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The Solution is the Problem: An Immanent Critique of Capitalism's Crisis, 2008-2018

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The Solution is the Problem:

An Immanent Critique of Capitalism's Crisis, 2008-2018

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ABSTRACT

THE SOLUTION IS THE PROBLEM:
AN IMMANENT CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM'S CRISIS, 2008-2018

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This dissertation examines the way that capitalism responded to the financial crisis of 2008 by presenting itself as the solution to problems of its own making. Guiding my criticism, is the concept of immanent critique and these chapters represent works of critical theory that endeavor to think through the contradictions of contemporary capitalism. The chapters of this dissertation examine capitalism's response to it's own crisis in four domains: political consumerism, the 2010 Haitian earthquake, philanthropy, and the prosperity gospel. Each of these responses seeks to overcome one or more of the fundamental problems of capitalism – inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, and the ceaseless imperative of unlimited growth – by presenting capitalism as the solution to these very problems in specific, though related ways. In Chapter I, I look at advertising that seeks to appeal to politicized subjectivities (e.g., green) and consider practices of consumption, such as "buy one give one," that unite consumerism and charity within the act of consumption itself, in order to argue that consumer politics is constrained by the very logic of consumerism and is incapable of challenging its dominance. In Chapter II, I argue that the 2010 Haitian earthquake provided an alibi - a problem not of capitalism's making - which then in turn obscured the dialectical relationship between capitalism and impoverishment and the role of debt in constraining Haiti's past and future and allowed capitalism to present itself as the solution to both the natural disaster and the broader problems of its own making. In Chapter III, I argue that the philanthropists of today fail to recognize capitalism as an engine of inequality, immiseration, and environmental degradation, and in doing so, wrongly seek to solve the problems of capitalism with techniques and programs that replicate the very logic of capital. In Chapter IV, I argue that the Prosperity Gospel offers a solution to the problems created by capitalism by stunting systemic or structural criticism and transforming any failing of capitalism into a personal failure that can be overcome by right thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the way that capitalism responded to the crises of the financial crisis of 2008 by presenting itself as the solution to the very problems it creates. Guiding my criticism, is the concept of immanent critique and these chapters represent works of critical theory that endeavor to think through the contradictions of contemporary capitalism. In this regard my work is broadly influenced by the work of Karl Marx and the first generation of the Frankfurt School. As a result, certain concepts and assumptions endemic to that tradition will be noticeable to the reader throughout. In the interests of clarity, I will address a few of these assumptions later in this introduction. Briefly summarized below, the four chapters of this dissertation examine capitalism's response to particular crises: political consumerism, the 2010 Haitian earthquake, philanthropy, and the prosperity gospel. These responses seek to overcome fundamental problems of capitalism – inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, and unlimited growth – by presenting capitalism as the solution to these very problems. In doing so, these solutions have two important effects, they displace and propagate new crises and make it difficult to apprehend the fundamental contradictions of capital and the consideration of other forms of life.

In Chapter I "Citizens and Consumers: Political Consumerism and Method" I offer an immanent critique of political consumerism. I examine practices of political consumerism in order to demonstrate that the politicization of consumption depoliticizes and obscures deeper questions about consumption as our way of life and further entrenches consumer agency. In other words, I argue that consumer politics is constrained by the very logic of consumerism and as such is incapable of challenging its dominance. To draw out this argument, I look at advertising that seeks to appeal to politicized subjectivities (e.g., green) and consider practices of consumption, such as "buy one give one," that unite consumerism and charity within the act of consumption itself. In doing so, these practices present consumption as the solution to the very problems created by consumption (inequality, environmental degradation, etc.) and provide limited models of political agency within capitalism. This chapter also provides an account of immanent critique, my methodological approach, and considers two alternative frameworks that I find critically insufficient to the task of analyzing political consumerism. Put simply and perhaps inadequately, immanent critique is negatively dialectical: it thinks through the contradictions of a phenomenon and seeks out the negative elements – the material at the heart of the contradiction that resists sublation and reconciliation. In doing so it points to the limits, the elements that cannot be resolved by the object, to what exceeds the logic and practice. This insight is at the heart of my critique of political consumerism and it influences and shapes the critique in subsequent chapters.

Chapter II "The Phrase and the Plan: Narrative, Debt, and the Capture of Time" examines the 2010 Haitian earthquake through a reading of two key documents, the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (2010) and the Action Plan for the Reconstruction of Haiti (2010). These documents demonstrate the efforts, opportunism, and mechanisms that institutions and persons representing capital used to enforce neoliberal policies on Haiti in the wake of the earthquake. Consistent with a long history dating at least to the Haitian Revolution, capitalism here again asserted control to prevent a non-capitalist solution to the problem – negating its own antithesis in the form of revolution. As I argue, this process of negation was enabled by two interrelated phenomenon, the discursive production of Haiti as the "poorest country in the Western Hemisphere," and the role of debt in sustaining this status. Debt produces subjects beholden to ever-present indebtedness who are bound by fiscal, moral, and ethical constraints that mutually reinforce and maintain capitalism's capture of the present and future. The temporal dimension of debts predation on our present forecloses the possibility of alternative temporal horizons that would provide opportunities for action and the possibility of other forms of life. Both of these factors contributed to the omission and erasure of debt and extraction, depoliticized and obscured deeper questions about Haitian poverty, prevented a reckoning with the past, and foreclosed on the possibility of other futures unconstrained by debt. The crisis of the earthquake provided the opportunity for capitalism to enact bolder interventions than were possible prior to the plan for reconstruction, transformations that were long sought. In this way, capitalism thus presented itself both as the solution to its own failed economic policies and interventions as well as the solution to the natural disaster. It is the latter, the earthquake, that provided an alibi - a problem not of capitalism's making - which then in turn obscured the dialectical relationship between capitalism and impoverishment, the history of the country, and the role of debt in constraining Haiti's past and future.

Chapter III "Philanthropy's Gospels of Wealth" examines philanthropy in the age of neoliberalism and argues that big philanthropy's focus on alleviating the negative consequences of capitalism through the proceeds of capital is a Sisyphean task. In part one I offer a reading of *The Gospel of Wealth* (1889) by Andrew Carnegie and juxtapose it with current Ford Foundation President Darren Walker's *New Gospel of Wealth* (2015). What I find is an interesting dichotomy. On one hand, Carnegie readily accepts that capitalism produces inequality but justifies it on the grounds of improving the human race. Walker, on the other hand, fails to recognize capitalism's role in producing inequality and mistakes it, and the philanthropy it supports, as the solution to that very inequality. This belief is emblematic among the elite and pervades big philanthropy. In order to further demonstrate this tendency, part two offers a reading of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Annual Letters. The priorities and worldview that emerge in this reading, largely overlap with the vision of other international institutions of economic and political development and reflect an elite consensus. At the heart of the letters is an unshakeable belief in capitalisms ability to eliminate poverty, in technology and markets to improve outcomes, and in technocratic states to facilitate the necessary conditions of the global economy. I argue that the philanthropists of today fail to recognize capitalism as an engine of inequality, immiseration, and environmental degradation, and in doing so, wrongly seek to solve the problems of capitalism with techniques and programs that replicate the very logic of capital. Moreover, as Oscar Wilde argued, philanthropy itself, of which the foundations of today are exemplary, at best merely alleviate the worst aspects of capitalism, and in so doing prevent challenges to capitalism as a way of life.

Chapter IV "The Prosperity Gospel: An Inverted Consciousness of the World" examines the role of religion in both challenging and affirming capitalism in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Readers of the previous three chapters will notice a related but somewhat different dialectical movement concerning the way that capitalism presents itself as the solution to the very problems it creates. While the preceding chapters demonstrate this tendency through the reading of concrete practices and documents, this chapter performs a similar analysis but from a slightly broader perspective. Drawing on Karl Marx's remarks on religion in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *Capital Volume 1*, I argue that we should understand religion as "the general theory of this world" and "its universal basis of consolation and justification." As such, religious practices and pronouncements shed light on the dynamics of an age. In our contemporary moment I look to two different voices and traditions, Pope Francis's Catholicism and the Prosperity Gospel of Joel Osteen, in order find sources of consolation and justification in our time. What we see in reading these two religious figures are competing visions of what God wants from us, or for us, and wildly different analyses of the problems of our age and their solutions. As I argue, we can read the Prosperity Gospel as a faithful representation of the "inverted consciousness of our world" while Pope Francis's critical Catholicism represents a radical path divergent from the tenor of the time. As such, the Prosperity Gospel offers a solution to the problems created by capital by stunting systemic or structural criticism and transforming any failing of capitalism into a personal failure that can be overcome by right thinking.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, there are a number of assumptions that I inherit from the tradition of critical theory as well as those that spring from my work thinking through the contradictions of capital in these chapters. The first assumption worth stating outright is that capitalism produces inequality, environmental degradation, and poverty. Poverty is likely the most controversial of these effects and Bill Gates in particular is a vociferous defender of global capitalism's ability to lift up all of humanity and as he sees it, capitalism dramatically reduces poverty. This argument is addressed but in a different context in Chapter III of this dissertation. Gates's argument and those like it are supposedly backed up by sweeping and persuasive data but in actuality the evidence they point to simply obscures the misery and poverty produced by global capitalism. For readers interested in the finer points of this data and how it is mobilized see Roge Karma's "5 Myths About Global Poverty" for a recent critique.[1] More generally, Marx's discussion of the enclosure of the commons and the enactment of the bloody legislation demonstrates the dynamics of the simultaneous production of impoverishment and capitalist accumulation. Since birth, the capitalist mode of production has relied upon conditions of poverty for producing surplus value. The paupers of post-feudal England were some of the first but not the last to be ground under by capitalism and today few places and people on earth can avoid this fate.

The second assumption I need to account for is the way I seem to attribute agency to capitalism throughout this work with phrases like "capitalism responded." What I mean to suggest by this type of clumsy formulation is something akin to what Marx describes as "the economic law of motion of modern society." In other words, the implied agency refers to the way the capitalist mode of production generates and exerts force in many directions as it cycles from M to C to M in a circuit of endless growth. The materiality of the capitalist mode of production is

[1] Roge Karma, "Five Myths About Global Poverty," *Current Affairs*, July, 26, 2019, https://www.currentaffairs.org/2019/07/5-myths-about-global-poverty?fbclid=IwAR1FhUOipDzfBpuYoxboswBnX99g4XSSUwK2qc8C6lZHS5oZg3qyVejkSns

the logic of capital in motion, and this force is what I attribute a sense of agency to. Marx's own clarification in the original preface to Capital Volume 1 is useful here:

> To prevent possible misunderstandings, let me say this. I do not by any means depict the capitalist and landowner in rosy colours. But individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers [*Trager*] of particular class-relations and interests. My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.[2]

When Marx personifies capital, in the figure of Mr. Moneybags for example, he does so in order to illustrate the general tendencies of the capitalist not the individual motives of a particular capitalist. This difference is crucial as it reflects the heart of his critique of capital.

The third and last assumption I need to address concerns my use of neoliberalism throughout the dissertation. At times I use it interchangeably with capitalism or, following David Harvey[3], as short hand for a particular historical form of capitalism grounded in practices and policies of privatization and economic liberalization imposed on poor countries and populations by the rich. My hesitance to purge the term and simply replace it with capitalism stems from a persistent intuition that it does name something different about contemporary capitalism, the sharpness of the entrepreneurial logic, and the transformation of liberalism we live with today. My intention was to substantially address the concept of neoliberalism as part of this dissertation but as the project evolved and my inquiry into neoliberalism broadened, it was increasingly clear that I'd be unable to achieve this goal in a way that would serve either the project or the scholarship on neoliberalism. While this account may be unsatisfying, recent work[4] in the field of

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[2] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol.1*., Trans. Ben Fowkes, (New York & London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 92.

[3] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

[4] See Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberlism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019)* and Thomas Biebircher, The Political theory of Neoliberalism, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018)

political theory has returned to the work of Hayek, Mises, and others in order to excavate a political theory of neoliberalism and add important resources to the debate over the concept of neoliberalism.

CHAPTER 1

CITIZENS AND CONSUMERS: POLITICAL CONSUMERISM AND METHOD

On Method and Object

At the same time that capitalism responded to the financial crisis of 2008, it also increasingly discovered the need to respond to a very different crisis, the environmental costs of endless growth and the never-ending cycle of production and consumption. Growing awareness of the ecological consequences of capitalism as a way of life has forced governments to respond, at least rhetorically and with modest measures, to the increasingly apparent signs of global warming. Here as elsewhere, capitalism responded to this existential crisis by presenting itself as the solution to the very problems it creates. For example, Chevron launched its "Human Energy" marketing campaign in late 2007, conflating humanity and fossil fuels. In an advertisement from this campaign, Chevron boldly proclaimed; "The problem, becomes the solution" and further stated that "The key to ensuring success is found in the same place that created this need: humanity itself. When the unique spirit we all possess is allowed to flourish, mankind has proven its ability to take on and overcome any issue."[5] In doing so, Chevron expressed a truth emblematic of contemporary capitalism – "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism."[6] As a result, it is easier to imagine capitalism as the only solution to the very problems it creates. Central to this belief are popularized attributes about capitalism like innovation, or as the quote from the advertisement above concludes; "It's a spirit of hard work, ingenuity, drive, courage and no small measure of commitment." Chevron's Human Energy campaign is but one particular example of this

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[5] Chevron. "Human Energy." Marketing Campaign. 2007.

[6] Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism: *Is There No Alternative?*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 8.

tendency for capital to survive crises of its own making, a tendency that takes many forms, from renewable energy technologies, to proclamations of corporate social responsibility, to forms of ethical and political consumerism.

In this chapter I will examine practices of political and ethical consumerism in order to demonstrate that the politicization of consumption depoliticizes and obscures deeper questions about consumption as our way of life and further entrenches consumer agency. In other words, I will argue, consumer politics is constrained by the very logic of consumerism and as such is incapable of challenging its dominance. To draw out this argument, I will look at advertising that seeks to appeal to politicized subjectivities (e.g., green) and consider practices of consumption, such as "buy one give one," that unite consumerism and charity within the act of consumption itself. In doing so, these practices present consumption as the solution to the very problems created by consumption (inequality, environmental degradation, etc.) and provide important models for political agency within capitalism.

In order to clarify my argument and to distinguish its specifically critical quality, I provide a brief treatment of alternative approaches and arguments concerning political consumerism. The first, embodied in the work of Michele Micheletti and Dietlind Stolle, accurately identifies the limits of political consumerism but nevertheless see in it a hope for meaningful political action facilitated by global governance. The second, a nostalgic vision of liberal subjects motivated by real needs and restraint, appears in the work of Benjamin Barber. For Barber, consumerism is childish and what is needed is a moderating ethos akin to the protestant ethic to restore a proper balance to American democracy. For reasons I lay out below, I find both of these positions insufficient and offer critical theory, particularly immanent critique, as an alternative theoretical horizon better suited to grasp the contradictions of political consumerism and capitalism.

The specifically critical character of immanent critique consists in its focus on internal contradictions. Put simply and perhaps inadequately, immanent critique is negatively dialectical: it thinks through the contradictions of a phenomenon and seeks out the negative elements – the material at the heart of the contradiction that resists sublation and reconciliation. In doing so it points to the limits, the elements that cannot be resolved by the object, to what exceeds the logic and practice. This excess can both illuminate contradiction(s) and simultaneously offer a kernel of hope for different forms of life. To that end, I draw upon the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, particularly their *Dialectic of Englightment,* as well as the work of Walter Benjamin, to situate my argument. For the purposes of this project, what I find valuable about these thinkers is the attention they pay to the evolution of the commodity form and to the relationship between culture and industry. Their work furthers Marx's critique of the commodity form not simply by restating his argument but by subjecting contemporary forms (such as the opera ticket) to the spirit of his ruthless critique. My hope is that working within this theoretical tradition allows me to avoid the limits of Micheletti and Barber's critique, as well as the limits of liberalism, to offer a more radical critique of the present.

The last section of this chapter offers a consideration of another approach to the question of political consumerism and to the nature of subjects and power. This approach draws on Michel Foucault's work in the *History of Sexuality* and to the role of genealogy in political theory. Foucault's theorization of power, or at least that attributed to his work, demonstrates the way in which power operates through discourse and how subjects both produce and are able to resist and contest power. While different in important ways, there are affinities between immanent critique and genealogy, particularly the ability to diagnosis non-identity - the discontinuities endemic to forms of power, its inability to recognize its own origin and to achieve full self awareness of its own practices and discourses. For my purposes in this chapter, Foucault's treatment of Artemidoris helps to illuminate the work of best selling author and food critic Michael Pollan. The ethic of food offered by Pollan is a prescriptive ethics that seeks to overcome the negative effects of capitalism on food systems and human health and at the same time it provides a set of criteria that consumption eagerly seeks to address as yet another market segment. As a result, I find Foucaultian resistance to political consumerism insufficiently critical, yet hold out hope for the promise of genealogy.

Citizens and Consumers: Liberal Commensurability

At the heart of political and ethical consumerism is the evolving relationship and tension between the consumer and the citizen subjectivities. While both subject positions empower and disempower individuals as they navigate the market and society, the consumer act, in theory, is private and concerns one's own well being, while the citizen is concerned with the public good. In practice, if we tried to analyze this relationship, we would be hard pressed to draw such a clear distinction. Today, neoliberalism[7] offers a strong narrative that subordinates the citizen to the consumer and broadly conflates economic and political freedom. In general, this narrative reduces the role of the citizen to an agent of formal consent for a diminished government dedicated to providing security and facilitating market activity. Accordingly, human freedom and agency find

[7] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

their proper expression through subjectivities such as the consumer and entrepreneur and above all as individuals in a market. Global capitalism operates across borders and with citizenship tied to the nation-state the consumer subject has assumed a role of contestation and political expression seemingly able to bridge the gulf.[8]

Due to this complicated conceptual environment it is often hard to disentangle these subject positions, and it is this difficulty that has produced a hybrid citizen-consumer. In the twilight of liberalism and neoliberalism, the citizen and the consumer become compatible, even mutually reinforcing, subject positions. Within the horizon of liberalism there exists a commensurability between the two, stemming from the centrality of the rational, autonomous, subject of the liberal worldview. However, the financial crisis of 2008 and rise of consumerism in China suggest that there is no natural compatibility between consumers and citizens, especially as those terms are understood in democratic capitalism.[9] Despite these frictions, scholarly engagement of these issues often responds by either equating consumer and citizen action or seeking to rescue the liberal political subject from the follies of the market and restore a proper rationale balance between the two. Below I briefly consider a few examples of these tendencies in order to demonstrate their insufficiencies.

The work of Michele Micheletti and her colleague Dietlind Stolle has brought a level of conceptual clarity to the practices of contemporary political consumerism. As

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[8] The November 2012 fire and building collapse at garment factories in Bangladesh offered an opportunity to analyze the role and responsibility of those in the first world for the fate of those in the third. Unsurprisingly much of the media coverage has framed the issue as one to be addressed by consumers, not citizens.

[9] For a treatment of this issue see Streeck, Wolfgang. The Crises of Democratic Capitalism. *New Left Review,* No.1 (Sept & Oct 2011)

social scientists however, they have charted aspects of the development of the phenomenon but are unable, within the frame of their analysis, to critically interrogate the practice. As a result, Micheletti's conclusions suggest that political consumerism is ultimately a problem of global governance and holds out some hope for consumer activism as the solution. In doing so, she argues for the capacity of political consumerism to influence political institutions and companies as an effective politics. While I find her analysis illuminating, I do not believe political consumerism holds the critical capacity Micheletti maintains. This is in part because I believe she does not fully grasp the contradictions and pathologies endemic to political consumerism and embodied in the citizen-consumer. The politicization of the market, conceived as a site of individual actors making choices to send signals to national and international actors, is limited in even the most optimistic account and incapable of politicizing the role of the market itself in everyday life.

In *The Market and the Forum*[10], Jon Elster argues that political theory has largely cast the market as the realm of private instrumental reason and the forum as the realm of politics where private interests and instrumental reason do not intrude. He rightly sees this as a false dichotomy and criticizes deliberative thinkers like Habermas who elevate rational agreement as the goal of politics and theorists like Mill for advocating a politics that is an end in itself designed to improve the participants. For Elster, social choice theory of a Marxist variant forges a middle ground where the political process is recognized as instrumental and political acts are private. While I also view the market as

[10] Jon Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory," in *Foundations of Social Choice Theory*, edited by Jon Elster and Jon, Aanund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 103-132.

a site of politics, as does Micheletti, I believe wedding politics (democracy in particular) to instrumental reason (even of a Marxist variant) further naturalizes the mechanisms and tenets of capitalism.[11] Furthermore, critiques that rely upon instrumental reason are ill equipped to analyze the symbolic value[12] of cultural capitalism that increasingly defines consumerism and play an important role in my overall project and in this chapter in particular. Despite its Marxist leanings, social choice theory is limited by its liberalism and at best only folds political consumerism into its vision of private politics, a position akin to the economic subject.

Political theorist turned consultant and best-selling author Benjamin Barber followed up his widely read *Jihad vs. McWorld* [13]with *Consumed; How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*.[14] As the title suggests, Barber offers a wide-ranging critique of contemporary consumer capitalism. The problem with consumer capitalism, according to Barber, is that it turns us into children who lack the strength, clarity, and fortitude that the protestant ethic once provided when capitalism served real needs for hard working people. This narrative of an infantilizing ethos is both romantic and assuring because it suggests another capitalism is possible, one that society

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[11] In the Mirror of Production, Jean Baudrillard argues that by leaving the economic principle of labor intact, Marx reproduces the broader categories and logic of political economy that capitalism relies upon.

[12] See Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. (St. Louis, MO.: Telos Press, 1981)

[13] Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*. (New York: Times Books, 1995)

[14] Benjamin Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*. (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2008)

has already experienced, in which markets live up to their promise and notions of citizenry maintain an air of responsibility in order to preserve the public good.

If Micheletti was emblematic of my concern about the conflation of the consumer-citizen, Barber is equally representative of a desire to redeem the Liberal subject. For Barber, what is needed today is a moderating ethos capable of constraining capitalism and strengthening citizens. He offers no specific ethos capable of delivering us form the infantilizing ethos of consumption but does emphasize that it must distinguish between real and manufactured needs, something he nostalgically sees exemplified in the protestant ethic. Ultimately this will aid in the cultivation of cosmopolitanism, not unlike Micheletti's desire for global governance, with the citizen reasserting its role over the consumer.

I find this argument troubling for a few reasons. First, it presumes a distinction between real and manufactured needs that I do not believe is easily substantiated.[15] Second, it assumes that a moderating ethos would be more attractive than consumption as a way of life. If Barber imagines a moderating ethos akin to the protestant ethic, he misrecognizes the function of a spirit of capitalism, which does not dictate, but rather reflects and informs, the actually existing conditions of capitalism. In order for a moderating ethos to appear the dialectical conditions of capitalism must generate and be

[15] While it is true that we need the means to maintain ourselves, or as Marx might put it, to be able to continue to sell our labor power, it is not clear what standard or fashion these needs must take. A look at ancient prescriptive texts like those by Artemidorus examined in The Care of the Self by Foucault show a diversity of opinion on how one should maintain oneself. A simple geneaology of nutritional science (or diet plans) will yield a wide diversity of opinion and indicate the overlapping relationship between science and culture. In light of this difficulty it might be argued that while basic human needs may not be easily identifiable in any particular time or place they are abstractly universal. That may be true but neither Barber nor I is concerned with abstractions. Without a culture that valorizes limited consumption a distinction between authentic needs and manufactured wants is not legible.

generated by it. Lastly, Barber does not offer a robust account of the contemporary spirit or spirits of capitalism, a task that might allow him to better conceptualize and develop his notion of a moderating ethos. However, in doing so, he may reach the limits of his critique.

Capitalism today is increasingly financialized with consumption driven by credit. US consumers are structurally encouraged to spend. There is no longer an incentive to deferred gratification in this world or the next. The protestant ethic may have helped to set the wheels in motion but, as I argue in Chapter Four, the prosperity gospel is the ethic of today. A moderating ethos therefore would need to contend with the deep structures of our economy, at present it is hard to imagine a U.S. citizenry interested in abandoning consumption as a way of life. What Barber fails to recognize is that the realm of consumption does not simply infantilize human beings. In late capitalism, acts of consumption not only consume objects - they produce subjects. This is the core of cultural capitalism. Consumerism allows individuals to engage in acts of self-creation and re-creation. While subjection is produced through acts of consumption, production has also transformed work into a creative enterprise of self-expression and fulfillment. In the post-fordist era the one-dimensional[16] man of the firm gave way to the creative professional and flexible independent contractor.

[16] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991)

Two notable works chart dimensions of this transformation. In *The Conquest of Cool*[17] Thomas Frank convincingly demonstrates the way in which the 1960's counterculture was integrated into advertising, fashion, and the business culture at large. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello trace a similar transformation through French management literature from the 1970's through the 1990's. In *The New Spirit of Capitalism* they argue that forms of critique are instrumental in shaping the spirit and logic of capitalism. In the wake of the social upheaval of 1968, capitalism had to definitively shed its reliance on the asceticism of Protestantism as the spirit of capitalism.[18] The years since have seen the erosion of labor and the abandonment of the firm. What has risen is flexibility in both labor and production and decentered modes of working. Boltanski and Chiapello term this logic connexionist.[19] What we currently encounter is a world in which we are increasingly compelled to find meaning through the endless cycle of work and shopping. These activities are central to our view of the good life and our private and public institutions are designed to engender this lifestyle.[20] The insight that capitalism dynamically responds to and incorporates elements of critique is important and suggests something more complex than mere co-optation. The tendencies of political consumerism I am concerned with signify a similar adaptation and incorporation of environmental and social critiques of capitalism. Just as the fashion industry transformed itself in the face of cultural upheaval of 1968 and industry has

[17] Thomas Frank, *The conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997)

[18] Daniel Bell referenced in Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. 2005. *The new spirit of capitalism*. London; New York: Verso.

[19] Ibid, 345.

[20] Sixteen years after the start of the Iraq War the forced adoption of privatization and "democracy" remains an awe-inspiring failure and testament to US hubris.

embraced creativity in the work place, today consumer capitalism has embraced the desire to overcome its own negative tendencies.[21] I believe that what is needed is not a new moderating ethos or a faith in the consumer subject as an agent of change. Rather, we need an immanent critique of political consumerism that investigates the contradictions and pathologies of the logic of consumer capitalism and is capable of challenging consumption as such as a way of life.

Citizens and Consumers: Immanent Critique

In this section, I will draw on Theodor Adorno's theorization of negative dialectics as it relates to immanent critique and Walter Benjamin's notion of constellation to aid my inquiry. Their work and intellectual relationship, at least as it appears in their correspondence, offers an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of historical materialism to grasp the emerging commodity form and its transformation of everyday life. Because the critical theory of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin will serve as my theoretical touchstone it will be useful to offer a brief sketch of the relevance of their work to my project.

In "The Culture Industry: Mass Deception as Enlightenment," Adorno and Horkheimer lay out a blistering critique of the domination of capitalist society. At its core this chapter, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment Philosophical Fragments*[22], is concerned with

[21] For instance we can view green products that present themselves as more environmentally conscious as a response to the environmental critique of capitalism. Similarly, we can look at marketing campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" as a response to feminist critiques of capitalism.

[22] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002)

the transformation of art produced in the structure of patronage to art produced by and in accordance with the demands and logic of industry. However, the form of the chapter is fragmentary and quite a bit emerges in their analysis that is noteworthy. For instance, the connections Adorno and Horkeimer draw between the development of liberalism and the culture industry, the administered society, and the unreality of choice presented by consumerism, challenge sacred ideas of democratic theory and the autonomy of individual choice which remain operative today. These insights have played an important role in critiques of consumer society[23] and continue to allow us to challenge the economic and social structures in which we live. More broadly they resonate critiques of neoliberalism and homo economicus.

Adorno and Horkheimer's theorization of enlightenment in *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* provide a formative angle through which to view the emergence of consumer society. The transformation they describe of enlightenment as an exercise in pursuit of human freedom to one that produces an alienating distance between subject and object traces the transformation of enlightenment into *ideology* in the modern world. The disenchantment of the world produced by this form of enlightenment, specifically through the influence of positivism, seeks to eradicate the negative (the mysterious or other) from society. Liberalism played a significant role in this process and Adorno and Horkheimer describe this relationship as well. The result of this transformation was the production of a seemingly totalizing political and social edifice – a disenchanted life.

I mention this aspect of the work because I feel it is an important frame for understanding the erasure of the boundaries between art, industry/advertising, and

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[23] Juliet Schor and Douglas B. Holt, *The consumer society reader* (New York, NY: New Press, 2000)

entertainment described in the above mentioned chapter and the essays collected in the Culture Industry edited volume[24]. It is through the socio-economic-political process of enlightenment described by Adorno and Horkheimer that the distinction between art and industry as well as social and economic values collapses or erodes. Central to this change is the emergence of information as a commodity, underwritten by advertising, and experienced by citizens as the *free* press. These shifts create some of the central conditions undergirding consumer society. The culture industry itself is only made possible by the integration or wedding of art and industry to serve capital. "The style of the culture industry, which has no resistant material to overcome, is at the same time the negation of style. The reconciliation of the general and particular, of rules and the specific demands of the subject, through which alone style takes on substance, is nullified by the absence of tension between the poles."[25] However, at this point, what I wish to stress is the totalizing nature of this form of enlightenment. By elevating man above nature his authorship is reified and he fails to recognize his role in the production of the world he now confronts. As a result one views the choices that are presented in consumer society as natural and as the only choices available. Moreover, the idea that one makes choices in this way is naturalized. The limit of political choice in liberal consumer societies is reached when one seeks to extend choice or politics beyond the domain of the market or when one questions the centrality of the market in life. It is

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[24] Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, edited by J.M. Bernstein (London; New York: Routledge, 2001)

[25] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002)

precisely these political questions that are obscured by the process of enlightenment described by Horkheimer and Adorno.

Consumption as a way of life provided through state and capital administration is considered not only constant but as a prerequisite for national success. At the core of this way of life is a cyclical process of consumption and production whereby desire and objects for fulfillment are continually reproduced. The choices available for fulfillment of these desires are the only meaningful choices in this social totality whether they are found on the store shelves or the voting booth. The pure volume of individual choices that constitute our consumer focused democracy make it difficult to imagine its paradoxical nature. The consumer and political choices we make in fact prevent us from making more fundamental choices about our way of life. Debt, financialization, and the entire process of consumption and production are future oriented and help to create the inertia of so-called progress. Much like the role of style in the culture industry mentioned above, choice today has no "resistant material to overcome."

The rise of mass culture, which owes its formation in part to the development of enlightenment, concretized the marriage of art and industry and expressed this new symbolic order in the form of advertising. Seventy years ago Adorno and Horkheimer perceived that "advertising becomes simply the art with which Goebbels presciently equated it, l'art pour l'art, advertising for advertising's sake, the pure representation of social power."[26] Adorno and Horkheimer saw language being transformed into instrumental communication (a result of the rise of positivism) contributing to a "culture as advertising" which troubled signification and resulted in the "demythologizing of

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[26] Ibid, XXX.

language."[27] Today advertising techniques are far more advanced and the scale and integration of advertising in daily life is far greater then at any time in the past. If advertising is the "pure representation of social power,"[28] all advertising is political and the terrain of advertising becomes the site to express and satisfy political commitments. It also obscures or erases the negative – a life organized by other principles and activities, a different form of politics and a different way of life. Therefore, it is by analyzing the production of meaning in relation to advertisements that we can approach the limits of contemporary politics.

In addition to Adorno and Horkheimer, the work of their contemporary Walter Benjamin also has influenced my investigation of political consumerism. While certainly influenced by Marx and dialectical materialism, Benjamin offers a richer materialism that attempts to illustrate not only the practices of an epoch but its spirit. In order to do so he develops a number of interesting concepts including the "dialectical image," "trace," "constellation," "phantasmagoria," and "aura," as well as experimenting with form. His use of montage, especially the "convolutes", a patchwork of collected material that comprises much of the Arcade Projects, relies on juxtaposition and creative assemblage to produce an effect or discovery on the part of the reader. It was his creative tendency that both excited and frustrated Adorno. In their correspondences Adorno begs for Benjamin to more clearly mediate his arguments because they are too important to be lost in the forms Benjamin is working in. Whether one agrees with Adorno or not, Benjamin's experimentation with form, the critical attention he pays to everyday objects, art, and lifestyles that others ignore, and his ambition to broaden and innovate dialectical

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[27] Ibid, 132.
[28] Ibid, XXX

materialism to better capture the lived experience of a time is inspiring and prescient. While our dream world[29] is no longer solely constructed of iron, the alienation endemic to the plastic cage[30] we inhabit is more difficult to identify than that of past epochs and our efforts to do so must not shrink in front of this difficulty.

Benjamin's work is particularly useful in its demonstration of new forms of value that are not easily reduced to Marxist formulations relying on labor power, use value, and exchange value. Many sections of the unfinished Arcades Projects and the preceding essay, *Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, paint a complex picture of how value is produced in the world of consumption itself. Rather than an emphasis on production as the fountainhead of value, Benjamin demonstrates how the social world of consuming produces value as well. The Arcades and the department stores that follow them create "wish images"[31]- new desires that express the present and long for the future. "What emerges in these wish images is the resolute effort to distance oneself from all that is antiquated – which includes, however, the recent past."[32] Today this fashion cycle has become routinized by industry on an impressive scale and luxury and customization have permeated most levels of socio-economic differentiation. We see this in the 2012

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[29] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002)

[30] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995)

[31] Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, edited by Howard Eiland, and Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002)

[32] Ibid, 33

partnership of Nieman Marcus and Target[33] as exclusivity attempts to marry itself to mass distribution. “Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped.”[34]

Some of the most interesting ideas regarding the commodity form appear in the written exchanges between Adorno and Benjamin. In a letter dated August 5, 1935, Adorno writes: with “the vitiation of their use value, the alienated things are hollowed out, and as ciphers they draw in meanings. Subjectivity takes possession of those things, insofar as it invests them with intentions of desire and fear.”[35] The metaphor of a cipher is provocative and it appears to anticipate the micro targeting and product differentiation we encounter today. The advertising industry does not sell use value they sell ephemeral identity and signification – sign value. The pure volume of similar products, especially food products, competing for our attention and differentiated mainly by brand is evidence of the vitiation of use value as a meaningful concept for analyzing contemporary consumption. “Dialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning – are instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning.”[36]

The value produced through apprehension and presentation of fashion extends to all commodity forms. In another letter, Adorno comments to Benjamin that the possession of an opera ticket has an “exhibition” value for the owner that is not reducible

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[33] See related press release https://corporate.target.com/press/releases/2012/10/target-and-neiman-marcus-reveal-highly-anticipated

[34] Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, edited by Howard Eiland, and Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002) 37.

[35] Ibid, 53

[36] Ibid, 63

to the upcoming performance or the purchase price of the ticket.[37] In fact, this exhibition value may be quite diverse, signifying access to an exclusive event, exhibiting cultural literacy, expressing fandom, etc. This value is only produced within the social totality and functions as both social and economic currency. Exhibition value is further theorized by Benjamin in his famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility*.[38] He argues that a shift has occurred between "cult value" and "exhibition value" through technologies of mechanical reproduction, namely photography. This shift eliminated the "auratic" character of the work of art by eliminating the distance between subject and object. "The presentation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being's self-alienation."[39] In addition it has heralded "profound changes in apperception" leading to conditions of "reception in distraction." In our own time the development of digital technologies has allowed for a greater reduction in time, bringing us closer to immediacy in the realms of communication and information. Desktop and cloud computing software have reduced the financial and technical barriers to entry for anyone interested in producing and distributing information or commenting on current events and pop culture. These changes, like those analyzed by Benjamin, disrupt our collective understanding of artistic, journalistic, and political authority and our relation to one another. The blogosphere put into question the authority of the paper (a form already transformed from direct patronage to one subsidized by advertising), the twenty-four hour news cycle only increased the tendency of politics to be an exercise of continual presentation and manipulation, and the rise of "social" media has allowed us to interact

[37] Ibid, 107-109
[38] Ibid, 101
[39] Ibid, 113

through alienated self-presentations whose very presence creates speculative financial value and targeted demographics for marketing.

Practices of Political and Ethical Consumerism

Consumption has a long and complicated discursive and material history[40] and at the outset it is important to distinguish what I mean and do not mean by political and ethical consumerism. History offers a plethora of examples of political battles waged on the terrain of consumption and consumer purchasing power is employed individually and collectively to achieve broader goals of equality and inclusion.[41] Oftentimes this takes the form of a boycott, or conversely increased patronage (buycott), to express a political or ethical point of view. These practices politicize acts of consumption for those who are shut out or disenfranchised from the political processes.[42] In doing so, shopping transforms into a site of political contestation. While boycotts and buycotts continue to play an important role especially for marginalized communities, they will not be the focus of this section.[43] Similarly, I will not focus on acts of political consumerism associated with nationalism such as "buy American" campaigns.

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[40] see David Graeber, David. 2011. "Consumption," *Current Anthropology* vol. 52, no.4 (August 2011): 489-511.

[41] see Victoria DeGrazia, and Ellen Furlough, eds. *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2008)

[42] Roopali Mukherjee, and Sarah Banet-Weiser, eds. 2012. *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2012) 7.

[43] One example of the continuing relevance of boycotts can be found in the 2012 dispute between the Mayors of Boston and Chicago with the restaurant chain Chick Fil-A. The dispute arose when Chick Fil-A executive voiced opposition to gay marriage and gay marriage activists turned Chick FIl-A's expansion into downtown Boston into a battleground over issues of marriage equality.

Rather, this section examines two interrelated tendencies of contemporary consumer capitalism that present political and ethical consumerism as the solution to the problems[44] caused by global capitalism and consumption as a way of life. The first is the portrayal of objects of consumption (and brands[45]) as socially, politically, or environmentally conscious. This tendency takes many forms. What I have in mind are claims that promote a product's attributes, production, or packaging as green, sustainable, or providing some other social benefit in comparison to other products.

For example, the water filtration company Brita suggests that we can "filter for good."[46] By using a Brita filter an individual can reduce plastic waste by no longer consuming bottled water and improve their health by drinking water free of contaminants. Brita is also concerned with reducing sugar intake, an easy goal for those in the water filtration business but one that resonates in our culture of obesity.[47] Similarly, the carmaker Subaru expresses this tendency in the promotion of its zero waste manufacturing facility.[48] This environmentally friendly factory helps Subaru demonstrate its commitment to being a "leader in environmental initiatives."[49] The campaign is silent on the fact that Subaru is in the business of producing cars with mediocre gas mileage

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[44] Among the problems created by global capitalism are increasing inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation.

[45] Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*. (New York: Picador, 2010, 3rd ed)

[46] "Why Brita," Brita, accessed August 14, 2019, http://www.brita.com/why-brita/

[47] The Soda Stream makes a similar argument regarding plastic waste but not on sugar consumption. This point of departure demonstrates how various producers can adopt ethical message in service of their sales goals.

[48] "Environmental Sustainability," Subaru, accessed March 2013, http://www.subaru.com/company/environment-sustainability.html

[49] Ibid

that contribute to global warming and it also doesn't address the environmental impact of the source material used in the manufacturing process. Nevertheless, the beauty of advertising is its ability to appeal to sentiment rather than engage in argument. It is above truth and falsehood and seeks only identification. We can find a plethora of similar examples in most store aisles and advertising circulars.

The second tendency I want to highlight is the embedding of social, ethical, environmental, or political acts within the act of consumption itself. This model of consumption collapses or at least erodes distinctions between consumption and charity, transforming acts of consumption into solutions for the problems created by consumer capitalism itself. Two variants of this second tendency are discernable in the market. The first and most compelling is the buy one give one (B1G1) consumer model, not to be confused with the ubiquitous buy one get one (BOGO) sales promotion. Companies that adopt this model provide a product to someone in need for every product that is purchased. When you buy one they give one.

The most recognizable brand utilizing this model is Toms.[50] Toms offers canvas slip on shoes in a hip style. For every pair of Toms shoes you purchase another pair will be given to someone in need. Through a contest Fans of Toms are eligible to go on a "giving trip" in order to be involved in the delivery of the shoes. To participate in a giving trip fans need to win a "ticket to give" through online voting.[51] Toms recently added eyewear to its line of B1G1 products, going up against B1G1 competitor Warby

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50 "Homepage," Toms, accessed March 2013, http://www.toms.com/

51 "Ticket to Give," Toms, accessed March 2013, http://www.toms.com/ticket-to-give/faq

Parker[52] who sells affordable and chic glasses online. Following Toms lead, billion-dollar shoe brand Skechers[53] launched Bobs shoes, its own B1G1 program. Skechers mimicry suggests that the B1G1 model is not only attractive to socially minded entrepenuers but also to large apparel corporations. Toothbrush maker Smiled Squared[54] offers B1G1 toothbrushes and urges us to "rethink buying." One Laptop Per Child[55] launched their early laptops to consumers as a B1G1 proposition before embracing a more traditional non-profit and philanthropic path.[56]

The second and related variant of this tendency I call the "buy one donate some" model. This model also unites the acts of consumption with charity but maintains a certain distance (through money) between the good consumed and the social good achieved by recipient charities. Newman's Own[57] brand food products are by far the most successful and recognizable version of this model contributing all profits to charity. Similarly, Starbucks' bottled water line "Ethos"[58] takes a small fraction of the profits and uses them to fund charity work through the Starbucks Foundation. Like the B1G1 model, this second variant (B1G$) unites the consumer act with an act of charity. In doing so, both variants offer the opportunity for consumers to make a seemingly positive impact

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52 "Homepage," Warby Parker, accessed August 2019 http://www.warbyparker.com/

53 "Bobs," Skechers, accessed March 2013 http://www.skechers.com/info/bobs

54 "Homepage," Smile Squared, accessed August 2019 https://smilesquared.com/

55 "Homepage," One Laptop Per Child, accessed August 2019 http://one.laptop.org/

56 One Laptop Per Child is an interesting case not only for its adoption of B1G1 early on. Central to the idea of bridging the digital divide is cultivating technical capacity that can then be utilized for entrepreneurship and industry.

57 "Homepage," Newmans Own, accessed August 2019 http://www.newmansown.com/

58 "Ethos Water Fund," Starbucks, accessed August 2019 http://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community/ethos-water-fund

simply by purchasing a product. As such, consumption becomes the solution to a whole host of discrete problems that various brands can forge an affinity with.

One of the reasons these models gain traction is because consumption is also a rich site of production. Consumer acts are integral to contemporary self-creation and form the terrain upon which our identities are tied, contested, and re-affirmed.[59] As a result, political consumerism seeks not only to make a difference but also offer the individual the opportunity to demonstrate who they are and what they value. On a recent visit to my local VW dealership service counter I encountered a display for Autotex windshield wipers that suggested "Change your blades…Change a life!" By purchasing their "pink" wipers I could not only improve the cleanliness of my windshield but support breast cancer research at the same time. Furthermore I can demonstrate my support to others by installing the wipers on my car. The "Autotex PINK" mission statement adds a feminist undertone to its message; "Autotex PINK is a woman-owned and created company that is bringing the power of women together with quality auto parts to "wipe out" Breast Cancer."[60] While it may seem silly to associate "the power of women" with "quality auto parts," the fact that these types of associations are increasingly made in the realm of consumption further indicates that the consumer subject is not engaged in rationale acts of accumulation imagine in homo economicus. Similarly, and despite its attempts to overcome *homo economicus*, behavioral economics can better account for consumer behaviors but does so by elevating the influence of decidedly non-rationale explanations – psychology, neuroscience, etc.

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[59] This is particularly interesting in subcultures. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1991)

[60] "Pink," Autotex, accessed March 2013 http://autotexpink.com/

So what? Isn't it commendable that companies are using the power of the market to supply the needy with goods and charities with money? Isn't this a win-win situation where one gets what they want and are able to do something positive at the same time? At face value the transformation of acts of consumption into acts resembling altruism appears reasonable enough, especially in comparison with buying something that only generates profit. These models appeal to a sense of compassion that I do not want to dismiss easily. In fact, it is precisely because of the appeal of these models of consumption to our concerns about global capitalism's negative effects that I am concerned with this form of consumer capitalism. The critical character of immanent critique allows for the interrogation of the internal contradictions of these practices while liberal models are powerless against this positivity.

The politicization of consumerism, as seen in these examples and many others, depoliticizes our relationship with deep structures in our society that shape the terrain upon which we live. Impulses that seek to alleviate the material and psychic damage of capitalism are displaced and incorporated through these models of consumption within the broader logic of capitalism. This incorporation dissuades us from considering how to deal with the problems created by the market in a way that does not rely on the market itself. By offering shoes to the impoverished, Tom's merely offers a solution to a problem that has not been problematized. In other words, giving consumer goods to the needy does not examine or address the role of capitalism in the creation of poverty and inequality. Rather, it adorns the wreckage. Charity, especially when given from riches derived from capital, reeks of noble perversity whereby one takes with one hand only to give with the other – always from the seat of moral authority.[61] The same can be said when charity is subsumed by consumer capitalism.[62]

Michael Pollan: An Artemidorus of our time?

In addition to immanent critique and the liberal approaches to apprehending and critiquing political consumerism I have considered above, I conclude this chapter with a brief examination of genealogy and Foucaultian resistance, as yet another conceptual avenue for critique. My conclusion is two-fold; on one hand I find practices of resistance critically insufficient to take on political consumerism, and on the other hand, maintain the critical potentiality of genealogy. Genealogy is an effective methodological approach to investigate practices of political consumerism because it allows us to see a given perspective as "not the only possibility open to us."[63] Furthermore, once one understands the contingency of subjectivity it opens up the critical possibility of "re-orienting our ways of thinking" through a process of re-evaluation that "enables us to make sense of ourselves in respect (to) the aspect of our subjectivity that, as we now see, is rendered obscure by the existing perspective."[64] This critical re-evaluation from within shares a conceptual affinity with immanent critique, which as I have argued above, is particularly useful for working through contradictions and identifying material resistant to reconciliation.

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[61] Slavoj Zizek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce, RSA Animate, accessed August 2019 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpAMbpQ8J7g

[62] Ibid

[63] David Owen,"On Genealogy and Political Theory," *Political Theory* (vol. 33, 2005): 110-120

[64] Ibid

In the third volume of the *History of Sexuality The Care of the Self*, Michel Foucault suggests that the art of cultivating oneself existed in various forms throughout ancient Greece. He examines a number of prescriptive texts, beginning with Artemidorus's work on dreams. This text was designed as a practical guide for individuals to use in order to interpret their dreams and gain benefits in the waking world. Like so many of the texts Foucault considers in the third volume it expresses an art of existence that goes beyond the mere interpretive prescriptions. Through his exposition we notice how the particular regimen that suggests this or that, reflects or reformulates larger cultural values and moral schemas. These arts of existence seek to cultivate in the individual not only the right relationship with one's physical self but also one's relation to the soul and with the larger society. In many cases the health of the individual and the society are mutually constituitive.

In describing the regimens and prescriptions for pleasure, its relation to the body, marriage, the wife, etc., Foucault emphasizes how such regimens developed from a tradition of alimentary/medical prescriptions centered on dietetics. In fact, the ones concerning sexual pleasure were much less influential than those concerned with dietetics.[65] For Greek and Roman authors concerned with medicine "the thing that matters is eating and drinking. A whole development – evident in Christian monasticism – will be necessary before the preoccupation with sex will begin to match the preoccupation with food."[66] Christian monasticism may have been necessary in order to emphasize sexual pleasure but the tendency to fashion oneself in such a way is

[65] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self, trans by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 140

[66] Ibid, 141

characteristic of cultivating oneself in terms of an art of existence. The tendency towards this sort of ethical behavior can be observed in a number of time periods with a variety of focuses. Through examining prescriptive texts it is possible to illuminate discourses that such texts seek to address. The regimen prescribed often seeks to address the care of the individual as well as the society.

In the post-crisis period, food politics has produced a number of prescriptive texts and no author has enjoyed as much popularity as Michael Pollan. It may be tempting to classify Pollan's work as little more than a diet, something akin to Atkins or South Beach. While his texts do offer advice on what, when, and how to eat they also provide a critique of the industrialization of food, the consumerism of the food industry, and the environmental and human health impact of such processes. In fact his prescriptions stem from his critique. In *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, Pollan argues that the industrialization of food, beginning with the first fast food (highly refined flour in the late 19th century), has led to the western diet which is defined by food substances better suited for consumer consumption than human consumption. All of this occurs under the ideological banner of nutritionism and the biochemical isolation of nutritional elements. His critique is damming and his writing style persuasive, I imagine this is why his books sell so well. Another reason I believe his works are popular is due to the advice he offers. By following his prescriptions one can fashion an art of existence centered on green living with benefits that go beyond ones own health. Much like Artemidorus, his advice can inform practice and at the same time reflect broader cultural discourses, in this case environmentalism. Consider the regimen he suggests:

- Eat food[67]
- Don't eat anything your grandmother would not recognize as food[68]
- Avoid food products containing ingredients that are A) unfamiliar B) unpronounceable C) more than five in number or that include D) high fructose corn syrup[69]
- Avoid food products that make health claims[70]
- Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle[71]
- Get out of the supermarket whenever possible[72]
- Eat mostly plants, especially leaves[73]
- You are what what you eats eats too[74]
- If you have the space, buy a freezer[75]
- Eat well-grown food from healthy soils[76]
- Eat wild foods when you can[77]
- Be the kind of person who takes supplements[78]
- Eat more like the French, or the Italians, or the Japanese, or the Indians, or the Greeks[79]
- Regard non-traditional food with skepticism[80]
- Don't look for the magic bullet in the traditional diet[81]
- Have a glass of wine with dinner[82]

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[67] Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2009) 147

[68] Ibid, 148

[69] Ibid, 150

[70] Ibid, 154

[71] Ibid, 157

[72] Ibid, 157

[73] Ibid, 162

[74] Ibid, 167

[75] Ibid, 168

[76] Ibid, 169

[77] Ibid, 170

[78] Ibid, 172

[79] Ibid, 173

[80] Ibid, 176

[81] Ibid, 177

- Pay more eat less[83]
- Eat meals[84]
- Do all your eating at a table[85]
- Don't get your fuel from the same place your car does[86]
- Try not to eat alone[87]
- Consult your gut[88]
- Eat slowly[89]
- Cook and if you can plant a garden[90]

I admit that listing these prescriptions without their contextualization robs them of some of their critical purchase. However, I believe it is still possible to see the contours of Pollan's argument in this abridged version of his regmin. Perhaps that is why he thought it would be beneficial to publish Food Rules, a text that offers similar prescriptions without the longer arguments put forth in In Defense of Food and The Omnivore's Dilemma. In any case the prescriptions listed above suggest an art of life that is concerned with the physical and social well being of the individual as well as the community. This text may be read by people who are attracted to environmental, progressive, left leaning politics but the core of the argument is conservative, unapologetically so. While Pollan does not claim or suggest that a return to pre-industrial society is possible or even desirable, his advice urges us to take direction from tradition

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82 Ibid, 181

83 Ibid, 183

84 Ibid, 183

85 Ibid, 192

86 Ibid, 192

87 Ibid, 192

88 Ibid, 193

89 Ibid, 193

90 Ibid, 197

and fashion our practices in ways that may effect industrial food production or save us from its individual consequences.

Much of this advice is aimed at restoring the relationship between humans, the environment, and each other. Pollan does not explicitly argue that an authentic relationship between humanity and nature has been obscured but similar assumptions appear to animate his thought. This is particularly clear in his concluding remarks in reference to the prescriptions listed above:

> And what these acts subvert is nutritionism: the belief that food is foremost about nutrition and nutrition is so complex that only experts and the industry can possibly supply it. When you're cooking with foods as alive as this – these gorgeous and semigorgeous fruits and leaves and flesh – you're in no danger of mistaking it for a commodity, or a fuel, or a collection of chemical nutrients. No, in the eye of the cook or the gardener or the farmer who grew it, this food reveals itself for what it is: no mere thing but a web of relationships among a great many living beings, some of them human, some not, but each of them dependent on the other, and all of them ultimately rooted in soil and nourished by sunlight.[91]

This passage is a clear expression of Marx's Fetishism of the Commodity. The reified character of commodity relations obscures the relationship between individuals and presents itself instead as a relationship between things. These are the conditions that create the "danger of mistaking" that Pollan mentions above. Likewise it is through a relationship to food that recognizes the social relationship of its production whereby food can "reveal itself for what it is." At the same time a type of Foucaultian resistance to power can be read in the description of the ethical practices as subversive acts.

In his section on the body, Foucault argues that ancient Greek discourses advocating the care of the self demonstrate a deep concern for the environment. This was

[91] Ibid, 200

expressed as a "medical perception of the world" that stressed the frailty of the human body and advocated environmental precepts to fortify ones health.[92] These precepts included ones home, its architecture, its orientation, and its interior design" which corresponded to a therapeutic or dietetic benefit.[93] The seasons and what one ate also held considerable meaning and must accord with an overall relationship to one's environment. "This preoccupation with the environment, with places and times, called for a constant attention to oneself, to the state one was in and to the acts that one performed. Addressing that category of people considered to be especially fragile, the city-dwellers, and above all, those who devote themselves to study."[94]

I am hardly the first to argue that contemporary dietary and environmental ethical behavior can be conceived as practices that amount to an art of existence. In his essay *The Care of the Self and Environmental Politics: Towards a Foucaultian Account of Dietary Practice*, Joseph Tanke argues that vegetarianism functions in this way. "A vegetarian appropriation of Foucault's ethics, however, allows us to see how the diet forges a close relationship with ethical and environmental truths. And such a strategy helps to secure a position from which critical truths can be deployed."[95] Tanke stresses a number of positive outcomes that result from the vegetarian diet. As a practice, abstaining from the consumption of meat provides a topic of conversation that allows engagement between individuals regarding environmental concerns. For the same reason

[92] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self, trans by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 101

[93] Ibid, 101

[94] Ibid, 102

[95] Joseph Tanke, "Towards a Foucaultian Account of Dietary Practice," *Ethics & The Environment*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2007, 16

it provides opportunities for environmental activists to communicate and build communities centered around a diverse array of practices and politics. One political triumph that Tanke mentions, is the pressure such groups were able to put on Burger King to offer a veggie burger on their menu.

The Burger King veggie burger provides a useful example of political consumerism that allows us to consider Foucaultian inspired analyses of resistance and the genealogical insights that inspire such conceptualizations. A generous reading, like Tanke offers, suggests that vegetarianism as an ethical lifestyle forges a community capable of pushing for political and ethical demands, in this case the addition of a veggie burger to the menu at Burger King. Here an ethic of responsibility produces practices of care of the self and this ethic provides the basis for shared interest and the possibility of political action. The horizon for the resistance is endemic to the dynamics of the ethical practices - the lifestyle entailed by such ethics - resulting in a resistance that is embedded in the fiber of such a way of life. In this case, the practice of vegetarianism, in the West, is embedded in the logic of industrialized food production. As such, resistance to such practices may entail, as Tanke suggests, pushing a fast food chain to include veggie burgers on their menu. The success of such resistance is its ability to enable forms of life that transform, challenge, or reconfigure forms of power. This view results from a reading of Foucault that emphasizes the view that power is not top down but rather pervasive – reproduced by subjects – and as a result, the very site of resistance or contestation.

While I am sympathetic to this view of power, I have reservations concerning the critical nature of this resistance in general and for political consumerism in particular.

Both the vegetarianism Tanke describes and the food rules suggested by Pollan are examples of ethical forms of life that critique the industrialization of food production and the environmental and social consequences of capitalism on food. As such, they offer ways of life that resist or contest the commodification of food through practices that seek to challenge, in Pollan's words, the discourse of "nutritionism." My concern is that this type of resistance is critically insufficient to illuminate or challenge political consumerism. As I argued earlier in this chapter, capitalism is dynamic and capable of incorporating forms of critique. Burger King adding a veggie burger to it's menu is a perfect example of this tendency and we could easily identify a whole host of companies and brands offering consumers food, cooking utensils, cook books, etc. to help the food conscious live their ethics. In fact these market segments drive all of sorts of chains and retailers from Whole Foods to Thrive Market. Resistance might then be seen as a tactic for transforming capitalism, to encouraging it to create practices amenable to ethical demands and, further entrenching political consumerism. Viewed this way, one can see a compatibility with the liberal approaches analyzed earlier, while the conceptual vocabulary differs the critical capacity is equally limited and the potential effects are commensurable.

While I am skeptical about the potential of this form of Foucaultian resistance, and the analysis it rests upon, to critically interrogate political consumerism, I am hesitant to dismiss genealogy as a useful and thoroughly critical concept writ large. I see an affinity between immanent critique and genealogy, namely their ability to identify the discontinuities endemic to forms of power. At its critical best, genealogy demonstrates the inaccuracy of our inheritances and reveals alternative lineages, a practice that can rupture established truths and unsettle discourses of power. Immanent critique can operate in similar ways, by identifying the negative elements at the heart of a contradiction that resist reconciliation. In doing so, both genealogy and immanent critique can identify kernels of hope that are capable of generating different forms of life and overcoming dialectical reabsorption.

CHAPTER 2

THE PHRASE AND THE PLAN:

NARRATIVE, DEBT, AND THE CAPTURE OF TIME

Introduction

Chapter Two examines the 2010 Haitian earthquake through a reading of two key documents, the Post Disaster Needs Assessment and the Action Plan for the Reconstruction of Haiti. These documents demonstrate the efforts, opportunism, and mechanisms that institutions and persons representing capital used to enforce neoliberal policies on Haiti in the wake of the earthquake. Consistent with a long history dating at least to the Haitian Revolution, capitalism here again asserted control to prevent a non-capitalist solution to problem – negating its own antithesis in the form of revolution. As I argue, this process of negation was enabled by two interrelated phenomenon, the discursive production of Haiti as the "poorest country in the Western Hemisphere," and the role of debt in sustaining this status. Both of these factors contributed to the omission and erasure of debt and extraction, depoliticized and obscured deeper questions about Haitian poverty, prevented a reckoning with the past, and foreclosed on the possibility of other futures unconstrained by debt. The crisis of the earthquake provided the opportunity for capitalism to enact bolder interventions than were possible prior and the plan for reconstruction, transformations that were long sought and had also been intended in the past. In this way, capitalism thus presented itself both as the solution to its own failed economic policies and interventions as well as the solution to the natural disaster. It is the latter, the earthquake, that provided an alibi - a problem not of capitalism's making - which then in turn obscured the dialectical relationship between capitalism and impoverishment, the history of the country, and the role of debt in constraining Haiti's past and future.

Here it is useful to take a step back and recall the broader political economy context that helped frame the earthquake not only as disaster but also as an opportunity. The financial crisis of 2008 shook the foundations of global finance and the world economy. What saved the capitalist system from itself was a series of public bailouts that allowed for the banking system to survive and stabilize the credit markets. As with most crises of capitalism, the lower classes suffered the brunt of the consequences through the dispossession of homes, loss of jobs, and destruction of modest savings. Across Europe a brutal regime of austerity aimed at punishing the "lazy" countries. Central to the crisis were credit default swaps - instruments of risk mitigation, investment, and insurance wrapped into one- that were unable to protect the predatory and profitable mortgage industry from collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions.

Following the collapse, debt and risk emerged as defining features of the global economy and a number of thinkers offered critical accounts of debt (and finance). In *The Making of Indebted Man*, Mauricio Lazzarato argues that late capitalist political economy is best understood as a debt economy. Drawing on the Second Essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Lazzarato elucidates the manner in which debt profoundly structures time and subjectivity. The temporal dimension of debt is central to the logic of capitalist reproduction and the credit that sustains it.

> Objectivizing time, possessing it in advance, means subordinating all possibility of choice and decision which the future holds to the reproduction of capitalist power relations. In this way, debt appropriates not only the present labor time of wage-earners and of the population in general, it also preempts non-chronological

> time, each person's future as well as the future of society as a whole. The principle explanation for the strange sensation of living in a society without time, without possibility, without forseeable rupture, is debt.[96]

By extending credit into the future, debt projects the present order of things indefinitely prefiguring our individual and collective possibilities. As such, the management of risk endemic to debt neutralizes time.[97]

Debt produces subjects beholden to ever-present indebtedness who are bound by fiscal, moral, and ethical constraints that mutually reinforce and maintain capitalism's capture of the present and future. The temporal dimension of capitalism's predation on our present forecloses the possibility of alternative temporal horizons that would provide opportunities for action and the possibility of other forms of life.

> For finance, the future is a mere forecast of current domination and exploitation. But if a critical threshold of uncertainty with regard to future of exploitation and domination is passed, the present, emptied of its possibilities, collapses. The crisis is then a crisis of time from which emerges a time of political and social creation, which finance can only endeavor to destroy. This is exactly our present situation. The logic of debt is stifling our possibilities for action.[98]

When time is neutralized by debt it seizes the temporal plane blocking the potential for alternative action to emerge. Capitalism produces indebtedness in order to secure its hold on society and govern the actions and aspirations of the population: the future will not differ from the present but merely will repeat it. Various forms of debt (student, mortgage, credit cards, car loans) ensure a continued labor force yoked to capitalism as a way of life. An individual constrained in this way must make certain choices in order to

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[96] Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012), 46-47.
[97] Ibid, 45
[98] Ibid, 71

maintain and sustain their standard of living, contributing en masse to the reproduction of capitalist society. It is capitalism as a way of life, the result of its dominion over time, which eliminates the possibility of other forms of life.

Haiti is no stranger to debt and its history is bound up with creditor-debtor relations. After achieving independence in 1804 French gunboats returned in 1825 demanding 150 million francs in restitution for colonial losses due to independence and threatened re-conquest if the debt was not paid. Although the debt was eventually reduced to 90 million francs, it imposed a stranglehold on the newly independent country already reeling from the revolution and centuries of slave labor. Not only did Haiti have to pay restitution to previous slave masters and plantation owners but the banks also prospered from the debt. This debt marked a new phase of external constraint being imposed upon Haiti. Instead of whips and chains the ledger books aided in the extraction of profit and control over the country. The chaotic history of Haitian independence is in many ways defined by foreign debts and interventions most notably the United States occupation from 1915-34. Despite the historical forces acting on Haiti much of the blame for its poverty and instability is attributed to corruption. In 2003 this point was made clear when Haitian President Aristide demanded the repayment of $21 billion dollars for the independence debt from France. French President Chirac responded "Haiti's dire economic straits were more the consequence of corrupt government than thwarted development inflicted by payoffs to France in exchange for recognition of the nation's independence."(LA Times) For the West, Haiti's ever-present poverty cannot be understood as the product of foreign enrichment through centuries of indebtedness only as the responsibility of a corrupt and incapable people unable to transcend their condition of debt. It is not debt that structures their bondage but their own failings. By challenging this view with his demands of "poverty with dignity," Aristide was doomed by foreign powers.

For Haiti debt is a constraint on the present and a barrier to the future. It structures a state of existence in which Haiti is always already "the poorest country in the western hemisphere" at the mercy of global capital and foreign interests. In what follows, I will demonstrate the narrative elements and narrative omissions, the very form of which corresponds to the temporality of debt that produce Haiti as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. After doing so, I will turn my attention to this narrative in action through an examination of key documents concerning the reconstruction of Haiti following the 2010 earthquake. What I find is capital and international predation, a system offering the only solution it can conceive – a transformation of Haiti to serve the current needs of global capital – sweatshops, tourism, and mangoes. The phrase discussed in part one aestheticizes the financial plunder of Haiti, idealizing the negative imprint of capitalism, and in doing so attributes self-referential adulation.

The Phrase

Readers of newspaper articles or official documents may be familiar with a phrase that either prefaces or accompanies a subject concerning Haiti. The phrase I am referring to is "Haiti the poorest country in the western hemisphere." It appears so frequently and often without direct import to the rest of the subject at hand, that it achieves the status of a truth that must be continually affirmed through mere presence alone. However, it is not always clear from the accompanying text what this phrase is supposed to convey about Haiti. In popular and official discourse its character is akin to a Homeric epithet that indicates something ever-present about a noun. The phrase, as an epithet, tells us that "Haiti" is "the poorest country in the western hemisphere" and that this distinction is a defining characteristic of Haiti – a future that will not be radically different from the present. Its usage performs the useful role of shorthand by providing a marker of character that allows us to fit Haiti into the neoliberal narrative of our time. Narratives are multiple, overlapping, and contested - qualities that make them difficult to capture and delineate. For the purposes of this chapter I am concerned with the narrative of Haitian economic development laid out in the Action Plan for the Reconstruction of Haiti. This plan imagines the future of Haiti defined by tourism, export crops (mostly mangos), and industrial labor. Through its usage, the phrase as Homeric epithet plays a prominent role in this narrative of development. It does so by silencing the past through omission, foreclosing alternative futures, and erasing debt as the engine of subjection haunting Haiti. The erasure of debt hides the fact that under capitalism the perpetual nature of the present renders the present and future commensurable.

In order to establish the connection between the phrase and the narrative of Haitian economic development I will demonstrate how they have appeared and developed in newspaper accounts from the 1960's through the present. I am not presenting an exhaustive content analysis but rather offering a reading of articles that I believe are representative of the discursive construction of the phrase and Haitian economic development in the press. My claim is that these articles demonstrate not only how the phrase is employed as epithet but also how the phrase is imbued with a vision of capitalist economic development. In other words, the phrase begins to tell us not only that Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere but also that this fact, this problem, can be solved by capitalism. As I will demonstrate the phrase foregrounds conditions ripe for capitalist intervention.

The first occurrence of the phrase I can locate is from a July 16, 1962 New York Times article titled "Episcopal Gains in Haiti Related: Missionary Tells of People's Helping Own Advance." In the article, Rev. Henry C. Burrows claims his church now has people of God "willing to do God's work in their own country." What is God's work in Haiti? Rev. Burrows situates God's work within a number of facts about Haiti:

> He (Rev. Burrows) described Haiti as "that most beautiful of lands," but said it was the poorest country in the western hemisphere with an average yearly per capita income of about $80, and also the most overpopulated. From 85 to 90 per cent of the population is illiterate, the missionary priest said.[99]

To change these conditions, the church worked to establish an educational department encompassing schools in Port au Prince and the countryside. Episcopal success rested in the ability to provide Haitians with a "community among themselves" within the educational system where they could find "joy and meaning derived from responsibility where before there was only fear and despair" Rev Burrows was quite proud that he had accomplished this without humanitarian aid for it depended not on secular handouts but on God's work – a characteristic he believed could sustain itself over time.[100] This article echoes a number of narratives from the civilizing work of Christian missionaries to a protestant ethic of responsibility. It also includes particular economic facts, and the language of international political economy to describe Haiti. As such, it may represent a

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[99] Edward C. Burks, "Episcopal Gains in Haiti Related: Missionary Tells of Peoples Helping Own Advance," *The New York Times*, July, 16, 1962.

[100] Ibid

time when the echoes of civilizing (and colonial) narratives could still be heard and narratives of post-colonial economic development were beginning to emerge.

A few years later the phrase appeared again in two special articles by Edward C. Burks in the New York Times titled “Oddities Abound in Port-Au-Prince” and “Haiti is Facing Downturn in Her Economics Fortunes.” It is in these articles that a narrative of Haitian economic development begins to appear. In the first article the phrase is amended to the “poorest and most illiterate nation of the Western Hemisphere” and goes on to state “there is practically no effective program of social improvement.”[101] However, hope lies in the opening of a new jet runway built by the Duvalier government, which promises to bring more tourists now that “fast all-jet services from Miami and New York” will be available. Burks then offers the reader an account of the “tranquil” yet impoverished streets of Port au Prince. [102] The reader is presented with a portrait of an English speaking greeter at the airport, women leading donkeys carrying goods through the streets, a voodoo witchdoctor, and cockfighting. This description stands in as a Haitian norm from which Burks can distinguish the building materials used in the more wealthy neighborhoods and the squalor of the slums. “In poorer areas, such as the big slum La Saline, the shanties of sticks, mud and thatch are the worst of the hemisphere. Even after the visitor decides that the clock stopped in Haiti ages ago, he may be impressed by the way the drummers keep time.”[103]

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[101] Edward C. Burk, “Oddities Abound in Port Au Prince,” *The New York Times*, February, 28,1965, 16.

[102] Ibid

[103] Ibid

In light of the temporal dimension of debt to which Lazzarato draws our attention, the clock stopping is an interesting choice of metaphors but for the opposite reason the article suggests. Time was neutralized in Haiti not by its failure to integrate into capitalism but precisely by its integration into this system of perpetual indebtedness. The all-jet tourist service is then another technique whereby capitalism presents itself as the solution to the very problems it creates due to its inability to apprehend its own limits and nature. Conversely, capitalism - debt - explains exactly why the poorest, most illiterate, and worst shanties in the hemisphere would exist in a country out of time.

The second article begins "Haiti, poorest of the Western Hemisphere nations, is facing a new downward turn in economic fortunes."[104] In 1965 demand for commodities like coffee and sisal dropped and Haitian crops were damaged by a hurricane though exports of sugar, bauxite, and copper remained steady. Much like the previous article, the new jet runway and the prospect of tourism remained the only hopeful economic note. The promise of tourism, which forms a pillar of what I have termed the narrative of Haitian economic development, is present with the earliest appearances of the phrase in the popular press.

The following year an article titled "Haiti's Economy in Dismal Shape" stated that: "This (Haiti) is a naturally attractive country for tourists. But few tourists come and this fact is a measure of Haiti's economic and political frustrations. It is the poorest country with the most repressive political regime in the Western Hemisphere, and the

[104] Edward C. Burk, "Haiti is Facing Downturn in Her Economics Fortunes," *The New York Times*, March, 8, 1965, 43.

prospects for rapid improvement, either economically or politically, are dim."[105] The rest of the article presents a winding account of Haiti's economic desperation highlighted with UN statistics and an emphasis that tourism is the way forward despite accounts by hotel owners that tourists have been "frightened away."[106] In these three early articles, where the phrase first appears, the economic future of Haiti is presented as linked to the development of international tourism – a key feature of the narrative of Haitian economic development that I am attempting to draw out.

Since 1965, the phrase has been an ever present, continuous, and unchanging staple in coverage of Haiti. From 1980 to the present the phrase appears 1805 times in over 200 newspapers worldwide.107 Considering the marginal coverage of Haiti in the International news arena this is a staggering number of occurrences. It is not until the 1970s that the other dimensions (cash crops and manufacturing) of a Haitian narrative of development begin to appear in the popular press alongside tourism. Much like the articles from the 1960's the phrase, as epithet, helps to situate Haiti - further enriching it with new dimensions of an economic development strategy.

In early 1972, "Haiti, Reviving, Is Still Poor Land" appeared in the New York Times. The article states: "Haiti is still by far the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere – per capita income is only $74 a year – with economic and social problems that will take generations to resolve."[108] Despite this dire situation, the article stresses that

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105 "Haiti's Economy in Dismal Shape," *New York Times*, December, 2, 1966, 13.

106 Ibid

107 Search results from pro quest database search July 29, 2011

108 "Haiti, Reviving, Is Still Poor Land," *The New York Times*, January, 28, 1972, 57.

since Duvalier's son has taken over as President, "long term development plans" are being formulated. These plans reflect and seek to push forward the recent gains in tourism and "light industry."[109] Furthermore, the UN Development Program studied the possibility of building a highway and the Inter-American Development Bank made loans for agricultural production. Growth in manufacturing is also recognized: "Semimanufactured exports were expected to exceed $15-million in 1971 and industry is continuing to expand to take advantage of Haiti's cheap labor. Many assembly plants – which manufacture baseballs, brassieres, and textiles for export – are owned by United States and Canadian investors."[110] This article represents the further development of the narrative of Haitian economic development foreshadowing the elements of the Action Plan. In particular, it reflects the centrality of tourism and manufacturing in plans for Haiti's economic future. Like the previous articles the phrase continues to establish the character of Haiti – one of poverty. The phrase frames the problem in such a way as to suggest that capital – if a later version of the same capital that pertains today – can solve its own problems. This dimension is present in the title of the article as well. A revival (similar to the clock starting again) is possible in the "still poor land" in the form of Duvaliers son's economic development plans.

In 1980 when a group of Haiti's financier's visited Port au Prince the times declared "Haiti Meets Its Angels." These "rich uncles to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country are likely to urge the Haitian Government to clean up its economic act

[109] Ibid

[110] Ibid

when meetings are held in Port au Prince this week."[111] The article suggests the way for Haiti to clean up its economic act is to reduce corruption, inefficiencies, and to reduce government spending. The "rich uncles" who are named in the article include the U.S. and the I.M.F. I find this rhetoric remarkable in two ways. The portrayal of the U.S. and the I.M.F. (among others who are not named) as Haiti's "angels" evokes a religious sensibility similar to that expressed by Rev. Burke fifteen years earlier. This sensibility represents a civilizing impulse as well as a responsibility for saving Haiti. The description of the U.S. and the I.M.F. representatives as "rich uncles" suggests a paternalistic relationship between Haiti and the institutions and countries involved in Haiti's economic development. The article does not specify the corruption, inefficiencies, or necessary reductions to government spending but I believe we can link them to the narrative of Haitian economic development I have been establishing. Corruption and social spending are often pointed to as largely contributing to Haiti's existence as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. However, this narrative does not acknowledge the centrality of international financial institutions and Western nations in the administration of aid and loan programs designed to put economic development into practice. This omission immunizes the tenets of the narrative from being implicated in the poverty of Haiti and allows the authority of the narrartive to retain its efficacy over time.

By 1987, Duvalier had fled and Haiti was suffering in the aftermath of the long regime. The "sublime indifference" of America towards Haiti prompted Arthur Schlesinger to write an opinion piece challenging the hypocrisy of US foreign policy

[111] "Haiti Meets Its Angels," *The New York Times*, December, 7, 1980, F1.

towards Haiti in relation to US interventions in Grenada and Nicaragua. While "Haiti is the poorest country in the western Hemisphere" Schlesinger urged Americans not to allow Haiti to "become the Kitty Genovese among nations."[112] To that end he appealed to "humanitarian intervention;" "What Haiti needs is some form of disinterested international trusteeship that could restore a framework of order within which recuperation, development and democracy might become possible."[113] More than twenty years later the political situation of Haiti resembles Schlesinger's advice. The Interim Committee for the Reconstruction of Haiti may not be entirely "disinterested" but it is charged with overseeing the reconstruction and development of the country. This trusteeship has helped to draft Haiti's economic development policy and is tasked with overseeing its implementation. Schlesinger's op-ed marks a certain shift where the narrative of Haitian economic development meets a narrative of humanitarian intervention and prefigures the later "ngo-ization" which turned Haiti into "the land of ten thousand NGO's."[114] As in the previous articles, the phrase plays the role of epithet from which a solution can be proposed – in this case humanitarian intervention.

The rise of Aristide and Fanmi Lavalas challenged the narrative of economic development advocated by international financial agencies and wealthy countries. This challenge, and the socio-economic reforms he proposed, fueled his removal from power in 1994 and again in 2004. It is not until after he left the country for the second time that the narrative of economic development coalesces and not until after the January 2010

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[112] Arthur Schlesinger, "Yes Washington, There Is a Haiti," *The New York Times*, Sept 9, 1987, A27.

[113] Ibid, A27

[114] Kathie Klarreich and Linda Polman, "The NGO Republic of Haiti," *The Nation*, Oct 31, 2012.

earthquake that it can fully become official policy. In early 2009 Paul Collier, an Oxford economist, drafts a report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations titled "Haiti: From Natural Catastrophe to Economic Security."[115] The report outlines a series of strategies that harness Haiti's advantages to provide economic development through the development of tourism, manufacturing, and export agriculture. Favorable U.S. laws (HOPE 1 & 2) provide incentives for U.S. companies to invest in Haiti and allow businesses to leverage low wages, favored tax status, and Haiti's close proximity to the U.S. market to produce textiles, mangos, and other goods. Haiti's historic monuments and beaches (marketed as Hispaniola to cruise ship passengers) are touted as an exploitable resource for the tourist industry.

Shortly after the earthquake, an op-ed titled "Building Haiti's Economy, One Mango at a Time," co-authored by Paul Collier and Jean-Louis Warnholz, appeared in The New York Times. The piece made the same economic development case Collier's report to the Secretary-General did a year before the earthquake:

> Haiti is by far the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and yet it need not be so, because unexploited economic opportunities abound there. Some of the best mangoes in the world grow in Haiti – though too many of them rot, offshore from the world's largest market, for want of adequate roads and well-governed ports.[116]
>
> Haiti also has many qualities attractive to tourists: a warm climate; magnificent white-sand beaches and turquoise water; Tortuga, the famous pirate island off the northern coast; and the Citadel, a mountain fortress erected after Haiti's

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[115] Coller, Paul. Haiti: *From Natural Catastrophe to Economic Security A Report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations*. January 2009

[116] Paul Collier and Jean-Louis Warnholz, "Building Haiti's Economy, One Mange at a Time," Op-Ed, *The New York Times*, Jan 28, 2010.

> independence in the early 19th century to fend off colonial powers, now a World Heritage site. Still, it is one of the least visited places in the Caribbean.[117]
>
> The Hope II trade pact with the United States, signed in 2008, granted Haiti duty-free access to the American apparel market for the next decade. Already, as a result of the deal, many garment factories situated along Haiti's eastern border (so as to use Dominican electricity and ports) have become profitable and competitive with Chinese garment makers. But light manufacturing could be much bigger in Haiti – if the Haitian government and donors would credibly commit to providing functioning roads, electrical grids and ports, and if outside private capital would invest, patiently, in Haitian businesses.[118]

Collier and Warnholz are suggesting that if Haiti can implement an economic development policy of mangoes, manufacturing, and tourism "it need not be" the "poorest country in the Western Hemisphere" any longer.[119] This linkage between the phrase and the narrative of Haitian economic development is explicit. Mangoes, manufacturing, and tourism form the central component of both the Post Disaster Needs Assessment and the Action Plan for the National Recovery and Development of Haiti enshrining this narrative as official policy. The implementation of the Action Plan by the Interim Committee for the Reconstruction of Haiti (ICRH) further establishes the materiality of this narrative. The ICRH has the legal, political, and financial authority to implement the policies laid out in the Action Plan. The phrase and the narrative of Haitian economic development help to anchor this configuration of power, producing Haiti as a chimera- imbued with never realized potential that only the market can unlock.

My reading of "Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere" demonstrated the dynamic historical relationship between this phrase and the

117 Ibid
118 Ibid

119 Ibid

development of a narrative of Haitian economic development. In doing so, I have paid careful attention to what appeared in the articles (both explicitly and implicitly) and the manner (stylistically and temporally) by which they appeared. I did not focus on what the articles did not say. However, by focusing on what is not said I will demonstrate the productive power of omission in the formulation and maintenance of a narrative. Narratives tell us what is important and what is not important, they tell us what to pay attention to and what to ignore, and they provide a structure for comprehending time: past, present, future. Omission or silence often plays a crucial role in a narrative's ability to legitimate itself by avoiding issues that trouble and challenge it's logic and coherence.

In the articles I surveyed, including the ones discussed above, there is no mention of past or future, and here too no mention of Haitian slavery, its rich history as France's wealthiest and most productive colony, or the hundred and fifty million gold francs requested by France, at the barrel of 500 cannons, for Haiti to gain recognition as an independent country and as repayment for French colonial losses stemming from independence. There is also no mention of the nearly twenty-year U.S. occupation of the country and the benefits this reaped for U.S. business interests. Similarly there is no mention of the U.S. blockage of IDB loans to Haiti120 in the late nineties and early two thousands which further starved Aristide's second administration of desperately needed funds nor any mention of the structural adjustment policies Haiti has been subject to for nearly thirty years.

[120] Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights. "Letter to IDB President: On Behalf of Haitian Supporters." 11/14/2002. URL- http://www.rfkcenter.org/node/270

As I have demonstrated, Haiti "is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere," might it possible that these factors might have something to do with the history of the country? I believe these factors constitute important elements in the history of Haiti but they are entirely absent from the newspaper accounts. In fact, the majority of the instances where the phrase appears there is absolutely no reason provided for why Haiti is "the poorest country in the Western hemisphere." In the rare cases where some account of why Haiti's epithet is warranted, one encounters the following reasons: political and economic corruption among Haitians and economic inefficiencies. These reasons imply that Haiti's poverty stems from its own shortcomings as a nation, having nothing to do with outside influence. Through omission, the narrative of Haitian economic development, produces Haiti as "the poorest country in the Western hemisphere," and establishes (as epithet) a fact about Haiti that requires no causal explanation. In the event that an explanation is gestured towards, responsibility for Haitian poverty resides with Haiti itself.

Part of what gives a narrative[121] its power is its ability to highlight certain elements and downplay others. As such, it is akin to the "silence" or "unthinkability" that Michel-Rolph Trouillot's describes in his analysis of the Haitian Revolution. "The contention that enslaved Africans and their descendents could not envision freedom – let alone formulate strategies for gaining such freedom – was based not so much on empirical evidence as on ontology, an implicit organization of the world and its

[121] My use of narrative is influenced by the Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope in The Dialogic Imagination.

inhabitants."[122] What produced this ontology were narratives about who counted as a human being, what they were capable of, and whether or not the events were an uprising or a revolution. The common wisdom of the time made the event of the revolution "unthinkable" for Western audiences. Similarly, the narrative of Haitian economic development structures the terrain of possibility and intelligibility concerning Haiti's economic and social existence. This terrain is structured by debt, which exert claims on the past, present, and future suffocating alternative futures. By omitting certain elements and emphasizing others it makes it difficult to consider important factors that are crucial in understanding Haiti's history. As a result, today's Western audience has a hard time "thinking" of Haiti as something other than the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Imagining alternatives to the discourse of Haitian economic development are equally hard and indicates some elements of the ontology at work in our own time.

The phrase not only appears in news articles but also, with regularity, in the documents of some of the most powerful organizations in the world. It is used with regularity by the US State Department, US Department of Defense, CIA, USAID, World Bank, Inter American Development Bank, and the IMF.[123] While it is well beyond the scope of this essay to provide a comprehensive account of each and every occurrence of the phrase, it should be clear from the organizations listed that the phrase enjoys widespread usage by some of the most influential governmental and non-governmental institutions of the West. These organizations, among others, play a significant role in the world economy and have a long and complicated history with Haiti.

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[122] Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History. Beacon Press, Boston. 1995. pp 73
[123] Research conducted summer 2011 utilizing Google advanced search and individual site searches.

What accompanies the phrase in these documents, much like the newspaper articles, are varying levels of omission. The long history of foreign involvement, by the very organizations authoring the reports, is minimized or non-existent, as is the central role of debt. The jumps in the narrative can be almost comical. Consider the categorization below of Haiti in the "background" section of the CIA World Fact Book:

> In the late 18th century, Haiti's nearly half million slaves revolted under Toussaint L'OUVERTURE. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first black republic to declare independence in 1804. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. After an armed rebellion led to the forced resignation and exile of President Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE in February 2004, an interim government took office to organize new elections under the auspices of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)."[124]

Two hundred years of Haitian history are reduced to poverty and political violence. There is no mention of the U.S. occupation, its other interventions, or the heavy involvement of the IMF, IDB, or other Western nations. This silence implies that the poverty and violence experienced by Haitians is a product of their own shortcomings a fact about the country that is unrelated to the efforts of outside actors.

A content analysis of similar documents would surely provide additional instances of omission and implication. This tendency is what made the remarks by Bill Clinton, prior to his appointment as UN Special Envoy to Haiti, so extraordinary. Clinton stated that "trade liberalization policies," which were imposed on Haiti, may have benefited "farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked."[125] His admission was widely reported on

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[124] "The World Factbook," Central Intelligence Agency, Last modified August, 21, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html

[125] Alex, Dupuy, "Disaster Capitalism to the Rescue: The International Community and Haiti After the Earthquake," NACLA Report on the Americas 43 no. 4,(June 2016): 3.

by the left media but received little coverage from the mass media. Despite recognizing the failure of such policies in alleviating poverty in Haiti, President Clinton continues to pursue trade liberalization and neoliberal reforms of the country as the Special Envoy and co-chair of the (IHRC).

The Earthquake

The earthquake can be a "window of opportunity." "This is a rendezvous with history that Haiti cannot miss." – Government of the Republic of Haiti

In part one I argued that debt structures the timelessness of Haitian poverty and demonstrated the aestheticizing role that the phrase "the poorest country in the western hemisphere" plays in producing a narrative of Haitian economic development. The coherence and efficacy of this narrative relies on the omission of slavery, colonialism, foreign interference, and indebtedness as well as the foreclosure of other possibilities by the time-neutralizing nature of debt. In part two I examine the way this narrative was mobilized in the international response to the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Drawing on the concept of disaster capitalism, I consider the ways that a problem not of capitalism's making becomes an opportunity for long-sought interventions, in particular, the refinancialization of Haiti's future, this time in the form of microfinance.

The January 12, 2010 earthquake shook Haiti for only thirty-five seconds but was able to kill more than 300,000 people, injure roughly 300,000, and displace 1.3 million. In addition to the impacts on human life, the infrastructure of the country was completely destroyed. While the attention of the world focused on Haiti during the immediate aftermath of the crisis and generous donations began to poor in, the long term plan for Haiti's reconstruction was largely ignored by the media and donors. Through a reading of the Post Disaster Needs Assessment, Action Plan for the Reconstruction of Haiti, pledge statements from the UN Donor Conference, and the International Peace Operations Industry journal, I will argue that the politics of reconstruction can be read through the lens of disaster capitalism. In doing so, the complex relationship between aid and neo-liberalism can be brought into greater focus.

In *The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism,* Naomi Klein argues that free market neo-liberal ideologues have exploited moment's of crisis (natural or manmade) to institute economic policies that would be impossible to achieve under normal circumstances.[126] Many of these politicians, businessmen and women, academics, and financial managers look to Milton Friedman as a source of inspiration and intellectual justification. As Klein points out, one of Friedman's last accomplishments was inspiring the privatization of the New Orleans school system. Indeed many policies were enacted in the aftermath of the chaos that sought to fundamentally change elements of the society. While hurricane Katrina was a disaster for some, it was a tremendous economic and social opportunity for others. It allowed free market proponents to rebuild former public institutions as private wealth generating assets.

Following Klein, Mark Schuller, in an edited volume *Capitalizing on Catastrophe Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction*, puts forth a more robust definition of disaster capitalism. "National and transnational governmental institutions' instrumental use of catastrophe (both so-called natural and human-mediated disasters, including postconflict situations) to promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist

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[126] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, (New York: Metropolitan, 2007).

interests."[127] I would also stress another dimension of this process, which is the mutually constitutive relationship between governments, development organizations, and the private sector. The unifying element of this relationship is the acceptance, tacit or implicit, of neoliberal theories and the growth of the peace operations industry in recent years is due to this crystallization. As Antonio Donini suggests, "disaster assistance is rooted in the ideological frameworks of humanitarianism, traceable both to various traditions of charity and philanthropy and to the so-called civilizing impulses of the Enlightenment and its subsequent manifestations in the expanses of empire."[128] As such, disaster capitalism is a fruitful lens to view our current landscape of international political and economic exploitation.

A growing number of firms have made disasters extremely profitable. These firms understand their work as part of the stability operations industry or contingency operations. The International Peace Operations Association (IPOA) is a trade group made up of a large number of companies providing business solutions to the problems created by disasters through the delivery of services, support, and consulting to governmental and non-governmental entities. These solutions include a large array of services from physical to social reconstruction and security. There is no aspect of a disaster that cannot be exploited as an economic opportunity. The IPOA organized a recent meeting in Miami to help its members prepare for the upcoming Haitian gold rush. The timing coincided with the lead up to the UN donor meeting for the reconstruction of Haiti. The IPOA dedicated an issue of the *Journal of International Peace Operations* to

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[127] Mark Schuller, *Capitalizing on Catastrophe Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction*, Edited by Mark Schuller and Nandini Gunewardena, (Lanham, Md, AltaMira Press, 2008): 20.
[128] Ibid, 29

the reconstruction of Haiti and serves as a primer for businesses looking to cash in on all of the money pledged at the donor conference. Reuters reported the sentiments of an organizer of the IPOA meeting: "I don't think they have any option but to get private companies in to help reconstruct Haiti, Kevin Lumb, CEO of London-based Global Investment Summits Ltd."[129] Whether or not Haiti has other options was not considered by the Haitian government or the international community. As my reading of the Haitian government's plan for reconstruction will suggest, the way forward is not up for debate, it need only be successfully implemented, and accepted by the Haitian population. In many respects the plan only intensifies the neoliberal efforts that already were underway prior to the earthquake.

With all of the potential profit, it is doubtful that any major player in the reconstruction process is interested in finding or proposing another option. While a network of Haitian organizations have suggested, and worked hard to promote, that "Another Haiti is Possible"[130] they have largely if not entirely been shut out of the process. Those who have been invited to the table have discursively acknowledged if not endorsed neoliberal policies.

The IPOA is not the only organization preparing businesses for the gold rush. The U.S. government tried its best to aid domestic businesses as they seek contracts in Haiti.

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129 Pascal Fletcher, "Private Sector Eyes Opportunity in Haiti Rebuilding," Reuters, March, 10, 2010, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-quake-haiti-business/private-sector-eyes-opportunity-in-haiti-rebuilding-idUSTRE6294UX20100310

130 Beverly Bell, "What Would 'Another Haiti' Look Like? Haitian Views on Their Country's Future," The Huffington Post, June, 7, 2010, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-would-another-haiti_b_603003

The International Trade Administration, a division of the Commerce Department, held a number of seminars in New York, Philadelphia, and Miami in May and June to help U.S. companies cash in on all of the money flowing to Haiti. If you can't make it to one of these seminars rest assured that "the Department of Commerce will continue to monitor the reconstruction process as opportunities develop for U.S. Businesses, including U.S. Government procurement opportunities and opportunities funded by international development banks."

The privatization of disaster reconstruction and even disasters is nothing new. However, the growth and intensification of these practices has solidified through the alignment of humanitarian and neoliberal models. Those who follow current events may remember the role that private firms played in providing security in post-Katrina New Orleans and the numerous firms participating in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan. The most famous or infamous is Xe Services, LLC formerly known as Blackwater. This company has provided security services to the U.S. Military in Iraq and has been involved in a number of cases of violence where contractors and Iraqi's have wound up dead. It is these cases that have found traction in the American media because they confound our understanding of war, sacrifice, and military service. By privatizing certain responsibilities that have historically been performed by the armed forces, the U.S. government has created new conditions where notions of accountability and the rule of law are murky.

Similarly, when the stability operations industry serves the needs of those suffering from natural disasters our understanding of generosity, compassion, and public and private responsibility is challenged. Where should we draw the line between humanitarian aid and economic exploitation? Should firms be able to profit off of disaster relief? Is privatization the only viable way to effectively and efficiently deliver food and shelter to people trying to survive? I certainly believe these questions demand serious consideration but the most influential actors in the reconstruction process do not confront these moral and political questions. It is not in their interests to do so.

In advance of the March 2010 UN Donor Conference for Haiti eighteen organizations sent a joint letter to Secretary of State Clinton requesting that private contractors be barred from profiting off of the reconstruction effort. This letter was in response to the IPOA conference and specifically named IPOA members, citing instances of alleged criminal activity committed in Iraq during contract work. The signatories argued "Haiti does not need this poorly-regulated system of security contracting. Over-militarization of aid has already traumatized an already suffering people and prevented life saving aid from reaching earthquake victims in time."[131] Furthermore, they request that the US continues to "support "smart" aid that creates jobs for Haitians, provides direct investment, in the public sector, builds local infrastructure and ensures that reconstruction efforts operate with transparency and follow a rights-based approach."[132] To my knowledge, Secretary Clinton did not respond to this request nor has the state department taken any action to curb the privatization of disaster response.

Continuity through Catastrophe

[131] "Letter to Secretary Clinton," Institute for Democracy and Justice in Haiti, accessed August 14, 2019, http://www.ijdh.org/2010/03/topics/politics-democracy/letter-to-secretary-clinton-on-private-military-contractors-and-haiti/

[132] Ibid

The phrase was not the only mechanism that augmented the temporality of debt. This happened explicitly through policy as well as in particularly new forms of interference. When US backed candidates failed in their bid against Aristide in 2000, the Bush Administration was left no choice but to economically starve the Aristide government in order to destabilize Aristide's popular support and governing capacity. Documents procured through a freedom of information act suit confirm US involvement in blocking loans to Haiti.

> The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights and Zamni Lasante released internal U.S. Treasury Department documents exposing politically motivated, behind-the-scenes interventions by the United States and other members of the international community to stop the dispersal of $146 million in loans that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) had approved for Haiti. The IDB originally approved the loans in July 1998, including $54 million for urgently-needed water and sanitation projects. However, documents show that members of the U.S. Executive Director's office at the IDB and U.S. Department of Treasury (DOT) staff sought ways to tie the loans' release to unrelated political benchmarks that the U.S. government wanted the Haitian government to reach. This intervention, and its political basis, was in direct violation of the IDB's charter, which bars the Bank and its Officers from interfering in or basing decisions upon the political affairs of member states.[133]

I cite this in order to illustrate the interference of the US government in shaping the future of Haiti. In a broader sense, by blocking these loans, this debt, the US withheld the credit flows necessary for Haiti to maintain the present –its perpetual indebtedness. By challenging the international order of things – capitalism – Haiti was disciplined in order to reassert a perpetual present.

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[133] "Press Release," Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, June, 23, 2008, https://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/wochnansoleypressrelease.pdf

The 2004 coup and the political chaos of the intervening years have been friendlier to neo-liberal economic interests but success has still been limited. The US passed the HOPE and HOPE II acts in 2006 and 2008 respectively. These acts create duty free zones and status for textile's and apparel imported from Haiti into the US.[134] This policy was aimed at taking advantage of the extremely low labor costs and relative proximity of Haiti to the US. In essence, Haiti presented a wonderful opportunity for sweatshop labor and the US government was happy to offer incentives towards developing this capacity in the interests of creating jobs in Haiti and a flow of cheap goods into the US. In 2008 Paul Collier was commissioned to write a report for the UN concerning Haiti's economic future. In this work, titled "From Natural Catastrophe to Economic Security – A Report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations," Collier argues that the economic future of Haiti rests on the development of export focused agriculture (namely mangoes), tourism, and textile manufacturing. Despite the limited success thus far, he believed that HOPE II could still be effective.[135] While the infrastructure needed to truly develop the agricultural export potential of Haiti would be difficult to accomplish, tourism to "Hispaniola" proved easier to achieve.[136] In order to truly take advantage of Haiti's cheap labor and agricultural and tourist potential a more significant tectonic shift was required than simply removing a pro-poor politician from office. The earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010 was precisely the disaster, the opportunity, needed to transform Haiti into a neo-liberal state capable of fulfilling the

[134] "Haiti Country Commercial Guide," Department of Commerce, accessed August, 14, 2019, https://www.export.gov/apex/article2?id=Haiti-Trade-Agreements

[135] Paul Collier, "Haiti: From Natural Catastrophe to Economic Security: A Report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations," January, 2009.

[136] Ibid

economic desires of the US, other powerful international interests, and the Haitian elite. In the following section I offer a close reading of the Haitian Government's "Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti" emphasizing the continuity with Collier's report and the larger backdrop of neoliberal reform.

Territorial Rebuilding

The territorial rebuilding section of the Plan calls for the clearing of debris, the appropriation of land for public use, and significantly different urban re-development. In the brief summaries these actions sound benign, even reasonable, obviously a country toppled by the effects of an earthquake needs to be physically reconstructed. The devil, as always, is in the details and the only particular example mentioned regards relocating "families effected by the earthquake."[137] However, it becomes clear further on in the Plan that all territorial rebuilding is being carried out in accordance with the economic plans for Haiti's future. A graphic titled "National transport network and areas of great potential for industrial development" illustrates how the territorial reconstruction is aimed at creating economic zones and networks of roads to link goods with easy access to export zones (ports and airports).[138] In order to adequately achieve the economic goals of tourism, agriculture, and textile manufacturing, the Haitian government needs to geographically reassign the population in order to produce the requisite workforce. Or as the Plan puts it: "Better redistribution of population and economic activities throughout the country requires the consolidation of new regional development centres, which are based on the economic development and the integration of various dimensions (industrial

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[137] Government of the Republic of Haiti, "Action Plan for National Development and Recovery in Haiti: Immediate Key Initiatives for the Future," March, 2010, 12.

[138] Ibid, 13

production, agriculture and social and special organization). Choices will need to be made and priorities established."[139] The Haitian population is not making these choices or establishing the priorities.

As I mentioned above, the physical reconstruction of Haiti requires that the population be relocated and more evenly dispersed throughout the country. The Plan suggests that this is necessary in order to get the most out of the newly created economic zones – especially the following development centres: Cap Haitien, Les Gonaives, St-Marc, Hinche, Port-au-Prince and Les Cayes.[140] It is believed that by creating these diverse and multiple centres, Haiti will be able to make itself as attractive as possible for foreign investment. Sharing Collier's optimism, the Plan suggests that "the Hope II law provides an initial framework for using Haiti's comparative advantages; to benefit from its workforce, the proximity of North American market and know-how of its private sector and national and international private sectors will be necessary."[141] The comparative advantage is the abundance of a cheap desperate labor force living in the poorest country in the hemisphere. It's hard to imagine how this can be seen as advantageous to the interests of those making up the labor force.

Haiti's comparative advantages allow for a plethora of business opportunities and are not limited to textile manufacturing. In order to facilitate these investments "the State of Haiti wants to encourage investments in this sector by supporting the development of industrial parks and free zones. Bankable projects exist in this area. These projects with

[139] Ibid, 16
[140] Ibid, 17

[141] Ibid, 17

internal profitability will be funded by private equity of national and foreign companies and bank loans with special conditions, and it is understood that the State will intervene directly wherever necessary to implement the necessary infrastructure and ensure more balanced geographical distribution for job creation."[142] In order to implement the necessary infrastructure, when projects are not profitable from the get go, Haiti will pursue the BOT (build – operate – transfer) model.

In this model the initial costs of starting a business and developing it to the point where it is financially viable are guaranteed by the state through profitable operating contracts. BOT strategy applies to conventional business and public services. The Plan emphasizes the necessity of repairing the electrical grid to pre-quake levels and expanding it well beyond those service levels in order to provide access to the population and for the purposes of economic development. "Here too, public-private partnerships and BOT systems must be used for a large part of the necessary investment."[143] In essence, the population bears higher costs with the resulting economic benefits are given to private individuals. In many regards this is a lose-lose situation and the only justification of the BOT model is its presumed ability to create jobs and effectively provide services.

Economic Rebuilding

"The economic renewal is based on the close collaboration between the private sector, which will be the engine of wealth, and the State, which will take all the necessary

[142] Ibid, 17
[143] Ibid, 28

measures to provide Haiti with the legal and regulatory framework that can meet the requirements of a modern country open to investments."[144]

In reading the economic section of The Plan the centrality of debt for all aspects of the reconstruction effort comes into clear focus. The economic development centers and specific initiatives in farming, manufacturing, and fishing will only be successful if time can be re-neutralized, if credit can re-establish the order of things. In order to unleash the productive potential of the Haitian economy the State will focus on establishing the conditions, assurances, and mechanisms to restore capitalization and extend it through guaranteed funds and microfinance. Before examining the details of this aspect of the Plan I first draw out some of the concerns and framing that lead into it.

According to the Plan, agriculture holds the potential to supply jobs to the population, reduce food insecurity from natural disasters and international economic pressures, and provide an exportable resource. There are barriers to recognizing this potential and the Plan seeks to address them with a number of interventions including finance, infrastructure, and migration. "Farmers and fisherman usually work with rudimentary tools. The modernization of equipment, when requested by the farmer or fisherman, requires funding that is currently not easily accessible."[145] It also calls for the development of "penetration" roads that will allow crops from areas across the country to make it to national markets. These penetration roads will allow for large-scale agribusiness to effectively produce and export cash crops and it isn't difficult to imagine elite Haitian landowners and/or foreign agribusiness exploiting re-located labor and transportation resources. While most of the Plan appears to be speaking towards the

[144] Ibid, 22
[145] Ibid, 22

interest of a national food supply and improvements in the conditions faced by subsistence farmers, it also conveniently suggests that the food interests of the Haitian population and the world market coincide. "It is not only the most sensitive fruits that are affected by bad conditions, but also vegetables, tubers and cash crops for export. This is also the case of livestock and fishing products, the distribution of which suffers from the same structural weaknesses."[146] While the plan advocates for food independence and protection of the domestic market, the territorial rebuilding, specifically the geographical transformation is very attractive to agribusiness.

In addition to relocating the population and building the requisite infrastructure and economic centres, "the State is committed to encouraging these investments by revising the legal and financial framework regulating investments in the production, transformation, distribution and service sectors. An adequate incentive policy will also need to be elaborated to favour the establishment of manufacturing industries, free zones, industrial areas and areas for the development of tourism."[147] A legal code sufficient to facilitate and protect the interests of domestic and foreign business interests is a crucial component of neo-liberal development plans. A predictable and favorable tax code can serve as an attractive incentive to foreign firms looking to exploit Haiti's cheap labor and proximity to the US.

The Plan articulates the need to create a stronger central government capable of securing and responding to particular needs of the citizenry. A stronger government will also aid in the facilitation of conditions attractive to global investment. The stability

[146] Ibid, 22
[147] Ibid, 26

offered by a strong state contributes to a feeling of confidence among foreign investors. In order to build and sustain a more powerful central government the State needs to increase tax revenue by "widen(ing) of the fiscal base."[148] The Haitian government is banking, literally, on the ability of neo-liberal economic reforms to deliver jobs that will result in Haitians paying more taxes. "The Government and the private sector will need to undertake immediate efforts to widen the fiscal base so that fiscal revenues go from the rate before the earthquake of 9 percent towards a 16-18 percent rate. This will only happen if a strengthened dialogue between public institutions and the private sector takes place where the private sector has a bigger participation in decision-making, including in the creation and management of the development centers."[149]

For all of these initiatives to bear fruit, to increase tax revenue, Haiti must have access to capital and that, in turn, requires debt. This debt will enable the country to finance reconstruction, recapitalize and increase microfinance lending capacity and small business borrowing, and attract venture capital. In spite of the earthquake, yet enabled by it, the solution to Haiti's problems remains the same – debt, an ever-present condition of subjection extending infinitely. Of course proponents of the plan see things quite differently. For them, as we will see in a different context in chapter three, capitalism is an engine that alleviates poverty not one that produces it. Trapped by the logic of capital they mistake its ever-present condition as a fact of nature rather than a barrier to other presents and futures.

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[148] Ibid, 27
[149] Ibid, 27

Guarantee loans are a key element of the Plan for restoring access to credit and the debt economy. Drawing on the recommendations of a report from the Ministry of the Economy and Finances and the Bank of the Republic of Haiti the Plan lays out the rationale for establishing guarantee funds and also how such a system would function. According to this account one consequence of the earthquake was the "decapitalization of consumer borrowers," or in other words, amid the death and destruction customary borrowers no longer had access to credit.[150] In order to restore credit to this class, a guaranteed fund could be established to allow the undercapitalized Haitian banks to offer zero percent interest loans. This would allow various financial institutions to restore credit and expand it to individuals, contractors, small businesses, and others involved in the reconstruction effort. However, these guarantee funds would have fees and interest rates that the Haitian government, and by extension the Haitian people, would be on the hook for. Furthermore, loans from these funds are to be used for "productive investments" and "not to guarantee or write off doubtful credit."[151] Structured in this way guarantee loans create the conditions for the restoration of the debt economy at no interest to the particular borrower but also allow the lender to extract fees and interest from the State further entrenching debt at the collective and individual level.

The Plan has a similar approach for rescuing micro-finance institutions through the establishment of guarantee funds and the recapitalization of these lenders. It also suggests the creation of a fund to buy back "non-performing credit portfolios" that would then be turned over to collectors who would reap a recovery commission on any debts

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[150] Ibid, 24
[151] Ibid, 24

collected.[152] Micro-finance institutions are facing increasing scrutiny and many large financial companies have entered the space leading to questions about the social good and humanitarian principles that micro-finance institutions claim.

> In three decades microfinance has evolved—from small nongovernmental organizations lending $50 to women to buy sewing machines or fruit to sell at market to, in some cases, formal banks that cover costs and grow through profits, like any business. Drawn by the prospect of hefty profits from even the smallest of loans, a raft of banks and financial institutions now dominate the field, with some charging interest rates of 100 percent or more.[153]

By focusing on individual or small scale giving, micro-finance put a human face on finance capital but the veneer of generosity is thin and the real consequence of such lending is a further extension of the debt economy into the underclasses of the world.

In February 2010, NPR reported the story of Yvrose Jean Baptiste, a Haitian woman who accessed micro credit and used it to develop a small-scale international distribution operation. As the reporter explained: "Yvrose told us that she has a fifth-grade education. And I couldn't stop thinking that she has to understand all these complicated financial principles that people I interview on Wall Street get paid millions to master: interest rate arbitrage, loan maturities."[154] While it might be surprising to the reporter, micro-finance is a process that produces neo-liberal subjects capable of mastering and embodying the logic of finance capital. Indeed, for its proponents that is its promise, the creation of entrepreneurs capable of helping themselves. When micro-finance credit is used to fund subsistence-based cottage industry it appears entirely

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152 Ibid, 25

153 Neil MacFarquhar, "Banks Making Big Profits From Tiny Loans," The New York Times, April, 30, 2010.

154 Adam Davidson and Chana Joffe-Walt, "Poor Haitian Businesswoman Masters High Finance," accessed May 6, 2010, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123879571

benign. Its uses, however, are not limited to such projects. As I have articulated throughout this chapter, debt is profoundly structuring of human action and potential. The structure of temporality under conditions of debt is simply the repetition of the present as future and re-establishing the conditions of indebtedness is a central element of the Plan. In these two very different discursive practices – the phrase and the Plan – we therefore witness one and the same temporal form. To the extent that capital can narrate the future as a repetition of the present, it establishes the conditions under which it becomes possible for it to negate non-capitalist responses to otherwise unpredictable crises, and to present itself to as the solution to problems that otherwise might call its future into question.

CHAPTER 3

PHILANTHROPY'S GOSPELS OF WEALTH

Introduction

This chapter examines philanthropy in the age of neoliberalism through a reading of important primary documents and essays, and argues that big philanthropy's focus on alleviating the negative consequences of capitalism through the proceeds of capital is a Sisyphean task. In part one, Gospels of Wealth, I offer a reading of *The Gospel of Wealth* by Andrew Carnegie and juxtapose it with current Ford Foundation President Darren Walker's *New Gospel of Wealth.* What I find is a clear and unapologetic argument from Carnegie justifying capitalism and inequality on the grounds of improving the human race. Walker on the other hand believes that capitalism can alleviate the inequality it produces and that philanthropy can play a strong role in bridging the gap. In doing so, Walker misapprehends the nature of capitalism and mistakes the problem for the solution. Part two, Pearly Gates, offers a reading of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Annual Letters. The priorities and worldview that emerge from my reading largely overlap with the vision of other international institutions of economic and political development. At the heart of the letters is an unshakeable belief in the centrality of capitalism to eliminate poverty, in technology and markets to improve outcomes, and in technocratic states to facilitate the necessary conditions of the global economy. Much like Carnegie, Bill Gates is a strong proponent for capitalism but unlike his predecessor fails to recognize its limits for alleviating the suffering and the inequality it produces.

Gospels of Wealth

"It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair."[155]

- Oscar Wilde, The Soul of Man Under Socialism

During the gilded age of the late 19th century Oscar Wilde correctly identified the paradox of philanthropy in his time. Under capitalism philanthropy was merely ameliorating the worst effects of wage slavery and inequality, not addressing its root causes. Philanthropy on his view was a symptom of the cause, one that served to sustain the injury by preventing the worst suffering which, if realized, may collapse the system. Wilde argues that it is impossible to address poverty within the system that produces it and called for a re-founding of society based on socialism or communism. He hoped such a transformation would result in a human society that produces security through cooperation and human flourishing through individualism. A wholesale upheaval, not philanthropy, on Wilde's view would be necessary to alleviate the suffering produced by capitalism.

Despite the recent re-emergence of socialist voices in America politics, Wilde's critique may ring strangely in the ears of many in the contemporary United States who largely see philanthropic giving, particularly from the wealthiest, as a moral good and perhaps more importantly as decoupled from the capitalist system itself. In other words, the capital accumulation that produces the coffers of big philanthropy is removed from the moral judgment of the donor's charity. For most, philanthropy or charity is not a political object but rather a communal good nestled in associational and religious life. As such it is largely de-politicized despite its reliance upon public subsidy, through tax

[155] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," 1891, accessed June, 11, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/

exemption and legal structure, and its outsized influence on democratic governance and policy.

Today we are experiencing a new gilded age where vast fortunes and rising inequality are producing new foundations with tremendous resources and political clout. In some ways our condition is not so different from the one diagnosed by Wilde: capitalism reigns supreme and philanthropy is as incapable of addressing the ills of capitalism today as it was in his time. In other ways, things are different. The structures and tax advantages of philanthropy have deepened and produced conditions for broader tax avoidance by the upper classes, particularly in the form of the donor advised fund which allows anyone with means to give charitably in a "tax efficient" manner[156] (Fidelity 2019). There is also experimentation among mega donors as they try different forms of organization like the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, an LLC rather than a 501 c3[157]. Experimentation like this reduces transparency and allows for forms of commercial activity that 501 c3's do not provide[158] (Philanthropy Digest 2015).

Beyond the structures and strategies of philanthropy in our gilded age there is a new articulation of the way in which philanthropy aims to address the ills of the world. Many of the large donors coming onto the stage have made their fortunes in technology, either in the first wave of desktop computing or in cloud, app, and social media companies. By and large these fortunes are generated by the broad-based adoption of

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156 "Fidelity Charitable Donor-Advised Fund," Home Page, Fidelity Charitable, accessed June, 11, 2019, https://www.fidelitycharitable.org

157 Organizing as a Limited Liability Company (LLC), allows more flexibility for wealthy individuals to control their wealth than are offered in either a 501c3 foundation or donor advised fund. These benefits include the ability to invest in for-profit ventures, give to politics, and less transparent reporting standards.

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technology by a user base and the financial speculation of an initial public offering (IPO). Post-IPO, the corporation sustains its profitability and market value from rents, advertising to its user base, and/or other services and subsidiaries. These companies often begin as “start-ups” seeking to “disrupt” existing markets with new technologies, often with little regard for the effects on working people or society. Such disruption produces new opportunities for capital accumulation and speculation and the ethos that drives it is one of innovation, risk taking, and world changing hubris. This ethos, largely associated with the culture of Silicon Valley, is capitalism transformed and self-conceived to solve problems and change the world.

Aspirational as this sounds, it is founded on the delusion that techno-capitalism can address and overcome the challenges central to capitalism itself. As compared to a commodity driven business, these entities can afford these fantasies and have spawned a whole class of thought leaders and visionaries such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Sean Parker, etc., who are endlessly celebrated and valorized by the broader culture. These thought leaders have brought this ethos into their philanthropy, seeing it as just another vehicle to change the world, and they set about their giving as they would their business - by emphasizing results, catalyzing outcomes, and above all embedding the logic of capitalism into the fabric of giving. In doing so, these philanthropists refine the discourse of capital accumulation and philanthropy, blurring the boundaries between the aims of their business and the role of their philanthropy. This is a subtle shift, but one emblematic of neoliberalism, which in practice extends the logic of the market to domains previously governed by other values and rationales. We can mark this shift by looking at Andrew Carnegie, a contemporary of Oscar Wilde and wealthy industrialist, who articulated a justification for philanthropy under capitalism. Today's philanthropists echo much of his broad vision but importantly disavow some of the truths Carnegie was able to acknowledge.

Just a few years before Wilde publishes *The Soul of Man Under Socialism,* Andrew Carnegie published his essay *Wealth*, now known as *The Gospel of Wealth*, in which he gave a full-throated defense of capitalism in the late 19th Century and the virtues and duty of philanthropy under such conditions. For him inequality was a measure of how far civilization had advanced and he "welcomed" it "as highly beneficial."[159] "Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor."[160] Carnegie saw the forces of progress – capitalism – as inevitable and a "waste of time to criticize" lest we risk destroying civilization itself.[161] His views amount to a zero-sum teleology underpinned by *individualism* as ethos and fact of nature. Brimming with social Darwinism, Carnegie saw in the "caste" system produced by capitalism the brute accounting of the surviving and thriving of the fittest.

Despite the atomization and grinding nature of industrial production such a system produces commercial goods of higher quality at cheaper prices than at any time in the past. This benefit, despite its consequences, justifies in Carnegie's mind the system of capitalism. Civilization on this score is the achievement of ever-increasing material abundance. However he goes even further, emphasizing that such a system benefits the

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[159] Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth," 1889, accessed August, 27, 2019, 1, https://www.carnegie.org/publications/?q=gospel+of+wealth&per_page=25&per_page=25#!/publications/the-gospel-of-wealth/

[160] Ibid, 1

[161] Ibid, 2

race (of man) as a whole. Critiques of civilization that promote reducing inequality and emphasize collective needs over individual are summarily dismissed as wrong because they misapprehend the human condition and have led only to misery and failure. As he puts it:

> The Socialist or Anarchist who seeks to overturn present conditions is to be regarded as attacking the foundation upon which civilization itself rests, for civilization took its start from the day that the capable, industrious workman said to his incompetent and lazy fellow, "If thou dost not sow, thou shalt not reap," and thus ended primitive Communism by separating the drones from the bees.[162]

As Marx reminds us in his discussion of primitive accumulation and the enclosure of the commons in *Capital*, Carnegie's portrayal of the industrious and the lazy is yet another example of the ideology the ruling class uses to justify the production of wage labor and whitewash the brutal destruction of the commons and the life of subsistence it supported. This historical revisionism plays a central role in maintaining his belief in the inevitability and value of capitalism.

While Carnegie sees the benefits of inequality and individualism, he is wary of some of the consequences of great fortunes, especially as they change hands. He is not a fan of leaving vast sums to inheritors, a practice he likens to European aristocracy, and sees the leaving of such wealth to children as a burden that destroys the individual. On the other hand, he thinks that estate taxes are somewhat positive in returning large amounts of wealth to the many but do so in misguided ways. Carnegie prefers philanthropy for paternalistic reasons that reinforce his reverence for civilization and disdain for collectivism. In his eyes the greatest stewards of the interest of the many are

[162] Ibid, 4

the few who have triumphed in accumulating capital, provided they focus on public goods that foster the betterment of the masses and not the misguided giving to individuals. This paternalism is striking but what is more noteworthy is the extension of the same argument to wages. For Carnegie higher wages would be a similar waste to advancing the interests of the "race."

> If we consider what results flow from the Cooper Institute, for instance, to the best portion of the race in New York not possessed of means, and compare these with those which would have arisen for the good of the masses from an equal sum distributed by Mr. Cooper in his lifetime in the form of wages, which is the highest form of distribution, being for work done and not for charity, we can form some estimate of the possibilities for the improvement of the race which lie embedded in the present law of the accumulation of wealth. Much of this sum, if distributed in small quantities among the people, would have been wasted in the indulgence of appetite, some of it in excess, and it may be doubted whether even the part put to the best use, that of adding to the comforts of the home, would have yielded results for the race, as a race, at all comparable to those which are flowing and are to flow from the Cooper Institute from generation to generation. Let the advocate of violent or radical change ponder well this thought.[163]

Carnegie's extension of paternalism to wages demonstrates the contempt he has for working people and his disdain for democracy. Presiding over one of the worlds' largest fortunes, Carnegie had shown consistent disregard for working people, including during the bloody Homestead Strike at his iron plant.[164] It is clear that he has no faith in the dispossessed to manage their own affairs, even the meager wages he and others pay. As I've discussed, this viewpoint is underpinned by social Darwinism and we should not be surprised that it extends so far. It also gives us insight into the particular focus of his

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163 Ibid, 10

164 See discussion of correspondence with Frick in Bridge, James Howard. "The Inside History of the Carnegie Steel Company." New York: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1903; rev. ed. 1992.

charitable giving, which he elaborated in a follow up to *Wealth*, titled *The Best Fields for Philanthropy*.

In this essay, Carnegie picks up where he left off in *Wealth*. Having examined the options available for wealthy capitalists to dispose of their large surplus and advising philanthropy, he now turns to what form that philanthropy should take. The seven recommendations he offers are consistent with his vision of civilization and the paternalistic role of the capitalist philanthropist. Carnegie suggests that surplus wealth should be channeled into the following areas: universities, public libraries, medical facilities and research, public parks, city halls, public swimming baths, and churches. His reputation today reflects the fact that he put his money where his mouth was by funding universities and public libraries across the United States. Consistent with his view that giving to the poor directly, through wages, or through government taxation was egregious and counter to the flourishing of the race, in these essays Carnegie offers a vision of authoritarian capitalism buoyed by paternalistic giving serving the interests of civilization and progress.

There is much one may find objectionable in Carnegie's thinking from paternalism to social Darwinism, at the same time there is a level of consistency and coherence to his thought that we will not find in the techno capitalist ethos today. Our contemporary visionaries do not accept the fact that capitalism produces inequality or poverty. Carnegie at least had the capacity and willingness to acknowledge the social and material costs of progress and the resulting inequality. This is something the philanthropists of today seem incapable of. As a class they subscribe to the belief that capitalism reduces, not produces, poverty and inequality, that capitalism will bring widespread prosperity, and above all that endless growth enables opportunity for the most disadvantaged. This faith in capitalism to alleviate the very problems produced by capitalism is the magical thinking of neoliberalism and the deep-seated denial of the ruling class. The result of this delusional thinking can be seen in the funding choices of their foundations. Instead of funding for public libraries we see funding for charter schools and individualized learning software. Instead of general funding for institutions of higher education we see grants supporting technological research in the interest of specific industries. Carnegie was an authoritarian paternalist but his view of humanity was not reducible to homo economicus.

In his recent book *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*, Anand Giridharadas examines the relationship between elite ideology and growing inequality. By focusing on particular figures and tracing their biographies and ideologies, he illuminates the deluded thinking of our thought leaders and elite change agents. As he characterizes it: "What these various figures have in common is that they are grappling with certain powerful myths – the myths that have fostered an age of extraordinary power concentration; that have allowed the elite's private, partial, and self-preservational deeds to pass for real change; that have let many decent winners convince themselves, and much of the world, that their plan to "do well by doing good" is an adequate answer to the age of exclusion."[165] While Giridharadas does not explicitly frame his critique as such, he is laying bare the way that neoliberal ideology motivates and self-clarifies the machinations of the global elite and sustains the very system of inequality it presumes to

[165] Anand Giridharadas, "Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World," (New York: Alfred A. Knopft, 2018), 11.

fix. His work is broader in demonstrating this tendency but for my purposes here his attention to philanthropy is useful.

Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation, is the primary focus of Giridharadas's chapter on philanthropy, titled "Generosity and Justice." A few years after joining the foundation, Walker published an essay on his Ford Foundation blog titled *Towards a New Gospel of Wealth*. He rightly claimed that Carnegie's essay inaugurated the contemporary era of foundation philanthropy and attempted to articulate some of the deficiencies with such a vision for the present moment. Walker rejects inequality as a necessary fact of capitalism and argues that rising inequality should make us "reflect on the principles of philanthropy" set out by Carnegie and "consider to what degree they point to the realities and responsibilities of philanthropy in our time, and to openly acknowledge and confront the tension inherent in a system that perpetuates vast differences in privilege and then tasks the privileged with improving the system."[166]

Raising the tension, let alone urging the confrontation, was a bold move for a foundation president, something akin to breaking the fourth wall in theatre. Walker risked upsetting polite society by shifting the conversation from morally pure benevolence to the morally dubious ill-gotten position of the elite. This type of confrontation requires those at the top to recognize the structures that produce them as a class and consider the way those same structures produce a permanent and growing underclass. "Walker had broken what in his circles were important taboos: Inspire the rich to do more good, but never,

[166] Darren Walker, "Toward a New Gospel of Wealth," Ford Foundation, accessed June, 11, 2019, https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/toward-a-new-gospel-of-wealth/

ever tell them to do less harm; inspire them to join the solution, but never, ever accuse them of being part of the problem."[167]

It is important to recognize that Walker risked this confrontation (heresy) from within, not only as the President of the Ford Foundation but also, as Giridharadas highlights, a former investment banker and a person of color who had overcome deep structures of inequality and come out on top. He was an example that upward mobility was possible, the kind of feel good story that reinforces elite narratives of American opportunity that downplay structural inequality. ""Look at Darren," he [Walker] mimicked his admirers cooing. "Why can't they all be like Darren? I mean, look at Darren. He had a single mother. He put himself through school. You know, he never had a father. He didn't even know who his father is." The question that his life raised for them was: Why couldn't all poor people end up like Darren Walker?"[168] As the embodiment of this narrative Walker was in a unique position to challenge it but in doing so, risked unsettling larger narratives and jeopardizing his own authority among the elite.

Walker's revisiting of Carnegie's vision for philanthropy is limited, uncritical, careful and attempts to uphold some of tensions inherent in the work in order to reflect on the positive developments within philanthropy while at the same time pushing for a reckoning with the underlying issue of inequality. On the positive side of the scale he sees a diversification of philanthropic approaches including the "Giving Pledge[169]" and

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[167] Anand Giridharadas, "Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World," (New York: Alfred A. Knopft, 2018), 155.
[168] Ibid, 166

[169] Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett spearheaded the practice of committing to give back most of their wealth and have lobbied other ultra wealthy individuals to do the same. Many have taken the pledge and more information can be found here: https://givingpledge.org/

progress on vaccinations. On the negative side of the scale he sees persistent and growing inequality. “Why in too many parts of the world have we failed to provide employment, education and health care, decent nutrition and sanitation? What underlying forces drive the very inequality whose manifestations we seek to ameliorate?”[170]

For Walker the task is to marry the “radicalism of Carnegie’s 19th century revolution” with Martin Luther King’s call for examining the “roots of injustice,” “the causes of human suffering” and “privilege.”[171] His hope is that in doing so we might be able to fashion philanthropy capable of grappling with the nature and challenges of our time. Walker views our moment as one of “more enlightened, egalitarian, and participatory societies” whose citizens are able to “hear and heed more diverse voices and perspectives.”[172] Perhaps more importantly, he places tremendous faith in the advances of data and social scientific inquiry to shed light on the particularities of inequality, techniques not conceivable in Carnegie’s time. While outside the scope of this chapter, this point cannot be overstated as the foundations of the twentieth century embraced and drove social science research techniques in their quest for funding *impacts* and *outcomes.*[173]

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170 Darren Walker, “Toward a New Gospel of Wealth,” Ford Foundation, accessed June, 11, 2019, https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/toward-a-new-gospel-of-wealth/
171 Ibid

172 Ibid

173 Joanne Barkan, “Plutocrats at Work: How Big Philanthropy Undermines Democracy,” *Dissent*, Fall 2013, accessed June, 11, 2019.

In order to understand and begin to address the root causes of inequality Walker argues for "three basic forms" of change.[174] The first is a "critical" and "honest" reckoning with "racial, gender, ethic, and class biases." Second, foundations must reject the long influence of paternalism within philanthropy and begin listening to and partnering with those they seek to help. "Third, we need to interrogate the fundamental root causes of inequality, even, and especially, when it means that we ourselves will be implicated."[175] This third form of change is the most dangerous and leads Walker to question the extension of economic thinking to all domains of life, the way that foundations reproduce these inequalities in hiring practices and policy development/implementation, and why foundations are necessary.

The soul-searching Walker urges could lead to some radical conclusions but before the critique goes too far and he is misunderstood as a true heretic and radical, he emphasizes philanthropy's "obligation to capitalism." Echoing Henry Ford II, Walker acknowledges foundations as "creatures of capitalism" and while he and other foundation presidents and board members want an economy that works for more people, that economy is and should be capitalist.

> To put it more bluntly, we were established by a market system and endowed by the money of the past century's 1 percent. We are stewards of enormous resources – participants in and beneficiaries of a market system. As a result, our work is quite literally enabled by returns on capital. In turn, I believe we are obligated "to strengthen and improve" the system of which we are part. My conviction is no anathema to capitalism. Adam Smith himself argued that the "invisible hand" could not be blind to the condition of society, and that "no society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and

174 Darren Walker, "Toward a New Gospel of Wealth," Ford Foundation, accessed June, 11, 2019, https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/toward-a-new-gospel-of-wealth/
175 Ibid

> miserable." This from a visionary who was not only the forefather of American capitalism but also the author of Theory of Moral Sentiments, which he regarded as more important than his Wealth of Nations.[176]

Walker's New Gospel of Wealth present us with a vision for philanthropy that tasks it with reducing inequality, paternalism, and racism at the same time it strengthens and improves capitalism. For a critic of capitalism this reads as magical thinking and a cogent expression of neoliberal ideology. At the same time that he acknowledges the extension of market logic to all domains of life, he reflexively parrots the commonsense wisdom of the elite that it is through capitalism that a better world is possible. It is inconceivable from his position, and from the position of philanthropic foundations, to consider that capitalism might be the engine of inequality and that their interventions are anathema to solving the fundamental issues.

Carnegie was a paternalist and social Darwinist but he at least recognized the role that capitalism played in producing inequality. We may not like his justification – that overall this inequality is worth it for civilization to advance – but at least he acknowledged the tradeoff. Carnegie's prejudices and anti-democratic ideology was odious but consistent and coherent. The same cannot be said of the vision of philanthropy Walker advocates. At root it is a paradox that stretches the bounds of coherence but one that underpins contemporary elite ideology: the inability to acknowledge capitalism as an engine of inequality and the simultaneous presentation of capitalism as the solution to the problems of inequality. This paradox itself may be a symptom of neoliberalism and a product of the economizing influence on all domains of life, one that naturalizes market logic.

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[176] Ibid

Giridharadas's treatment of Walker ends in a similar aporia; one less critical, but nonetheless doubtful of his ability to usher in a new gospel of wealth. Despite Walker's pronouncements and arguments, when push comes to shove he is willing to meet the donor class "where they are," which means emphasizing opportunity and his personal story of ascendance over the underlying causes of inequality. His belief that he can change the culture of philanthropy from within is certainly optimistic but the power of one personality is not enough to transform the interests of an entire class or even pierce the narratives that sustain it. More fundamentally, Walker's merging of Carnegie and King is untenable and only serves to confuse us into believing the cause of inequality is also its cure. As Wilde argued it is only a "wholesale upheaval" that can adequately address the causes of inequality and many of the problems we face.

The Pearly Gates

Each year Bill and Melinda Gates write an annual letter for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). Since 2009 these annual letters have served to provide an overview of the previous year and a glimpse into the priorities of the coming year. While the annual reports provide greater detail on the activities and funding priorities of the Foundation, these letters also provide a window into the thinking of Bill and Melinda Gates and offer an ongoing narrative of their interests, priorities, and worldview. In this section I offer a reading of these letters that focuses on the claims present within them in order to demonstrate the centrality of neoliberalism, capitalism, and market logic in the projects and worldview of the BMGF. What I find is both unsurprising and noteworthy. A businessman with an unwavering faith in technology to solve problems, Bill Gates made his fortune by founding Microsoft and for many years was the world's richest person. Due to this stature, he occupies an important place in the post-industrial capitalist imaginary. His thinking, especially concerning philanthropy, echoes the industrialists of the previous gilded age while also reflecting the more contemporary logic of neoliberalism.

It is worth noting at the outset of this analysis that the thinking of Bill Gates, as expressed in the letters, differs in some ways from that of Walker or Carnegie. Gates's worldview of philanthropy is linked and mutually co-constitutive with international development, foreign aid, and private enterprise. While the Walker's vision is compatible with these elements it figures much less explicitly in his thinking and programming. Gates on the other hand thinks of philanthropy as one pillar that engages in strategic ways with, and in the gaps between, other pillars. His focus on global health is emblematic of this process and might be read as demonstrating philanthropic tendencies quite different than those discussed in the first half of this chapter. However, I want to briefly suggest another frame for interpreting this seeming inconsistency. While I don't have the space to draw out the full contours of this argument, I believe we can read Gates's views as consistently expressing the genealogy of biopolitics and neoliberalism that Foucault[177] lays out. Seen this way, the annual letters reflect a concern for governing and producing populations, measurement as a technique of governing, and the economization of non-

[177] See Foucault, Michel, *Security, territory, population: lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009). And Foucault, Michel, *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010).

economic domains of life.[178] For the purposes of my argument one can then see the interventions of BMGF as even more deeply consistent with the logical of neoliberalism.

What I hope my reading of these letters offers is a demonstration of the ideology driving the largest private foundation in the world. While it's spending in the world of philanthropy is massive, it is miniscule compared to the expenditures of governments and yet it exercises a tremendous influence over policy makers. It is this influence that amplifies and reinforces neoliberal beliefs and practices with the effect of furthering and naturalizing market logics in domains previously untouched by these forces. Nowhere has this influence been more pronounced or contested than in the public-school system of the United States. One of the key domestic focus areas for the Gates Foundation, an unshakeable faith in teacher training and performance as the key ingredient in improving outcomes for underserved and underprivileged school children, has driven much of their funding. This focus has put the foundation at odds with unions, school districts, and teachers, leading to support for Charter school systems. I will return to this example later in this section.

While for my purposes in this chapter my treatment of the BMGF is limited to a reading of the annual letters and some related documents, it is worth mentioning that a broader critical analysis of the foundation, its activities, and structure, reinforces my reading. To my knowledge the best critical analysis of the structure and activities of the BMGF was researched and produced by Global Justice Now, a UK based NGO. Their report, authored by Mark Curtis and titled *Gated Development: Is the Gates Foundation*

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[178] See Brown, Wendy, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

always a force for good, offers a well-researched critique of the foundation's activities and interests. The report also raises difficult questions about the structure and mission of the foundation.

Central to Global Justice Now's concerns is the lack of accountability and enormous influence that the foundation enjoys. As the world's largest charitable foundation Bill and Melinda Gates enjoy access to world leaders, policy makers, and researchers. Despite the relative size of BMGF compared to public spending, their deep pockets provide them with the ability to shape how those public dollars are spent. As communities around the world bend to their whims for funding they face little oversight and virtually no democratic accountability. The fund that stewards their endowment, though independent, invests in related medical and farming technologies as well as industries responsible for deepening global inequality. While the independence of the fund removes any direct conflict of interest, more broadly the business interests are clearly aligned with the philanthropic. As I will show, this is entirely consistent with Bill and Melinda's worldview and the work of the BMGF. Perhaps what is more troubling and consequential is Global Justice Now's claim that the BMGF sides with business solutions when they are not the most effective and believes that business logic can address questions of justice that arise from deep inequality.

> *Gated Development* demonstrates that the trend to involve business in addressing poverty and inequality is central to the priorities and funding of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We argue that this is far from a neutral charitable strategy but instead an ideological commitment to promote neoliberal economic policies and corporate globalisation. Big business is directly benefitting, in particular in the fields of agriculture and health, as a result of the foundation's activities, despite evidence to show that business solutions are not the most effective. For the foundation in particular, there is an overt focus on technological

> solutions to poverty. While technology should have a role in addressing poverty and inequality, long term solutions require social and economic justice. This cannot be given by donors in the form of a climate resilient crop or cheaper smartphone, but must be about systemic social, economic and political change – issues not represented in the foundation's funding priorities. Perhaps what is most striking about the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is that despite its aggressive corporate strategy and extraordinary influence across governments, academics and the media, there is an absence of critical voices. Global Justice Now is concerned that the foundation's influence is so pervasive that many actors in international development, which would otherwise critique the policy and practice of the foundation, are unable to speak out independently as a result of its funding and patronage.[179]

To the extent that there are critical voices, they are indeed marginalized and effectively screened out from the circles of elite global governance that Bill and Melinda travel within, as do so many world leaders, policy "experts," and business prophets. We might describe a Davos consensus around an ethos of democratic capitalism that can shade left or right depending on context but maintains the centrality of markets and liberal state institutions to enforce property rights (increasingly intellectual property), and favorable access to foreign markets. This commonsense wisdom dominates elite institutions and polite company and frames what is largely understood as the appropriate order of the world for the 1%. It was this polite consensus that Darren Walker sought to upset and which echoes in the BMGF annual letters.

Throughout these letters Bill and Melinda Gates affirm a view of society in which the private sector, government, and private foundations all have a role to play. A believer in markets, technology, and innovation to solve the world's problems, Bill Gates offers

[179] Mark Curtis, "Gated Development," Global Justice Now, June, 2016, accessed June, 11, 2019, 4, https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/gjn_gates_report_june_2016_web_final_version_2.pdf

“catalyzing” philanthropy as a vision. This vision, unsurprisingly, channels the lessons he has learned in building Microsoft: a faith in data, measurement, market incentives (either creating markets or filling the void), and outcomes. Above all, his zeal for solving problems, which he understands as improving outcomes whether those outcomes are vaccination rates or teacher effectiveness, defines an element of his personality and his philanthropy.

In reading these letters the broad contours of Bill and Melinda’s world-view comes into focus. As two of the wealthiest people in the world who helm the world’s largest private foundation, they see themselves as agents of change shining light on the world’s problems and making smart interventions to fix them. While he does at least articulate a recognition that the world of philanthropy and business differ in important ways, he clearly buys into a technocratic vision where industry, government, and philanthropy each play their part within a capitalist ecosystem. This is evidenced throughout by the consistent focus and professed anxiety about foreign aid decreases in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and the effect it will have on health, entrepreneurial innovation spending, and economic outcomes.

In his mind, this tripartite allowance should be capable of meeting the broad needs of humanity. It is worth noting that to a limited extent he does recognize the failure of markets and in fitting with this trinity doesn’t see markets as the solution to all problems. At the same time however, he does extend an economizing logic to non-market interventions, a consistent neoliberal logic. In his 2010 letter, Bill recognizes that there is little investment in innovation aimed at solving the issues of the poor because “the poor can’t generate a market demand.” In order to address this deficiency of the market, the

Gates Foundation "helped launch a new approach to encourage a high-volume, low-cost supply of a pneumococcus vaccine that meets the needs of poor countries. This approach is called an Advance Market Commitment, and it involves a group of donors pledging $1.5 billion to help pay for the vaccine for poor countries. We expect manufacturers will commit to building factories much earlier than they would otherwise in order to compete for this money."[180]

In reading the first few years of letters (Gates 2009-2012) I was taken aback by the technocratic governance that infused the choice of issues and interventions. Focused largely on vaccines, agriculture, and education the letters convey a macro level thinking intent on saving lives, improving yields and teacher performance. Bill jumped into these issues as he had at Microsoft by digging into the "data" and seeking the counsel of experts who can guide his strategy. "In the same way that during my Microsoft career I talked about the magic of software, I now spend my time talking about the magic of vaccines" (Gates 2011). However, at Microsoft Bill was looking for opportunities to build and expand a software monopoly, extract greater rents from users, and fend off and snub out competition. In short, he was focused on growing the value of Microsoft through aggressive profit seeking and market domination. The new goals he was interested in required a different rationale or at least one tempered and adjusted to meet needs the market had not.

In grappling with the challenges and realties of meeting these goals we see Bill and Melinda stretching new frames to situate their interventions. What eventually took

[180] Bill and Melinda Gates. "Annual Letter 2010." Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Accessed June 11, 2019. https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Resources-and-Media/Annual-Letters-List/Annual-Letter-2010.

root was a veneration of international foreign aid and a ceaseless lobbying and appeal to governments to provide support. This became particularly important in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and renewed importance with the inauguration of the Trump presidency. In 2011, reflecting on the trend of austerity and worrying about how decreases in internal aid would jeopardize poor countries ability to achieve "self-sufficiency" Bill offered the following:

> The world's poorest will not be visiting government leaders to make their case, unlike other constituencies, so I want to help make their case by describing the progress and the potential I see in key areas of health and development. Perhaps it is ironic for someone who has been so lucky to talk about the needs of those who have not. I believe it is in the rich world's enlightened self-interest to continue investing in foreign aid. If societies can't provide for people's basic health, if they can't feed and educate people, then their populations and problems will grow and the world will be a less stable place. Whether you believe it a moral imperative or in the rich world's enlightened self-interest, securing the conditions that will lead to a healthy, prosperous future for everyone is a goal I believe we all share.[181]

He does not make a moral argument, but his promotion of an "enlightened self-interest" for rich countries can be read as confirmation of Oscar Wilde's criticism. In other words, rich countries need poor countries to remain stable, provide resources and cheap labor, and above all embrace neoliberal governance in order to sustain the dominance of rich countries. This is the "enlightened self-interest" of the Global North. Bill knows well that reducing disease and improving global health is a benefit to rich counties in the long

[181] Bill and Melinda Gates. "Annual Letter 2011," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Resources-and-Media/Annual-Letters-List/Annual-Letter-2011

term as is socio-economic and political stability. For example, “eradication [of polio] could save the world up to $50 billion over the next 25 years.”[182]

Setting aside philosophical concerns, it is worthwhile to consider the implications of the policy interests the BMGF supports and toward which they want the aid of foreign governments to contribute. Improving health care in the developing world is a worthwhile pursuit. However, the dispassionate rationalized approach of the BMGF seeks to save the most lives as possible through vaccination in order to shape a population with the potential for self-sufficiency and economic mobility. The linkage between vaccination (and its benefits) and the production of individual and collective economic actors is made explicitly, though in the margins, and often in the negative. For instance, Bill argues that increased sickness among children results in deficient nutrition and as a result lower IQ scores, and “although an IQ test is not a perfect measure, the dramatic effect you see is a huge injustice. It helps explain why countries with high disease burdens have a hard time developing their economies as easily as countries with less disease.”[183] An alternative explanation may be that Bill is confusing the symptom for the cause.[184] Similarly, he claims that reducing child mortality reduces birthrates over time instead of leading to overpopulation. This patchwork of mutually reinforcing claims is why Bill and Melinda believe “childhood health issues are key to so many other issues,

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[182] Ibid
[183] Ibid

[184] See Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, (London; New York: Verso, 2006)

including having resources for education, providing enough jobs, and not destroying the environment."[185]

The BMGF focus on farming can be understood in an analogous and complementary way, comprised of two main trajectories: first, the development of GMO crops capable of producing higher yields and resisting pests and disease; and second, through increased yields the transformation of the subsistence farmers into empowered producers of surplus that can be brought to market. This circuit can be further marketized within the global aid industry by the purchase of surplus for use in aid activities. "When small farmers in Mali are earning extra income by feeding hungry families in Niger, it's a clear win-win."[186] Despite the presence and centrality of non-business entities (governments and NGOs) the logic of business, of markets, of neoliberalism shapes the unspoken diagnosis of the problem and the remedial interventions. "The private market does a great job of innovating in many areas, particularly for people who have money. The focus of Melinda's and my foundation is to encourage innovation in the areas where there is less profit opportunity but where the impact for those in need is very high. That is why we have devoted almost $2 billion to helping poor farm families, most of which are led by women, boost their productivity while preserving the land for future generations."[187]

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[185] Bill and Melinda Gates. "Annual Letter 2011," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Resources-and-Media/Annual-Letters-List/Annual-Letter-2011
[186] Ibid

[187] Bill and Melinda Gates. "Annual Letter 2012," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Resources-and-Media/Annual-Letters-List/Annual-Letter-2012

In the 2013 letter we get a full-throated promotion of another important aspect of neoliberal governance – measurement. While measurement is central to the BMGF interventions in the American public education system it also plays a role in the administration and production of "best practices" in the health and agriculture areas as well.[188] In a video posted at the top of the letter Bill gives us his pitch on "Why Measurement Matters."[189] To do so, he returns to the impact of foreign aid and his favorite example of polio, claiming that it is important to "adopt programs that we can actually measure, are we getting the bed nets out?, e.g.."[190] Bill goes on to comment that compared to a few decades ago it (philanthropy) is now more like a business where you can use measurements to gauge results and inform adjustments. He is careful to point out that in the past – a less quantitative era - was "equally well meaning" as the present. This is a strange comment considering the assumption would be the opposite, and that the business informed era might be less likely "well meaning" on the face of things. Ultimately, the story Bill wants to tell about measurement is that it is a key variable in driving human progress. He draws inspiration from the "Lord Chancellor" a small micrometer used in the development of steam engines. This tool made a decisive difference in developing steam power and Bill projects an analogous upside to "cell phones, satellites, and cheap sensors" which "can gather and organize data with

[188] Bill and Melinda Gates. "Annual Letter 2013," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Resources-and-Media/Annual-Letters-List/Annual-Letter-2013

[189] Ibid
[190] Ibid

increasing speed and accuracy. These modern-day Lord Chancellors will also help speed progress in education and agriculture, as well as other health efforts.[191]

It is unclear if Bill's optimism about technological rationalism in his areas of intervention is warranted, let alone desirable, but it is striking that his imaginary posits a broad upside to surveillance data mining for philanthropy. This view is consistent with the broad vision of tech evangelists and has been shaping our culture, politics, and economy in profound ways over the past decade. Microsoft may have gained its dominance in the rise of the desktop era but with its ubiquitous foothold in business and homes drawing vast rents from its users, it is a key player in cloud computing and data analytics. Much like Dell, IBM, and others it is offering businesses and governments the capacity to transform their data into efficient and/or profitable insights. This new frontier of opportunity for big tech has been enabled by the development of increased computing power, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and an increasingly "connected" world of devices. Facebook, Google, Amazon, Apple, and others operate in similar ways either offering similar services or serving as key data mining and data production platforms. By capturing and defining the digital public sphere, companies with "social" platforms have brought about new norms of privacy, an embrace of corporate surveillance, and above all succeeded in demonstrating the potential of making the personal the profitable.

Steeped in a world of techno-capitalism, and utopian about the promise of technology to change the world, Bill's shift from leading Microsoft to the BMGF was one of changing objectives, not of kind. In the letters he does evoke an awareness that

[191] Ibid

business and philanthropy are different but those differences appear largely to be additional challenges (such as government health regulatory agencies) that he did not face in the business world, not qualitatively different terrains where questions of history, culture, fairness, equity, and self-determination are rife. Instead, he narrowly addresses these issues under banners like inequity that in his mind can be improved and *measured* through particular interventions. In doing so the BMGF substantially contributes to a culture of charity increasingly defined by the logic of neoliberalism.

In their annual letters Bill and Melinda rarely, if ever, mention capitalism. As a common sense touchstone they do not need to directly evoke it. Instead we hear about inequity, business, efficiency, markets, and economic empowerment. Despite the unwritten but ubiquitous presence of capitalism in their letters, they devote their 2014 annual letter to a defense of "progress" that reads like a full-throated defense of global capitalism.

> By almost any measure, the world is better than it has ever been. People are living longer, healthier lives. Many nations that were aid recipients are now self-sufficient. You might think that such striking progress would be widely celebrated, but in fact, Melinda and I are struck by how many people think the world is getting worse. The belief that the world can't solve extreme poverty and disease isn't just mistaken. It is harmful. That's why in this year's letter we take apart some of the myths that slow down the work. The next time you hear these myths, we hope you will do the same.[192]

The letter seeks to debunk three myths they believe "block progress for the poor."[193] These myths are: (1) poor countries are doomed to stay poor; (2) foreign aid is a big

[192] Bill and Melinda Gates. "Annual Letter 2014," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/Resources-and-Media/Annual-Letters-List/Annual-Letter-2014

[193] Ibid

waste; and (3) saving lives leads to overpopulation. In the preceding I have addressed the issues surrounding "myths" two and three as they have appeared in previous annual letters, here I offer a reading of the first "myth."[194]

Bill is dismayed that so many people feel like poor countries are doomed to stay poor and he is incredulous about this fact because as he sees it the data paints an entirely different picture. According to Bill, the distinctions of "developing" and "developed" countries are imprecise. Based on the data, the story of the last fifty years is one of increasing economic opportunity and innovation, growing middle classes, and improving national economies. This is largely gleaned from GNP data and World Bank classifications. It is to the latter's "low income" ranking that Bill refers in his excitement about poverty being eradicated by 2035. Despite this "progress" he accepts that "inequality will still be a problem" and a billion people will still be poor.[195] He also recognizes that the achievement of these goals will have negative environmental impacts and contribute to other problems. As Bill puts it:

> Some people will say that helping almost every country develop to middle-income status will not solve all the world's problems and will even exacerbate some. It is true that we'll need to develop cheaper, cleaner sources of energy to keep all this growth from making the climate and environment worse. We will also need to solve the problems that come with affluence, like higher rates of diabetes. However, as more people are educated, they will contribute to solving these problems. Bringing the development agenda near to completion will do more to improve human lives than anything else we do.[196]

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[194] Ibid
[195] Ibid

[196] Ibid

The development agenda he is justifying and promoting is merely the affirmation of the current regime of international global capitalism. As such, his charitable work should be squarely grouped with the dominant entities in this space – the World Bank, IMF, UN, G20, etc. The development agenda is nothing more than expanding global markets, producing neoliberal subjects, and providing uplift for the impoverished through market mechanisms and structures. Despite the 2008 financial crisis, growing global inequality, and above all else, awareness of the profound effect capitalism is having on the climate, Bill like most of the elite affirms that "growth" and capitalist "development" is the best model for human flourishing. His faith in technological and market innovation to solve the problems caused by these very forces is central to maintaining the myth of global capitalism's beneficence.

David Harvey reminds us that by solving one contradiction of capital more are generated.[197] In the passage above Bill acknowledges this, though not fully, in his insistence that the neoliberal subjects he elevates today will solve the problems of their elevation tomorrow. As Harvey points out, this insight is most profound with ecological crises like the climate change we face today. In the 18th century Britain faced the contradiction of needing to use land for fuel production and food production and resolved it by resorting to fossil fuels under the earth. "A contradiction can often be the 'mother of invention.' But notice something important here: resort to fossil fuels relieved one contradiction but now, centuries later, it anchors another contradiction between fossil fuel use and climate change. Contradictions have the nasty habit of not being resolved but

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[197] David Harvey, Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism: David Harvey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

merely moved around."[198] Wedded to global capital, the development agenda seeks to overcome existing contradictions in order to produce the next contradictions. In this way we might say we solve a problem today in order to have a problem to solve tomorrow because our solution (capitalism) is the problem.

Much of my discussion thus far has focused on the international dimension of the BMGF's work, specifically around farming and vaccination. The third major focus area for the foundation has been on improving teacher effectiveness in the United States. Focus in this area has been informed by the belief that if teacher effectiveness can be improved then student outcomes will follow. If student outcomes improve, economic opportunity and social mobility become attainable. As the story goes, this virtuous circle could have broad and important impacts in overcoming deep-seated inequities, especially for children and communities of color. The enthusiasm for this type of silver bullet initiative stems from the same place as their enthusiasm for reducing childhood mortality or increasing crop yields, a belief that by understanding the data and identifying the proper lever they can use their resources and political capital to drive change and impact outcomes.

To improve teacher effectiveness, the BMGF partnered with school districts to provide performance-based incentives and career ladders to retain the most effective teachers. The approach was carried out at traditional public districts as well as some charter schools. By focusing on additional compensation and individual teacher performance the program challenged hard fought union protections and seniority provisions by introducing performance-based pay. Conceiving student outcomes as a

[198] Ibid, 3-4

byproduct of teacher effectiveness/job performance, the initiative furthered the broader logic of the charter school movement that has been able to model and parrot non-union labor and management practices from the private sector to discipline teachers and tweak curriculum. More broadly the work promoted the narrative that teachers and students, as individuals, are the cause of educational achievement gaps, not the messy world of socio-economic inequality, historic forces of oppression, or ongoing public school tax funding schemes.

The Rand Corporation was contracted to evaluate and write a report on the effectiveness of "The Intensive Partnerships for Effective Teaching" initiative and released their report on 2018. Despite six years of investment, based on data the initiative largely failed to deliver its goals. "Sites implemented new measures of teaching effectiveness and modified personnel policies accordingly but did not achieve their goals for students."[199] Perhaps even more troubling for the initiative were the findings for low-income minority students. "Overall, however, the initiative did not achieve its goals for student achievement or graduation, particularly for LIM students."[200] As a result of the failure the BMGF is reevaluating its K-12 education program.

Many factors made this failure possible and it raises serious questions about the role of foundation initiatives and democracy. Two people helming the world's wealthiest foundation latched onto research supporting teaching effectiveness as an important driver of student success. Using their resources and connections they set about reforming school

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[199] Stecher, Brian M., Deborah J. Holtzman, Michael S. Garet, Laura S. Hamilton, John Engberg, Elizabeth D. Steiner, Abby Robyn, et al. "Improving Teaching Effectiveness: Final Report." Product Page, 2018. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2242.html

[200] Ibid

districts, leveraging matching public funds, and seeking concessions from unions and districts. In doing so, they influenced and shaped important decisions for school districts in ways that ultimately did not realize the assumed student outcomes. Bill and Melinda do not live in the districts, do not have children attending these schools, yet used their influence and resources to shape policies and funding priorities for districts governed, at least in theory, by the citizens whom they serve. In the wake of such failure there are few to no avenues of redress. The BMGF simply re-evaluates its programming and moves on to the next idea while the school districts bear many costs for the experiment including matching funds provided by the district and the alignment of resources to support the program which could be focused elsewhere.

Across all of their intervention areas from vaccines to agriculture to education technocratic patterns emerge illuminating two mutually reinforcing and inseparable threads - neoliberal global capitalism and technocratic data driven intervention and management. In this context we can understand neoliberal global capitalism as a system that preferences the market and the individual to solve problems, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth. The role of state, international agencies, and nonprofit organization is largely to facilitate the correct environment for the engine of neoliberal capital to thrive and to address the externalities of the market. Embracing this worldview allows Bill and Melinda to screen out all of the messy questions of history, equity, and culture and turn their focus on technocratic solutions to "problems." After surveying the data, the BMGF chooses strategic interventions, silver bullets if you will, like mosquito nets or teacher effectiveness, and throw gasoline (money and resources) on them believing that they will lead to broad impacts and change. Any failure or setback does not challenge the method or the worldview it just becomes a learning opportunity to bring forward to the next intervention, not a rethinking of the enterprise or the problems themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered two readings aimed at illuminating dimensions of the role of philanthropy in neoliberal capitalism. Central to my readings is a demonstration of the ways in which philanthropy today mistakes the cause (capitalism) of inequality and immiseration for the solution. This blindness is enabled in part by the logic of neoliberalism and the colonization of the collective imaginary with the belief that markets are central to achieving human flourishing. The *fact* of this belief and the ideology it spawns has eclipsed the space of any critical distance from the wonders of the market and the power of capitalism. Marx himself acknowledged the dynamism and growth of capitalism while at the same time revealing its alienating nature and foundation of exploitation. Compared with Carnegie, today's philanthropists and global elite reject and deny any recognition of these realities preferring instead to believe that far from causing inequality, capitalism alleviates it.

Returning to Carnegie's writings is refreshing because it offers an explicit justification for capitalism and in doing so, reminds us how profoundly the logic of capitalism has colonized conventional wisdom. Far from inconsequential, this shift is symptomatic of the ascendance of neoliberal thinking. Darren Walker, who seeks to update Carnegie's philanthropic worldview, is perhaps the finest example of this ineptitude. As president of the Ford Foundation, he attempts to conjure the impossible, the alleviation of inequality by the very forces of inequality. The half-hearted introspective challenge he lays out in the *New Gospel of Wealth* to the donor class asks both too much and too little of them. What strikes me about his argument is that he is actually trying to make one but in doing so gets necessarily lost in the fog of Carnegie, King, Smith, and the real world challenges his foundation seeks to address. As Wilde makes clear, without understanding the nature of the problem, the nature of capitalism, philanthropy merely reproduces it and for Walker this means quite literally stewarding capital, a mission he elevates with no sense of irony.

Bill Gates has a more developed position but ultimately suffers from the same blindness as Walker. In his defense of development we hear echoes of Carnegie's defense of capital. We see arguments about the benefits of capitalism but what is crucially missing is recognition of the inequality and poverty that it produces. For Carnegie this is a worthy price, for Gates it is unimaginable and he has the data to show you why things have only improved, as long as you accept his measures and frame. What is profoundly troubling about the BMGF is its tremendous influence on public policy and its lack of accountability to the people it claims to serve. While in this essay I only briefly touched upon the structures that enable big philanthropy, it is worth noting that the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (as a LLC) will be less transparent than BMGF and able to mix for profit and charitable work. While both charitable structures should worry those concerned with democracy the lack of transparency further erodes our capacity to hold these influential entities accountable.

Stepping back from the particulars of the case studies I want to return to the larger picture of the relationship between philanthropy and capitalism. One thing I hope the reading of Carnegie and Walker together emphasizes is a shift in thinking among the elite from viewing capitalism as both increasing the standard of living and producing inequality and a desperate underclass versus a view that fails to see capitalism as producing or contributing to inequality and poverty. While the paternalism, social Darwinism, and racism may have receded or become subtle it has been replaced with banal platitudes about inclusivity and economic opportunity that fail to understand the nature of the problems it seeks to solve. As neoliberal philanthropy's interventions continue to fail it is impossible for the grant makers to understand it as a failure of *kind* rather than a failure of *execution* or undermined by unexpected factors. Much like Gates, they will continue to tinker in the crises of capitalism moving from the wreckage of one intervention to the next.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL:

AN INVERTED CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORLD

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of religion in both challenging and affirming capitalism in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Readers of the previous three chapters will notice a related but somewhat different dialectical movement concerning the way that capitalism presents itself as the solution to the very problems it creates. While the preceding chapters demonstrate this tendency through the reading of concrete practices and documents, this chapter performs a similar analysis but from a slightly broader perspective. Drawing on Karl Marx's remarks on religion in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *Capital Volume 1*, I argue that we should understand religion as "the general theory of this world" and "its universal basis of consolation and justification."[201] As such, religious practices and pronouncements shed light on the dynamics of an age. In our contemporary moment I look to two different voices and traditions, Pope Francis's Catholicism and the Prosperity Gospel of Joel Osteen, in order find sources of consolation and justification in our time. What we see in reading these two religious figures are competing visions of what God wants from us, or for us, and wildly different analyses of the problems of our age and their solutions. As I argue below, we can read the Prosperity Gospel as a faithful representation of the

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[201] Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, trans. Joseph O'Malley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), x. accessed online August, 14, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_Hegels_Philosophy_of_Right.pdf

"inverted consciousness of our world" while Pope Francis's critical Catholicism represents a radical path divergent from the tenor of the time.[202] As such, the Prosperity Gospel offers a solution to the problems created by capital by stunting systemic or structural criticism and transforming any failing of capitalism into a personal failure that can be overcome by right thinking.

Following the financial crisis of 2008 serious questions about inequality and precarity were raised – most notably, by the occupy movement. The 99% became a critical refrain with cultural legs, and far flung, if minimal, effects. Similarly, the Black Lives Matter movement raised issues of police criminality, institutional racism, mass incarceration and widespread inequality and erasure. Obama was elected in the midst of this crisis and responded by bailing out Wall Street and the Automotive Industry, rescuing core institutions of neoliberalism from themselves and reasserting the commonsense centrism of the Clinton administration. His careful pragmatism and identity propelled a right wing resurgence ultimately culminating in the election of Donald Trump. Hillary Clinton's defeat at the hands of Trump and the treatment of Bernie Sanders by the Democratic Party in the 2016 primary stoked the embers of discord between centrists and leftists in the party setting the stage for the 2018 and 2020 election cycles. The crises produced by the financial crisis have animated much of this political upheaval on both sides and elite power has attempted to maintain control of both parties in the face of demands that the status quo is incapable of addressing due to their commitment to more of the same - neoliberalism.

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[202] Ibid

The ascension of Pope Francis is another, albeit different, event aligned within the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. While the Pontiff's stature is truly global, his visibility and humility have renewed a religious criticism largely absent in contemporary America. The Pope's criticism draws its inspiration from antiquity but its diagnosis of the present moment is modern and biting. Put simply, Francis's church is more radical. On his view the plight of the poor requires more than the charity of the wealthy, it requires a transformation of the conditions that create wealth. This message challenges neoliberalism directly in a battle of ideology - the individual and the banal versus the collective and the divine. As I will demonstrate, in his writings Pope Francis addresses this dichotomy by challenging economies of exclusion, environmental degradation, technology, and alienation.

This paper offers an immanent critique of neoliberalism, limited to the American context, by juxtaposing Pope Francis's critique of capitalism with the dominant ideology of neoliberalism in general and the so-called Prosperity Gospel in particular. In order to do so, I provide a close reading of two works authored by Francis. The first is "Encyclical Letter LAUDATO SI' of the Holy Father Francis On Care for Our Common Home"[203] In it he offers a blistering critique of the contemporary world attacking economies of exclusion, environmental degradation, technology, and alienation. The second text is "Apostolic Exhortation EVANGELII CAUDIUM of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the

[203] Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican Press, 2015.

Gospel in Today's World."[204] This text echoes the concerns of the Encyclical Letter and seeks to renew the spirit of the Church and focus its attention and efforts on overcoming these problems. Unsurprisingly, in addition to his ruthless critiques, what I find in my reading of these texts is a profound emphasis on Love (Agape) that provides a greater understanding of his criticisms and hope, and also fundamentally limits his critique due to its reified nature.

One thing that is notable about Francis's critique is the strangeness with which it hits the American ear. Most of the voices we hear tell us a different story. We hear about the individual in the market, economic freedom, personal choice, growth and prosperity. We are encouraged to embrace market life as the way to alleviate the problems we face and sounds counterintuitive that it is simultaneously the cause of inequality, climate change, and abject poverty. Americans have a long and complicated tradition of faith and prosperity. Disparate elements both secular and religious have congealed into what is known today as the Prosperity Gospel or charismatic movement. Self-help, positive thinking and will power dominate its more secular variants. Emerging from mysticism, New Thought, Mesmerism, Christian Science, Pentacostalism and other sources a uniquely American idealism was born.[205] Its coherence with long standing American myths and its focus on the individual has allowed it to reinforce dominant economic narratives and it is compatible with neoliberalism.

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[204] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, Vatican Press, 2013.
[205] See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Due to the diversity of its many authorities, my treatment of the Prosperity Gospel is somewhat less ambitious than the reading I offer of the Encyclical and Exhortation. After providing a brief historical genealogy I focus on contemporary figures and offer a reading of Joel Osteen's *Your Best Life Now*. What I find in this reading is the absence of Love (Agape) central to the thought of Pope Francis and instead a message of love of the self, stripped of its universalizing transcendence and reflecting secular self-help narratives. The elevation of the individual, her power to improve her own position through accessing God via idealism (mind power), and the belief that worldly treasures are not only valuable but also attainable offers a stark contrast to the work of Pope Francis.

The constellation at the heart of this paper is neoliberalism, the Catholicism of Pope Francis and the idealism of the Prosperity Gospel. What I hope to offer by contrasting these religious engagements with the contemporary social and political moment is an immanent critique of neoliberalism. The ideology of neoliberalism structures the socio-political material and discursive landscape and by juxtaposing these two religious formations, we can see both affirmation and profound challenge. The prosperity gospel affirms selfish aggrandizement and projects an inverted Christianity that resonates with our time. Francis's Catholicism offers a fundamental critique that rests on the essentialism of Christian love (agape). As a result, it offers of the possibility of transcendent emancipation through practice on earth while the prosperity gospel strengthens the status quo and presents itself as a vehicle through which individuals can overcome the limits of contemporary capitalism.

The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor

Since his ascension there has been no more visible critic of capitalism than Pope Francis. Living in accordance with this critique by rejecting the opulent papal apartments and favoring Fiat's for transportation have added to his mystique. Francis seeks to renew the churches focus on serving the poor through leading by example. As the first Jesuit Pope this renewal makes sense but the sophistication of his critique of contemporary life is surprising. In a number of written works and speeches Francis has condemned the social and environmental devastation wrought by global capitalism and financialization[206]. He has called on the faithful to embrace this critique and evangelize on behalf of the Church. Pope Francis has authored a number of texts and delivered speeches at times seemingly indiscernible from the work of contemporary critical theorists. In fact, you can purchase one of these works from Verso, a publisher better known for hawking the work of "Radical Thinkers" than Pontiffs. This unusual association raises a number of questions. What exactly is Francis critiquing and what is the inspiration? What elements of faith inform his criticism? What vision does he offer?

In order to explore these questions, I will offer a brief reading of two key texts authored by Pope Francis. The first is "Encyclical Letter LAUDATO SI' of the Holy Father Francis On Care for Our Common Home"[207](Hereafter Encyclical). In it he offers a blistering critique of the contemporary world attacking economies of exclusion, environmental degradation, technology, and alienation. The second text is "Apostolic Exhortation EVANGELII CAUDIUM of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy,

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[206] See Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Semiotext(e)/Intervention Series, 2012).
[207] Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican Press, 2015

Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World"[208] (Hereafter Exhortation).

While the imagined audiences for these texts are different, the two works are in dynamic conversation with one another. In tone and treatment, the Encyclical is aimed at a broader audience than the church while the Exhortation is explicit in its attempt to address church officials and faithful. The Encyclical puts the problems of the modern world up front and the spiritual and doctrinal grounding of the critique in back. The Exhortation reverses the emphasis offering a spiritual and doctrinal explication of the critique of the present. Francis is crafting a story for the role of the church today that echoes the long history of the church and positioning it as uniquely qualified to take on the challenges of modernity. As the first Jesuit Pope, he is careful to articulate his vision as compatible with the vision of Benedict and John Paul before him. Throughout the Exhortation he references the textual work of his two predecessors alongside that of Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis performs a similar grounding in the Encyclical but widens the conversation to include other religious leaders such as Patriarch Bartholomew and secular interlocutors.

The Encyclical begins with a reference to Saint Francis of Assisi who according to Pope Francis "reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."[209] Rather than care

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[208] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, Vatican Press, 2013

[209] Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican Press, 2015, 2

for this common home humanity is increasingly destroying it. Furthermore, ecological crises are simultaneously social crises. For Francis the root cause of these problems is a particular hubris – "we have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will."[210] This hubris is an "irrational confidence in progress and human abilities."[211] In the contemporary moment this hubris is embodied in the fundamental belief in progress offered by the marriage of technology and industry. In what follows, I highlight some passages from the Encyclical that identify the challenges of the present and diagnose their causes before turning my attention to the Exhortation.

The central focus of the Encyclical is the environment as an object of religious and material concern and the threats posed to it by humanities way of life. By emphasizing the current ecological crises, the Encyclical seeks to explain the fundamental causes of ecological devastation and draw on a set of Judeo-Christian principles that can "render our commitment to the environment more coherent."[212] According to Francis, the spirit of this undertaking reflects the sentiments of Pope John Paul, who argued in his first encyclical, "human beings frequently seem "to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption"… At the same time, he noted that little effort had been made to "safe-guard the moral conditions for an authentic *human ecology*." This authenticity is at the heart of what Francis believes the Church can offer and a thread he weaves throughout the text. For our purposes, in this context we can understand authenticity as a quality of practices and persons that reflect the harmony and wisdom endemic in the love of God.

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[210] Ibid, 2

[211] Ibid, 19

[212] Ibid, 15

Harmony, in this sense, is reflected in Francis's portrayal of Saint Francis of Assisi: "I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically."[213]

There are six themes that I will highlight in my reading of the Encyclical. Five of these themes express significant drivers of our ecological crises: consumerism, technological fetishism, climate change, neoliberalism, and inequality. The sixth theme simultaneously grounds the overall critique and provides a set of values that could serve as the basis of what Francis refers to as a "new lifestyle." Stressing the common good and authenticity this theme can best be described as integrating Catholic values of Love into a way of life that does not reproduce the social and ecological damage of capitalism. "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change."[214]

While these themes are distinct, they reflect, in their own particularity, the logic of global capitalism. This logic is one of accumulation and dispossession, speculation, and privatization. The ideology of neoliberalism heightens these characteristics by glorifying the role of the individual economic actor and the hollowed out state, both of which serve the interest of capital. At the same time that they enrich the enriched, they impoverish citizens with a perverse economic and political *freedom*. In practice, the logic shared by these themes contributes to a web of mutually reinforcing tendencies of extraction and accumulation that produces social and environmental precarity. Pope

[213] Ibid, 5

[214] Ibid, 13

Francis is keenly aware of the fact that each of these themes expresses a dimension of the same problem. Trying to disentangle these themes as independent elements is akin to untying the Gordian knot. As Pope Francis puts it:

> As examples, I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.[215]

In the Encyclical a key element of the critique of technology is the recognition of technological fetishism as a defining feature of contemporary neoliberal ideology. Rather than refuse to acknowledge the environmental challenges caused by global capitalism, elite mouthpieces posit technology as the solution. While there is some historical evidence to justify a belief in future technology to overcome current problems, global capitalism is betting the planet on it and the stakes couldn't be higher. However, technology is not simply an abstract capacity with material promise. Under current conditions of production and consumption, technology is intricately woven into the accumulation process. The driver behind technological innovation is not the alleviation of human suffering, inequality, or environmental destruction but the ability of industry to harness technological capacities to advance their interests. "Technology, which linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves

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[215] Ibid, 16

incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others."[216]

The belief that technology under the direction of capital is the best, if only, way to overcome the problems created by global capitalism is a cruel optimism that reflects the profound influence of neoliberal ideology. After all, it is neoliberalism that holds that the common good is best achieved through the unleashing of market forces through autonomous individuals. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, this view remains entrenched.

> The alliance between the economy and technology ends up sidelining anything unrelated to its immediate interests. Consequently the most one can expect is superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern for the environment, whereas any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented.[217]

Neoliberalism produces this ideological blindness a fact we must recognize lest we see this behavior merely as pure greed carried out in the face of its devastating consequences. While there is undoubtedly greed there is also a spectrum stretching from true belief to unreflective acceptance of the common sense wisdom generated by neoliberal ideology. This is much more pernicious than selfish callous greed because it is more difficult to penetrate or illuminate. It is from this perspective that we should interpret the following quote from Francis. "Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing

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[216] Ibid, 20

[217] Ibid, 54

their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change.”[218]

The technological concerns in the Encyclical extend beyond techno-capital fetishism. In addition to the consequences of inequality and environmental devastation, Pope Francis is concerned with the qualitative social transformation posed by technological innovation and the resulting impact on human beings. One concept he develops to name this dynamic is *rapidification*, by which he means:

> The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called “rapidification”. Although change is part of the working of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. Moreover, the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development.[219]

This rapidification results from both the speed of technological innovation and the immediacy produced by technological mediums of connection. Planned obsolescence and the culture of consumerism generate an endless supply of objects and desire. The relentless pace of production and consumption produces immense pressure in the workplace to increase output in order to maintain market share and capitalize on emerging opportunities. The widespread use of smart phones extends the workday virtually, blurring the line between private and work life. New expectations of availability eliminate the psychic refuge the end of the workday once provided.

[218] Ibid, 26

[219] Ibid, 18

These changes are not limited to the workplace. Digital communication technologies have had a broad and profound impact on human relationships and intimacy, transforming social expectations and conventions. Social networking offers the opportunity to create and project a sense of self for consumption by others and personal vanity. The immediacy and ease of such technologies reduce judgment and publicize the personal. Empowerment is the promise of social media but it merely enriches itself through digital sharecropping while valorizing narcissism. In a more hopeful passage, Pope Francis identifies these challenges but suggests that social media can serve a progressive value.

> Efforts need to be made to help these media become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches. True wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollutions. Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail, do not tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus giving rise to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature.[220]

The dichotomy between "contrived emotions" on the one hand and "real relationships" involving people and nature on the other, speak to Pope Francis's belief in the promise of an authentic way of life informed by the Love of God. In his view, technological fetishism and the qualitative effects of technology on culture limit the possibility of this integral vision from flourishing.

The Encyclical's treatment of environmental devastation, framed as both ecological crises and climate change, provides the strongest language of the link between

[220] Ibid, 47

social inequality and damage to the environment. The interpenetration of themes is consistent throughout the text but this particular relationship is repeatedly called out.

> Today, however we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."[221] "The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation.*[222]*

We can read into this critique the integral view of a common good and common home and the recognition that we cannot attend to one dimension of the problem without simultaneously addressing all dimensions. This holistic view reinforces the desire for a new way of life and authenticity mentioned earlier without articulating the vision as Catholic.

Where Pope Francis tips his hat is in his discussion of the intrinsic value of nature writ large, humanity, and non-human animals. He bemoans the loss of biodiversity due to the insatiable economic exploitation of natural resources. "It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential "resources" to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves."[223] This intrinsic value extends to all creatures creating "basic and universal human right(s)" such as access to safe water because it is "essential" to survival and a pre-requisite for all other human activity.[224] "Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water,

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[221] Ibid, 49

[222] Ibid, 48

[223] Ibid, 33

[224] Ibid, 30

because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity*."[225] The formulation of an essential intrinsic value takes on added importance for the Pope who rejects the ecological benefits of population control. His refusal to consider overpopulation as a meaningful question in the context of environmental devastation seems at odds with many other dimensions of his critique. It is however, consistent with a coherent Catholic vision of social emancipation and environmental stewardship.

To close my treatment of the Encyclical, I cite a long passage that directly challenges the oft-heard interpretation that God gave Man dominion over the world and all it holds. In addition to the refutation it provides, what is striking is the window into Pope Francis's interpretive lens.

> We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf, Gen 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationships of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.[226]

While this interpretation can stand on the text alone, its importance only makes sense in the context of the present moment – a moment of impending calamity -where a relationship of mutual responsibility is required. At no other time in human history has

[225] Ibid, 30
[226] Ibid, 67

the political necessity of such a position been necessary. The Exhortation, which I turn my attention to now, offers a similar interpretive frame that explicitly brings the doctrine of the Church to bear on the problems of the present moment.

The presumed audience of the Exhortation differs significantly from the Encyclical. While the Encyclical engaged a broader audience emphasizing a critique of the present moment, the Exhortation directly addresses all the people of the Church. In doing so, it offers a similar critique with greater doctrinal context for the faithful. Nevertheless, it remains a biting critique of consumerism, technological fetishism and inequality. The focus here is less on the social effects of such phenomenon but rather the spiritual consequences to our relationship to God and each other.

> The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too.[227]

In this passage we see the spiritual heart of the matter, the very real danger that our world of consumerism prevents a meaningful relationship with God and by extension the rest of humanity.

According to Francis, God's love, agape, is thwarted by the frivolity and individuality of contemporary life. The importance of agape for grounding his critique of

[227] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, Vatican Press, 2013, 2

the present and the foundation of his hope and vision cannot be understated. This foundation offers the potential for personal and collective liberation:

> I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.[228]

The full potential of human life, an authentic life, is made possible through the encounter with God's love. Francis takes pains to highlight the challenges of the contemporary moment because he sees the potential of these trends to set off a process of "dehumanization which would then be hard to reverse." This course of events would run "counter to God's plan" and only by renewing our relationship with him can our divine potential flourish.[229]

My point in highlighting the role of agape in the Exhortation is to emphasize the foundational role it plays in the thinking of Pope Francis. While his critique is his own, and we can imagine many different critiques that could draw on the same foundation, nevertheless the cohesion and power of the criticism is inseparable from the absolute belief that informs it. While the role of agape is muted in the Encyclical, which purports to appeal to a broader audience than the Exhortation, it's arguments should be read in the right *context* and *appropriate hermeneutic* – the horizon of agape. These arguments

[228] Ibid, 7 &8

[229] Ibid, 51

include a new kind of anonymous power brought about by knowledge and information,[230] economies of exclusion,[231] trickle-down economics,[232] the idolatry of money,[233] and perhaps most important, as it relates to agape, moral relativism: "The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds."[234]

Capitalist Catholics Push Back

A number of prominent American Catholic's took umbrage with the Pope's criticism. Conservative columnist Peggy Noonan, in a Wall Street Journal Op Ed titled "The Two Sides of Pope Francis,"[235] captured the essence of this outrage. While she appreciates the humility of Pope Francis and his opposition to "throwaway culture," she rejects his politics and critique of capitalism. As she puts it:

> The less lovable pope is – well, and I say this still with love, Uncle Frank in the attic. This is the one who endorses secular political agendas, who castigates capitalism in language that is both imprecise and heavily loaded. He doesn't actually, seem to know a lot about capitalism or markets, or even what economic freedom has given and is giving – his own church.[236]

For Noonan, the message of Pope Francis is inspirational and welcome as long as it doesn't cross the line from simply encouraging good deeds to identifying the causes of

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[230] Ibid, 52

[231] Ibid, 53

[232] Ibid 54

[233] Ibid, 55

[234] Ibid, 67

[235] Peggy Noonan, "Declarations: The Two Sides of Pope Francis," The Wall Street Journal, September, 26, 2015, A13

[236] Ibid

inequality and calling for a corrective politics. The reason for the Pope's overreach is his lack of understanding of capitalism, markets and economic freedom.

It is unclear from this column what mistakes Pope Francis makes in his critique of capitalism. Is he simply wrong about the relationship between capitalism and inequality, between finance and instability, and between consumption and environmental devastation? Noonan leaves us wanting on this score but does throw us an ideological bone in the phrase "economic freedom," which I read as code for neoliberalism in general and personal responsibility in particular. This reading makes sense in light of the "one small example" she offers:

> Stephen Schwarzman of the Blackstone Group gave $40 million to the Catholic schools of New York, meaning he is giving his personal wealth to pay for the education of children, many of whom are recent immigrants and some of whom sleep in cars. Last I looked Mr. Schwarzman was not a monk or a mystic but a businessman in private equity. This is not abusing, ignoring or dehumanizing the poor. This is lifting them up, helping them in a concrete way that will change their lives.[237]

The lesson Noonan wants us to take from this example is threefold – a holy trinity if you will. The first element is the figure of the individual, in this case Schwarzman, who possesses personal wealth. The second element is the vehicle for that wealth – private equity and third is the free choice of charity. In Noonan's view, the obligation among Catholics to serve the poor concerns what they do with the riches they possess not with the structures that produce those riches. In other words, Schwarzman contributes to inequality through his private equity work and at the same time donates some of that money to the poor. This duality exists in the abstract, he doesn't exploit the same people

[237] Ibid

in the morning that he elevates in the evening. The inability to see the incoherence, especially in the abstract, highlights the ideological blinders of neoliberal ideology so dominate in American society.

Schwarzman is not alone among wealthy American Catholics. Ken Langone, the billionaire founder of Home Depot, who is spearheading the efforts to raise $180 million dollars to restore a NYC Cathedral, raised similar concerns on the behalf of the donor class to Cardinal Timothy Dolan of NYC.[238] Of central concern was a perception that Pope Francis failed to recognize the virtuous nature of American billionaires compared to those of other countries.[239] Furthermore, an anonymous donor was rankled by the "Pope criticizing market economies as "exclusionary," urging the rich to give more to the poor and criticizing a "culture of prosperity" that leads some to become "incapable of feeling compassion for the poor."[240] Prompted by the concerns of his donors and the broader popular concern about the Pope's economic rhetoric, Cardinal Dolan authored a piece for the Wall Street Journal to reassure the wealthy and blunt the Pope's criticism.

The title of the piece is illuminating in itself – "The Pope's Case for Virtuous Capitalism."[241] To my knowledge Pope Francis has never categorized his critiques as a call for virtuous capitalism or suggested that the capitalist economic system itself may be virtuous. Reading Dolan in the Wall Street Journal one gets the sense that a great

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[238] Michelle Caruso-Cabrera, "Pope's Sharp Words Make a Wealthy Donor Hesitate," *CNBC*, December, 30, 2013, accessed August, 14, 2019, http://www.cnbc.com/2013/12/30/pope-francis-wealthy-catholic-donors-upset-at-popes-rhetoric-about-rich.html

[239] Ibid

[240] Ibid

[241] Cardinal Timothy Dolan, "The Pope's Case for Virtuous Capitalism," *The Wall Street Journal*, May, 22, 2014

misunderstanding or mistranslation has occurred. Careful to hit all the right notes, he affirms: "everyone has the natural right to economic initiative and to enjoy the fruits of that labor," furthermore the "free market has undoubtedly led to a tremendous increase in overall wealth and well-being around the world."[242] In the same breath he tempers the role of individuality with a concern for the "benefit of all people" and echoes the Pope's argument that "an important part of humanity does not share in the benefits of progress."[243] For Dolan the problem isn't capitalism, or any particular socio-economic order, it is mobilizing the "essential element…genuine human virtue" to properly regulate individual initiative and private property.[244] While recognizing the concern for the poor this sentiment explicitly reflects neoliberal ideology. From the American perspective this is unsurprising and arguably coherent. How often have politicians and opinion makers from both parties promised to unleash a torrent of economic growth simply by getting the right incentives and removing burdensome regulation to allow the noble small businessman to flourish? Despite all the evidence to the contrary neoliberalism pervades and its dominance appears as common sense easily offended by the Pope's criticism. For many American Catholics, capitalism is not (or should not be) at odds with a concern for the poor, in fact they believe it is the key to eliminating poverty as demonstrated in the preceding chapter on philanthropy.

Embracing Hubris: The Power of I

Genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture. For this reason they entail a personal relationship, not with vague spiritual energies or powers, but with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the saints. These devotions are fleshy, they have a face. They are capable of fostering

[242] Ibid
[243] Ibid
[244] Ibid

relationships and not just enabling escapism. In other parts of our society, we see the growing attraction to various forms of a "spirituality of well being" divorced from any community life, or to a "theology of prosperity" detached from responsibility for our brothers and sisters, or to depersonalized experiences which are nothing more than a form of self-centredness. – Pope Francis[245]

If we understand Pope Francis's critique of modernity as a challenge to the dominance of neoliberalism we can similarly understand the Prosperity Gospel as an affirmation of neoliberal ideology, and an inverse representation of contemporary capitalism. To do so first requires some understanding of the history and contours of this gospel. Unlike the Catholic Church there is no bureaucracy or figurehead guarding tradition to look to. I think of the prosperity gospel as a constellation of secular and sacred forces that combine in interesting ways. Kate Bowler's *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*[246] provides an excellent history of a complicated tradition. In doing so, she traces the diverse influences, texts and figures that have contributed to this phenomenon. "Prosperity Gospel is composed of three distinct though intersecting streams: Pentecostalism, New Thought (an amalgamam of metaphysics and Protestantism…) and an American gospel of pragmatism, individualism, and upward mobility."[247] These three streams converge and diverge, producing a diverse collection of figures and thought positions that are at times mutually reinforcing and at others starkly opposed. The complex nature of this history has resulted in a limited popular view of the

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[245] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, Vatican Press, 2013, 90(73)

[246] Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

[247] Ibid, 3

prosperity gospel and in conventional wisdom it is largely associated with evangelical televangelists.

The stream I am most interested in highlighting for the purposes of this chapter is New Thought. I see this stream as emblematic of a spirit of self-help and material fulfillment uniquely suited to serve contemporary capitalism and reflect is logic and values. It is also in some ways uniquely American. Phineas Quimby[248], a native of New Hampshire, became a famed mesmerist after apprenticing with a visiting hypnotist and setting up shop in Maine. Quimby's writings and practices were influential on the New Thought movement in general and on Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, in particular. His work sought to unlock the power of the mind to overcome problems faced by individuals. Part hypnotherapy, psychotherapy and spirituality his work centered the individuals mind as the source of suffering and flourishing. These tendencies were common across variants of New Thought. As Bowler puts it: New Thought "Adherents, acting in accordance with divine principles relied on their minds to transform thought and speech into heaven sent blessings."… " It focused on the individual rather than groups and emphasized the power of the individuals mind."

This focus on the individual and the possibilities of the mind was powerful. Through right thinking, Truth, faith, naming, and even tithing - individuals could overcome their present condition with thoughts and words tapping into divine energies. Health and wealth became accessible to all requiring only the courage and faith to

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248 "Home Page," Phineas Quimby, accessed August 14, 2019, https://phineasquimby.wwwhubs.com/

believe. The individual character of this power was one of personal responsibility – a quality deeply associated today and in some ways inseparable from neoliberalism and homo economicus. Softer and more secular forms appeared early in the 20th century including the publication of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and in publications like the Christian businessman. Over the past century and-a-half a plethora of figures have shaped this discourse a trajectory Bowler traces through the figure of E. W. Keyon before mapping the broader ministries. My interest is in the way these popular figures within the tradition of New Thought have combined the sacred and the secular, articulating a vision of religious materialism and providing a frame through which to achieve it. While I am only going to refer to a few contemporary figures in this chapter, most notably Joel Osteen, it is my position that they are contemporary Andrew Carnegies and serve a similar purpose – making the economy and religion recognizable, accessible, and compatible to the modern individual.

Oprah Winfrey is an exemplary example of secular mind power and she has used her broad reaching media platforms to promote all manner of self-help prophets even launching the mega careers of Dr. Phil and Dr. Oz. As her success grew she embraced the ethos of the Prosperity Gospel promoting self-help and positive thinking and featuring guests such as Suze Orman, Deepak Chopra, and Joel Osteen.[249] Nicole Aschoff describes it this way: "Oprah's success and charisma undergird her core message that anything is possible. Her story is a real-life rags-to-riches tale that inspires a belief that wealth and success are achievable if we open our minds."[250] Joel Osteen, appearing on

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249 Nicole Ashcoff, "The New Prophets of Capital," (London; Brooklyn: Verso, 2015), 85

250 Ibid, 78

OWN delivered a similar message in his “The Power of I Am” part of Oprah’s Lifeclass.”[251]

> When you say I am beautiful, not only does beauty, youth, freshness start coming your way but on the inside your spirit person begins to come alive. Your self-image begins to improve you will start carrying yourself like you are someone special. You won’t drag through the day feeling less than, inferior, you will have that spring in your step, that go-girl attitude. Beauty is in being who god made you be with confidence.” “God made you who you are on purpose…nothing about you is by accident.” “Dare to get up in the morning and say I am a masterpiece.” “As long as you go around thinking I’m just average, I’m just one of the billions of people on earth, nothing special about me, the wrong I am will keep you from rising higher.

The power of this message is profound and echoes the American idealism of New Thought. It is up to the individual to “carry” themselves in a way that embodies their specialness, to actively think that they are not merely average - like everyone else. In naming and believing these truths the individual can succeed by tapping into the power of their relationship with God. After all, “beauty is in being who God made you to be with confidence”- a divinely mediated confidence.

Joel Osteen may be the most important voice of the prosperity gospel today and he has grown Lakewood Church, housed in a former sports stadium in Houston, into a mega church and multimedia empire. His sermons reach millions of people weekly and his books are consistent best sellers.[252] As the quote above indicates, central to Osteen’s message and theology is the power of an individual’s minds to transform their lot in life.

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[251] Joel Osteen, “Pastor Joel Osteen’s Full Sermon “The Power of I Am,” YouTube video, 27:29, Posted October, 29, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kjSK-PcU9o&t=11s

[252] “Our History,” Lakewood Church, accessed August, 14, 2019, https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/about/history

He is not alone in his faith in the power of thought and we can look to *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne as a similar contemporary best selling phenomenon of mind power and look back to the Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* as an important antecedent. Osteen, like Byrne and Peale, offers a metaphysic of empowerment suited to the culture of contemporary capitalism that relies upon immediate gratification (through debt and credit) and a never-ending cycle of consumption. While it is true that the prosperity mindset Osteen suggests is not limited to material abundance, it is also true that economic success is a central and overriding concern that provides the necessary background conditions for other forms of success and fulfillment.

In *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*, Osteen offers readers advice on how to develop a "prosperous mindset" through illustrative stories and assurances that material abundance is what God wants for us all. For Osteen these gifts have already been bestowed to all and are not to be attained through sacrifice or piety but rather merely actualized.

> Understand, God has already equipped you with everything you need to live a prosperous life. He planted "seeds" inside you filled with possibilities, incredible potential, creative ideas, and dreams. But just because those things are within you doesn't mean they will do you any good. You have to start tapping into them. In other words, you've got to believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have what it takes. You must keep in mind that you are a child of the Most High God and you were created for great things. God didn't make you to be average. God created you to excel, and He's given you ability, insight, talent, wisdom, and His supernatural power to do so. You have everything you need right now to fulfill your God-given destiny."[253]

[253] Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living At Your Full Potential*, (New York: Faithworks, 2004), 82

The passage quoted above would be compatible with many strands of Christianity except for one key element, Osteen's insistence that God has given us "His supernatural power." It is this belief, that through right thinking we can access God's power and actualize our potential and achieve prosperity, that we see the thread of new thought and it's liberatory promise.

According to Osteen giving up our "poverty mentality" is key to accessing this power.[254] This mentality, forged by experience, is what prevents us from taking what God wants for us. To illustrate this point Osteen offers two stories, the first concerns cheese and crackers, the second his father's struggle to abandon his own poverty mentality. The first story is about a man who saves enough money to buy a ticket for transatlantic passage on a ship. He only has enough money for the ticket and packs a suitcase full of cheese and crackers because he cannot afford to buy food on board. Throughout the trip he fantasizes about the banquet meals the other travelers are enjoying only to discover towards the end of the trip that they were included in the cost of his ticket. The lesson that Osteen wants us to take from this is that God has provided a banquet for us and we need to stop eating crackers and cheese. Our prosperity is already given, we just need to take it for it is what God wants for us.

The second story concerns his father's road to a prosperity mindset. In the early days of Lakewood Church his father was struggling to take care of the family and was offered a $1,000 check from a parishioner to help with their needs after hosting a visitor for the church depleted their resources. Rather than accept the check, Osteen's father painfully puts it in the church coffers, but in doing begins to realize that he must abandon

[254] Ibid, 85

his belief that God demands his poverty and begins to form a prosperity mindset. Rejecting his poverty mindset is difficulty but maintaining it, according to Osteen, is not what God wants of us.

> When we go through life with a poverty mentality, it is not glorifying to God. It does not honor His great name. God is not pleased when we drag through life, defeated, depressed, perpetually discouraged by our circumstances. No, God is pleased when we develop a prosperous mind-set. Too often we become satisfied and complacent, accepting whatever comes our way. "I've gone as far as I can go. I'll never get any more promotions. This is just my lot in life." That's not true! Your "lot in life" is to continually increase. Your lot in life is to be an overcomer, to live prosperously in every area. Quit eating the cheese and crackers and step into the banquet hall. God created you for great things. What a tragedy it would be to go through life as a child of the King in God's eyes, yet as a lowly pauper in our own eyes.[255]

Poverty and humility in the service of God are then understood as an affront rather than a glorification of Him. Through His endowment of us with all of our abilities and most importantly "His supernatural power" we must adopt a prosperity mindset in order to feast at the banquet he has already bequeathed. Anything less is a failure to live up to God's plan for us and the only thing standing in the way of our prosperity is ourselves.

Conversely, accepting our lot in life, our conditions of poverty or struggle, is a failure to recognize that we are the only ones responsible for our own hardships. It is not the financial crisis of 2008 that caused us to lose our home or job it is merely our poverty mindset and our inability to overcome it. A more generous reading might contend that even when bad things happen to us as no fault of our own, it is still our responsibility to overcome and feast at the banquet God has already provided for us. The centrality of the individual as responsible for his or her own flourishing is central to the New Thought

[255] Ibid, 87

stream of the Prosperity Gospel and it is not difficult to see the deep compatibility with neoliberal ideology and the broad contours of contemporary capitalism. As Marx might say, the religion of the Prosperity Gospel is the logic of the world “in popular form,” the inverted consciousness of our state and society.

Conclusion

This chapter presented two different religious responses to the 2008 financial crisis through a reading of Pope Francis’s Exhortation and Encyclical and Joel Osteen’s Your Best Life Now. These readings sought to draw out each author’s explicit and implicit theorization of contemporary society from their respective religious traditions. While those traditions originate well before the financial crisis of 2008, and some of the work I cite from Osteen predates the crisis by a few years, both are important examples of religious argument that seek to offer the faithful an analysis of the world that is compelling and consistent with God. Before revisiting their arguments here, I turn to Marx to ground the broad dialectical movement I am attempting to demonstrate in this chapter.

In the introduction and both sections above I made reference to Marx’s comments about religion in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,* particularly his comment that religion is the inverted consciousness of the world. Now I want to shift the focus to his oft-cited section on the fetishism of the commodity in *Capital Volume 1* in order to draw out a larger claim. This section is one of the most important passages of the text because it describes how it comes to be that relationships between people are conceived as relationships between things. Under capitalist production, the “commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves” and also reflects the generalized character of the commodity form beyond any particular instance of production.[256] Marx goes on to suggest the only place to seek an analogy is in the example of religion: “There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race.”[257] In each case humanity fails to see itself as the author or producer of the mysterious world that confronts them. In this sense, fetishism veils the genealogy of human hands and minds in the very creation of major domains of life – religion and the economy – and presents those objects as supernatural.

In Section One: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor, I outlined Pope Francis’s critique of contemporary capitalism. His account of the social, environmental, and economic devastation produced by contemporary capitalism is quite probing and persuasive. Readers of critical theory will identify with many of the arguments and find inspiration in concepts like rapidification and his description of economies of exclusion for their own critiques. At the same time the horizon of his criticism is fundamentally limited by the fetishism of religion. While agape grounds his radical critique, it also reminds us of the intrinsic role that God plays in his critique, something we can largely overlook. Despite his critical insights, ultimately he leaves us on our knees at the mercy of a God who we are always already indebted to and whose nature he fails to see as a product of humanity instead of its author.

[256] Karl Marx and Ernest Mandel, Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy, trans Ben Fowkes, (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 165

[257] Ibid

Perhaps more importantly for my purposes, Francis offers a view of Catholicism that is far from an inverted representation of our world, and instead we see a ruthless criticism of the values and practices of it. Cardinal Dolan's intervention, cited above, is an attempt to right the ship, to massage Francis's hermeneutic to comport with the world as it is and offer the faithful – particularly the wealthy – a Catholicism which is compatible with the world, a more faithful inverted representation than Francis offers. In other words, virtuous capitalism and charity are all God requires of you and we should celebrate you for it rather than see your gains and behavior as a symptom of an economy of exclusion. This is the limit to Pope Francis's critique. He offers a message to the faithful that does not reflect the values and practices of the world they inhabit, and it suggests a much more radical upheaval then most would consider. His efforts are further hampered by the Church's global crisis of sexual abuse and financial scandals.

On the other hand, Joel Osteen's message of prosperity provides an inverted representation of our world that is compatible with dominant narratives of economic empowerment, responsibility, and opportunity. Osteen's message sanctifies these values, encourages their pursuit, and argues that God has already provided for their realization if the faithful shed their poverty mindset and access His power. The coherence between religion and world that is offered to receptive audiences is one reason for the growth and popularity of Prosperity Gospel mega churches at the same time that the Catholic Church hemorrhages parishioners, consolidates parishes, and sells off property to cover legal settlements. The Prosperity Gospel provides contemporary capitalism with a "basis of consolation and justification," that lends divine authority to a system of individual interests and economic responsibility. In doing so it reiterates core elements of neoliberalism and meshes seamlessly with secularized notions of positive psychology and self help that work in parallel and permeate the broader culture in general and management thinking in particular.[258] Secular and religious versions of the Prosperity Gospel present capitalism as the solution to the problems of capitalism in two senses: first they stunt systemic or structural criticism of capitalism and second, they transform any failing of capitalism felt by an individual into a failing of the individual which can be overcome with mind power. Put another way, capitalism does not produce failures only individuals who fail to take advantage of right thinking.

[258] See *Smile or Die* and *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America* by Barbara Ehrenreich.

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