it turns poisonous, **too much of a good thing**, what my wife describes as a gift out of control.³²

²⁹ See for a short and extraordinarily accessible account of such a view in classical Sanskrit Indian tradition, “**Epistemic Pluralism: From Systems to Stances.**” The author, Jonardin Ganeri, is the editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, and teaches at the University of Toronto. Ganeri discusses this tradition in relation to a fascinating series of Western writers and thinkers including John Dewey, Simone Weil, and a critically important book, *Retrieving Realism*, co-authored by Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor.

³⁰ Or faith in the sense of faith in a proposition of truth rather than the sense of being faithful or loyal or trustworthy, referring to interpersonal *relationships*).

³¹ Elizabeth Senior, *The Atlantic*, “American Rasputin,” July/August 2022.

³² See my discussion of the scale of growth of **privatized** concentration of power and control in every sector of society in the last half century, at https://demogenesis.org/?page_id=36S40. I am drawing on the

The monomyth, the symbolic universe, of neoliberalism takes possession of the *means, the media* of symbolization, destroys all symbols of egalitarian citizen agency and replaces them with a veritable tsunami of symbols, all of which are emptied of meaning except for the message of class domination by “them” over “us”: “they” are givers and “we” are takers. Here is the same fanatical, monomaniacal appetite for more, more, more applied to what we call “the media,” as we see in the case of money.

I am aware that I am raising deeply disturbing questions that cannot possibly be addressed adequately in the few minutes I have left. I don’t do so lightly. Let me make two or three points briefly. First I want to acknowledge and even underscore **the danger of using extreme language, like genocide, totalitarian, Orwellian, demonic, diabolic, evil, apocalyptic, revolution, terrorism, war, and extremism itself.**

The danger of such terms lies in their power to unleash the polarizing dangers of attitudes and emotions like righteous anger, rage, hatred, contempt, indifference towards life, attitudes that treat lives as objects to be manipulated, engineered by an expert class.

I dare to bring up these matters because of the example of Bruce’s courage in facing the capitalist monster together with his gentle manner in listening to suffering souls, his relentless determination to track down the source of that suffering to its roots, his dedicated precision regarding terminology” in reporting on the sources of resistance and hope found there (153), an attitude that couldn’t be more different from the climate of violence and death that threatens to make it impossible for anyone to breathe.

I suggest we must face these matters squarely because of what is at stake. What is at stake in the stories we tell about ourselves? Some seventeen years ago former Vice-President Al Gore named one fateful possibility, the loss of our own soul as a nation. In response to the public revelations of the officially legitimated, authorized and yet depraved forms of torture carried out by U.S. forces at the Abu Ghraib prison complex in Iraq Gore warned of “the possible loss of intimacy with our own souls when we fail to recognize the existence of a soul in those over whom we exercise power, especially if the helpless are degraded and come to be treated as animals.”³³

THE EARTH

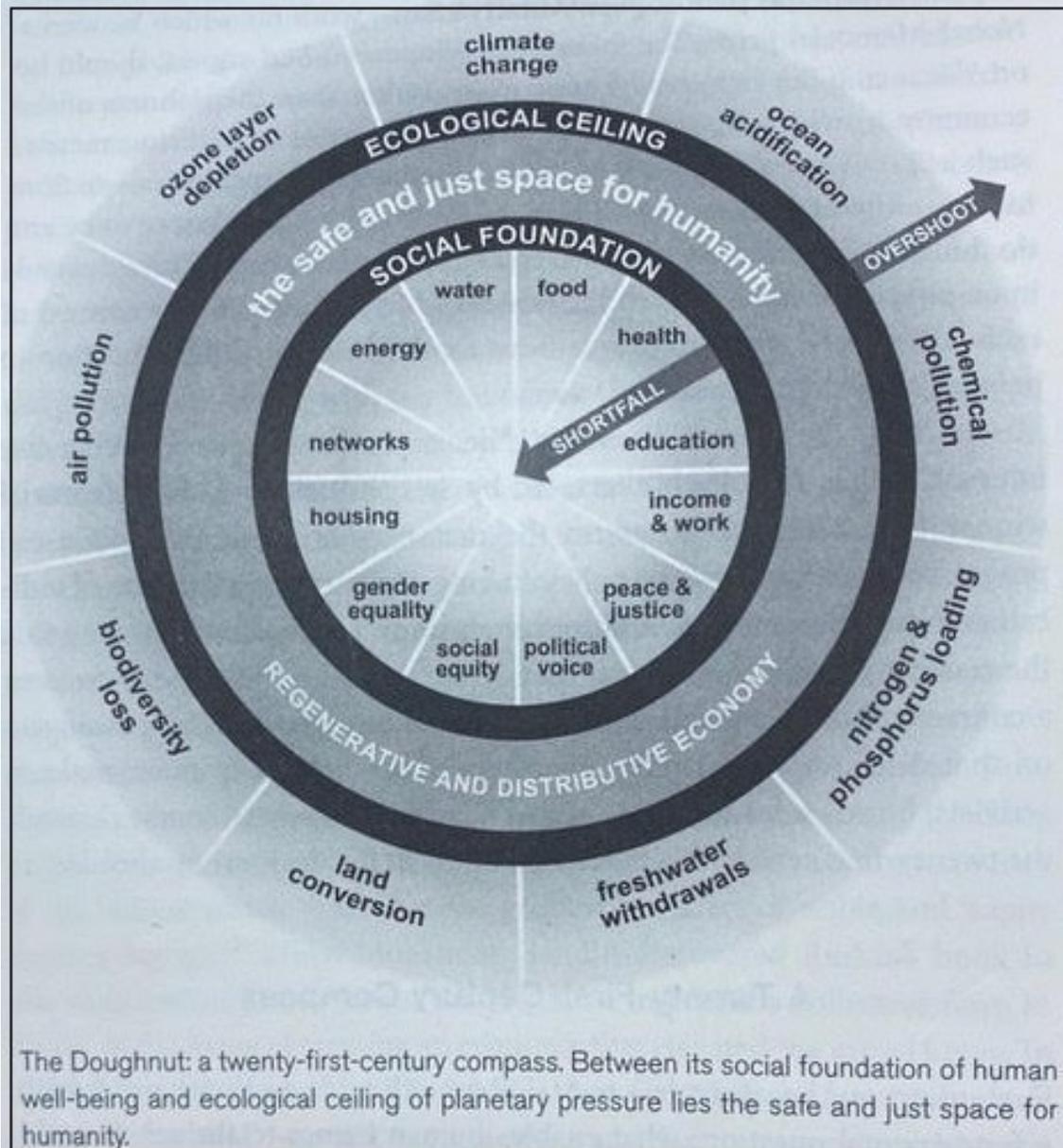
Finally, I want to leave you an image of the earth, which I suggest must be a matter of ultimate concern, worthy of our utmost attention, and which the Oxford economist Kate Raworth, has argued, must become the starting point for reimagining a new economics, and, I suggest, must become the starting point for approaching monetary reform. Why? **Because the earth – its land, water, air, life and history - is the source of value, or better, the mediator to the terrestrial species we call humankind of the ultimate sources of our being, “shrouded in mist.”**

trilogy of works by Barry Lynn, beginning with *End of the Line: The Rise and Coming Fall of the Global Corporation*, (2005), *Cornered: The New Monopoly Capitalism and the Economics of Destruction*, (2010), and *Liberty from All Masters: The New American Autocracy vs. The Will of the People*, 2021.

³³ I am paraphrasing a statement of Al Gore, cited in “What We’ve Lost: George W. Bush and the price of torture,” by William Pfaff, *Harper’s Magazine*, November 2005, p. 56. Gore said, in a speech at NYU May 26, 2004, “One of the clearest indications of the impending loss of intimacy with one’s soul is the failure to recognize the existence of a soul in those over whom power is exercised, especially if the helpless come to be treated as animals, and degraded.” Pfaff’s article is must reading for everyone.

That means, minimally, that monetary reform must take as its starting point, with Raworth, care for the earth, and, I suggest, must therefore make the **allocation** of money, fiscal policy, a co-equal concern with monetary policy.

This image and many more can be found in the book called *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st century Economist*, by Oxford economist Kate Raworth.



It uses a doughnut to suggest what a terrestrial economy must look like, a simple image for a wicked problem. The well-being of the living human web is sustainable only within the space between the outer ring showing the outer limits of planetary systems and the inner ring showing the social, political, economic, cultural, and psychological limits.

In other words, *nothing can be left out a terrestrial political economy. There are no “externalities.* Our perspective or stance, or attitude towards money, debt, banking, economics, must take “into account” not simply the numbers on balance sheets but the energies of souls, individual, and collective.

That means, minimally, that the allocation of money, or fiscal policy, become a co-equal concern with monetary policy.

CONCLUSION

The mission of monetary reform is to bring about fundamental change to the global monetary system, no less. Bruce has made the case that monetary change at this fundamental level entails economic, political, social, and cultural change. It includes changing how we understand ourselves, our understandings of human nature, in other words, our psychology, as well as our ideas about technology, religion, and, indeed, our whole symbolic universe.

I conclude with a question. How do we change a symbolic universe that has us in its grip? How do we take on a project of this magnitude?

1) The work of AMI and AFJM to educate the public about our privatized money creation system and to back an act of Congress to end it is critical. But that will not change the symbolic universe. **One could argue that an act of Congress requires a new ideology first. The answer can't be which one must be done first. They must be attacked together.** In no way am I suggesting that AMI or AFJM should take on this whole project themselves. Nor am I suggesting that we dilute our particular focus on monetary policy and the imperative of ending the privatized banking industry's lock on money creation. Rather, to repeat, I believe that **Bruce's challenge to clearly understand this mission within the larger framework of the threat from neoliberalism will enable the monetary reform movement to identify and form alliances** with those who are engaged in the conflict on other fronts, such as the pastoral theology and psychotherapy front represented by Bruce. The footnotes I have included are intended to identify other potential allies.

2) From this angle of vision, **Bruce has made a powerful case for writing new stories, drawing on ancient ones, on history, as a source of the power for collective change, what he calls "re-membering," joining us all together also as members of the body politic to which we all belong as a terrestrial species.** He has identified the virtues or attitudes of hope, humility, love, and even mourning as powerful sources for a global "Blockadia" against the symbolic house of cards that is neoliberalism.

3) I have made the case that **re-imagining democracy is essential to change**, essential to a democratic post capitalist world, symbolic universe, movement, and institutions. I have suggested that in effect we all need to go back to school to learn what democracy really means. To democratize does not mean to make something accessible to a wider range of consumers for a profit (See Lora Kelley, *Mother Jones*, November-December 2022)

4) **Learning from the wisdom of even more ancient peoples we call "tribes" about what we call "democracy."** Likewise listening to the voices of all of those that the capitalist "West" colonized and treated as "primitive," not fully human, incapable of democracy. Some writers I have been learning from: Ramon Grosfoguel, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Enrique Dussel, Mamdani Mahmood.³⁴

³⁴ "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, I(I). 5/13/2011 <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/21k6t3fq>. Boaventura de Sousa, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: the coming of age of epistemologies of the*

5) Here's another thought: **"Social change is preeminently symbol change."** Jonathan Z. Smith, an eminent scholar of religion at the University of Chicago for almost 50 years made this claim in an article entitled "The Influence of Symbols in Social Change." He also happened to be my advisor.

He summarized his argument this way: **At the heart of the issue of change are the symbolic –social questions: what is the place on which I stand? what are my horizons? what are my limits?"** The answers to those questions form **"a whole symbolic universe which is, for the individual or culture, the Universe. To change stance, perspective, or angle of vision, is to totally alter one's symbols and to inhabit a different world."**³⁵ Throughout my presentation I have called attention to "attitude," which is very close in meaning to "stance."

6) Danielle Allen urges us to **"talk to strangers"**

AFTERWORD: HUMILITY VERSUS HUMILIATION

Before concluding I want to say a word about the nature of the fix we are in today, the nature of the problem we still refer to so routinely as climate change but which in fact is a threat to the capacity of the planet to support "the living human web." We are faced with a problem on a planetary scale, a problem of a complexity that cannot be reduced to our toolkit of solutions because it includes us and we are a question to ourselves, a mystery to ourselves.

R-V as a pathologist of our global sickness describes the nature of the pathology in one chapter in terms of "systems," drawing on an understanding of "the entire cosmos" as made up of "innumerable, interacting open systems with differential capacities of self-organization set on different scales of time, agency, creativity, viscosity, and speed" (p. 68). The concept of **complexity** provides an **essential** way of getting at the specific pathology or pandemic affecting humankind in the face of the threat to the planet.

A 1973 article co-authored by a professor of design and a professor of city planning adopted the expression "wicked" problems to describe certain kinds of social policy issues.³⁶ "Wicked" refers to the **problems**, not the designers. It refers more specifically to the features of such problems, ten of which the authors describe vividly. All ten apply to the planetary-scale challenges confronting humankind today. This is not the occasion to go into detail on the concept. The point I want to make is that fundamentalized answers like those offered by financialized capitalism are hopelessly oversimplified and impotent, despite the illusion of unlimited scientific, technological, financial, and engineering power wielded by the master class.

South. 2018. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the 'Other' and the Myth of Modernity*. 1995. Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* 2020.

³⁵ "The Influence of Symbols on Social Change," in: Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, (1978).

³⁶ Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973), 155-169.

How can such problems be addressed? The starting point is obvious, self-evident, staring us in the face everywhere we look. We must abandon, once for all, the notion that we can crack open the secrets of ourselves and the universe, and find the once-for-all answer to the mystery of our own being.

Yes, we wake up to find ourselves, each one individually with the potential power of a unique perspective on the course of events we are caught up in. It is a power that can be used together to tend and care for that gift of life. Or it can be used together with a faction to seek to dominate and destroy. We occupy a unique position in the moving “gap” between past and future. Constitutional politics is about what we are going to do as a species with that gift.

R-V ended his presentation on a note of mourning, grief, love, humility, prudence, knowledge. We must first weep. Weep until the confluence of our tears become rivers of justice. Weep until the swelling of our tears become tides of steadfast love. Then our knowledge will become wise. Our words will come to us, but spoken in humility. Our actions will be prudent. And the paths before us will become clear.

I want to respond to that appeal to mourn, grieve, weep. I want to distinguish between humility and humiliation. I sense a connection between humility and gratitude, humility and trust, acknowledgement of vulnerability, limits, need, a need to acknowledge interdependence. A cluster of attitudes that have nothing to do with humiliation, or being humiliated. The difference between humility and humiliation is the difference between a terrestrial-scale democracy of democracies in which neither of two parties dominate the other and domination, on the other.

One of the most thoughtful explorers of the practical power of the perspective available from a democratic stance of cognitive humility is the Spanish thinker, Daniel Innerarity. It is vital, he says, “to understand the function of ignorance in a knowledge society. The importance of ignorance for the acquisition and reproduction of knowledge, for the emergence and change of institutions. Ignorance is not merely a shortfall when it comes to decision making but an opportunity for creative action.”

I cannot possibly even begin to do justice to what Innerarity means by such a claim. I can only say that it is not just a clever paradox. On the contrary, *The Democracy of Knowledge*, from which this comment is taken, is a serious, concrete, book-length reflection on the claim, including three chapters on “the cognitive challenge of the economy.” Published in 2013, it zooms in on the economic crisis of 2008 and its catastrophic consequences for millions, as a concrete case in point.

In effect, Innerarity is elaborating on the “wicked” nature of our problems, confronting head on the paradox that the more we learn the more we know about what we don’t know, and imagining skillfully and patiently what that means for the advantages of a genuine democracy in contrast to a political order of domination. *The Democracy of Knowledge* was preceded by *The Future and Its Enemies: In Defense of Political Hope*, published in 2012. The latter can be read as an extended commentary on Bruce Rogers-Vaughn’s notion of hope. Innerarity’s 2017 book, *Ethics of Hospitality* likewise, as a commentary on “care,” develops the claim that “after the movers and shakers and revolutionaries, it seems that those who take care are those who are called to govern a new historical epoch. Nowadays, Marx’s famous thesis can thereby be formulated: revolutionaries have dedicated themselves to transforming the world; now we need to preserve it” (p. 6).

Citizens are ordinary heroes, “ordinary people who are behaving in heroic ways in the face of some extreme circumstances.” “Everyone has a story to tell and a lesson to give.” Someone needs your story. Your story matters.”

APPENDIX

In *Caring for Souls*, Bruce Rogers-Vaughn points out that “individuals do not appear as uniform, static monads,” or as “a sack of potatoes.” He goes on to refer to “psychoanalytic object relations theories” which “understand the individual psyche [or soul!] as constituted by the ‘internalization’ of all the intersubjective experiences from birth onward, that have affective significance for that individual. In effect, the individual is a system of relationships in dynamic relation. **The individual is a community** [!], yet manifesting her own agency. Recent object relations theorists have contended that **internalizations forming the psyche are not limited to private and familial relationships, but include the entire social and political environment**” (p. 68).

In its extreme forms neoliberalism views humans as infantile, never outgrowing their earliest uncontrolled desires. This attitude shows up in behavior that characterizes the excesses of much of the capitalist class, playing with the globe as if were a toy, competing for the biggest yacht, the most houses, cars, the most expensive private plane, buying their own island, treating the financial market as a casino. If this strikes you as exaggerated, consider the behavior of the 45th occupant of the Office of President of the United States, when the expression “adults in the room” was understood not to include the President.³⁷ This view shows up also in privatized neoliberal **policies** such as indifference regarding prenatal care, infancy and childhood, despite the rhetoric of family values, and concern for the life of the fetus.

The contrast could not be more stark when compared with Danielle Allen’s fully fleshed out view of humans as capable of democratic **citizenship**, as “**equality of agency**.” (*Our Declaration*, p. 246) We as persons are each and all equally “**endowed**,” that is, have inherited by birth into the human family the capacity to be co-creators of our common world. Similarly, Hannah Arendt: “The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs . . . is ultimately the fact of **natality**, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted.” In other words, our capacity for action, our agency, is rooted in the reality of what it means to be human. Natality, in other words, refers to the birth of new men [sic!] and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born” (*The Human Condition*, p. 247).

In this appendix I want to reflect briefly on these two views by drawing on the work of the psychoanalyst, Thomas Ogden on early (pre-oedipal) infant psychic development, Ogden in turn building on the work of Donald Winnicott. What **are** human infants like fresh from the womb? My reflections are essentially **questions to psychoanalysts** about certain aspects of the views of Allen and Arendt that have to do with neo-natal human nature. What has prompted this comparison is Ogden’s notion of “subjectivity” as “a sense of oneself as **creator of meanings**” (p. 217. My bolding), his

³⁷ See Eric Alterman, “The American Berserk,” *The Nation*, May 4/11, 2020.

account of **the process by which the infant becomes “the creator and interpreter of his symbols”** (p. 213). It seems to me that Ogden’s psychoanalytical account is, at a minimum, worth consideration as support for what we could call a “high” view of human nature, in contrast to the “low” view of neoliberalism.

Likewise, the potential relevance to making symbolic worlds in Bruce Rogers-Vaughn’s work seems evident.

There is a further element to add to Ogden’s picture before trying to say more about that relevance, namely the notion of “potential space” taken from Winnicott. A crucial step in the development of an infant is “the capacity to **generate** personal meaning represented by symbols that are mediated by subjectivity (the experience of oneself as subject who has created one’s symbols).” This extraordinary capacity involves “differentiation of symbol, symbolized, **and interpreting subject**. . . . That **space** between symbol and symbolized, mediated by an interpreting self, is the space in which **creativity** becomes possible and is the space in which we are alive as human beings, **as opposed to being simply reflexively reactive** beings. This is Winnicott’s potential space” (p. 213).

I suggest that **Winnicott’s “potential space,” in infancy, has the features of genuine public space, political space at a micro scale.**³⁸ The idea that “politics” can be found “in the crib” may strike some as scandalous, but only if one reduces “politics” to a reductive two-party version. In the larger sense of politics as power arrangements and negotiations, the experience of struggle over power and control begins early in infancy. When our daughter was three months old I came into our apartment one day to find both Mom Ruth and daughter Heidi in tears. Ruth had given Heidi a bottle for the first time Heidi had apparently decided it was much easier, and was determined not to nurse again. Ruth was just as determined to continue nursing her.

I want to turn now to an article on Arendt and psychoanalysis by Joel Whitebook which, I want to suggest, shows how dangerous the “infantile” view of neoliberalism can be and does so in terms that show how this danger is manifest in the form of a monetized world.

In Whitebook’s article Arendt the classicist is the one repeating the Greek warning against freedom understood as unrestricted freedom to make money. **“For the Greeks, the function of economic activity should not be moneymaking with its ‘irresistible tendency to grow,’ as Arendt put it, but the provision of the necessities for the good life. And because those necessities were intrinsically limited, economic activity was limited as well. Like most premodern societies, the Greeks recognized that if the market were emancipated and the accumulation of wealth became an end-in-itself . . . a potentially unlimited dynamic would be introduced into the world. Such a dynamic would, in the long run, swamp all other essential elements of an ethical life predicated on limit.”** (p. 247).

The significance of Arendt’s warning is the extreme circumstances under which it was issued, its radical terms, and, for this presentation, its grounding both in a view of

³⁸ Tilo Schabert, author of *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence* (2015), argues that infancy is political from the start, “an act of political caring for human beings by human beings.” He holds that the act of political caring is carried out through the work of securing life and survival, which is “the work of government.” Human beings “take themselves caringly ‘into their own hands,’ and make themselves the beginning of the work that is required of them . . . the work of government” (p. 1). Thanks to Josh Daniels for this reference.

human agency comparable to Allen's and Arendt's own signature devotion to a *public* world. I won't try to expand on all three of these features. I want only to call attention to the terms of her warning, specifically, the concept of omnipotence.

According to Whitebook, "when Arendt tries to determine the nature of 'radical evil' it begins to sound remarkably like the psychoanalytic concept of 'omnipotence'" (p. 254). In fact, she used the term, saying, in a letter to Karl Jaspers, her friend and mentor, "that radical evil is not simply the product of 'the lust for power,' but arises from 'the delusion of omnipotence. ... And like the psychoanalytic theorists, Arendt sees omnipotence as deriving from the drive toward unification and the destruction of plurality – or of difference'" (p. 254). She feels as if it, the radical evil unleashed in the delusion of omnipotence, has to do with "*making human beings as human beings superfluous*" (p. 255). The "total domination" of the camps sought to create "a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity. ... a state of existence where all human agency, and hence all human individuality, had been eliminated," and individuals were reduced to "fungible units" that "can be exchanged at random for one another" (pp. 255-56).

Whitebook again detects, "behind the desire for omnipotence ... the wish for self-sufficiency – for monadic autarchy – so familiar to psychoanalysts, where the individual would need no one (or no thing) beyond himself or herself. If, Arendt argues, "an individual man qua man were omnipotent," he would be self-sufficient, and "there is in fact no reason why men in the plural should exist at all." Like the God of monotheism, the omnipotent man would be 'one'" (256).

Arendt made no attempt to analyze "the nature of the wish for omnipotence," which Whitebook considers a purely psychological question. He notes some attempts "within the Freudian mainstream" to address the problem of omnipotence "in terms of [the] earliest stage of development. He concludes, finally, by posing the question as to why this wish for omnipotence, if it is "a psychological constant," became "unleashed in the twentieth century." He points to two features: the massive advances of technological power, and the fact that "modern European society was the first in history not only to allow the introduction of a potentially infinite into the world, but also to celebrate it. The latter has taken the form of unleashed capitalism: "The unprecedented marriage of the endlessly expanding capitalist economy with modern science and technology has introduced a metastatic dynamic into the world that methodically destroys the traditional normative and social constraints."

Story, and history, plays a central role in Bruce's account of neoliberalism as story is central to his call for a postcapitalist project, story not made out of whole cloth but literally made out of our individual and collective past, our heritage, our traditions. But of course, neoliberalism would privatize the past as well, would take ownership of it on behalf of the infantile desire for omnipotence of the few. We no longer need to go abroad to find an example of this Orwellian war against the past. Fintan O'Toole, one of the most acute analysts of the Trump psyche, describes the former President's infantile attitude to the past in an article published in July 2020.³⁹ O'Toole engages in a surgically precise description, interpretation, and analysis of the present pathological "moment" in American history, a pathology which he finds in our relationship to *time - past, present, and future* - but especially in our relationship to the past, to history. O'Toole focuses on

³⁹ Fintan O'Toole, "Unpresidented," *The New York Review of Books*, 7/14/2020.

three armed conflicts that “have never ended,” the Civil War, the Vietnam War, and the so-called war on terror.” “Their toxic residues flow from different directions into the current breakdown of the American polity.” He “reads” Trump as the embodiment of the most malignant, unresolved, **repressed** strains of our common past – now boiling over, even as for three years, Trump has engaged in puffing up his own historic self, belittling everyone else, and, in his “demented solipsism,” “shrink-fitting history “so that it hugs Trump’s own ample figure, cleaving both to his greatness and to his victimhood as an object of unparalleled persecution.” “While the country he misgoverns was still boiling over [with unresolved history], Trump was still boiling [it] down,” boiling down all of American history into “a tale of his own pain and glory.” See also Govert Schuller’s article, “On Trump: The Ruling Pathocrat,” available [here](#). A pathocrat is a person without a conscience. “malignantly narcissitic” spellbinders.

I want to end by calling attention to the work of Andrew Schaap, who has appropriated Hannah Arendt’s work creatively and with the same kind of relentless careful attitude as Bruce Rogers-Vaughn in order to analyze the efforts in post-apartheid South Africa to pursue their efforts at reconciliation. The book is called *On Reconciliation*, published in 2004. Schaap’s book I suggest can be read as a call at all costs to keep the “potential space” of politics open for attention by the public to those things that matter to the public.