Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies

BIAS, BELIEF, AND CONVICTION IN AN AGE OF FAKE FACTS

Edited by
Anke Finger and Manuela Wagner

Bias, Belief, and Conviction in an Age of Fake Facts

In this book, the authors engage in an interdisciplinary discourse of theory and practice on the concept of personal conviction, addressing the variety of gray zones that mark the concept.

Bias, Belief, and Conviction in an Age of Fake Facts discusses where our convictions come from and whether we are aware of them, why they compel us to certain actions, and whether we can change our convictions when presented with opposing evidence, which prove our personal convictions "wrong." Scholars from philosophy, psychology, comparative literature, media studies, applied linguistics, intercultural communication, and education shed light on the topic of personal conviction, crossing disciplinary boundaries and asking questions not only of importance to scholars but also related to the role and possible impact of conviction in the public sphere, education, and in political and cultural discourse.

By taking a critical look at personal conviction as an element of inquiry within the humanities and social sciences, this book will contribute substantially to the study of conviction as an aspect of the self we all carry within us and are called upon to examine. It will be of particular interest to scholars in communication and journalism studies, media studies, philosophy, and psychology.

Anke Finger is a Professor of German Studies, Comparative Literature, and Media Studies at the University of Connecticut, USA. Her many publications focus on the total artwork, expressionism, and the media philosopher Vilém Flusser, among other topics, within the areas of modernism, media studies, and intercultural communication.

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Foreword

I have been studying the psychology of moral conviction for close to 30 years. The approach I have generally taken is a very bottom-up one. Instead of defining what a morally convicted attitude is, my collaborators and I ask people whether they perceive a given attitude as a moral conviction, and then examine how the features of morally convicted attitudes are the same or different from other kinds of attitudes. For example, although most if not all moral convictions are examples of strong attitudes (e.g., they are experienced as more evaluatively extreme, important, and certain), not all strong attitudes are moral convictions. People tend to have strong attitudes about their favorite sports teams, musicians, or even certain brands. However, these attitudes are seldom moral convictions but instead reflect people's strong preferences. People might use the words "right" and "wrong" about certain things, but not all these judgments or attitudes are necessarily moral convictions. For example, someone in the United States might forcefully argue that driving on the left side of the street is wrong, but at the same time, find it perfectly acceptable that someone in Australia or the United Kingdom routinely does so. People's positions on some issues reflect widely understood norms or coordination rules in the groups to which they belong, norms and rules that do not always apply outside of the confines of one's group. Although strong, people are unlikely to experience these kinds of attitudes as moral convictions.

Although sharing some characteristics with strong attitudes, we have discovered that moral convictions differ from otherwise strong but non-moral attitudes in some important ways. Moral convictions are seen as more universally applicable (i.e., if it is perceived as morally wrong, it is also morally wrong 100 years ago, in other cultures, and so on), seen as objectively true to people as the idea that 2 + 2 = 4, people are very unwilling to compromise their positions on morally convicted attitudes, and will persist in holding them even when their positions are at odds with important authorities (e.g., the law) or a majority of their peers. People are likely to become more politically engaged when they have moral convictions about their preferred candidates or the issues at stake (i.e., more likely to vote and engage in collective efforts at change), as well as to volunteer and give to causes they

morally support. People also become very focused on achieving morally convicted ends, to neglect concerns about the means used to obtain them, including whether they are obtained by the use of deception or extra-legal violence. The normative implications of these and other findings are both reassuring (moral convictions can protect against obedience to potentially malevolent authorities) and terrifying (moral convictions are associated with rejection of the rule of law and can provide a motivational foundation for violent protest and acts of terrorism; for a review of these and other research findings, see Skitka et al. (2021).

Most scholarship on moral conviction has come out of experimental social psychology. This edited volume takes a completely different tack. The editors of this volume have brought together an impressive interdisciplinary group of scholars who come at the question of moral conviction from a wide range of different epistemological traditions in the humanities and social sciences, including philosophy, comparative literature, media studies, religion, psychology, and linguistics. The scholarship in this book, therefore, has the potential to be genuinely transformative, not only by shedding new light on the question of moral and personal convictions but by also inspiring a new wave of interdisciplinary scholarship on these questions. It is one of the most exciting new books to come out in recent years, and I hope it is but the first of many future efforts for a continuing interdisciplinary dialogue about these questions.

Linda J. Skitka

Reference

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This project has been both an adventure and an exercise in humility, and we wish to thank the many colleagues and friends with great conviction and sincere gratitude for their consistent encouragement. First and foremost is Michael P. Lynch whose unwavering support included bringing many of the authors in this volume together in 2019 to begin conversations around conviction as the corresponding element to humility, within the context of the "Humility and Conviction in Public Life" initiative housed at the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute. This initiative, and hence this book project, was made possible through the support of a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

As Covid-19 affected all of our lives, the project slowed down but did not lose momentum or spirit. We thank all contributors for their consistent collaboration and enormous patience and for their generous participation during the peer review process. We also thoroughly appreciate and express our sincere thanks to Routledge for enthusiastically welcoming our ideas, especially Suzanne Richardson who embraced the project from the very start. A sincere thanks to Tanushree Baijal as well for guiding us through the manuscript process. As always, we are grateful to the many colleagues who inspire us and our work with their open and critical conversations.

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1 Introduction

New Parameters for Bias, Belief and Conviction: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Personal Positions and their Justification

Anke Finger and Manuela Wagner

Acting on conviction has been linked to extreme accomplishments and significant positive change. At the same time, according to one of the earliest modern commentators on the concept of conviction, Friedrich Nietzsche, "convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies". Personal conviction, as a moral, cultural, and emotional concept, has largely escaped interdisciplinary scholarly scrutiny, with relatively few studies (Larmore, 1987; Skitka, 2012 for an overview see, Skitka, 2021) investigating from different perspectives what is defined as "an unshakeable belief in something, without seeking evidence", or as the Oxford English Dictionary has it, "a firm and settled persuasion." Beliefs are based on certain sets of values, but what about the much stronger term conviction? Where do our convictions come from? Are we aware of our convictions? How do we develop our convictions? Why do they compel us to carry out certain actions? Are they generated or maintained by affects? What do we gain or what does it cost us to follow our convictions? Can we change our convictions if we are presented with compelling evidence proving our convictions "wrong"? (How) do we communicate convictions to those around us? And can we still listen to someone when our convictions clash with theirs? These questions are at the core of this book.

We live in a time where the loudest, and often most caustic, voices appear to garner the lion's share of national and international attention. When divisiveness gets rewarded and polarization is often the result, it is critical to demonstrate that there are other paths that we can take toward a more productive national and international discourse. One of the main questions motivating the conversations in this book is whether close examination of a core aspect of divisiveness, of personal or moral conviction, can help repair fissures and tears in our social tissue. The psychologist Linda J. Skitka (2012), a leading scholar of moral conviction whose foreword is included in this book, pursues what she deems Janus-faced features of conviction in "Moral Convictions and Moral Courage: Common Denominators of Good and Evil" (*The Social Psychology of Morality*, 2012, pp. 349–365). She tests the "accepted

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wisdom" that "strong situations" eventually force people to fall in line, conforming to social norms and she argues, "good and evil sometimes become less clear when acts of moral courage are related to actors' political, social or cultural beliefs" (p. 350). Studies on obedience and conformity are pitched against "authority independence," for example, to show that "heroism" and "terrorism" may be two sides of one coin and dependent on one's perspective or value system: "it is […] important not to let our values about what counts as good and evil blind us to the possibility that others have an opposing but equally 'moral' (by their standards) view" (p. 361).

Assuming that our convictions, in extreme cases, can lead us to heroic acts or the opposite thereof, or that they present, at the very least, an important factor in whether we act or do not act on important issues in society or on behalf of groups we align ourselves with, a crucial question follows: how aware are we of our convictions? Importantly, which of our convictions are not backed up by evidence and why? While we don't want to suggest that heroism and terrorism are smoothly conforming with conviction – their connection requires separate analysis – the conundrum inherent to conviction seems to be precisely its oscillatory qualities, akin to finding that line between being true to yourself and voicing beliefs that are deemed beyond a cultural or social norm, outrageous, or even vile. As Skitka points out,

> [g]iven that strong moral convictions are associated with accepting any means to achieve preferred ends, gaining more insight into how and why moral convictions promote constructive, but potentially also quite destructive, forms of moral courage is a critical agenda for continued scientific investigation.
>
> (p. 363)

Whether we engage via social media or in face-to-face settings, drawing the "line between heroism and terrorism" may often constitute a matter of opinion, of cultural and situational context, and, sometimes, of one's emotional disposition that – as is so often the case today – comes as a result of media effects. Where do we find ourselves within a certain debate, on a particular issue, amongst a particular group? How do we identify, examine, and trace our innermost beliefs when so much of what we try to communicate is context-driven, context-determined and channeled via a plethora of divergent media?

Conviction, Fake Facts and Media Literacy

In *Information: A Historical Companion* (Blair et al., 2021), the entry on "information" is fittingly entitled "Information, Disinformation, Misinformation." While information as a modern concept has long been associated with books and the press, with a reading public that is educated enough to compile information as part of a duty of citizenship, misinformation or disinformation,

as the mischievous twins, have always accompanied or been adjacent to information as a basis for human knowledge formation. Geoffrey Nunberg alerts us that numerous terms for fake or wrong information have been used over the course of history, with the latest gaining currency in the 19th century:

> Fake news' emerged already in the 1890s, when *fake* itself caught on, first in America, as a slang term for something that masquerades as the genuine thing. *Propaganda* was an obscure and recondite word until World War I, when it was attached to the public relations campaigns of the contending governments.
>
> (Nunberg, 2021, p. 498)

Many languages, indeed, have words for mis- or disinformation as they describe political, cultural or psychological acts of influencing public opinion in ways that manipulate, divert or, indeed, convince audiences. Applying the most up-to-date concept of information in the 21st century, that is, data, this concept, too, points to the past whereby it emerged concurrent with the concept of information as it was used in the modern age:

> In the general culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'data' still evoked specialized kinds of argumentation and the special situation of argument. As the etymology of the word indicates - 'data' is the neuter past participle of the Latin verb *dare* (to give) – 'data' in the early modern period were 'givens.' What 'data' meant depended on what kind of argument one was making, what kind of facts, principles, or values, might be 'given' in a particular argument.
>
> (Rosenberg, 2021, p. 389)

While we think of data as underlying all digital information today, communicated via a binary code that compresses information, based on Claude Shannon's information theory from 1948, the data glut our cultures are exposed to and are experiencing today obfuscates the ambiguity data as a concept itself embodies. Data, considered neutral bits of information collected or gathered to inform and construct meaning, were never such, that is, neutral. As the conversations in this volume circle belief, bias, and fact, Rosenberg calls our attention to a crucial difference between data and facts:

> For facts to be facts, they must be true. Data, on the other hand, may be – and very often is – erroneous or confected. None of this affects its status as data. Facts proven false cease to be facts. Data proven false is false data.
>
> (Rosenberg, 2021, p. 390)

When considering bias, belief, and conviction, data (false or correct) and information, including mis- or disinformation, function as part of the scaffolding with which to build "data" in the early modern sense. Data nourish

arguments, but they don't nourish them in a neutral fashion. They are picked and curated, as we learned above, based on "facts, principles, or values." This combination presents a mathematical conundrum: while facts can only be facts if they are true, as Rosenberg has demonstrated, principles and values emerge from ambiguous territory, making arguments formed with false or correct data filtered through belief, bias and conviction (principles and values) very unstable constructions indeed. Literacies that facilitate awareness and understanding of information are much in need of adapting as well. Jürgen Habermas (2021), author of the influential *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in 1962, acknowledged such need for adaptation: "Just as the letterpress turned everyone into potential readers, digitization today turns everyone into potential authors. But how long did it take until everyone learned to read?" (pp. 488–489). Since the 18th century, the world has seen a rapid increase in general print literacy. Today, media literacies beyond print, however, require an exponentially higher awareness and, ideally, knowledge of media affordances and media effects. Both constitute elements that influence the communication of information, with media affordances determining the possibilities and limits of a particular channel or apparatus of communication (radio, social media, TV, book, camera, etc.) and with media effects determining "those things that occur as a result – either in part or in whole – from media influence." (Potter, 2012, p. 38). While media effects have long been studied taking mostly dominant groups into account, recent scholarship is calling for new "critical media effects frameworks" that "address various dimensions of experiences such as discrimination, stress, media access, media representation, etc. that are informed by multiple identities and power hierarchies." (Ramasubramanian and Banjo, 2020, p. 386). Conversely, in "How to Obfuscate," Finn Brunton offers strategies to generate "personal disinformation" in order to conceal one's identity in the interest of maintaining data privacy in an age of oversharing, both willingly (on social media) and unknowingly (by allowing personal data to be used for capital gain, e.g., by Google; Brunton, 2017). As a result, we find ourselves in "disrupted public spheres" (Habermas, 2021, p. 498) where principles and values, as two-thirds of the data, as the "givens" informing an argument, present two sides of the coin: they can inform as agreed upon principles and values of a more or less regulated mass media or can inform as the individualized, algorithm-enhanced principles, and values of ad hoc authors speaking through unregulated social media platforms. That is territory ripe for communicating and debating conviction.

Conviction, Fake Facts and Intercultural Dialogue

In this book of connected essays, the authors engage in an interdisciplinary discourse of theory and practice on the concept of personal conviction, addressing the variety of gray zones that mark the concept. Scholars from philosophy, psychology, comparative literature, media studies, applied

linguistics, history and intercultural education shed light on the topic of personal conviction, crossing disciplinary boundaries and asking questions not only of importance to scholars but also related to the role and possible impact of conviction in the (digital) public sphere, education, and in political and cultural discourses. We live in a world in which problems have become so interconnected that we will not be able to survive without large-scale intercultural collaboration as can be seen in international crises, such as the climate crisis, the pandemic or the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Productive (intercultural) dialogue, however, is only possible if we are truly open to interrogating what is fact and what is fiction, indeed, if we are willing to look at an issue from different perspectives, even those that go counter to our convictions. In order to define "interculturality," we refer to the work by the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)*. This framework has been developed by a group of experts who conducted an audit of 101 existing conceptual schemes of democratic, civic and intercultural competence and came up with an educational model through which "young people acquire the knowledge, values and capacity to be responsible citizens in modern, diverse, democratic societies" (2018, Volume 1, p. 5). In the foreword, Secretary General Jagland explains that "[t]he need for it was brought into sharp focus by the many terrorist attacks across Europe in recent years" (p. 5). According to Barrett (2020), one of the main authors of the RFCDC,

> The CoE's approach to interculturalism is based on universal human rights, shared fundamental values, respect for common heritage, respect for cultural diversity and respect for the equal dignity of every individual. Intercultural dialogue is accorded a central role in this approach because it allows national, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other divides to be bridged on the basis of the shared universal values of dignity and human rights.
>
> (pp. 2–3)

Here we are interested in the role of conviction as it can facilitate or hinder dialogue, that is, whether an understanding of our deeply held convictions can open our minds to different perspectives rather than blindly believing something that is not based on or clearly goes against factual information. Ultimately, we investigate how conviction can be used wisely, employed as a tool to understand ourselves and the world around us, and to avoid the dark side of conviction, which is often connected to unreflected and underinvestigated aspects of action and human interaction.

About This Book

This book, therefore, is an attempt to highlight and critically examine the contributions of various disciplines and vantage points engaging with each

other on a topic that is of vital importance today. Given the fluidity of the concept of conviction, the dialogue between multiple disciplines, we propose, has a better chance to examine the kind of "moving object" conviction presents. Especially in an age when media affordances and technology permit the manipulation of mediated opinions as well as facts (such as so-called deep fakes), personal conviction should become an element for self-reflection, deep introspection and critical analysis. If we fail to understand or at least become aware of and question our convictions, we argue, we all will be in danger of seeking out information that complies with existing positions, creating confirmation bias and resisting information that might contradict our de facto blind convictions. Bias and stereotype loops will continue without challenge, maintaining fissures and tears that mark many sociopolitical discourses. This book, by taking a critical look at personal conviction as an element of inquiry within the humanities and social sciences, adds to the study of conviction as an aspect of the self, as a human characteristic we all carry within us and are called upon to examine. In an age of media and data saturation, fake facts abound when convictions inform the great challenges of our everyday lives around the globe. These challenges include pandemics (Covid-19), wars (the Russian attack on Ukraine), natural catastrophes (climate change), political upheaval (the January 6th, 2021, insurrection in the USA), and ethnic conflict (racism). Personal convictions greatly influence how we approach these challenges, and at the very least we should gain a better understanding of how they are generated.

Michael P. Lynch leads off our discussion with a chapter on "Political Conviction" as he answers three central questions about the nature of conviction: (1) What are convictions, and how do they differ from mere beliefs? (2) How do we come to form our convictions? and (3) Why are they so resistant to counter-evidence? Examining the relationship between the concepts of conviction and identity, Lynch compares attacks on them to attacks on ourselves: they are difficult to change by appealing to facts alone. But that also means, as Nietzsche was wise to point out, that convictions form as our identity forms, in alignment or in conversation with each other, and what can start out as a passing opinion, can, with the right urging, be hardened into unbending conviction.

Anke Finger, in her chapter on "Manifesto Moments," argues that nothing spells conviction quite like manifestos. An increasingly prolific literary, artistic and sociopolitical genre since the 19th century, manifestos have spawned artistic and political movements, conspiracy myths, art projects, political parties and ad hoc rebellions. This chapter identifies and explores manifestos as a genre of conviction to place them within the larger context and history of the genre's political aesthetic. What makes a manifesto a manifesto? How does conviction speak through it? How do political manifestos address a particular sense and patterning of identity and in-group formation? Theories are drawn from intercultural communication and

media studies research inform this novel approach to the manifesto genre that has to include conviction as an element of inquiry for the analysis of the plethora of 21st-century manifesto expressions.

In "Convincing Atmospheres? The Influence of Diffuse Factors on Conviction Building," Christiane Heibach puts forth that convictions might result from complex processes that point to a context-sensitive interpretation of convictions as *changeable*. Pivotal to her discussion is the concept of atmosphere. Atmospheres, understood as social phenomena, have, according to the German phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz, certain characteristics: they emerge through the interaction between nonhuman and human entities and fill spaces with emotions. Thus, atmospheres transcend the separation between subject and object and are experienced (felt) pre-cognitively, affectively and immediately (although they can be – retrospectively – subject to rational thinking). This will also mean that we might change our convictions with the atmospheres we experience: an extreme, but illustrative example, is totalitarian regimes which, according to Peter Sloterdijk, develop "toxic atmospheres" that lead to the contamination of social micro- and macro-spaces as well as interactions, and thus also gain the power to change individual convictions.

Justin E. H. Smith approaches belief and bias by focusing on the topic of pseudoscience, and in his chapter, he discusses how established knowledge, that is, scientific fact, can be undermined, ignored or given to interpretation that includes the spurious. His approach, which includes consulting Theodor W. Adorno and Paul Feyerabend, is based on examining several case studies, including creation "science," flat-earth theory and the anti-vaccination movement, and Smith explores how certain groups go about ignoring or even denying established (science) facts. Indeed, the workings of the natural world become blurred with the workings of our social or emotional worlds when pseudoscience is at work, and the quote in the chapter's title "I believe because it is absurd" demonstrates the defiant conviction subscribed to no matter the evidence to the contrary. This chapter is a reprint of Smith's Chapter 5 from his 2019 book *Irrationality: A History of the Dark Side of Reason*, published by Princeton University Press.

Personal convictions and commitments sometimes conflict – in content, priority, or application – not just with established scientific fact but also with broader moral and social values. Matthew Pianalto, in his chapter on "Conviction, Contemplation, and 'Making a Difference'," examines this tension between personal convictions and other values and responsibilities. Given the multitude of worthy projects and problems in the world, there is nothing inherently self-indulgent or confused in choosing to focus on projects and ways of living that conform with one's most fundamental values – assuming that those values are not themselves morally repugnant. Such "ground projects," as Bernard Williams calls them, constitute the basis of a meaningful and motivated life. These issues are illustrated in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* by the character David Lurie, who honors his

conviction about the respect owed to animals in a manner that may seem not to "make a difference" but which nevertheless reflects ethical sensitivity and integrity.

Adrian Hermann extends the discussion of conviction from the personal into the realm of religion in his chapter "Bad Belief? On the Role of Conviction in Religion." He starts from the hypothesis that religious belief is exposed and labeled as *conviction* in situations of individual crisis and collective critique. In this sense, speaking about religious beliefs as convictions classifies them as *bad* beliefs. From a global historical perspective, recent studies have demonstrated that the understanding of beliefs – as subjectively held propositions – as central to religion is a key aspect of the establishment of the modern global concept of religion and the "world religions" discourse since the 19th century. Simultaneously, the concept of religious freedom was globalized in the same timeframe and implies that private, individual belief is the preferred and modern form through which religion should be expressed in democratic societies. By looking at examples from Christianity, Islam and New Religious Movements, Herrmann discusses, on the one hand, how religious beliefs are framed as convictions in processes of deconversion as part of exit narratives. On the other hand, he demonstrates how in debates about "fundamentalism," religion is understood as encompassing problematic convictions that are incompatible with liberal democracy.

With Jen Cole Wright's chapter on "The Psycho-Social Function of Moral Conviction," the conversation moves from religion into the discipline of psychology. Wright asks what is acceptable (even desirable) diversity – and when does that diversity become deviance? The tension generated here introduces critical space for variation, both within and between communities. It also highlights a problem – the imperfection of our moral knowledge and the vulnerability of our normative structures to error and corruption. Moral conviction has a critical psycho-social role to play in this endeavor – and it is a paradoxical role, insofar as it is necessary both for protecting existing normative structures from corruption and for spearheading corrective endeavors, when normative structures have become dysfunctional and change is required.

In "Moderating Conviction Through Civility in Education," Deborah Mower offers an educational intervention, arguing that civility as an orientating attitude, when taught as part of a process in an educational setting, provides conditions to moderate both the properties and content of conviction. Matters that individuals hold with an attitude of conviction are often treated as being settled or "closed." Yet while such convictions are often 'closed' in terms of challenge, revision or sometimes even discussion, they play an active part in motivating our actions. Mower argues that both the properties and content of conviction can be modified through a sustained educational intervention. Civility as an orientating attitude, when taught as part of a process in an educational setting, provides conditions to moderate

both the properties and content of conviction. She describes the design of an applied ethics course built around cases from the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, detailing specific assignments and activities. More specifically, Mower holds that normative clarification, justification, factual completeness, and finality are additional properties of conviction and that they – as well as some of the properties proposed by psychologists – can be altered by teaching civility in a process.

Continuing the investigation into educational contexts, Manuela Wagner and Michael Byram's chapter on "Intellectual Humility, Conviction and Intercultural Citizenship Education" posits that the major role of education is for students to become engaged citizens. They argue that our interconnected world, with its complex and global problems, requires students to be global or intercultural citizens. Teaching for intercultural citizenship means that students (a) acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to intercultural competence, which enables them to interact with or mediate between people from different contexts and (b) apply their intercultural competence in the here and now to solve a problem and take action in their intercultural local or global community. In particular, they look at how convictions, especially blind convictions, might prevent us from making judgments based on specific evidence. In the model of intercultural competence they have used in their work, the element called "critical cultural awareness," 'evaluate, critically and on the basis of an explicit, systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries' (Byram, 2021, p. 66) is a means of challenging blind convictions and paving the way for collaboration with others. Through investigations of the concepts and by applying them to teaching practice, they demonstrate how students can analyze their convictions and engage in dialogue across differences.

Rounding out the discussion on education is John Sarrouf's chapter "In Pursuit of the Dialogic Classroom: Designing Spaces for Conviction" in which he focuses on the cultivation of conviction in groups by designing spaces for reflecting on one's own values, beliefs, and narratives, as well as a connection to others. He shows that teachers and leaders can, through intentional design, create spaces for the development of conviction. The chapter examines stories from the field to share ways in which thinking in groups in dialogic spaces has supported the development of convictions in college students on issues such as Israel/Palestine, Guns in American Society, Abortion and Confederate Symbolism. He also examines how the cultivation of intellectual humility through the use of dialogue makes space for more uncertain students to develop their convictions. In highly polarized settings, which classrooms can become, the ability for students to develop and share convictions becomes threatening and socially discouraged. The practice of Reflective Structured Dialogue that supports restructuring exchanges to invite greater intellectual humility in some students makes developing and sharing convictions more welcomed and possible in others.

We conclude the volume with some considerations of future research to be accomplished. As we pose at the outset, this collection of articles is a mere beginning of interdisciplinary and international investigations into the concept of conviction. We humbly propose that much more information is to be gathered, additional questions to be pursued and different vantage points to be engaged. We do hope that what follows provides a solid foundation for inquiries to come.

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2 Political Conviction

Michael P. Lynch

1

In a much-discussed study after the 2016 US presidential election, researchers asked 700 Americans about two well-known photos of the crowds attending the Obama and Trump presidential inaugurations (Schaffner & Luks, 2018). Both photos are taken from the same vantage point, each showing throngs of people assembled in front of the Washington monument for the inauguration. But one photo (of Obama's) clearly has more people than the other (of Trump's). The researchers asked a simple question: which photo has more people in it? The results were revealing. Trump supporters were likely six times more than Clinton supporters or nonvoters to say that the half-empty photo contains more people.

This study, while striking, really only reflects a phenomenon that recent US politics already illustrates for all to see. Many people's political judgments seem to be made in defiance of the evidence and even reality itself. In late 2020, claims that the presidential election was fraudulent, that thousands, even millions of "dead people voted," and that Republicans were conspiring with Democrats to "steal" the election from Donald Trump were ubiquitous. No claim can be too bizarre; in US politics, it seems, no judgment is off-limits. For many observers, philosophical and otherwise, this phenomenon raises the question of whether such judgments really ever attempt to describe reality, or to say what a person believes is really true, or whether, in making political judgments we aren't really just playing a different game altogether.

At the same time, and especially after the insurrection of January 6th, it is abundantly clear that many people are willing to *act*—and act violently—because of what Timothy Snyder has called the "Big Lie." And to some, that, along with recent polling data, suggests a contrary lesson: that people really do *believe* the absurdities of QAnon and the conspiratorial ravings of Donald Trump.[1] When his followers claim the presidential election was fraudulent, we should accept that this is how they see reality, that's what they think is true.

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The pandemic has brought home that we are not dealing with just one Big Lie, but with many Big Lies—that COVID-19 is not a threat, or even is a hoax, that climate change is similar and that vaccines are dangerous. Both of the common reactions to the electoral lies that I just outlined—that people really believe them or that they are expressions of tribal fealty—apply to these other lies as well. In most cases, these reactions illustrate a common tendency to flit back and forth between two overly simple models of political conviction. When we are in the grip of one model, we are tempted to think of convictions as beliefs, and our political judgments as reports of those beliefs. When we are in the grip of the other, we see convictions as partisan emotions and attachments, and thus the judgments we make in an expression of emotion—the verbal equivalent of wearing certain hats, driving certain kinds of cars and eating certain types of food. Which model one favors influences not just one's picture of political psychology but also one's views on the ancient question of whether politics, including democratic politics, has anything to do with truth and rationality. On the first model, our political judgments are attempts to say what's true—attempts that often fall laughably, or tragically, short of the mark. On the second view, our political judgments can be insensitive or inspiring, repugnant or clever, but they aren't in the game of evidence and truth—and, therefore, neither is politics, regardless of our democratic hopes to the contrary.

In what follows, I suggest a very different, and more pragmatist, account of our political convictions and their relationship to our political judgments—one which avoids the temptation to oversimplify the activity of politics and accordingly puts us in a better position to understand the various threats that the Big Lie and kindred conspiracy theories pose to democracy.

2

The idea that politics is a rational enterprise, and can be based on rational foundations, is typically thought to have reached its apex in the 17th and 18th centuries. A distinctive temptation of political theories of the period was the tendency to regard politics—at least from a suitable distance—as being similar to science, even mathematics. As John Locke (1975) put it:

> I doubt not, but from self-evident positions, by necessary consequences, as incontestable as those in mathematics, the measure of right and wrong might be made out, to anyone that will apply himself with the same indifference and attention to the one as he does to the others of these sciences.
>
> (IV.ii.18, p. 549)

Medieval natural law theorists like Aquinas also held that there were truths about politics and morality that were discoverable by reason—but reason

was guided by divine providence. The later English theorists like Hobbes and Locke wanted to retain the idea that there were such truths but wished to ground our knowledge of them in human judgment and experience. Hence the idea that political morality could be derived from certain "self-evident" propositions.

How many people in Locke's time would have actually agreed that politics is of all things, like *mathematics* is a question best left for professional historians. For our purposes, it is a useful illustration as the most extreme form of a more general standpoint about political judgment we might call *political rationalism*. That view, crudely put, holds that convictions are beliefs—representations of how we see the world. Our political judgments and decisions, therefore, report those beliefs, and if they are ever lucky enough to be true, that is because their representation is accurate, or "corresponds" to the "facts" or reality. So baldly put, rationalism is less a theory of political conviction as a theoretical stance, a position from which one can build a picture of the political world.[2] Its attraction, whether in Locke's day or our own, is that it leaves room for the idea we can provide reasons for and against convictions—by providing evidence to show that they are more or less likely to represent reality. Moreover, it offers a readily understood theory of political progress, one clearly influential on deliberative democrats like Habermas: political progress consists in our acquiring more and more rational and justified (and hence more likely to be true) convictions and shaping our society in light of them.

These attractions notwithstanding, political rationalism could hardly be thought to be a popular, or even much-discussed, view in contemporary political science or political theory outside of analytic philosophy departments.[3] The view was already waning in influence by the beginning of the 19th century. An early and powerful critic was the Scottish *enfant terrible* David Hume, a skeptic about reason generally, but who was particularly insistent on its limitations in morality and politics. For Hume, like Francis Hutcheson before him, political morality was not a matter of belief but of preference, sentiment and sympathy; it concerns not the head, but the heart. Thus, while in mathematics, reason and evidence might compel us to judge one way or the other, Hume (1978) infamously announced that, "Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger " (II.iii.3, p. 436). Hume's point was that politics and morality are the realms of action, and merely thinking that reality is a certain way never by *itself* motivates anyone to act. For that, one also needs desires, feelings, sentiments and passions. It is not enough to simply have the belief, e.g., reducing carbon emissions is the only way to halt climate change. For that belief to have any relevance, it needs to be coupled with the desire to *do* something.

When it comes to politics, it is clear that the Humean view has both won the day in the public mind and in political psychology. We don't expect political discussion to be particularly objective, reason-based or even

informed—and that's even before we go on Twitter. We expect politics to be the realm of the passions, a realm where reason is less a slave than dead, buried and forgotten. And these expectations are underwritten not just by the long history of the human political condition but by an avalanche of social scientific evidence.

In more contemporary language, Hume's insight is translated as the idea that political reasoning is motivated reasoning, and the best explanation for this fact is that political thought is aimed at different ends or goals than other kinds (Taber & Lodge, 2006). In one sense, of course, all reasoning is motivated—since human thought can always be said to aim at certain goals humans are motivated to achieve. But where a simple rationalist model might suggest that the motivation of such cognition is to pursue true beliefs and report them in our judgments, in psychology, "motivated reasoning" refers to the idea that cognition, and in particular politically-relevant cognition, is motivated by non-rational factors, including confirmation and disconfirmation biases (seeking out information that confirms your prior beliefs and ignoring what would disconfirm those beliefs) and prior attitude effects (when strong prior feelings about an issue affect how people evaluate arguments on that issue). Moreover, a stream of literature has suggested that humans in general often employ "system 1" or intuitive, reflexive and emotionally-valanced thinking causally prior to more reflective "system 2" thinking, which is often employed only later to rationalize or otherwise make sense of their intuitive thought (Haidt, 2001; Kahneman, 2013). Some have even suggested that as the neuroscientist Drew Westen once put it, "When the outcomes of a political decision have strong emotional implications, and the data leave even the slightest room for artistic license, reason plays virtually no role in the decision-making process" (Westen, 2007, p. 112).

Equating conviction with belief also ignores the fact that many of the political judgments people make seem to be made from a standpoint of *aspiration*, not representation. Our political judgments frequently reflect not how we see the world but the kind of world we wish to live in, or the kind of person we aspire to be, or the kind of group to which we aspire to belong or the kind of ideas to which we aspire to be associated. Political judgments reflect, in other words, *aspirational narratives* as much as, or more than they reflect what we believe is true or how we represent the world as being. These aspirational narratives are stories that tell us what is politically sacred; they explain how we understand our tribe or party. The sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (2018) describes such narratives as "deep stories." As she puts it, a deep story is "a feels-as-if story—it's the story that feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel" (p. 135).

Then we encounter here the other end of our dichotomy: the perspective I'll call *political emotivism*. If political rationalism is often derided as "the philosophers'" view of politics, then that voiced by many political

scientists, psychologists and sociologists is its opposite—one which, ironically, was both inspired by a philosopher (Hume) and widely discussed by philosophers in the mid-20th century.[4] According to those philosophical emotivists, judgments of morality were not *representations* but *expressions of our emotions and sentiments* in much the same way we express ourselves by wearing certain kinds of clothes, saying "ouch" when in pain or by cheering for the home team. Political emotivists can be seen as expanding this view from morality to politics.

More precisely, the political emotivist charges the rationalist with misunderstanding both the *causes* and the *function* of political discourse and judgment. Where the rationalist assumes that convictions are beliefs, the political emotivist takes our convictions to be emotional attachments or sympathies. Political judgments are, therefore, the result of those attachments. As the psychologists Peter Ditto and Brittany Liu (2016) note, referencing Haidt, "when ordinary people form moral judgments" they are seldom the product of some reasoned, principle-based analysis. Instead…. they result primarily from "gut" intuitions, implicating *feelings* that some acts are morally good or morally bad" (pp. 103–104).

This understanding of the causes of political judgment generally comes with a parallel account of the point or function of political communication. Where rationalists tend to assume that political judgments function to report what we believe, political emotivists see political discussion as self-expression done for the purposes of persuasion or motivation. When we express ourselves in this sense, we "manifest some part of our point of view," as Mitchell Green (2007) puts it—we signal our "thought, affect or experience" (pp. 1–15). Political judgments on this view function much like wearing a certain kind of red hat, or waving a political banner or shouting "Lock her Up!" at a rally; they communicate tribal allegiances, motivate action and express one's passions. This aligns with the idea that when we argue politically, we aim not at the truth but at winning—we act more like lawyers than scientists (Baumeister & Newman 1994; Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum 2009). While we might act like our political judgments are the result of reason and experience, we actually just make judgments that we feel will win others to our cause or signal our virtue and outrage, or simply intimidate others into silence. If so, then it should not be surprising such judgments are so resistant to counter-evidence. We didn't form them because of the evidence, and they aren't functioning to report evidence. They are in a different game entirely, one whose ends are persuasion and domination, not knowledge and truth.

So political emotivism seems more attuned to *real politic* but it also offers to explain otherwise puzzling data. Consider again the Trump voters who reported that one picture had more people in it than it obviously did. Perhaps some did, in fact, believe that. But in similar studies, other researchers have reported that rewarding people financially to answer questions correctly significantly decreases the likelihood that any respondent

will choose the obviously incorrect but more politically palatable answer (Bullock, 2015)—which seems to suggest that many people don't actually believe the political answer even when they give it. So perhaps a better explanation is that, rather than reporting their beliefs, respondents in the first study are conveying their emotions—their feelings about Trump being their guy, about the mainstream media being the enemy of the people, and pointy-headed pollsters being against him. By answering as they did, they were *expressing* their feelings in no less effective way than if they had raised their middle finger. And in doing that, they were reminding themselves and those doing the survey what they stood for—and what they stood against.

Political emotivism, then, has its attractions. But it also has a clear problem, one long apparent to philosophers who were sympathizers and critics: expressions of emotions, like shouts of "boo!" at a sporting event, are not the sort of things that *can* be true—or false. That, in turn, means that if political judgments are always expressions of emotional attachments and sympathies, they *can't be false*. This has led philosophers to worry about what has come to be called Frege/Geach problems—puzzles about how, if emotivists were right, moral judgments could be the antecedent of conditionals, meaningfully negated or used as premises (or conclusions) in valid deductive inferences. These problems are serious and have led to an industry of sorts aimed at solving or at least mitigating them. But focusing on them when it comes to political emotivism would just bury the lead. For whatever we think about morality, the idea that political judgments can't be false seems, to put it mildly, out of step with reality. For it is obvious that many politicians and their followers routinely say explicitly false things in the course of political discourse—e.g., that the January 6th insurrection was "peaceful," that COVID is not that dangerous, that the last presidential election was fraudulent. Political emotivism, in short, threatens to undermine our ability not only to rationally criticize our own and others' political judgments but also to understand the harm that false judgments—and big lies—can play in political life.

The philosophical emotivists of the last century regarded their positions as an *a priori* truth about moral and political language and thought. Most contemporary *political* emotivists, however, are not philosophers and lack the latters' penchant for a priori theorizing. These political emotivists would say they reach their view on the basis of empirical investigation. It is, they'd argue, just the best explanation of the data, and Haidt or Ditto would presumably happily concede that there may be exceptions to their generalizations. Maybe some weirdos really do reflect and reason about politics; their view is just that most people don't, even ones that think they do.[5] Likewise, they might say, maybe some people really do make mistakes in their reasonings and their beliefs; but for most people, politics is not a game of reason and belief, but a matter of passion and power. The idea is that statistically speaking, the normal causes of political judgments are emotional attachments, and the normal function of those judgments is expressive.

We should wonder about the scope of this claim. Is it meant, as many of its advocates implicitly seem to suggest, as a universal, if contingent, claim about the function and causes of political judgments *in general*? That is—in all cultures and times? If so, then the data given in its support seems woefully inadequate, given that mostly is gleaned from the behavior and intuitions of 20th and 21st century American college students. Responding that similar results turn up elsewhere in the world—let's assume they do, for sake of argument—doesn't rule out what seems, on the face of it, a more likely possibility—namely that the emotivist account is actually a *realistic description of how we use our political judgments in contemporary political culture*. Emotivists tend to write as if they are revolutionaries, providing surprising results that up-end our more rationalist vision of ourselves, concluding that "in important ways public reason in contemporary American politics is little more than an illusion" (Ditto and Liu 2016, pp. 103–104). Yet the experiences of the last decade of political culture should cause us to wonder whether it is emotivism—not rationalism—that best captures most people's views about political judgment. Many of us don't *expect* political discussion to be particularly objective, reason-based or even informed—and that's even before we go on Twitter. We *expect* politics to be the realm of the passions, a realm where reason is less a slave than dead, buried and forgotten. If anything, Donald Trump personifies this kind of self-conscious emotivism—the view that political judgment is for expressing one's hatred, pettiness and power, and nothing more.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that a good deal of visible political discourse is increasingly and self-consciously expressive. But if so, then that is less an a priori fact about politics or "normative language," but a reflection of the contingent facts of our political moment—a moment wherein much of our political interactions happen online or are influenced by what happens online. To put it bluntly, if you want to see what the world would be like if political emotivism were true, just look at Facebook and Twitter.

3

I've introduced two theoretical standpoints on political conviction. From one standpoint, political convictions are beliefs, which our political decisions and judgments simply report. But that drains our convictions of their passion; I strongly believe that two and two are four, that I live in Connecticut and that it is a good idea to wear one's seatbelt. But none of these are worth calling *convictions* of mine because they just don't matter enough to me. As a result, it is tempting to tack to the other shore and think of convictions as strong emotions that judgments express (in much the same way a middle finger can express anger). But that too seems off—among other things, it leaves unexplained the obvious truth that our convictions have content and can be criticized by evidence.

This is a sign that the choice between the head and the heart is a false one. We need a more nuanced account of conviction, one which explains the particular connection to action, aspirations and values that conviction has in our lives—but which also allows us to make sense of the obvious fact that some convictions are misguided and unjustified. The idea I want to explore is that convictions are identity-reflecting *commitments* (For contrasting and complimentary views of conviction, see Williams, 1985; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Pianalto, 2011; Lynch, 2019). To explain this, I have to say what I mean by a "commitment" and how I see them as connected to our identities.

I am committed to a person when I am willing to stand by them, and I am committed to a proposition when I am willing to stand by *it*—when I am willing to act on it, use it as a premise in reasoning, and defend it against objections. Commitments then are emotionally-valanced, inherently motivating, contentful states. And while they are often accompanied by beliefs, they aren't beliefs. Most of the time, I am committed to what I believe and believe that to which I'm committed. But not always.[6] Sometimes, and especially in politics, my beliefs and commitments come apart. One reason for that is obvious: in the actual practice of politics, what I am willing to stand up for might be, for straightforward political reasons, different from what I believe. This is the kind of practical reasoning that politicians must be willing to engage in all the time. And for similar reasons, a politician might believe things they don't commit to. So too for the rest of us—what we are motivated to stand up for often, but not always, aligns with our beliefs about the way the world is.

Yet convictions, as I'm using the term, aren't just any old commitments. Convictions are those commitments (either to people or to propositions) that play a particularly central role in our lives by reflecting, and partly composing our self-identities. A person's self-identity in general is their aspirational self or what is sometimes called their self-image; it is the kind of person they aspire to be, even if they don't always live up to that aspiration (Frankfurt, 1988; Flanagan, 1996). This aspect of my overall identity is determined by several other factors, chief among them an interplay of my social-identity and my values. That's because the kind of person I want to be is also a factor of what I care about, my values and deepest commitments. Caring about something means identifying with it, investing in it to the point that I thrive when it flourishes and suffer when it is diminished (Frankfurt, 1988).

In general, then, our convictions are those commitments that reflect our vision of who we are. Accordingly, our political convictions reflect our political vision of who we are—the kinds of political groups we wish to be a part of, the ideas and values endorsed by those groups and the attitudes that group has toward its rivals (See Bar-Tal, 1998; Van-Djik, 2002). Naturally, how closely connected one's political self-identity is to one's self-identity as a whole varies from person to person. For some people, their political self-identity is the most important part of their vision of themselves. For many

others, politics matters less. But even in that case, the political convictions they *do* have (even if they don't think or reflect upon them very often) will be affected by other aspects of their identity and vice versa: by which social groups they actually belong to, their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual preference and how they see these parts of their life. What kind of job I have, what sort of love life I enjoy, and how I interact with others all affect who I am and how I see myself—and they all help to shape my political identity as well, for the simple reason that they help to shape my political view of the world.

So, to the extent that we have them, our political convictions reflect not just our aspirations for the *world*, but for *ourselves*—they reflect the kind of political world *we* aspire to live and belong to. And by virtue of that fact, our political convictions carry authority over our lives. Most obviously, they have authority over our actions; they obligate us to do some things and grant us permission to do others: to vote, to protest, maybe even to engage in open rebellion. We may not take advantage of these permissions or live up to the obligations, but we feel them just the same.

But our convictions also have a kind of epistemic authority—or authority over what else we believe, or at least say we believe. One reason for that is that our political convictions ground our political worldview. They become part of the landscape, our frame of reference, our political "picture of the world" that is the very "background against which [we] distinguish between what is true and what is false" (Wittgenstein, 1969, §94). But another reason is that when something becomes a political conviction, it is difficult for us, from a psychological standpoint, to doubt. That's because to doubt it would be to doubt who we say we are. As a result, our own self-interest motivates us to hold convictions fixed, and be willing to make all sorts of sacrifices on their behalf. As Daniel Kahan has influentially put it (Kahan et al., 2007; Kahan, 2013) convictions cause us to engage in "identity-protective reasoning." We often are willing to explain away contrary evidence, even if doing so flies in the face of the facts or logic itself. And we do that precisely because of the authority we give convictions over our life by virtue of their connection to our self-identity. That's why I am so reluctant to give them up, and why I may feel bad or guilty for not having the courage to live up to them. It is because they are commitments central to my self-identity that giving up a conviction can feel like an act of self-betrayal and a betrayal of one's community. And of course, our political community may well agree. As a result, our convictions often make it pragmatically rational to be epistemically irrational—to ignore the evidence and stick to your convictions come what may. No one wants to crush their self-image. And few want to risk the approbation of the community.

4

Convictions, I've suggested, are neither beliefs nor emotional attachments. And these distinctions, to invoke a favorite phrase of the pragmatists, are distinctions that make a difference.

First, the distinction between conviction and belief takes us one step closer to making sense of the puzzle about whether many people are sincere when they share posts to the effect that the January 6th insurgents weren't violent or that COVID is a hoax. Given our distinction, we can say that some people may be insincere in *belief*—when push comes to shove, they don't think that this is the way the world really is—but they *are* sincere in their *convictions*. And of course, some people may be sincere in both belief and conviction, or insincere with regard to both.

Second, our distinctions allow us to incorporate some of the insights of political emotivism. We can say, with the emotivist, that often political judgments are more aspirational than representational, that convictions are commitments connected to our self-identity, and therefore sometimes contrary to reason. But unlike the emotivist, we don't have to say that convictions are completely outside the scope of reason and evidence. We don't have to say that because it is possible to ask of any commitment we have toward a proposition whether it would be rational to also *believe that proposition*. And that in turn allows us to give a simple and straightforward characterization of the rationality of a commitment toward any proposition P. Namely, P is *epistemically rational* just when *its propositional content would be rational to believe*. And a proposition is rational to believe, we can say, just when it is likely to be true based on the evidence. A proposition can be rational to believe in this sense even if one does not, *in fact*, believe it is true. Likewise, it can also be epistemically irrational in the same sense—by *not* being rational to believe.

Finally, we can now articulate a question often ignored in these debates. We can ask, in short, whether we *should* be committed to what we don't believe, or more generally whether we should strive to integrate our beliefs with our commitments to action. Moreover, we can ask these questions without having to say that people's tendency to commit without belief in politics, or to hang on to their convictions come what may, are either a priori truths about "language" or universal facts about the human condition. Perhaps they are these things. Or perhaps they are as much simply consequences of our historical moment, contingent features of our own fractured political life. If so, then we needn't treat them like they are set in stone. We can ask, and should ask, whether we should be committing to that which we don't think is true.

5

For all their utility, our distinctions so far still leave one question unanswered. The case of the voters making judgments about inauguration photos suggests that our actual judgments often express convictions over and above what the words we use would seem to convey. The judgment, e.g., that "All Lives Matter" can be used to signal someone's conviction that "racism isn't really a problem,' and "the election was stolen" can convey

the conviction that the media and the academic elite are the enemies of the people even if the person making that claim isn't committed to the claim they made—that the election was really stolen. All that is, I think, familiar. More importantly, the actions we engage in, and the clothes we wear—and the judgments we form—can also be associated with certain convictions whether not we *intend* for them to express those convictions. Our judgments, as I'll put it, have *political meaning* that goes beyond their literal meaning or propositional content.

Political meaning, as I mean the term here, is a kind of social meaning. Lawrence Lessig influentially defined social meaning as "the semiotic content attached to various actions, or inactions, or statuses, within a particular context" (Lessig, 1995). This idea has been generalized by feminist philosophers, among others, and Sally Haslanger notes that things such as food, money and jewelry all have social meanings: "*Pink* means girl and *blue* means boy, no?" (Haslanger, Social Meaning and Philosophical Method, 2014, p. 18). Haslanger sees social meanings as constituted by the conceptual schemes and beliefs we use to interpret the world around us and the objects and actions within it that we take to have some value, positive or negative: "[T]hey guide our interaction with each other and the material world" (ibid.).

Social meaning is a broad category and includes the artistic, religious and cultural significance we attach to various "vehicles" of meaning. Political meaning concerns only what I will call the *political contributions* of the vehicle. Like other kinds of social meaning, political meaning can attach to all sorts of vehicles, and in many parts of our lives, it washes over everything—just as we noted at the outset. This is particularly true in visual culture. Almost every visual product of our cultural lives—from the clothes we wear to the Netflix shows we watch and the color of paints we choose for our children's bedrooms—sends political signals and contributes to political debates (Boylan, 2020). Thus, political meaning captures some of the ideas behind the feminist slogan that the "personal is political." That slogan notes how personal aspects of a woman's life—her body, her job, her status as a mother (or not as one)—are all politicized and thus the subject of political debate and judgment. What the concept of political meaning shows is that this idea generalizes: whatever we say or do can come to have political meaning.

What is responsible for something—some action or judgment—having political meaning? In large part, it depends on the responses that we make to the relevant action or judgment and the associations that we draw from them. To put it differently, things have political meaning depending on how they are perceived to contribute to politics. Examining how this happens in any particular case is, of course, a complex and largely empirical matter. But a few short observations can give us the general gist.

One factor concerns what the object, action, or judgment is taken to *expressively communicate*—that is, the sorts of convictions and values it is

associated with. Wearing a red hat of a particular color in the United States will be taken by most people to express political sympathies to the Right. Likewise with the judgment "All Lives Matter," no matter what the person themselves intend to mean by the hat or that phrase, they will be taken to expressively communicate certain convictions.

Another way a judgment can contribute to politics is by being c*ollectively action-guiding within a community.* Waving a flag can do that or carrying a sign. But so can voicing a judgment. Judgments, too, can motivate *us* to donate, organize, vote, petition and protest—that is, to engage in political activities.[7] And in making such a judgment, I am typically looking, at least indirectly, at engaging in some group activity, coaxing someone to join us in doing so, or illustrating that I am part of the team.

Finally, judgments, in particular, have the political meanings they do in part because of how they are perceived epistemically—specifically, whether they are counted by the community as epistemic "wins" for one side or the other. The claim that *mask-wearing lowers infection rates*, for example, was widely seen by both the Left and the Right in the United States during 2020 as a counter to some opinions ("mask-wearing doesn't correlate with any change in the rate of infection") and as a reason for other relevant judgments ("we should adopt a national mask-wearing mandate"). Its acceptance was seen as making a difference to the political problem of whether to impose mask mandates in the face of a pandemic. Hence, some people who opposed mask mandates in 2020 argued that there wasn't enough evidence to think that mask-wearing lowers infection rates precisely because they recognized that accepting that there was would undermine their political position.

In short, the political meanings of some vehicles consist in the contributions a community perceives them as making to politics. This includes their perceived epistemic effects, the convictions and identities they are understood as expressing and the actions they potentially guide. To grasp a judgment's political meanings is to understand how that judgment or claim contributes to politics differently within the various relevant communities.

Like other kinds of social meanings, political meaning is "in an important way, non-optional" (Lessig, 1995). By this, I mean that the political meaning is *not* something that one can simply decide to forgo or wish away. That's reflected in the above account: a vehicle's contributions to politics, at least in most cases, are largely external to the *agent's b*eliefs and intentions. But they are not independent of the beliefs, attitudes and actions of the community, precisely because they are constituted by those beliefs and actions.

The fact that I can't determine the political meanings of my judgment is easy to overlook or purposefully ignore. "I didn't mean it that way!" when exclaimed after some insulting political *faux pas* may be sincere. But it is not up to the speaker how the community understands the judgment's political meaning. Claiming, for example, that a Confederate war memorial

is "only about preserving history" is itself a claim with different political meanings, all of which identify the speaker as holding certain values and partisan convictions. For those opposed to such monuments, those convictions concern the relative importance of white heritage and the message that we can screen off the racist history of a symbol. But that history and those values exist independently of whether the agents in question do or do not believe their judgments have political meaning in the wider community.

6

As philosophers Quassim Cassam (2019) and Jason Stanley (2015) have both argued, an essential insight into Big Lies is that they function as political propaganda, as ways of propagating harmful ideologies. That's their political harm: they motivate and rationalize commitment to extremist action.

But our reflections in the last section also reveal that *what* one is committed to can come apart from the judgment that one actually makes. In particular, someone can come to be committed to a proposition not because they believe it, but *because they are committed to its political meaning in their community*. Consider, for example, the people who stormed the US Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. We can imagine that some sincerely believed that the election was stolen from Donald Trump. Some might have disbelieved it, while the others may have neither believed nor disbelieved. But all were committed, we can imagine, to the idea that the election was fraudulent—and not as a result of evidence, but *because they were already committed to that judgment's political meanings*. It is *because* they were already committed to these meanings—indeed, had the *conviction*, that Trump deserved to win, and that conceding the election's legitimacy would mean that one of their convictions would be false—that they were committed to the proposition that the election was stolen.

Another example: in the summer of 2021, a growing national debate about "critical race theory" (CRT) boiled over into town halls and school board meetings nationwide. Outraged white parents repeatedly claimed that the theory—a term heretofore understood as denoting a loose set of complex legal and philosophical views about persistent institutional racism and its effects—was being inserted into curricula in an effort to make white children feel bad and guilty. Educators around the country—syllabi and lesson plans in hand—vehemently denied this charge, pointing out in some cases that they weren't even capable of teaching such complex ideas to younger children, let alone that they were doing so.

Did the concerned white parents actually believe that CRT was being taught in primary schools? Hard to know. No doubt many did, or at least believed something they *called* "critical race theory" was being taught in the schools. But whether they believed it or not, it is clear that many people were committed to the idea, not because of anything to do with critical race

theory, properly so-called, but because they were committed to the *political meaning of the term in the white conservative community*, e.g., that white people are being oppressed, that talk of diversity is anti-white, and so on. Thus, it is not surprising that trying to explain to them what "critical race theory" literally means does not persuade them; for its literal meaning is not what they are opposed to, but its political meaning. And that opposition, in turn, is a matter of conviction, of identity, clung to as a matter of perceived self-interest. But as I noted above, that doesn't mean that these convictions are epistemically rational, or rational to believe because they are supported by evidence. They aren't, and our distinctions allow us to say so.

That one would commit to something one does not believe to be true because of politics is hardly surprising. For politicians, it may be their routine. And it isn't always a bad thing. In times of crisis, when evidence is undetermined, one must sometimes commit to plans of action, and the propositions that come with them, without full belief. What's problematic—particularly in a democracy—is when ordinary citizens put conviction over truth *routinely* and with *contempt*.

7

Earlier I noted that the political harm of Big Lies is that they encourage extremist violence. The epistemic harm, we might think, is that they get people to believe what's false. That's the point of calling them "lies" after all. But what our analysis suggests is that to stop there is to stop well short of understanding their true harm. That's because another fundamental epistemic harm of Big Lies, at least in the current political situation of the United States, is that they defray the value of truth and the democratic value of its pursuit by encouraging people to put conviction over truth, and to do so with contempt. Such contempt manifests itself as contempt for those institutions and practices aimed at helping us pursue what's true over what's false.

Dewey and the pragmatists teach us that the value of truth in a democracy lies not with getting everyone to believe the same thing. That's impossible for one and antidemocratic for another. Rather, the value of truth in a democracy lies in the special interest democracies have in protecting, encouraging and providing fair access to the means for pursuing truth. Democracies do this by protecting and providing access to certain institutions—such as science, historical archives, professional journalism and education—institutions that, ideally, are governed at least in part by certain social-epistemic rules (Lynch, 2022). Social-epistemic rules are epistemic insofar as abiding by them makes it more likely that you'll end up believing what is true over what is not; they are *social* because they concern how we conduct inquiries with other people. Social-epistemic rules, for example, include the rule that journalists should use more than one source; that teachers should use accurate textbooks, that detectives need to collect

evidence against the accused, or that judges should recuse themselves when their personal interests are at stake. Such rules are examples of professional norms aimed at helping the profession consume and transmit justified information in line with their professional goals. This is why we say that such institutions, and the rules and norms that govern them, are "evidence-based." These social-epistemic rules provide both citizens and institutions the means by which to pursue truth over falsity. To the extent that these institutions bind together citizens in a democracy, to that extent the social-epistemic rules they embody can serve as part of the common currency of reasons in the public. Expressing contempt for such rules, therefore, means expressing contempt toward, and therefore de-valuing, that currency.

Big Lies—COVID-19 isn't real, climate change isn't happening, the election was stolen—are outright denials of obvious realities. To commit to them requires committing to a whole range of other falsehoods—including falsehoods about the basic evidence that indicates that, e.g., the pandemic *is* real or that the election wasn't stolen. You must, as it were, challenge the very rules of the game in order to embrace these falsehoods—even if you don't really "believe" them. Thus my point: the harms of Big Lies go beyond getting people to just believe falsehoods. By causing people to *commit* to what they don't actually believe—to even take certain falsehoods as convictions—they encourage people to be contemptuous of the social-epistemic rules that govern core democratic institutions.

The situation we find ourselves in is depressingly like a football game where a player runs into the stands but declares, in the face of reality and instant replay, that he nonetheless scored a touchdown. In a normal game, where the rules are respected, the player would be ignored or even penalized. But ours is not a "normal" game. Imagine the player holds some power (perhaps he owns the field). If so, then he may be able to compel the game to continue as if his lie were true. And if the game continues, then his lie will have succeeded—even if most people (even his own fans) don't "really" believe he was in bounds. That's because the lie functions not just to deceive but to show that power matters more than truth. It is a lesson that won't be lost on anyone should the game go on. He has shown, to both teams, that the rules no longer really matter, because the liar has made people treat the lie *as true*. That's a fundamental epistemic harm of a Big Lie: it can actively undermine people's willingness to adhere to a common set of social-epistemic rules—about what counts as evidence and what doesn't. And that, in turn, can make it not only easier to justify one's convictions but also to stop listening and start shooting.

Notes

1 Thus, one recent study (PRRI, 2021) has been interpreted by the *New York Times* as saying 15% of Americans *believe* that "patriots may have to resort to violence" to restore the country's "rightful order" (Russonello, 2021).

2 Applied to democratic politics, Achen and Bartels (2016) call it a "folk-theory" of democracy.
3 An excellent discussion of the many arguments one can make against political rationalism can be found in Landemore (2017). Landemore herself defends a version of the view that bears some similarities to the pragmatist position defended below.
4 The paradigmatic expression was given in Ayer (1952). Perhaps the closet contemporary view in the political realm can be found in Hannon and de Ridder (2021). More sophisticated descendants of emotivism include (Blackburn, 1998). Blackburn's view bears some similarities to the pragmatist view sketched below.
5 Moreover, they will likely have a much more expansive view of the states of mind we express in our judgments—emotions, yes, but also sentiments, ideologies and attachments. And of course there are differences between individual researchers.
6 My account of commitments here is influenced by Cohen (1995) who refers to "acceptance" as the state in question. See also Schwitzgebel (2001). For further development of the view in the text with particular attention to the epistemological detail, see Lynch (2012).
7 For overviews of empirical work on the link between cognition and political action see Haidt (2001), Brady (2017), Khann and Sood. (2018).

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3 Manifesto Moments

Conviction, Reasonable Dissent, and "Vanguards of the Future"

Anke Finger

A 30-something woman, dressed conservatively in a calf-length brown skirt, black ballerinas, a white blouse, and a pastel blue cardigan, is finishing luncheon arrangements for her family of five. She calls everyone to the table. The hues of her immediate surroundings match the demure, organized, focused aura she emanates, with the mid-century wooden dining room furniture in perfect order, a purposely formal table setting, meticulously aligned, and a shimmer of dimmed sunlight breaking through the white curtains. It all feels a bit dusty and antiquated, as if looking back through time into an era that presents us with an idealized white, nuclear family life of yesteryear. Three squiggly boys aged anywhere between 5 and 12 join her around the table while she pours water into their glasses. The dog saunters in as well, nibbling at the metal bowls placed right at the foot of the table, while a domestic servant brings in the food. The woman keeps calling for "darling" to join the family for lunch. As they wait, the four of them lift their elbows, fold their hands, bend their heads, and the mother, her voice strong and clear, begins to say grace (Figure 3.1):

> I am for an art that is political-erotical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum. I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all […]. I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top. I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary. I am for all art that takes its form from the lines of life itself…

John, the father, "darling," finally enters the room and sits down to join everyone in the prayer. The mother looks up at him, unperturbed, simply noting his presence before she continues:

> … that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself. […] I am for the art out of a doggie's mouth, falling five stories from the roof. I am for the art that a kid licks, after peeling away the wrapper. […] I am for art that is smoked like a cigarette, smells like a pair of shoes. […]

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Figure 3.1 Manifesto, 00:30:06

> I am for art that is put on and taken off like pants, which develops holes like socks, which is eaten like a piece of pie, or abandoned with great contempt like a piece of shit.

As if on cue, all three boys burst into giggles, barely able to maintain their praying posture.

This luncheon scenario is one of twelve in Julian Rosefeldt's feature film *Manifesto* (2015) that stages almost 60 classic and lesser-known manifestos in a variety of everyday contexts. All of them are enacted by Cate Blanchett who plays that same mother (together with her actual children and husband, playwright Andrew Upton), a homeless man, a choreographer, a newswoman, a CEO, and a teacher, among several other roles. This particular scenario employs excerpts from the 1961 manifesto by the Swedish-American pop artist Claes Oldenburg, "Ode to Possibilities," composed for an exhibition catalog and, according to the artist, following in the poetic footsteps of Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg. By tying belief and manifestos together in a gesture of ritual prayer at lunch, exclaiming not routine lines from the Bible but explicit language rooting for the celebration of everyday life, even if absurd, Rosefeldt strongly suggests a convergence of faith and deed, of commitment and acting on that commitment. It is of central importance for my discussion of conviction in this chapter: performing a prayer ritual situates belief within a particular religious or spiritual context, pointing toward an order beyond the earthly. A manifesto, as demonstrated further down, is a decidedly secular genre that embraces conviction as a public, a political, a performed and a professed action. It is loud, short (mostly), and is conviction come alive—even when tongue-in-cheek. What,

then, can the manifesto genre tell us about conviction? Why is the genre so popular for professing convictions in the first place? And what can the recent revival of the manifesto genre tell us about convictions in the 21st century?

My own definition of conviction is derived from two sources: Matthew Pianalto's notion of conviction in this volume and Vilém Flusser's notion of "home" or "Heimat," including a conceptual or metaphorical home, as (a) commitment. At the outset of his article, Pianalto explains that

> convictions may also be personal in the sense that they differentiate us from others, often along lines that are ethically significant but controversial and difficult to settle. [...] Convictions will often reflect where one stands on contested issues that cannot be settled by the available evidence or arguments but to which one has a devoted position.
>
> (TBD)

Conviction here becomes a possibility for reasonable dissent, for a "differentiation from others" that includes ethics in combination with and openness toward substantial complexity, so it precludes or excludes fanaticisms, fundamentalism, or plain blind faith. It displays as well a distinctly avant-garde character whereby one's position "on contested issues" may be such that the "available evidence" may not yet be in, may still be in waiting or in need of being gathered, tested and proven because it is too new and too advanced. In essence, such is the definition of the avant-garde itself, at least if we consider the concept under the auspices of military history when the avant-garde consisted of a few who advanced ahead of the army to scout out, explore and, potentially, secure the territory prior to the bulk of the organization following in the avant-garde's footsteps: reconnaissance. In that sense, conviction can serve as a certain positional license, a testing of waters to be explored and mapped, for actions that are ethically required but for which the evidence is as of yet slim or in the process of emerging.

Adjacent to this notion of conviction as avant-garde, in a sense of a Gertrude Steinian "there's no there-there" that is still in need of substance or a foundation, is Vilém Flusser's notion of home as put forth in his essay on "The Challenge of the Migrant." "Homeland [Heimat]," to Flusser,

> is not an eternal value but rather a function of a specific technology; still whoever loses it suffers. This is because we are attached to heimat by many bonds, most of which are hidden and not accessible to consciousness. Whenever these attachments tear or are torn asunder, the individual experiences this painfully.
>
> (Flusser, 2003, p. 3)

Once these ties are cut, however, the home's "mysterious rootedness" is revealed as "obscurantist enmeshment" and falls away to allow for a "transformation of expulsion into the dizziness of freedom and the inversion of the question

'Free from what?' into 'Free for what?'" (Flusser, 2003, p. 4). Flusser sees the migrant, the nomad, the rootless or expelled person as the "vanguard of the future" precisely because commitment or engagement, Flusser's notion of conviction, is not home-grown, it is self-generated. It is independent of others because the future-facing question of "free for what?" requires developing a certain positional license, a testing of waters to be explored and mapped, for actions that are ethically required but for which the evidence is as of yet slim or in the process of emerging—just as mentioned above. The comfortable, the cozy because utterly familiar, home is gone. Now, one has to create a new home, a position, a conviction from within, relying on a self that may as of yet be unknown in full, with surroundings that may be equally unfamiliar. Such convictions may be the ultimate encounter with the personal and one's ethical positions (especially value ethics and normative ethics) since they emerge not from a familiar and comfortable context: they become expressions of reasonable dissent as they take nomadic forms, dislodged, and thereby free of specific moral or habitual roots. To demonstrate and communicate these particular kinds of positional licenses, the manifesto presents the ideal medium for such reasonable dissent: it, too, is without a home as such since most manifestos lack context in print or book form because of their brevity, ready to pop up at whim and to disappear again, powerful in their presence, yet soon already gone into some unknown future.

Some Data on Conviction by Way of Nietzsche

One of the most popular aphorisms on the internet is Friedrich Nietzsche's "Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies." Famously, he included a series of aphorisms (#629–637) on "conviction and justice" in the ninth book (Man Alone with Himself) of his 1878 volume *Human, All too Human*. The one cited above is #483. His definition of conviction, in aphorism #630, reads as follows:

> Conviction is the belief that on some particular point of knowledge one is in possession of the unqualified truth. This belief thus presupposes that unqualified truth exists; likewise, that perfect methods of attaining to them have been discovered; finally, that everyone who possesses conviction avails himself of these perfect methods.
>
> (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 199)

Nietzsche concludes that those with conviction cannot, as per his deduction, practice "scientific thought," and they thereby render themselves children, given the "theoretical innocence" with which they operate. Nonetheless, he concedes that, over centuries, their powers have been enormous, no matter the fallacy of having followed their convictions for the sake of truth.

In order to trace both the history of conviction as a term and manifestos as a genre, it is informative to discuss the frequency of using these concepts

experienced in the past. As it turns out, Nietzsche's contemplations on conviction fall into a time frame when conviction increasingly occupied the Western world, at least the English- and German-speaking worlds, based on two data sources. The German "Überzeugung," according to the DWDS (German Word Information System), was most frequently in use around 1870, falling off around 1900 and declining again around the year 2000. Ngram shows a completely different graph on the German word, using their German language corpus: the use of the term peaked around 1950, with a rapid rise starting around 1870. The word itself originates in the 16th century and designates "a certainty arrived at through contemplation." For the English "conviction," also with origins in the 16th century, the application of the concept peaks around 1840, but differences between American English and British English matter: the former shows wild spikes just before 1750, around 1775, and around 1790 and slowly falls off after 1850; the latter peaks around 1840, with just small spikes around 1775 and 1790. Of course, the socio-linguistic and lexical problem with "conviction" is that we do not know whether the term was used in its legal contexts or for its moral, ethical, or political meanings. Searching Ngram's corpus of English fiction yields the same results, with a significant spike just before 1800, and sustained use throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th.

Nietzsche, back in *Human, All Too Human*, points to a different approach to understanding conviction. "Why do we admire him who is faithful to his convictions and despise him who changes them?" he asks in aphorism #629. Judgment accompanies the betrayal of one's convictions, according to Nietzsche, and the apparently feeble-minded who change their convictions are stripped of their intellectual capacities or the autonomy of reasoning for themselves. Changing convictions becomes laborious as it turns into wrestling with one's "tribe" or culture and value group, as Michael Lynch has demonstrated above, including wrestling with oneself, one's emotions, and one's ideas and thoughts. The emotion most central to Nietzsche's investigation of conviction as a human feeling is pain, for this is what we suffer, he believes, when we "betray" our ideals and change beliefs. Why? Why suffer when we have a change of heart or—if we take Vilém Flusser's suffering into account—when we are forced to cut Gordian knots that set us free? What "judgments" or toxicities occur in the sociopolitical contexts of those who dare change—or even question—their convictions? For the discussion presented here, media diversification and utilization are at the center of the convergence between manifestos and conviction, a trend that started in the early 20th century and has marked the 21st like no other.

The Modern Manifesto Tradition

Nothing spells conviction quite like a manifesto. An increasingly burgeoning literary, artistic, and sociopolitical genre since the 19th century,

manifestos have spawned artistic and political movements, conspiracy myths, art projects, political parties, and ad hoc rebellions. They call for change, for overthrowing the status quo, for denouncing entire governments. Manifesto documents use specific visual and linguistic devices to pull in their readers, such as the future or future perfect ("X will have happened"), pithy phrases, short, declarative sentences, and bold design reminiscent of posters or marketing campaigns. It is often manipulative, a preferred channel of communication for alt-right fringe groups as well as leftist extremists who seek to shock, surprise, and spark action. When exploring the manifesto genre as a format for and an expression of conviction to position it within the larger context and history of the manifesto aesthetic, then, the following questions arise: How does conviction as an ethical and moral stance emerge from these examples? How do political manifestos speak to a particular sense and patterning of identity and in-group formation? How does conviction take a role in the manifesto genre that may differ from conviction in other media and expressions?

Janet Lyon, in her ground-breaking analysis of manifestos as a genre, closely aligns this form of expression with an understanding of modernity proper:

> [T]he manifesto form has much to teach us about the problems of modernity: while it may be best known as the no-nonsense genre of plain speech, the genre that shoots from the hip, it is in fact a complex, ideologically inflected genre that has helped to create modern public spheres.
>
> (Lyon, 1999, p. 2)

This form or genre becomes even more complex when considering it as a text explicitly composed to deliver emotions: "Linked with the form's passion for truth-telling is its staging of fervent, even violent rage. […] The manifesto is […] a genre that gives the appearance of being at once both word and deed, both threat and incipient action." (1999, p. 14). The manifesto voice breaking through and, loudly, seeking an audience, is marked by several elements that make up its manifesto characteristics: the word as a deed, as an announcement or threat of an action soon to follow, and as a break with history. According to Lyons, it is "both a trace and a tool of change." (1999, p. 16). It is a document and documentation of impending transformation because both urgency and necessity emerge from those words that speak of deeds, no matter how quickly the same deeds might happen.

Although the history of socio-politically motivated manifestos can be traced back to the Middle Ages, until recently the highest density of aesthetic programs in the form of manifestos occurs around 1900 and at the outset of the traditional avant-gardes in the early part of the 20th century. For the many different groups and movements referred to as the

"traditional" avant-gardes—a detailed discussion would burst the frame of this chapter—the manifesto genre presented the ideal mouthpiece, a medium for marketing and a call to action: it was small in volume, the language employed was direct, the demands usually formatted in a grammar of clear imperatives and the future or future past, and it served perfectly as a script to be read, reproduced, multiplied, presented to the public, and even performed. As a literary genre, the manifesto displays nothing short of oscillatory or multimodal qualities. It is a form of communication that combines a number of different text and rhetorical styles, juxtaposing or intersecting analytical, poetical and propagandistic aspects, among many others.

There are numerous collections of classic aesthetic manifestos, usually beginning with the Futurists in 1909. Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders' international overview alone lists over 250 texts from Europe and Latin America between 1909 and 1938 (Asholt and Fähnders, 1995). Mary Anne Caws' English-language equivalent, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (2001), also lists well over 200 manifestos from a variety of countries and regions, documenting what Caws has called a "manifesto moment" around 1900. Caws, too, enumerates certain characteristics of the manifesto, which mark its aesthetic modernism:

> MADNESS: At its most endearing, a manifesto has a madness about it. It is peculiar and angry, quirky, or downright crazed. OPPOSITION: The manifesto is always opposed to something—generally posing some "we," explicit or implicit, against some other "they." [...] VOLUME: The manifesto is by nature a loud genre, unlike the essay. [...] EXCESS: The manifesto makes an art of excess. This is how it differs from the standard and sometimes self-congratulatory ars poetica, rational and measured. STYLE: The manifesto has to draw the audience into the belief of the speaker, by hook or by crook. The present tense suits the manifesto, as does the rapid enumeration of elements in a list or bullet form.
>
> (Caws, 2001, p. 6)

A close look at one of the most famous examples in the history of manifestos, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's founding "Futurist Manifesto," published in French in *Le Figaro* in 1909, confirms the elements listed above that coincide with expressions of conviction claiming positional license to result in deeds: the manifesto starts out with an 11-point program expressing the urgent need for change ("we want," "we have to," "we will," and "we declare"), followed by the fiery announcement of Futurism's birth that stands in grand contrast to a devastating dismissal of the status quo, in this case, Italy's politics and culture. Evidently, Marinetti is building a new home that will provide avant-garde territory ready for comrades of similar creed. Furthermore, Italy's backward, dusty culture of archives and

museums has to be destroyed in order for the younger generations ("the oldest among us are thirty years old") to revolutionize and take over only to be thereafter revolutionized by the next generation ("When we are forty let younger and stronger men than we throw us in the waste paper basket like useless manuscripts!"). The tone of voice is brazen, the vocabulary muscular, and the deeds are a fact of history.

For our analysis of the convergence between conviction and manifestos, however, we need to venture further back into this history to re-connect even older versions of manifestos with the more recent waves of manifesting conviction in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Or, to use Caws' words, to examine another "manifesto moment," this time around 2000.

Some Data on Manifestos by Way of Politics

The history of the manifesto as a word in Latin, Italian, German, or English lexica is quite a bit older than conviction. Ngram English language data for "manifesto" provides a set of spikes before 1760, with the highest by far around 1530, and a much smaller spike around 1620. The frequency curve starts to rise around 1740, spikes in 1760, and again around 1800 only to decline steadily by 1900. Using "Manifest" to explore Ngram's German corpus, we can observe a similar trajectory until 1850, with spikes around 1650, early 1700, and again around 1740. But then the curve climbs steadily after 1860 to reach its highest peak around 1910. In contrast, the German Word Information System documents a steady rise of the word since the 1600s, with an early peak around 1760 and a dip around 1800, and then, again, a steady rise starting in the 1830s.

Etymologically, the manifestus or manifesto (from Latin and Italian) has a much more illustrious history than it receives credit for. The usages we can explore via databases do not reveal, for example, that the term served to propose "a public declaration" (in court and in politics, 1610 and earlier) and, conversely, in shipping and customs (a list of cargo, 1706). As a genre, it returns us to communicative territory much more in the public eye than the celebrated but—at first—decidedly obscure manifestos of the avant-gardes and, as the word "declaration" already signals, to political documents such as the "Declaration of Independence" that explicitly become part of a historicization of manifestos in modernity. Walter Fähnders, in fact, points to the manifesto's importance as a declaration of the state, issued by various Dukes and Emperors since the 17th century, that resulted in the toppling of governments or changes akin to constitutional amendments. Fähnders explicitly deems the *Communist Manifesto* from 1848 an outlier as by far most manifestos were issued within the gubernatorial or legislative realm until the early part of the 20th century (Fähnders, 1997, p. 19). Strictly speaking, the avant-gardes around 1910 hijacked the term "manifesto" from its rich political tradition to place their aesthetic programs within a context that highlights the intersection of politics and art,

of state and individual, of group and (party) program. For if we read the avant-gardes' manifestos within this tradition, each group's "declarations" may well be launched from the position of a proto-state or a state-in-the-making, especially on the background of the rise of the nation state since the 1700s as a collective entity and political structure. Here, too, we can trace the impetus for building a "home," for claiming positional license that broadcasts conviction and demands action. As such, the manifestos of the early 20th century, now revered and highly influential as they certainly serve as models for the manifesto by Claes Oldenburg, are accomplished in the practice of merging art and life. They attain a much darker notion, however, in that they also display an undercurrent of political declarations of state that has been diminished, forgotten or cast away over time. Marinetti's 1909 manifesto certainly foreshadows deeds accompanying his fascist politics under Mussolini. While Marinetti serves as a well-known and convenient example, the connection between political declaration in the legislative tradition and avant-garde manifestos deserves a closer look, especially when considering the emergence of the concept of conviction at this first "manifesto moment," around 1900.

Conviction becomes an object of interest for philosophers such as Nietzsche and within a then-nascent field called psychology that included philosophers such as William James (Livingston, 2013). It was Joseph Jastrow, a charter member of the still-new American Psychological Association, student of and co-author with C.S. Peirce, who embraced the difficulty of analyzing conviction—and I concur with Christiane Heibach's reading of his work here within the context of media studies and atmospheres. In 1917, he published the introduction of his forthcoming *The Psychology of Conviction: A Study of Beliefs and Attitudes* (1918) in the fifth volume of *The Scientific Monthly*. World War I, he writes, has shown us "that the strength and directions of men's convictions […] furnish the decisive motive power of the world's energies" such that they urgently require an "inquiry into the mental processes that generate and direct convictions." Significantly, Jastrow argues, "[t]here can be no question where beginnings lie. The original source of conviction is emotion." (p. 523). However, he does not consider actions born from emotions childish or immature or possibly innocent, quite the contrary. While the horrors of WWI are readily apparent to Jastrow—as they were to a great many members of the avant-gardes and especially the Dadaists who wrote anti-war manifestos from their Zurich exile starting in 1916—he takes this historical moment to suggest that psychology will ably wrestle with conviction since it is the psychologist's "obligation to seek control of human convictions through a study of their nature." (p. 544). He concedes that such control remains unscientific for now: "To gain for beliefs their proper recognition amid the rivalry of convictions and of the forces sustaining them, is an art." (p. 543). Yet, while Jastrow also acknowledges the emotional ties that bind convictions to their "tribal" enmeshments, such as neighbors, fellow citizens, and a

family or group's traditions, he is putting faith in the scientific method, just like Nietzsche, when he considers conviction "a compromise of logic with psychology." (p. 543). But what if that faith, that belief is entirely without foundation, where, in fact, alternative facts reign and the data of science is deliberately cordoned off to allow room for paranoia, conspiracy, fairy tales? As Justin E. H. Smith observes later in this book, in the 21st century, we grapple with "the near-total disappearance of a shared space of common presuppositions from which we might argue through our differences, and the presumption that one's opponents' view are not so much wrong as diabolical." (Justin, p. TBD).

Mediating Conviction in Today's "Manifesto Moment"

A recent media experiment is a case in point. In a 2018 article in *The New Yorker* about the social media platform Reddit, "Antisocial Media," Andrew Marantz confronts his readers with a number of questions central to the much-politicized presence of social media platforms in our daily lives:

> Is it possible to facilitate a space for open dialogue without also facilitating hoaxes, harassment, and threats of violence? Where is the line between authenticity and toxicity? What if, after technology allows us to reveal our inner voices, what we learn is that many of us are authentically toxic?
>
> (Marantz, 2018)

What IF, indeed? There's a reason we have a plethora of concepts for envy or hate, and then there is the always delightful *Schadenfreude*. Or: roaring silence. Take the following scene from Daniel M. Gross's book, *Uncomfortable Situations. Emotions between Science and the Humanities*, which is entirely tech-free but no less toxic:

> You're at a dinner party with friends. A debate about a contentious issue arises that gets everyone at the table talking. You alone bravely defend the unpopular view. Your comments are met with sudden uncomfortable silence. Your friends are looking down at their plates, avoiding eye contact with you. You feel your chest tighten.
>
> (Gross, 2017, p. 1)

Discomfort ensues. On everyone's part. Harassment or threats may be next. And one person's authenticity, one person's bravery, becomes someone else's toxicity, impeding dialogue, even among friends, or making it blatantly impossible.

The psychologist Linda Skitka, a leading scholar of moral conviction, pursues the Janus-faced features of conviction in "Moral Convictions and Moral Courage: Common Denominators of Good and Evil" (Skitka,

2012, pp. 349–365) where she tests "accepted wisdom" that "strong situations" eventually force people to fall in line, conforming to social norms; and where she argues that "good and evil sometimes become less clear when acts of moral courage are related to actors' political, social or cultural beliefs." (p. 350). Studies on obedience and conformity are pitched against "authority independence," for example, to show that "heroism" and "terrorism" may be two sides of one coin and dependent on one's perspective or value system: "it is […] important not to let our values about what counts as good and evil blind us to the possibility that others have an opposing but equally 'moral' (by their standards) view." (p. 361). While I don't want to suggest that authenticity and toxicity are smoothly aligned with conviction or with the manifesto genre, the conundrum inherent to conviction seems to be precisely its oscillatory qualities, akin to finding that line between being true to yourself and voicing beliefs that are deemed vile. As Skitka points out,

> [g]iven that strong moral convictions are associated with accepting any means to achieve preferred ends, gaining more insight into the psychology of how and why moral convictions promote constructive, but potentially also quite destructive, forms of moral courage is a critical agenda for continued scientific investigation.
>
> (p. 363)

Whether we engage via social media or in face-to-face social settings, drawing the "line between authenticity and toxicity" becomes a matter of opinion, cultural and situational context, and, sometimes, one's emotional disposition. Where do we find ourselves within a certain debate, on a particular issue, amongst a particular group? How do we identify, examine, and trace our innermost beliefs when so much of what we try to communicate is context-driven and context-determined? How, indeed, is positional licensing and conviction-as-a-home construction possible today when conviction as deed carries an inflationary value because action has become as benign as the click of a button?

Our Mass Manifesto Moment

In 2020, the Canadian designer Bruce Mau published his directions for a personal three-minute manifesto that he applies as an exercise in his workshops: "Write down what you want to do with the rest of your life in the next three minutes. Then share it with others." (Mau, 2020, p. 55). Three minutes is hardly time enough to share anything in conversation, let alone write something down. Given this tight time frame, wishes, beliefs, and, indeed, convictions would have to be voiced viscerally, tapping into one's deep-seated value system by default in order to emerge with anything beyond "how about world peace?"

Write Your Personal Manifesto … in the Next Three Minutes

> For several years now, I have used a Three-Minute Manifesto exercise in our design workshops,' he writes. 'The instructions are simple: Write down what you want to do with the rest of your life in the next three minutes. Then share it with others.'
>
> At first, most people imagine that three minutes is way too short to write a personal Manifesto. Once they begin, however, most participants complete it in less time than that. (In fact, when we first started we allowed six minutes, but most people finished early.) Three minutes is long enough because people know the future they want; they just haven't been asked.
>
> What is profoundly inspiring when we all hear the results as each person stands and reads their personal Manifesto, is just how beautiful people are. Almost everyone has an image of a more abundant, equitable, and just world they would like to live in, and of how they would like to help create it. People know how they'd like to apply their talent, energy, and intelligence: they clearly see what role they want to play and the impact they want to have. There is often crying involved in the process. The Three- Minute Manifestos are characteristically optimistic, enlightened, creative, inclusive, and generous.
>
> People are often astonished by their own Manifestos, and by each other's: they discover a common commitment to creating a beautiful world. Most powerfully, they discover the hidden beauty that was sitting in the room around them. They had no idea, for instance, that Joe in shipping was a poet who is working to save the planet.
>
> (Mau, 2020, p. 55)

Values matter, and, as Nietzsche, Jastrow, Marantz, Gross, and Skitka show us above, we are compelled to examine the origins of our values such that we can begin to understand our beliefs and, indeed, our convictions. In fact, understanding underlying value systems, using Schwartz's parameters, is a crucial step toward studying conviction, in their personal as well as group expression toward action. Cornelius Grove summarizes Shalom H. Schwartz's understanding of value

> as desirable trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles for activity in the life of an individual or other social entity. Values are beliefs that become infused with feeling about what is important in life, they not only motivate action but also give it direction and emotional intensity. They also function as standards for judging and justifying action, […] Values are acquired through socialization to the value priorities of one's dominant group and through the individual's unique learning experiences.
>
> (Grove, 2015, p. 851)

If we are instructed to compose our own three-minute manifesto, then which values does our subconscious tap into? What five-point program, say, are we to propose for ourselves, based on our socialization, the value priorities of our dominant group(s), our personal ethics, and through our unique learning experiences? Are we speaking for a group, just like the military or artistic avant-gardes? Were we a state, what kind of declaration would we issue? Which positional license would we take, which conceptual home would we build, and which dissent would differ enough to be future-facing but still remain reasonable? Social media, in particular, encourages outbursts and deep sharing, given the built-in algorithms that accelerate and distribute loud, outspoken, personal manifestos of all kinds.

The fact is that we are experiencing another "manifesto moment," albeit one that, with its focus on the personal, is fueled by information dissemination systems that far exceed the systems around 1900. Manifestos are springing up like mushrooms all around us. According to Galia Yanoshevsky, the manifesto genre has become so established and manifold that she chose to investigate not only the plethora of texts available but also how scholars in different disciplines choose to approach a genre that compels, among other characteristics, because of its "versatility: that it can come in different shapes and forms" (Yanoshevsky, 2009, p. 261). A WorldCat search for "manifesto" in titles indeed uncovers a breathtaking 8,576 results, all books, not pamphlets or articles, published between 2000 and 2022. They cover the benign to the boring, the political to the artistic, some more directed at self-help than political uprising. However, the individualization of manifesto-writing and sending political declarations into the world has increased such that it seems to be the only genre left with which acts are indeed announced and, tragically, often followed, as extremist manifestos have demonstrated. It seems that manifestos, together with convictions, have gone the way of inflationary values as well. Everyone can have convictions, express them in a manifesto, and act on their convictions accordingly, alone or within a group. The culmination of both an exponential rise of and niche focus on manifesto-publishing may lie, for now, in the sizeable volume on *Publishing Manifestos: An International Anthology from Artists and Writers* that features over 50 manifestos by publishers about publishing. The vast majority of these manifestos on publishing are from the 21st century.

Conclusion

Let's return to our initial scene of a family at their luncheon prayer, performing Oldenburg's 1961 "Ode to Possibilities" manifesto. At the end of the prayer, the family holds hands, and all shake their arms up and down in unison as they follow the rhythm of the mother's final incantation: "square which becomes bobbly," the manifesto's last line. The father is then invited

to help carve the roast duck, cold and dry by now, while the mother pours red-brown gravy up and down into the duck's open carcass, as if to revivify the bird with fresh blood. As the family starts to eat, the camera moves away from the table up and into the living room that resembles more a hunting lodge than a suburban family home. After sweeping over the dog in its bed, the lens focuses on a live raven adjusted on a perch, croaking. The glistening bird, the feathers almost reflecting the window, is surrounded by live-size dead animals, all taxidermied and stuffed: a huge black bear, a deer lying on a table, and a beaver. The skin of another animal decorates the dark brown leather couch and the chair's armrests on the other side are made from antlers. On the coffee table atop a newspaper, we can detect binoculars. The imagery constructed here notably supports the convergence of avant-garde manifesto and conviction (Figure 3.2).

In Genesis 8, Noah, following the flood, releases a raven to find out if the waters had receded. The raven does not return, presumably because it had already made a new home on dry land—the flood was over. Just as Flusser posed the question "Free for what?" the raven symbolizes the creation of a new home, a position, a conviction from within, relying on a self that may as of yet be unknown in full, with surroundings that may be equally unfamiliar—as discussed above. Indeed, convictions take nomadic forms, dislodged and thereby free of specific moral or habitual roots. The raven as avant-garde, as the future of new meaning-making, confirms the construction of personal conviction as a mode of survival and a new beginning. It also confirms that reasonable dissent, an engaged and committed "othering," can serve as a comfortable home.

Figure 3.2 Manifesto, 01:08:57

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4 Convincing Atmospheres? The Influence of Diffuse Factors on Conviction Building

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Convictions between Ratio and Emotion

It is a rather trivial proposition that most humans have convictions. But what are convictions, how are they generated and whom do they guide in which way? The answers to these questions are rather complex and depend on the chosen or individual perspective. As an academic subject, convictions are multi-dimensional because their analysis transgresses the established borders of the disciplines. Psychology might see convictions as part of the individual's code of conduct; sociology may focus on groups and their specific dynamics influencing the generation of convictions for communities, and religious studies/ethics may investigate convictions within the poles of individual belief and religious normativity. Furthermore, the characteristics of convictions are rather difficult to identify: Oscillating between individual psychological dispositions, social and cultural conditions and transgressing diverse fields of society (politics, religion, cultural identity, and individual lifestyle), convictions do not fit into the established categories of philosophical systems. Traditionally – at least in the Western hemisphere – these are mostly construed along the dualism between ratio and emotion, intellect and intuition. Convictions have – as the psychologist James Jastrow states in his pre-published introduction to his book *The Psychology of Conviction* from 1917 – long been seen as "products of rational considerations," an assumption that ignores that "[t]he original source of conviction is emotion" (Jastrow, 1917, p. 523).

Joseph Jastrow, one of the first prominent psychologists and in 1900 President of the American Psychological Association, negotiates between an *individual* and a *collective* view on convictions and identifies the tension between emotion, convention, and rationality as the fertile soil for conviction building: "The initial factor in the genesis of conviction is the rivalry between reason and emotion." (ibid., p. 523). At first sight, this might not surprise as today's psychological reflections pick up on and continue to reflect this ambiguous character of convictions between emotion and rationality. Wright et al. (2008) distinguish between the "content" of convictions, which are cognitive, and their strength and intensity as emotional quality.

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Jastrow presents a different constellation: He highlights a list of factors relevant for convictions, all of a "nature compact": "docility, contagion, complacency, imitation, and convention" (Jastrow, 1917, p. 524) lead to the persistence of convictions which are handed over from generation to generation.

The notions of "contagion" and "imitation" invoke the mass psychological conception of the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, published in his work *The Laws of Imitation* in 1890: According to Tarde societies are formed by processes of imitation as "elementary social acts" (Tarde, 1903/1890, p. 144), that spread "like a wave of light, or like a family of termites" (ibid., p. 3) and ultimately function like any number of epidemics or "contagions." (ibid., pp. 45–46). This means societies build their common world (be it habits, values, institutions, laws, etc.) through irrational processes of imitation. Consequently, societies are not able to be innovative, unless individual geniuses appear who are creative enough to break with uncontested traditions. Thus, Tarde's theory of society is based on the dualism of rare innovative and activist individuals on the one hand, and social structures that rely on unquestioned imitation and perpetuation on the other: Ideas/beliefs/convictions and conventions are established through unconscious processes of contagion. Tarde unequivocally concludes "Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism." (ibid., p. 87). In later works, Tarde distinguishes between mass and public – the latter is a sort of dispersed mass that is formed by mass media, especially (in his time) the newspaper. Therefore, mass and public are related to each other like body and mind.[1]

This dualistic understanding of society seems to be reflected in Jastrow's psychology of conviction, when he couples emotions with processes of rationality: He identifies pleasure and pain as elementary distinctive sensations which become rationalized in different intellectual fields related to philosophical disciplines. In the field of formal logic, there is a distinction between true and false, in aesthetics between good and bad taste, and morally between good and bad. These are the three orders of rational convictions which regulate behavior via institutions:

> Schooling and experience, book-learning and practical occupations, dealings with men and all manners of social observances and institutions – all of which are regulated by beliefs in the form of traditional explanations – leave as their deposit a logical sense which acts after the manner of sensibility of the sensory type [which is pleasure and pain, C.H.] but with a more complex psychology.
>
> (Jastrow, 1917, p. 527)

Jastrow, finally, argues that our system of values, which determines our behavior and is rationalized in institutional frames like the law, education, culture, etc., is based on irrational distinctions and unquestioned traditions.

Speaking of contagion and imitation as basic processes for social formation, emphasizing emotion and irrational, pre-conscious distinctions and pleasure-pain-based behavior, he establishes a strong relationship between mass psychology, individual psychology, and a kind of Lamarckian thinking of inherited behavior. Seen from an epistemological point of view – which means asking the Kantian question concerning the conditions which make cognition possible – Jastrow simply emphasizes the importance of basic emotional or affective and pre-conscious feelings that shape human behavior. This emphasis on pre-conscious feelings links his theory to the theory of atmospheres, formulated more than 40 years later in the 1960s.

Philosophically, "atmosphere" is not so much understood as the physical atmosphere of our ecosystem, but rather refers to the phenomenological understanding of the notion as something diffuse: it characterizes places of any kind, communities, and also individuals. Atmospheres are understood as inherent characteristics of situations and events, be they mass events or individual experiences. In short, atmospheres implicitly and sometimes also explicitly structure our everyday life experiences from early infancy to ripe old age. While convictions are attributable to individuals or groups, atmospheres are emergent phenomena that result from interactions between human and non-human elements. As I will argue in this chapter, atmospheres (in the social and the medial sense of the word) are decisive for individual and social conviction building. Furthermore, this correlation between conviction and atmospheres shows that convictions are – in contrast to the rather repetitive and stable character Jastrow ascribes to them – not only conventionalized and "inherited" through generations but also context-sensitive. This means that convictions are inherently related to the social, moral, cultural, and – last but not least – medial conditions of a time. Apart from the fact that convictions have a historical genesis and are passed on from generation to generation, it is necessary to examine the conditions under which convictions might change – and these conditions constitute what I would call the "atmosphere" of a time and culture.[2]

The Pillars of a Theory of Atmosphere

One of the earliest theorists to work with the term "atmosphere" is Hubert Tellenbach, a psychiatrist also educated in philosophy. He considered atmosphere as something that is developed by the individual in early infancy through specific experiences in her/his family. The basic atmospheric experience of the infant is of a sensorial nature: the smell, the taste, and the timbre of the voice of the people who surround her, especially of the mother whose "immediate emanate" ["unmittelbare Emanation"] is the basis upon which the infant develops a basic sense of trust ("Urvertrauen"). Generally, atmospheres are, according to Tellenbach, characteristics of social entities like individuals, groups, and cultures, but they can also characterize cities and architectures (Tellenbach, 1968, p. 47/48). As a psychiatrist, he mainly

concentrates on the particular individual "atmosphere," which is also part of an *interpersonal* atmosphere resulting from social interaction and which emerges from the people's individual atmospheres to form a *social atmosphere*. In this sense atmospheres are "a medium in which existence communicates itself to its world and the world communicates itself to existence" (Tellenbach, 1968, p. 52).[3] For the infant's experience family units are decisive and "always parts of groups, and these are (and have been especially in former times) grounded in common atmospheres. In the unexplainable aura that emanates from human relations, attitudes, valuations, shared worlds are formed, especially in thinking and talking."[4]

With this notion of atmosphere, Tellenbach combines factors of instinct with those of attitudes, valuations, and of course, also convictions (although he does not use this word). Tellenbach, as someone much more positively disposed toward such a pre-consciously and diffusely felt phenomenon than Jastrow might have been, adds that atmospheres are media of psychological diagnostics because aberrations in the interpersonal relationships of the infant can result in "pathological atmospheres." "Pathological atmospheres" are disruptions between the individual and her/his surroundings, as is the case with paranoia, for instance.

Tellenbach presents his notion of atmosphere with an emphasis on three main points: First of all, an *individual atmosphere* is the result of an elementary instinctive early infantile relation to the world based on diffuse sensory experiences like the smell, taste, and timbre of the mother and other members of the nuclear family. Second, atmospheres are a result of *interpersonal relations* which form the common grounds the nuclear family provides – attitudes, valuations, and convictions; and finally, atmospheres are *characteristics of social entities and intentionally designed environments*.

Following Tellenbach, the philosophers Hermann Schmitz and later Gernot Böhme have developed a distinct philosophy of perception in relation to the atmosphere (Schmitz, 1998) and a further differentiation of atmospheric characterizations (Böhme, 2001, 2014).

Hermann Schmitz focuses on an in-depth philosophical description of the impact atmospheres can have on bodily affection. According to him, atmospheres are feelings that are not bound to a subject but are perceivable within a spatial area, be it a room, an apartment, a public building. Consequently, Schmitz focuses on *sensing* atmospheres, which he describes as a primordial synesthetic process that involves body *and* mind and cannot be distinguished based on our traditional division of the sense organs. He speaks of "affective involvement" (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 248), which is situated between physical instinctive re/action and pre- and subconscious feelings. Media theorists like the Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi pick up such concepts of unspecific feeling and classify the latter as "pure experience" that precedes any kind of mediated perception. Massumi refers to the 19th-century psychologist and philosopher William James, who, in

turn, influenced Edmund Husserl and Gilles Deleuze. According to James, "pure experience" precedes any subject–object division and constitutes a non-mediated physio-emotional way of experiencing the world, before it becomes a separate part of the "self" (McKim, 2009, p. 4).

Gernot Böhme builds on Hermann Schmitz with his concept of atmosphere. He regards atmospheres as a relation between subject and object, focusing also on the act of *producing* atmospheres (Böhme, 2001, p. 53). He treats "atmosphere" as primarily an aesthetic term and connects it to phenomena of classic beauty in nature on the one hand and to different types of media-generated atmospheres on the other (Böhme, 2014). He also identifies different "characters" of atmospheres, e.g., synesthetic ones (which are sensed by the whole body, such as coldness or softness), communicative atmospheres (e.g., a tense atmosphere), or social atmospheres (e.g., a serene or hostile atmosphere) (Böhme, 2001, p. 89).

To summarize this brief overview, there are at least three dimensions of atmospheric thinking that are closely related to the question of conviction building: First, atmospheres are related to the *social constellations of the infant and thus communicate and constitute convictions* (Tellenbach). This correlates with Jastrow's idea of traditionalization because this sort of conviction is strictly housed within the atmosphere of the family and its specific history. Second, we continuously experience atmospheres that affect us and our felt body emotionally in an immediate, pre-conscious way (Hermann Schmitz). This sort of atmosphere is *unexpected, unforeseeable, and thus able to overwhelm us*. Atmospheres understood as emergent phenomena might lead to an ad hoc-behavior that can contradict our convictions – this is the second dimension of atmospheres. Third, atmospheres can be seen as an effect of design, as Gernot Böhme proposes. In this sense, they are mediated; they can even be media in their own right, but also transferable via mass media or media of interpersonal communication (or, in the case of social media, as a hybrid of both). These mediated or designed atmospheres can communicate convictions, but such that this is not primarily rational or cognitive: atmospheres carry an emotional appeal and serve as the basis upon which individual convictions might change. Again, this can have ambivalent effects: Atmospheres can lead to an expression regarding the freedom of speech and the right to change one's mind on the one hand, but they can also result in dogmatism.

Atmospheric Media and Conviction Building

Let me further elaborate on the latter, dogmatism, because it shows the explosiveness of a context-sensitive understanding of conviction (to which the notion of atmosphere may contribute decisively). In totalitarian regimes, all spheres of public and private life are used to communicate convictions that everyone who wants to survive has to share. These convictions lead to concrete actions of exclusion to which all citizens contribute – and in worst

cases result in the extinction and murder of the un-convinced. Of course, one of the main actors in this fatal constellation is mass media, but, as Peter Sloterdijk argues, totalitarian regimes occupy the space of air and signs ("der Luft- und Zeichenraum"), which means that they invade every part of society, from the private to the public spheres (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 189). He uses these terms to characterize the practices of totalitarian regimes, especially the Nazi Regime, which covered Germany with symbols anywhere from buildings and flags to the people's bodies and their gestures.

One of the most impressive and explicit examples of such an all-embracing totalitarian "semiosphere"[5] is one of the most quoted Nazi propaganda document, *Triumph of the Will* by Leni Riefenstahl. The movie shows impressions of the first political convention after the takeover which took place in Nürnberg in 1934. *Triumph of the Will* was released in 1935 and was a big success not only in German cinemas but also throughout many European countries. The British Newspaper *The Observer* for instance saw in *Triumph of the Will* "a convincing proof" of "the concentrated personal expression of a national energy, equally passionate and dynamic." (quoted in Loiperdinger, 1987, p. 131).

The stills you see below not only show the careful arrangement of the camera eye, but also the omnipresence of the Nazi Symbols reaching from flags to the people's bodies and their gestures – all of them arranged in symmetric rows (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Furthermore, the aesthetics of *Triumph of the Will* communicates a very specific perspective on the "mass." It is not at all the chaotic, uncontrollable,

Figure 4.1 Riefenstahl 2004/1935, 00:45:40

Figure 4.2 Riefenstahl 2004/1935, 00:45:12

and affection-driven crowd of Gustave Le Bon's famous study on mass psychology (published 1895, English edition: 1896)[6] – it is an ordered, cheer- and playful, but nevertheless disciplined mass, which is shown here, performing unity and devotion to the "Führer" (Figure 4.3).

Thus, it contrasts Le Bon's nightmare of an unpredictably and affectively acting and therefore dangerous crowd. What Le Bon obviously didn't consider was the danger of a disciplined, ideologically uniformed mass – or in other words: a people, maybe even: a nation, united by the totalitarian sign system of a toxic ideology (Figure 4.4).

Hitler did not only arrange physical mass events but also used technological mass media, especially radio and film, and printed journals to spread Nazi ideology. Apart from this "total mass communication" ("totaler Massenkommunikation," ibid., p. 186) he managed to extensively contaminate the social atmosphere of individual communication in everyday life. Sloterdijk refers to the Austrian Jewish writer Hermann Broch when he designates this totalitarian contamination as a collective coma, "Dämmerzustände" (ibid.). The word "Dämmerzustand" is also used for somnambulists and sleepwalkers, a term Gabriel Tarde decades before also used to characterize the imitating mass.[7]

Although this is a somehow radical (but not unique) example, it demonstrates that under the conditions of an all-consuming atmosphere people tend to ignore, adapt and even change their convictions. This does not only point to the blurring borders between opinion, belief, and conviction but also to the enormous impact of atmospheric constellations on convictions

Figure 4.3 Riefenstahl 2004/1935, 00:02:52

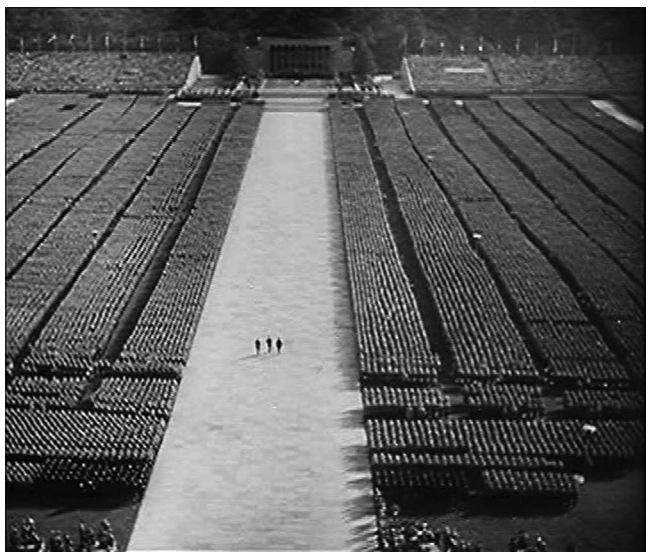

Figure 4.4 Riefenstahl 2004/1935, 01:03:18[8]

and their enactment. If everyone, including your leaders, tell you that a certain group of people are no human beings, that you are held to a new normative measure whereby your moral compass is to be realigned – what can you do to not be coerced to feel compliant to join those others who stereotype and denigrate them? Maybe you, against your formerly robust

judgment, discover how to sideline or oppress the weak who, as you are told, are supposed to have no right to share with you, whose lives, somehow, are lesser than? The social dynamics of toxic atmospheres are unforeseeable, and they *are* able to change convictions. It is not only that psychological experiments seem to have proven this behavior,[9] but the existence of so many followers ("Mitläufer") implicitly subscribing to the toxic Nazi ideology which they would probably have harshly refused under different conditions seem to be tragic proof enough.

Media – and with media I mean all modes of communication from public sign systems to nonverbal and verbal interpersonal communication to mass media – play a crucial role in this toxic constellation. Sloterdijk calls it a pathogenically air conditioned "closed communication sphere" where "synchronized-exalted publics" ["gleichgeschaltet-aufgeregte[n] Öffentlichkeiten"] breathe and re-breathe their own exhalations so that nothing new will appear and no fruitful dialogue can take place (ibid., p. 187). The purpose of such toxic atmospheres in closed social systems differs entirely from what Jürgen Habermas discussed in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*[10] where he describes the rise of the European bourgeoisie by the end of the 18th century. The self-conception and emancipation of the middle class would not have been possible without the development of journalism and its printed products, but also of public institutions which serve as meeting points for political discussions, among them public libraries, reading societies, and the famous salons where the middle-class intelligentsia met.

In contrast to the closed toxic totalitarian communication sphere, the emerging bourgeois public sphere is characterized by the openness with respect to its participants, its topics, and its communication processes that even extend beyond national borders. This sphere becomes the fertile soil for demands like freedom of opinion: political convictions of this kind form the foundation for democratic thinking, which is considered to be mainly rational (which means turning the leading political paradigm from "power by birth" to "power by merit"). What Habermas describes as the genesis of the open, confrontational and enlightened public sphere we still consider to be one of the most valuable developments of democratic culture. Of course, this sphere has conviction-building power: Resulting from a conflictual constellation between three different social classes – the feudal system, the bourgeoisie, and the proletarians *avant la lettre* – its principles are formulated against the former leading class and their rules.

From a media theoretical perspective, especially totalitarian political regimes seem to reveal that atmospheric thinking and media infrastructures are closely related. Seen from the perspective of social or political sciences, both fields belong to different epistemological spheres: atmospheres are experienced immediately, are pre- or subconsciously felt, and therefore prerational. They are closely related to intersensory perception and to what Hermann Schmitz calls "Leiblichkeit," translated as "felt body" (Schmitz

et al., 2011). This term describes the holistic anthropological concept where human proprioception cannot be differentiated into rational, emotional, and physical processes anymore. The felt body is – to refer to Tellenbach again – our medium within our environment (in the sense of the world which surrounds us).

On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is Habermas' concept of the bourgeois media system as a sphere of rational discourse. Throughout centuries, institutionalized media played a crucial role in political and moral conviction building, which in its (supposed) rationality seems to collide with the felt body of atmospheric thinking. But to develop an adequate procedural model of opinion-, belief-, attitude-, and conviction-building which is context-sensitive concerning individual psychic dispositions and unconscious social dynamics it is obviously necessary to bridge the dualism between ratio and emotion. Furthermore, this has to be linked to the structural conditions of a complex media system, which constitutes communicative environments. These are, in contrast to the modeling of enlightenment, by no way purely rational. A glimpse into media history may be productive here.

Digital Media as Atmospheric Media

The advent of electronic media (film and radio) challenges the idea of the rationality of mass media (understood mainly as printed media). Contemporary media theorists emphasize the emotional side of the emerging electronic media film, and later also radio, and critically reflect their influence on individual and social perception. Walter Benjamin and Rudolf Arnheim, who witness the advent of film and radio, emphasize their primarily effective effects: The radio, for instance, has intimate qualities because it appeals to the listener with the emotional timbre of the speakers' voices and thus takes over the function of, as McLuhan calls it, the tribal drum:

> Radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between the writer-speaker and the listener. This is the immediate aspect of radio. A private experience. The subliminal depths of radio are charged with the resonating echoes of tribal horns and antique drums. This is inherent in the very nature of this medium, with its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber.
>
> (McLuhan, 1994/1964, p. 299)

The same is the case with film which, for Walter Benjamin, is a medium of distraction and emotional appeal through the aesthetics of the technologically generated image (Benjamin, 2007/1936, p. 240). Once television becomes a mass medium, the critics again pick up these patterns: Neil

Postman's critique of American TV from the 1980ies, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), points to the superficial distraction which corrodes rationality and reason, substituting them with affection and irrationality. Furthermore, the fact, that radio- and TV-broadcasting are technically based on invisible connections between the broadcasting stations and the individual apparatuses through electro-magnetic waves activates fantasies of manipulation via radiation (see Sconce, 2000).

Aware of the effects of electronic networks, Marshall McLuhan consequently summarizes the radical changes in human proprioception with these words:

> The electronic human being wears his brain outside his skull and his nervous system on the surface of his skin. Such a creature is bad tempered and refuses direct physical confrontation.
>
> (McLuhan, 1995, p. 132)

McLuhan extends the idea of emotional electronic media to the emerging digital networks and predicts what social media communication currently reveals: the "bad-tempered" individual using social media for unfiltered emotional, often cranky, and trolling comments.

These reflections and perspectives on electronic media can be deemed atmospheric because they focus on emotional and implicit, even un- or subconscious effects. There is a fundamental paradigm shift I will call an "atmospheric turn" and which – in comparison to a pre-electronic print- and discourse-based media system – has decisively changed the processes of media-based conviction building.[11] The next phase of media change that began in the 1960s with the establishment of computer technology and the first digital networks boosts this perspective: the increased presence of aggressive and affection-led communication on social media platforms is alarming as it shows a fundamental change in the nature of convictions. In an age of fast verdicts and condemnations, convictions seem to lose their steadiness and rather take over a new role as ad-hoc weapons that can be arbitrarily adapted to the needs of the situation. Besides this "flexibility" and volatility of those digitally built convictions, we can observe a second effect. The enormous amount of data, information, opinions, and beliefs leads to a filter bubble (Pariser, 2012), which helps to reduce the noise of too much information and communication. The individual now has the choice to only communicate in groups of the same ideology or persuasion. This leads to exclusive communities based on homogeneous convictions where small groups of interest develop their private language refusing a public discourse, which is necessary to establish a "communicative rationality" (Habermas, 2007).[12] It is quite revealing that Habermas recently admitted that his notion of the public sphere has to be revised with regard to social media and their dynamics (see Habermas, 2021). The notion of a public understood as the result of democratic self-authorization

["Selbstermächtigung"] and the unforeseeable dynamics of a dispersed social media crowd seem to be contradictory and complementary at the same time. This challenging paradox shows clearly that toxic atmospheres do not only result from totalitarian systems but maybe also from dispersed and diverse communities – and to cope with such contradictory contemporary phenomena will be a new challenge for the humanities.

Digital media are atmospheric media because they combine interpersonal and mass media communication in new hybrid forms. This inherently changes our processes of conviction building, because, as Michael Lynch (2019, Chapter 3) has pointed out, it changes the narratives with which we practice identity-building (which of course is always complicit in or concurrent with conviction building). It is quite fascinating that this happens to some degree in the way Joseph Jastrow and Gabriel Tarde already observed a century ago: by processes of (emotional) contagion and imitation. A so-called shit storm for example is nothing else than a manifestation of these processes, and concepts like memes (Dawkin, 1976) and virality (Sampson, 2012) fit perfectly into such a diagnosis.

All of these elements need further investigation, and for the moment it would be too easy to generally ban digital networks with their algorithmically infused social dynamics (which, of course, are ambivalent). Looking back into media history, every new medium needs approximately 100 years to establish its own rules and standards in close relation to the societies within which they operate. This is why we have to carefully observe the dynamics between the different spheres that are involved in conviction building: It would be a cynical joke of history if the openness of the worldwide digital communication network were to become fertile soil for new toxic atmospheres of a totalitarian spirit – democracy and its media would then have abolished themselves.

Notes

1 Gabriel Tarde, who has long been neglected in sociology, has gained new attention since Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari prominently referred to his philosophy, as did Jacques Derrida. Currently, the dynamics of social media underpin Tarde's topicality because imitation seems to be a dominant behavior in social media communication. In the context of such unpleasant phenomena like shit storms and hate speech, it could be even more relevant to pick up Tarde's differentiation between a rather moderate and sensible public (the 'mind') and a rude, affection lead mass (the 'body'; see Borch, 2016, pp. 28–29).

2 Jastrow himself hints at this complex constellation when he justifies his research interest in convictions with the context of World War I:

> A notable contribution of the world convulsion of 1914 and thereafter is to the psychology of conviction. It has been made plain as never before that the strength and directions of men's convictions – authoritatively formulated in loyalties – furnish the decisive motive power of the world's energies.
>
> (Jastrow, 1917, p. 523)

Correlating these introductory sentences with the following statement that emotions are the "original source of conviction" (ibid.) suggests that all human decisions on world affairs around 1914 were based on emotions if led by convictions, not rational decision processes – what an indictment of the governments of belligerent nations!

3 Translations by CH.

4 "Familien sind stets Elemente von Gruppen; und diese sind (und waren es vor allem früher) in gemeinsamen Atmosphären begründet. In der unerklärlichen Ausstrahlung, die von menschlichen Verhältnissen, Haltungen, Wertschätzungen ausgeht, bilden sich vor allem Denken und Sprechen -gemeinsame Welten." (ibid., p. 54, translation CH).

5 "Semiosphere" is a term coined by the structuralist Juri M. Lotman. Originally it referred to the interplay of different language systems [Sprachsysteme]. I would like to extend its meaning, based on Sloterdijk's understanding of a toxic media sphere, such that the semiosphere points beyond the pure linguistic meaning to pictorial and acoustic messages and to different media constellations in interpersonal and mass media communication. In this sense "semiosphere" points very precisely to the overarching character of toxic semiotics practiced by the Nazis.

6 Gustave Le Bon was a contemporary of Gabriel Tarde – both were fundamentally critical of masses but differ in their arguments. Le Bon's understanding of the "mass" is correlated with negative characteristics: The crowd is inherently irrational, affective, unpredictable and manipulable (see Le Bon, 1896). Despite the contrasting orchestration of the masses in *Triumph of the Will*, Nazi ideology adapted le Bon's mass psychology especially concerning his theses on the crowd's suggestibility and its need for a leading figure.

7 *The Sleepwalkers* (1930) is the title of a trilogy written by Hermann Broch which deals with WW I and the failed Weimarer Republik; "Sleepwalkers" is also the title of historian Christopher Clark's intensely discussed work on the political constellations that lead to WW I (Clark, 2012). Hermann Broch wrote his "Massenwahntheorie" (Broch, 1987), quoted by Sloterdijk, between 1939 and 1948 – it remained unfinished. A discussion of the text is included in a new book by Brett E. Sterling, *Herrmann Broch and Mass Hysteria: Theory and Representation in the Age of Extremes* (2022).

8 It underpins history's irony that this scene has become iconic and part of popular culture: The final scene of Steven Spielberg's *Star Wars* Episode IV (*A New Hope,* 1977) clearly refers to Riefenstahl's scene of Hitler and two companions marching through the ordered mass towards the memorial of the victims of WW I. In *Star Wars* the rebels march through the orderly lines of their troops towards four light beams (instead of the Nazi flags) – it is not by chance that the middle (Hitler's position) is taken by the ape-like Chewbacca (see Kuller 2006).

9 Ron Jones, a teacher at Cubberly High School in Palo Alto, tried to demonstrate to his class how fascism worked – his experiment of 1967 has become famous as "The third wave". This "third wave" characterized a special greeting gesture (like the "Hitlergruß") which was performed by the group members who subscribed to the strict rules of discipline which Ron Jones had established in his class and which to his surprise were accepted without debate or resistance. When Jones requested that critics of his movement should be reported it became clear how toxic his 'regime' was – and how many were willing to denunciate not only their closest friends but also their own parents (see https://www.thewavehome.com/, 10/01/22). Other experiments like the famous but questionable Stanford Prison Experiment show similar effects (my thanks go to Anke Finger for this reference). It could be quite illuminating and productive to analyze such phenomena in applying the categories of toxic sign systems and social atmospheres.

10 The English translation was published in 1989: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge.
11 Of course, print media can have strong emotional and irrational effects, but their discursive structure invites profound reasoning and discussion while social media are designed for short and instant messages, which seem to inhibit differentiation and thorough reflection.
12 Although this communicative rationality is an outcome of a Eurocentric world view, it could be a rewarding endeavor to adapt it to the needs of a diverse society that reflects its power relations, its diversity of marginalized members and the groups' histories and needs, but nevertheless aims for an understanding between these communities to open up a perspective beyond fragmentation.

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5 "I believe because it is absurd"; or, pseudoscience

Justin E. H. Smith

The Stars Down to Earth

In a letter to Louis Bourguet of 1714, Leibniz (1849–1860) famously writes, "I despise almost nothing—except judiciary astrology." (p. 562). For him, the advancement of any science or discipline is directly connected not just with discovery and theory, but also with the creation of a proper institutional structure for the facilitation of discovery and the production of theories. Leibniz understood, in his medical and epidemiological writings beginning from the 1690s, that processing data about past epidemics would be a far better tool for anticipating future ones than would be more traditional varieties of fortune-telling; thus, effectively, that *retro*diction can be, when coupled with the evaluation of statistical data, a powerful tool for *pre*diction. And he saw, moreover, that this could be done with the help of machines, along with the collective labor of employees of state-sponsored institutions.

In spite of his disdainful remark, what Leibniz envisions might in fact be understood as something closer to an improvement, by a change in its basic techniques, of the art of fortune-telling, including judicial astrology, rather than an abandonment of it for more mature intellectual endeavors altogether. Divination of all varieties, whether astrology, tasseomancy (from tea leaves), or astragalomancy (from dice or knucklebones), may appear from the point of view of science to be the very height of irrationality. In fact, however, divination bears an important genealogical and conceptual relationship to scientific experiments as it develops over the course of the early modern period and also has an important connection to the history of computing or reckoning.

We may think of mantic practices, such as those imposed upon the feeding schedule of Paul the Octopus, or of divination in the most general sense, as the use of experimental techniques under controlled conditions in order to either predict the future or decide on a particular course of action. Today there is a great variety of machines that purport to tell us, either truthfully or not, about the course our future will take. All of these machines are built, more or less, on the same mechanical principles as Blaise Pascal's

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eponymous "Pascaline" device or Leibniz's stepped reckoner. Some of them, such as the "love meter" or the online personality quiz, are patently fraudulent, while others, such as the online credit-rating service, somewhat more plausibly purport to be able to determine our future fates, based on the fact of who we are at present, through the accrual of our past actions. We may ask, however, whether an anthropologist external to our culture would, in studying us, be able to make sharp distinctions among the horoscope, the personality quiz, and the credit rating, or indeed whether we ourselves clearly understand how they differ. In some parks in the cities of Eastern Europe you can still find standing scales for weighing yourself, and thus for getting a report on a certain factor of your physical health, standing right next to automated fortune-telling machines. Here the side-by-side positions of the scientific instrument and the mantic apparatus cannot but reveal to us their shared pedigree.

We may not ever, in fact, have been perfectly clear on the boundary between computation and divination. When Leibniz implored his contemporaries to "Calculate!" or to "Compute!" and suggested by this that he had, or was in the course of getting, some sort of engine that might reveal to them their proper future course, it would not have been out of line to interpret this as at least somewhat akin to a call to look into a crystal ball or to consult a chiromancer. We turn to machines to tell us what to do, and how things are going to be. We want the indications they deliver to us to be well founded, but we also want them to reveal fate to us, to mediate between us and the open future. Divination, in short, is an ancestor of computation. Both are projections of how the future might be. The latter sort of projection is based on rigorous data crunching that takes into ample consideration how the world has been up until now. The former sort also looks at the world in its present state, how things have settled into the present moment—how tea leaves have arranged themselves, how the heavens have turned, whether the birds are taking sudden flight or staying put in the fields. They do so, generally, in a piecemeal and impressionistic way and read past and present signs from one domain of nature into another, or from nature into human affairs, in a way that strikes us today as unjustified. But the shared ancestry is unmistakable.

Yet just as by the late 19th century the unity of science and faith in the programs of such comprehensive thinkers as Boyle or Goethe would be largely forgotten, the common ancestry of divination and computation would also, by around the same time, be more or less occluded from memory. By the 20th century, science was for serious people, astrology for dupes. Or worse, astrology was for the useful idiots of fascism. While still in exile in Los Angeles in the early post-war years, Theodor Adorno (1994) took an interest in the peculiar tradition of American newspapers to include horoscopes for their readers, whereby they ostensibly learn of their near-term fates on the basis of the star sign that governs their date of birth. The result of this interest was *The Stars Down to Earth*, Adorno's study

of the horoscope section of the *Los Angeles Times* over the course of several years in the 1950s (Adorno, 1994). He rightly saw these horoscopes as a drastically etiolated version of what would have been available to a practitioner of the art of horoscopy during the historical era in which astrology remained a meaningful, rich, and all-encompassing field of inquiry and explanation. To criticize the horoscopes in the *Los Angeles Times* is one thing; to criticize those of John Dee or any other Renaissance magus, or indeed of Galileo himself, who made a respectable income casting horoscopes alongside his more properly astronomical work, is another very different thing. To gloss over the differences, to take this sort of exercise as timelessly and context-independently irrational, is to overlook the ways in which different valences can come to attach to the same practices in different places and times.

For Adorno, midcentury American horoscopy, as well as the broader incipient New Age culture this heralded, was a subtle expression of a fascist tendency, to the extent that it involved submission to an abstract authority in the search for answers to life's deep questions, rather than any effort to critically reason through one's own life and options. A horoscope is not, for Adorno, what its enthusiasts today so often claim: "harmless fun." Horoscope readers who provide this defense will often claim that they do not necessarily believe what the horoscope says, and, moreover, that one does not have to believe it in order for it to retain its power to amuse and distract. This defense is typically proffered as a way of assuring skeptical friends that it is not really so irrational to read one's horoscope after all that one can do so while still retaining one's sharp critical sense. But it is even worse, Adorno thinks, to submit to abstract authority Linone knows to be empty. After all, if we sincerely believed that astrology offers the best, most state-of-the-art explanation of the causal links between celestial bodies and the biological and human world of the terrestrial surface, then the appropriate thing would be not just to read it "for fun," but to read it and then to structure one's life around it. To do so would at least have the virtue of conviction.

One of the remarkable features of the horoscopes in the *Los Angeles Times*, Adorno noted, is that they did virtually nothing to account for these purported causal links. They simply stated, without context, without detail, without any insight into the cosmology of the people who came up with horoscopy in the first place, that if you were born on such and such date, such and such suitably vague things will probably befall you—*Astra inclinant sed non necessitant*, as the old saying went, the stars incline but do not necessitate, and therefore any horoscopic prediction that fails to arrive cannot be subject to empirical disconfirmation. It is thus not enough, as a plea for understanding, for a reader of the *Times* horoscopes to say, "I just enjoy astrology!" For a reader of these horoscopes cannot *really* enjoy astrology, as he lacks the necessary historical curiosity and imaginative resources to do so; he cannot work himself into a position in which

the correlation of individual fates with the configuration of the stars and planets might actually mean something, might contribute to a sort of self-actualization, the cultivation of a life praxis, rather than simply signifying submission to the voice of an anonymous authority in an establishment newspaper.

Now, again, quite a bit has changed in the United States since the 1950s. For one thing, no American media consumer has the option of submitting to the abstract authority of the voices emanating from establishment news sources, as there are no such sources, but only media that fit or do not fit with our own preferred media profile, with the much-discussed bubble we each create for ourselves with the help of social media and of the glut of choices offered by cable or satellite television. The *Los Angeles Times* is rapidly downsizing, laying off its core staff, who are for their part taking to Twitter in a desperate struggle to stay relevant. Meanwhile, there are now horoscopists who write for a self-styled thoughtful, independent-minded, and skeptical audience (e.g., the syndicated author Rob Brezsny), and others who write for specific, finely focused demographics. And most recently—as if at long last explicitly reuniting the lineages of divination and computation, which we traced back at this chapter's beginning to their original unity—internet users are now able to consult "algorithmic horoscopes." As Amanda Hess has noted, "A.I. and machine learning can churn out predictions at speeds unmatched by flesh-and-blood astrologers" (Hess, 2018).

Interestingly, while in general Republicans are less science-literate than the broader American population, they are somewhat less likely than any other group, and indeed than liberal Democrats, to believe that astrology is "very or sort of scientific," according to a 2012 survey (Lindgren, 2014). The most prominent conservative media outlets in the United States, such as Fox News and Breitbart, do not feature astrology. This divide along political lines probably has to do with the perception of astrology as a pagan tradition (though of course it was practiced and promoted by members of the church for many centuries). Yet there are also astrologers out there ready to cater to consumers with a "family values" sensibility, or with a love of free markets. And again, these distinctions are extremely fluid. In recent years we have seen Tea Party demonstrators advocating holistic medicine, including traditional Chinese medicine and other cross-civilizational borrowings, as an inexpensive alternative to modern medical care for the uninsured ("New Left Media") (The Tea Party & the Circus, 2010). In the future, there is no reason why self-styled conservatives should not also turn, or turn back, to astrology.

Whatever may be the accuracy of Adorno's analysis of American horoscopy in the 1950s, there does not seem today to be any simple submission to abstract authority in the current "harmless fun" of astrology. There is, rather, conscious and elaborate identity construction, in which the sort of horoscope one reads is just one part of a suite of choices that also includes the clothing one wears and the music one listens to, all of which, together,

signal what kind of person one is. In the United States today, such signaling is generally inseparable from the matter of which side of the tribalist culture wars one identifies with. *Pace* Adorno, it seems likely that this fragmentation itself, rather than the role that horoscopes play within it, is the more disconcerting sign of incipient fascism.

We are one step further removed here, than the *Los Angeles Times* was in the 1950s, from the lifeworld of John Dee or Galileo, in which astrology presented itself as something to believe, something that genuinely helped to make sense of the world and of our place in it, rather than making it more difficult to do so. And yet even here there remains a faint but unmistakable link to the deeply human, and even extra-human, effort to orient in the world by reference to the fixed points of the celestial spheres (dung beetles, too, it turns out, navigate by the Milky Way) (Dacke et al., 2013). We admire the stability and regularity of the heavens and are prone to imagining that whatever share we have of stability and regularity in our chaotic, terrestrial, mortal lives is somehow borrowed from them. For this same reason, we still take exceptional astronomical events as significant, as momentous in ways that cannot be fully explained by their observable effects.

In 1997, 39 members of the Heaven's Gate cult committed suicide together on the occasion of the approach to earth of Comet Hale-Bopp, which, their leaders claimed, was in fact an extraterrestrial spacecraft. Alan Hale, one of the comet's two discoverers, declared the following year: "The sad part is that I was really not surprised. Comets are lovely objects, but they don't have apocalyptic significance. We have to use our minds, our reason" (cited in Frazier, 1998). Twenty years later, in August 2017, a total eclipse of the sun passed across the United States, from west to east. The path it followed matched the arc we might easily have imagined to be traced by an intercontinental missile fired from North Korea: entering American airspace in the Pacific Northwest and moving from there to the south and east across the heartland. The eclipse coincided with extreme tension over a recent war of words between Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, resulting from the latter's recent successful test of long-range missiles, and from the accumulating proof that his regime now would be able to deliver a warhead to American soil. Many said it was the closest the world had come to a nuclear confrontation since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Meanwhile, domestically, a neo-Nazi rally occurred in Virginia, and the president utterly failed to distance himself from the ideology of the demonstrators. As a result, he was abandoned by many business leaders who had previously attempted to abide and deal with his various flaws. He was again reprimanded by many within his own party, and the speculation that his reign was bottoming out, while this had arisen many, many times before, seemed to be reaching a new, fevered intensity (It did not, in fact, bottom out.).

It was inevitable that some would make a connection between the celestial and the terrestrial scales of events. It was jokingly said on social media, in countless variations, that the eclipse must somehow be a harbinger of

the fall of the Trump regime. Less jocularly, rumors flew that it was a conspiracy, or that it would trigger events on earth leading to the collapse of power grids, or other apocalyptic scenarios. Experts who knew better than to stoke such fears nonetheless warned that human behavior during the eclipse, with millions of people displacing themselves in order to observe it, might have significant consequences for the environment and for civic stability. Whether joking, cautious, or ridiculous, American anticipation of the 2017 eclipse differed very little from what happened in the great eclipse of 1654, when the materialist and atheist philosopher Pierre Gassendi bemoaned the ignorance of all the doomsayers, and of their learned enablers such as Robert Fludd (who had died some years earlier, in 1637).

It is not that there is no progress, or that we are not getting closer to a correct account of how the world works. But we still get vertigo on glass-bottom bridges, we still fear strangers more than friends, and we still are surely unsettled when the sky turns black at noon. All of these expressions of irrationality, moreover, are irrational in the narrow sense of failure to make the right inferences from what we in fact know. Nor is it necessarily the case that the chatter and jokes and misinformed speculations surrounding the things that frighten us, the impoverished borrowings from the venerable astrological tradition, are all just so much noise. These are all expressions of irrationality, but they do not seem to be, as Adorno had thought of astrology, straightforward expressions of a desire to submit to abstract authority. They are the products of active searching, not passive acquiescence.

Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom

One consequence of the partition between art and science has been the persistent proneness of science to infection and mutation, to meddling in its affairs by people who really do not know what they are talking about—people who are propelled forward by a moral conviction that this domain of human life, too, is theirs to play in, that the green lawn of science must not be roped off, transformed into a space that only the haughty college dons are permitted to cross.

The geneticist Kathy Niakan, who was the first researcher ever to gain ethics board approval to conduct research with human embryonic stem cells using CRISPR gene-splicing technology, has explicitly compared the innovations made as a result of this research to those that came with fire, and with the internet (Niakan, 2017). While we cannot possibly know all of the future applications of today's innovations and discoveries, we have effectively no choice but to continue. For the moment, the mainstream research community is unanimous in the view that research for medical applications, such as improvements in assisted-fertility treatment, is salutary and should continue, while any research involving the creation of new immortalized germ lines—that is, cells that give rise to offspring that

may then become part of the human species' shared genetic profile—would amount to a Promethean ambition to be decisively rejected by any ethics board (On the notion of Promethean ambition and its significance to the history of science, see Newman, 2004). Niakan asserts that the public frequently confuses these two sorts of research, and notes that it is largely as a result of this confusion that opposition to human stem-cell research is so widespread in public opinion. In fact, if it were left up to the public—that is, if it were an issue deemed to be worthy of democratic resolution—then Niakan would not have gained approval to conduct research on human embryos. She relies in her work on the approval of boards of experts, but not fellow citizens, and is grateful that this is the current arrangement where she works (in the United Kingdom).

Of course, the possibilities are not exhausted in the simple dichotomy between "expertocracy," on the one hand, and putting the vote before an ignorant public on the other. Another possibility is informing the public to a point at which it is no longer ignorant, and then turning the decision over to it. But the deepening of the crisis of public ignorance that has come with the rise of the internet, and the simultaneous sharpening of opposed opinions among different camps of the public, makes this alternative unlikely, and scientists such as Niakan are no doubt rational in their presumption that they must protect their work from public oversight. Niakan is hacking through nature's thorns and, like Oppenheimer before her, seems to be aware that her work is kissing awake new powers. The moral stance she adopts seems to take for granted that human beings will do whatever they find they can do, and thus new technologies are unstoppable. The best one can then do as an individual at the vanguard of these technologies is to use them responsibly, to satisfy well-composed boards of ethics, whose members establish their qualifications for membership not principally as ethicists, but rather as knowers of the relevant scientific facts. There are certainly many issues that should not be put to the vote, often because it is unreasonable to expect that the public could acquire the relevant expertise. But as long as scientific progress depends on antidemocratic institutions, the halls of science will continue to be invaded by gate-crashers: the amateurs despised by the experts, who make up in passion what they lack in knowledge, and who are the closest thing in our era to the Goethean dream of a science that can still make room for sentiment. But if they fail to fully realize this dream, it is in part because our era has made little room for a cultivation of sentiment that is not at the same time a descent into unreason.

Since the 19th century, there has been an expectation that science must now keep to itself, as the domain of reason, while unreason is free to romp within the limited spheres of art, poetry, and the expression of personal faith. Now that the violence of their separation has been endured, it has generally been supposed that they may be seen as a sort of divided homeland, which, even if naturally and historically unified, must nevertheless be protected against any invasion of the one side by the other.

Of course, low-level incursions have been a near-constant reality since the original partitioning of the two magisteria. Consider the case of that great oxymoron that has served as a wedge issue in American politics for over a century: creationism, or, as it sometimes styles itself, "creation science." There is no fixed, context-free reason why commitment to the recent extinction of the dinosaurs, within human history, should be a component of a politically conservative activist agenda. The particular political significance of a given belief of this sort is subject to perpetual change. In the early 17th century the "conservatives" reacted harshly to Galileo's discovery of sunspots. The sun is a superlunar body, and thus is composed not of diverse elements, but of one element only, for, otherwise, it would be subject to decomposition, mortal and corruptible, as only sublunar bodies are. But if it has spots, then these could only be a sign of composition from at least two elements. Therefore, the idea of sunspots is heresy and must be condemned. Somehow this issue was resolved fairly quickly, and today no Republican politician in the United States has to pander to an anti-sunspot constituency, even as some lawmakers continue to pretend, even perhaps to pretend to themselves, that the best evidence does not speak in favor of our descent from a common ancestor with the chimpanzees. Things could have been otherwise. Things will be otherwise, soon enough. Soon enough, public figures will be pretending to believe some completely implausible thing they could not, deep down, really believe, and that we cannot, now, anticipate.

According to the anarchist philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend (1975), the fluidity of the social role played by ideas extends to scientific rationality itself. Scientific rationality is an ideology, for him, and as such, it had been a particularly powerful and life-improving one in the 17th and 18th centuries. But its greatest breakthroughs were made, even then, by drawing on traditions that lay far beyond the field of scientific respectability, not only by our own standards today but by theirs. Thus, to cite Feyerabend's preferred example, in shifting to a heliocentric model Copernicus did indeed have some historical precedents to draw on, but these came from unhinged numerologists and astrologists such as the 4th-century BCE Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus, and not from defenders of views one would have seen as safe or respectable by the late 16th century (Feyerabend, 1975). Writing in the late 20th century, Feyerabend concludes that scientific rationality has largely outlived its purpose, and it does better when it exists alongside competing ideologies. He declares that he would like to see more Lysenkos—that is, more people like Trofim Lysenko, the Soviet geneticist whom Stalin favored, for a while, in view of his empirically ungrounded claim that a new "proletarian science" could transform grains to grow in cold environments in ways that a strict Darwinian account of adaptation would not allow (On Lysenko and Lysenkoism, see Lecourt, 1995 [1976]). Let Lysenkoism live, Feyerabend thought. And let astrology, holistic medicine, and creationism live too! As already mentioned, in more recent years holistic medicine has been defended, as an expedient alternative to a national healthcare system,

by American Republicans intent on repealing Obama's Affordable Care Act. In principle, there is no reason why these same people should not also take up the cause of Lysenkoism or astrology, and to do so, moreover, not as side interests, but as a central part of their political program. Stranger things have happened. One is in fact strongly tempted to conclude that there is never any way of deriving or predicting the political uses to which a given scientific doctrine will be put, or the political opposition it will face, by simply studying the content of the doctrine itself.

Consider specifically the Museum of Creation and Earth History, which opened in Petersburg, Kentucky, in 2007 (for a critical study of the museum, and its place in American society and history, see Trollinger & Trollinger, 2016). It features displays inspired by classical natural history museums, but with a twist: its mission is to bolster, or to bring to life, an alternative account of the origins of the diverse species of the world, including dinosaurs, in terms that are compatible with a more or less literal understanding of the book of Genesis. It is in effect a simulacrum of a museum, an institution that reproduces the look and feel of a museum, but that has no real authority to explain the objects it puts on display.

The museum's founder, Ken Ham, defends "young-earth creationism," a strict version of creationist doctrine on which the scriptural account of creation is literally, rather than allegorically, true, and everything that paleontology, cosmology, and related sciences would account for on a scale of millions or billions of years must somehow be accounted for as being not more than roughly 6,000 years old (for a summary statement of his views see Ham, 2013). For example, creation scientists have latched onto the phenomenon of rapid or "flash" fossilization, which does happen on occasion, leaving us the remains of prehistoric life forms that fossilized so quickly as to preserve skin and internal organs along with the bones or shells that are more commonly preserved.[1] This possibility, along with such facts as the occasional discovery of a fossil in a stratum claimed by evolutionists to date from long before that species' presumed existence, has enabled savvy creationists to develop an alternative account of the history of life on earth, according to which all events that mainstream science explains in terms of a geological timescale can in fact be explained on the much smaller scale of human history.

The key to note here is that this approach implicitly accepts that the sort of reasoning and provision of evidence that have come to reign in scientific inquiry over the past centuries should not be abandoned and that the scientific method is worthy of respect. It accepts, in effect, that if you want your claims to be taken as true, you must prove that they are true by a combination of empirical data and valid inferences. The creationists have accepted the rules of the game as defined by the evolutionists. They have agreed to play their game on the home turf of science, and it is not at all surprising to find them here at their weakest.

Creationism has been gaining ground not only in the United States but also in many other countries throughout the world with a similarly strong

streak of illiberalism and irrationalism in civic life. An interesting exception is East Asia, where the overall number of people who are uncomfortable with the idea of sharing a common ancestor with chimpanzees is lower than anywhere else in the world, quite apart from the nature of the political system or the freedom of the press that reigns in a given country. Turkey, by contrast, is one of the countries in which skepticism about evolution is even higher than in the United States. Some years ago, a charismatic cult leader, Adnan Oktar, also known as Harun Yahya (2006), decided to take up the battle against Darwin and found himself adapting many American Christian evangelical arguments and texts for a Muslim audience. This task was easier than one might expect, and one is struck by how closely his pamphlets—with their kitsch and childish illustrations of Noah's Ark and other signal elements—resemble what we might just as well expect to find in Petersburg, Kentucky. Harun Yahya's masterwork was his *Atlas of Creation*, the first volume of which was published in 2006 (that year I myself was mysteriously sent a complimentary copy, of the original Turkish edition, to my office in Montreal) (Yahya, 2006). In an amusing review of the work, Richard Dawkins noted that one of the supposed photographs of a caddis fly, meant to prove something about how currently existing species existed in what evolutionists wrongly take to be the distant past, was in fact an image of a fishing lure, copy-pasted from some online catalog for outdoor-sports equipment. One could distinctly see the metal hook coming out of it (Richard Dawkins Foundation, n.d.). This image may be thought of as the very emblem of the creationist movement: shabby, hasty, and reliant on the assumption that its followers have no real interest in looking too far into the matter.

And yet the question naturally arises as to why they should go to the trouble at all of producing their simulacra of scholarly texts and august institutions, their "atlases" and "museums." It is not as if no other model for religious faith has been defended since the beginning of the era of modern science. Already in the 17th century, Pascal articulated an account of religious faith on which it was its indefensibility in terms borrowed from reason that made it worth one's total commitment. Much earlier, in the 3rd century CE, the Christian apologist Tertullian had justified his commitment to the faith precisely in view of what he took to be its absurdity, leaving us with the stunning motto *Credo quia absurdum*: "I believe because it is absurd."[2] In the 19th century, again, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard articulated a vision of his own Christian faith on which this faith is strictly groundless, and on which its distinctive feature is that we come to our faith not through the persuasion of the intellect by reasons, but by an act of the will. For these thinkers, one does not defend religious faith against scientific reason by making the case that it is not absurd, or that its facts are better founded than the facts defended by science, but rather by embracing its absurdity as proof of its vastly greater importance than what may be comprehended by human reason. To make the case that faith is rational is for them self-defeating, quite apart from whether the case is convincing.

One might reasonably conclude that Tertullian and Kierkegaard have reflected somewhat more deeply on the nature of religious belief than Ken Ham has. The latter appears to take it for granted that assent to the truth of Christianity hangs on such matters as whether dinosaurs can be shown to have lived contemporaneously with human beings. This is somewhat as if one were to conceive of the problem of providing proof for the existence of God in the way that someone might set out to prove the existence of Bigfoot. God will not leave clumps of hair or footprints; it is simply an inadequate understanding of the issue at hand—as it has developed over the course of the history of theology and philosophy—to take God and Bigfoot as relevantly similar, so as to warrant the same sort of proofs and reasoning regarding their similarly disputed existences.

Now, assent to the truth of Christianity, in particular, involves more complications than does assent to the existence of God, as critics of Descartes's version of the ontological argument for the existence of God, for example, have noted: we might be able to prove the reality of some generic Supreme Being, but how this might compel us to accept, say, the Trinity or the truth of the Nicene Creed is not at all clear. Descartes pursued the matter through a priori reasoning, while Ken Ham wants to establish the truth of Christianity by empirical facts about fossils and so on, an approach that appears even more inadequate to the task at hand. Descartes can at least, perhaps, give us a generic Supreme Being by his a priori method. Ken Ham can only give us easily refutable empirical claims about the natural world, claims that cannot possibly be expected to ground transcendental commitments.

Skeptics and atheists, such as Richard Dawkins and other members of the "new atheist movement" (largely fractured and weakened in the era of Trump, when the great divide in our society no longer seems to be between the pious hypocrites and the up-front, morally balanced humanists) often suppose that the faithful are particularly credulous in their assent to belief systems that harbor blatant contradictions or absurdities: that God is both one person and three, for example. What they are missing is that it may well be not *in spite* of these absurdities, but rather *because* of them, that the doctrine is seen as warranting faithful assent. If there were no mystery at the heart of a religious doctrine, then the perfectly comprehensible facts that it lays out would likely grow less compelling over time. It is the mystery, the impossibility that is claimed as true, that keeps believers coming back, believing, not in the way that we believe that 2 + 2 = 4, or that humans and chimpanzees have a common ancestor, or that a clump of hair must have belonged to a Sasquatch, but in a way that is indifferent to the standards of assent involved in these latter sorts of a claim.

Alternative Facts, and Alternatives to Facts

The way in which mystery—or, to speak with Tertullian, absurdity—generates a hold on followers of a religion is of course explicable in strictly

sociological terms and does not occur exclusively in social movements that are religious in the narrow sense, that is, in movements that make claims as to the nature of the transcendental realm. I have identified the Museum of Creation as a simulacrum of a museum. Another way to put this might be to say that it is an "alternative museum," or, to deploy the most recent convention, an "alt-museum." To describe it in this way is of course to highlight its illegitimacy. After Kellyanne Conway, Donald Trump's then spokesperson, proposed in early 2017 that there may be "alternative facts," this phrase was widely repeated, but more or less only by people who wished to denounce and ridicule it.

To be fair to Conway, there *are* alternative facts, at least in one respect. As writers of history know, the past contains infinitely many events. Every slice of time in fact, in every sliver of the world, contains infinitely many. When we write our histories, then, when we periodize and narrate, we select some facts rather than others as being most pertinent to the account we wish to offer. The facts that we leave out—the infinitely many facts—are in some sense "alternatives": we could have included them if we had chosen to do so, and others might do so in their own history of the same topic. Perhaps one should say that these other facts are "facts in reserve." In any case, Conway was not wrong here, though it was easy to interpret her claim uncharitably, given that she was working for a regime that does habitually promote alternative facts in the stronger and more deplorable sense: facts that are not facts at all, but lies (to which we will turn in Chapter 8).[3]

Ken Ham's 5,000-year-old dinosaur fossils are not, more properly speaking, alternative facts, but rather alternatives *to* facts. What are people doing, exactly, when they offer up these alternatives? It is difficult to be satisfied here by Harry Frankfurt's (2005) famous analysis of "bullshit," in its technical philosophical sense, as being distinct from a lie, in that the liar is concerned about the truth and hides it, while the bullshitter has lost all concern about the truth as an anchor for his claims and wishes only to persuade (Frankfurt). Alternative scientific claims such as those of Ken Ham are indeed made out of concern for the truth, and they are made with implicit knowledge of the fact that establishment science really does have something close to a monopoly here, really is getting things right in a way that the alternative scenarios do not.

The message of the Museum of Creation, on this reading, is not, then, that dinosaurs and human beings really did roam the earth together, but simply that we, creationists, reject your scientific account of things regardless of whether it gets the facts right, and the reason is that it does not speak to us as a community united by shared values. And yet, unable to fully understand that this is a question of values and not facts—unaware of the legacy in the history of theology, from Tertullian to Kierkegaard, of authors who have dealt profoundly with this distinction and come up with accounts of faith that are boldly independent of any countervailing factual claims—characters such as Ham do their feeble best to operate at the level of facts

that they, likely, deep down, do not really believe. This is a species in the genus of irrationality, while bullshitting, however similar it may appear, is simply a moral transgression but not an intellectual failure. The successful bullshitter has not behaved irrationally; he has used what he knows to attain desired ends. The young-earth creationist is by contrast irrational to the extent that he does not fully understand what he is trying to do, what he is trying to defend, and he, therefore, sets himself up to lose in the long run. There is no plausible scenario in which he will be successful and will achieve his desired ends.

If the attribution of disingenuousness to defenders of creation science seems unwarranted, perhaps it will be helpful to go a bit further afield and to consider an even more extreme strain of rejection of the modern scientific consensus: flat-earth theory. It is likely significant that the social movement made up of adherents of this view, while it has been around for several decades (in a 1968 book, the classicist G.E.R. Lloyd had occasion to say of Aristotle that he "was no flat-earther"), has enjoyed a spike in recruitment since Trump's election (Lloyd, 1968). One suspects in fact that in multiple areas of social life, and not only in the political arena narrowly conceived, there has been an upping of the ante, or perhaps a widening of the so-called Overton window—a theory of how the range of acceptable ideas shifts in society over time, developed by the founder of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Joseph P. Overton, in the mid-1990s—with the result that the range of acceptable ideas within the public sphere has been significantly shifted (see Lehman, 2019).

Flat-earth theory is far more radical than even young-earth creationism (not to mention old-earth creationism or intelligent-design theory), in part because it makes claims about the present state of the world that one would think could be refuted by straightforward observation, while creationism simply offers an alternative account of how the present state of the world came about, and disputes the claims of evolutionists about past processes that none of us are able to observe directly. Standard flat-earth theory holds, for example, that the outer boundary of the disk of the earth is a great ice wall, and that nobody knows what lies beyond it. This claim alone is enough to signal that the theory is likely most attractive to people who, let us say, are not exactly in control of their own destinies, who might be called "low-will" in analogy to the description that political scientists have deployed of certain voters as "low-information." By contrast, a high-will individual who sincerely suspected that the disk of the earth is bounded by an ice wall would surely be able to pull together the resources to make an expedition and to observe the thing. Surely a conspiracy of this size, and a basic cosmological truth of this importance, would warrant staking it all, going into deep debt, mortgaging your home, in order to get to the bottom of things. Someone who could rest content with the ice wall theory is someone who does not ordinarily think of him- or herself as in a position to solve matters of great importance once and for all. Someone else, somewhere,

can do that, the flat-earther must think, just as forces somewhere else have passed off their sinister conspiracy on us.

The theory of the ice wall is one that makes a claim about how the world is at present, though of course flat-eartherism also reaches back, like creationism, into the past. It holds for one thing that NASA images of the earth from outer space are a hoax and that those who run NASA and similar agencies are part of a global conspiracy to keep the masses in perpetual ignorance. In order to make sense of NASA's dastardly scheme, whereby the commonsense obviousness of a flat earth is denied in favor of the counterintuitive theory of a round earth, one must also suppose that Kepler, Galileo, and even Aristotle were in on it too, since all of them claimed that the earth is round long before NASA came onto the scene. This must be an elaborate scheme indeed, to have been sustained for so long, in contrast with the scheme to convince us that human beings are descended from other animal species, which really came together only in the 19th century.

But the primary focus of the flat-earthers is an alternative interpretation of present sensory evidence. Unlike creationists, who tend to suppose that evolutionists are sincerely wrong, rather than being liars, flat-earthers take round-earth theory (as it were) to be a theory that is not really believed by its most active promoters, namely, the perpetrators of the NASA hoax. Moreover, to the extent that it is believed by the masses, this is only because of the manipulations of its elite promoters. Flat-earth theorists tend, in debate, to pass rather quickly from the details of the theory itself—the ice wall, for example, not to mention the epicycles in the orbits of the planets (for flat-earthers there are in fact round planets, but the earth is simply not one of them; it is not in fact a planet at all)—to a discussion of the social and political dimensions of the conspiracy. One senses, in fact, that the commitment to the actual content of the theory—that the world is flat—is rather minimal, and that the true nature of the movement is that it is a protest, against elite authorities telling us what we must believe.

Feyerabend's point about Copernicus drawing inspiration from the unscientific Philolaus might also be extended to Newton, whose intellectual character drew him to biblical numerology, among other fields. It may well be that if Newton had not been able to satisfy his curiosity in biblical numerology he would also never have succeeded in making the discoveries that the world would come to value. And likewise, it is at least possible that today a young scientist on the cusp of some great breakthrough will be triggered into making it while watching a flat-earther's video on YouTube, infuriated, perhaps, at how deeply wrong it is, and driven to an epiphany as a result of this anger. But it also does not seem reasonable to place much hope in such an eventuality; on the contrary, it seems very reasonable to seek to limit the proliferation of such videos, not by prohibition, of course, but by education, the cultivation of a level of scientific literacy in schoolchildren that would leave such videos without an audience.

One might reasonably expect that the popularity of flat-earth theory would sooner prevent breakthroughs than inspire them. These could well be breakthroughs that are still far from the cusp of being made, breakthroughs that *would have* been made, somewhat further off in the future, had some potential young scientist not been dissuaded from beginning to pursue a career in science after watching a video that convinced her that establishment science is an elite and sinister conspiracy. The greatest danger of flat-earth theory is not that it will convince a young and easily influenced mind that the earth is flat, but rather that it will initiate the young mind into a picture of the world as one that is controlled by dark forces, by powerful actors behind the scenes, rather than by political factions that we as citizens are in a position to understand and, one hopes, to influence. Flat-earth theory is a threat not primarily because it gets the physical world wrong, but rather because it misrepresents the human, social world.

To be indoctrinated into such a theory is to be cut off from an understanding of politics as the working out of differences, through agreed-upon procedures, in a neutral public space, and to accept instead a vision of politics that is modeled on guerrilla warfare, on asymmetrical combat between total enemies. This sort of indoctrination, which characterizes flat-earth theory, does not appear to be nearly as present a risk in other, comparable alternative or antiestablishment domains, such as traditional holistic therapies, or indeed creationism. One might well be initiated into an interest in botany from an initial interest in indigenous herbal medicines, for example. Or one might be initiated into learning about other cultures and their knowledge of the living world, and from there begin to read about anthropology and history. No harm here, certainly, even if one risks being cut off from the prideful confidence in the superiority of one's own culture's attainments that today infects so many aspects of science education.

It is less plausible, but not out of the question, that one might discover an innate interest in the life sciences during a visit to the Museum of Creation. Many naturalist thinkers have resisted what they see as Darwinian "orthodoxy." Their results may appear stubborn and wrongheaded, but not necessarily as spurious or completely without value. Interestingly Vladimir Nabokov, who was on the staff at the Harvard Museum of Zoology for a time, and who discovered and gave his name to a species of butterfly, was as vehemently contemptuous of Darwinism as he was of psychoanalysis. Thus he writes in his memoir, *Speak, Memory*, that natural selection

> could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of 'the struggle for life' when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation.
>
> (Nabokov, 1989 [1951], p. 125)

It is safe to say that Nabokov's concerns here are not the same as Ken Ham's, and, in turn, to assume that there is not, and never will be, a Nabokov of flat-eartherism: someone who plays a comparable role for that extreme pseudoscience to the one the Russian émigré author played for anti-Darwinism. A typical creationist, such as Ham, wants to say that nothing is nature, but all is art, or, more precisely, that nature is the artifice of a certain highly esteemed Artificer. Nabokov by contrast wants to say that art is natural, that our own mimetic activity is not an exception to what nature is doing all the time, but an instance of it. I will not help to lend legitimacy to creationism by agreeing with Nabokov here. Or, at least, I will not affirm his claim as a scientific claim. But if we view it as an opening to a general theory of art, he is perhaps onto something. Romanticism left us with the dead-end idea that art is the product of an artist's struggle, to get something out, something unique—something that belongs to him, uniquely, as a member of that rare class of creatures, the artists. What comes out, it has been thought, is something unlike anything else in the known universe: an artwork! There is no thought here that the work might be a species of secretion whose genus is not exclusive to a small group of human beings, or even to humanity as a whole. A work of art might be the exuberance of nature, channeled through a human being. The natural mimetics Nabokov observes in coleoptera is not the production of paintings and sculptures, but the very making of the beetle body. Of course, we know that insects do not literally make their own bodies, but even the most rigid Darwinists will speak as if the butterfly has taken to donning that pseudo-eye on its wing in order to scare off predators. What a fine job it has done! we think, congratulating the insect as if it were showing not itself, but its work (for further development of these reflections, see Smith, 2016/2017).

This discussion of Nabokov may seem like a digression, yet it is important in that it helps us to gain a view of the variety of motivations and philosophical commitments that might lie behind rejection of the consensus scientific account of the origins of species and the nature of their diversity. By contrast, again, it seems almost out of the question that flat-earth theory might ever serve as a gateway to serious cosmological reflection, or that it might be underlain by any philosophical commitments worth hearing about.

We are in the course here of developing a sort of provisional classification of different varieties of pseudoscience, with the aim of understanding their political uses and the context of their adoption. This classificatory scheme may be further fleshed out by a consideration of the anti-vaccination movement, which for its part seems to occupy a social niche somewhat closer to flat-earth theory than to interest in holistic medicine or in questioning the Darwinian orthodoxy. It is considerably more plausible to claim that vaccines cause autism than to claim that the earth is flat, but both positions appear to be motivated not so much by the content of the relevant claims, and the evidence on which these theories are based, as they are by wariness

of elite authority. Opposition to vaccination might emerge out of an interest in alternative medicines in general, and traditional or indigenous medicines, for complicated and problematic reasons are in our culture conceived as "alternative." But this opposition has a different political significance, and it is important to pay attention to this significance in assessing the theory itself, rather than simply contrasting establishment science with every species of fringe or antiestablishment science that crops up to challenge it, as Feyerabend sometimes seems to wish to do. Is there anything that may be said in defense of the anti-vaccination movement? Is there any approach by which we may gain a sensitive anthropological appreciation of what is at stake for its adherents? We may begin, certainly, by noting that people, in general, do not appreciate having foreign biological fluids injected into their bloodstreams, and this with good reason: ordinarily, to invite such admixture is to risk disease and death, and our revulsion and avoidance are no doubt evolved survival mechanisms, rational in their own way, as all such adaptations are. Fear of vaccines is in this respect comparable to fear of insectivorous bats or of strangers walking toward us at night.

Many members of the English working class reacted fiercely to the Compulsory Vaccination Act of 1853, resisting it, according to Nadja Durbach, as a form of political opposition to state control of individual bodies (Durbach, 2005). At the same time, we know that long before the significant innovations of Edward Jenner at the end of the 18th century, the Chinese have been practicing smallpox inoculation (intentional low-level infection) at least 8 centuries earlier, and there is some significant evidence from medical anthropology that similar practices have existed in folk-medical traditions around the world since antiquity. In the modern period, then, going back at least to Victorian England, resistance to the injection of disease agents has not been, or not only been, resistance to something new and unknown and apparently "unnatural," but rather, also, to the top-down imposition of state power. It is, at the bottom, the expression of distrust of authority, which is accentuated in periods in which the government has failed to convince the masses that the ends it pursues are, as is said, "for their own good." If government agents are in general perceived as crooks, it is not surprising that physicians working on behalf of the government are perceived as quacks.

These considerations are as relevant to the present moment in the United States as they were to 19th-century London. In March 2014, when Donald Trump was busy building up his profile as a political troll (having launched this phase of his career in 2011 with his contributions to the "birther" conspiracy theory, denying Barack Obama's birth on US soil), the soon-to-be president of the United States launched the following volley on Twitter: "Healthy young child goes to a doctor, gets pumped with massive shot of many vaccines, doesn't feel good and changes—AUTISM. Many such cases!" (Trump, 2014). The tweet is in the style of a folktale, and that is how Trump's audience best absorbs its messages from him. We do not know

who this child was; it is a generic child, a moral exemplum who need not have existed in fact in order to serve as a vehicle of some alternative truth.

But why did Trump choose at this point, even as his star was rising with birtherism and other more straightforwardly political conspiracy claims, to reach out to the anti-vax constituency and to express common cause with frustrated parents of toddlers showing autism symptoms—with Jenny McCarthy and other spokespeople from a trash-celebrity culture who, beyond this rather narrow issue, do not seem to be particularly interested in politics? Part of the answer to this complex question is that vaccination, along with opposition to it, is far more political than it may appear on the surface. It is, to speak with Michel Foucault, a paradigm instance of biopolitics, where policy and power collide with the real, living bodies of political subjects.

According to Alain Fischer, focusing on the anti-vaccination movement in France over the past 30 years, there are both proximate and distal causes for the rapid decline of faith in medical authority over this period (Fischer, 2017). There have been too many failures of the medical system to prevent sanitation crises, including, in 1991, the bombshell discovery that the Centre National de Transfusion Sanguine (Natural Center for Blood Transfusion) knowingly allowed HIV-infected blood into its supply. The same year a child fell ill with Creutzfeldt-Jakob syndrome after following a course of growth-hormone treatment. The medical system fails sometimes, and if it fails too much, it loses public confidence. But what counts as "too much" is significantly determined by the way the mass media depict risk, and here, according to Fischer, even establishment French media, such as *Le Monde*, have failed miserably. Over the past decade, moreover, the new social media have helped to significantly weaken trust in the medical system by inviting everyone with an internet connection to fuel whatever doubts might already exist with reckless speculation.

Some features of the modern anti-vaccination movement are common across borders and languages; others are more culturally specific. As Fischer notes, there has long been fear in France that it is the aluminum used in some vaccination procedures, which has been most harmful. The same element has been used in many countries, but mistrust of it, and claims as to its deleterious effects, have been limited almost entirely to France. Unlike the United States, France, notwithstanding occasional crises of contaminated blood, has a dependable national healthcare system, and there is virtually no danger for a French citizen or resident of being shut out of that system because of lack of money. By contrast, in the context in which Trump was tweeting in 2014, popular confidence in the healthcare system could not but be impacted, in part, by the perception and the reality of its inaccessibility. It is difficult to have confidence in a system that erects barriers to accessing it, and it is unreasonable to expect that citizens who are largely shut out from the healthcare system, who have no choice but to not be in it, should then be expected to docilely submit when they are informed

that there is one single branch of this system, the one that sees to vaccinations, that by marked contrast they have no choice but to accept. The bond of trust is so eroded by the general rule of exclusion that there is little hope of finding any trust for this single exception to the rule, where the expectation is mandatory inclusion.

The epidemiological rationale of vaccination is crowd immunity. Individuals are protected from infectious diseases not because they themselves are vaccinated, but because the majority of people around them are vaccinated. As long as the majority of the population is vaccinated, contagious diseases will be contained and will be less likely to strike even those few individuals who are not vaccinated. Thus one's own vaccination status is not the key element in determining whether one falls ill. One's own health is not up to one's own free choices but rather depends upon the general pattern of choices, or of coercions, within the population. Such a predicament is hard to accept if the reigning political ideology is one of individualism, or at least of a sort of microcommunitarianism that refuses to recognize any common cause with neighbors within the same geographical region who look different, speak a different language, or have different values. But diseases cut across community boundaries, whether we like it or not, and in this way, epidemiology reveals the limits of a political arrangement based on every individual, or family, or ethnic group, looking out only for itself. But it is precisely this sort of arrangement that was required in order for the Trump campaign to convince enough voters that he would look out for their interests as against the interests of other kinds of people. Even if Trump had not briefly wandered into anti-vax conspiracy mongering in 2014, his political vision would have continued to follow the same logic as this conspiracy theory, the logic that refuses to acknowledge crowd immunity, or its political equivalent: shared responsibility among all citizens for the well-being of the polis.

Fischer identifies a rapid decline of public trust in expert authority as one of the key causes of the rise of the anti-vaccination movement over the past few decades. He argues that sectors of the public have retreated into "magical thinking," as against the rational thinking of the scientific establishment. As Tom Nichols similarly observes, the most recent era seems to be characterized by "the death of the ideal of expertise," and accordingly the rise of opinions on all manner of subjects, forged and valued not in spite of but *because of* their ignorance of and contempt for well-informed analyses of these subjects (Nichols, 2017). It is, Nichols writes, "a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laypeople, students and teachers, knowers and wonderers—in other words, between those of any achievement in an area and those with none at all." (Ibid). But even this does not sound the full depth of the problem. For one thing, it is certain that Leibniz, Voltaire, and other paragons of rationalism and Enlightenment would have been delighted by Google and Wikipedia.

While the concern about the decline of expertise is in part warranted, it is complicated by certain important lessons of history. Sometimes decline in public trust in expert authority can be salutary; moreover, it can be helpful in replacing magic with rational thinking. This, in particular, is the shortest version of what we call, in shorthand, the "scientific revolution." The expert authorities who occupied positions of power in institutions, and who defended the official view that, say, action at a distance may occur as a result of "sympathies" between bodies, were opposed by those who wanted to explain these actions as only apparently taking place at a distance, but in fact as being mediated by subvisible particles. There were many more details to fill out, of course, and within a few decades, the theory of gravity would return, in Newton's 1686 *Principia mathematica*, to restore a sort of action at a distance (it is on these grounds that even by the time of his death in 1716 Leibniz still refused to accept gravitation, considering it a mysterious and occult power). But still, those who, around 1640, were rejecting the expert authority of the Aristotelians still clinging to power in universities—and who were conspiring to go and establish their own new institutions, which would become the great scientific societies and academies of the era—are considered from most historiographical frameworks to have been history's heroes.

So clearly it is not the rejection of authority that is the problem, but only the rejection of authority at the wrong times and for the wrong reasons. But how can we be sure of our ability to make such distinctions? It is not enough to say that the science itself is clear and dictates to us in its own clear voice, rather than in the voice of its human representatives, what is true and what is false. For most of us do not have a handle on science at all. We have not read even a fraction of the relevant scientific literature, nor could we read it if we tried; far less have we carried out the relevant experiments ourselves.

Like it or not, our acceptance of the official account of how infection works, and of how vaccination helps to prevent it while also not causing other problems such as autism or aluminum poisoning, is in the end a matter of trust, in people who appear to us trustworthy because we accept their claim that they have themselves performed the relevant experiments and understood the relevant literature. And this trust in turn is a commitment that is more likely to be threatened or rendered fragile by changes in the social fabric than by new empirical evidence about the scientific truth of the matter. In this respect, the emerging scientific societies of the 17th century might in fact reveal to us significant parallels to the websites of today that promote alternative theories of the causes of autism, or that link certain forms of cancer to the "chemtrails" (i.e., vapor trails) left behind by passing airplanes. Whether or not there are parallels—a question that might be of interest to historians and sociologists of science, and also, one hopes, to the public in general—is something that might be determined quite independently of the content of the respective theories, or of whether in the end, they turned out to be true.

It is hardly a promising sign, for contemporary alternative-science movements such as the anti-vax constituency, that in spite of their alternative stance they consistently play up whatever modest academic credentials their proponents may have. They exaggerate their institutional clout, and they generally include "PhD" after the names of their authorities (and even the occasional "MD"), in contexts in which those working solidly within the establishment would find it undignified or unnecessary to do so. So the establishment continues to have some considerable attraction after all, and one detects already from this that the antiestablishment stance is underlain more by ressentiment than by any real expectation that the alternative movement might, by force of the truths it possesses, hope someday soon to replace the establishment. Whatever else we might say of Francis Bacon or of Descartes, in their desire to raze the old and to build up new systems of inquiry in new institutions, there is no trace of ressentiment in their work. They believed that they were going to take over the establishment, and they were right. Their difference, then, from the confused and alienated citizens who start up websites linking vaccination to autism, or hypothesizing an ice wall that holds our oceans in, may be established without any need for nonscientist opponents of pseudoscience to carry out, or even to fully understand, the science.

The Paranoid Style in the 21st Century

If we think of flat-earth theory's ascendance in the Trump era as more than a coincidence, as having blown in like an icy gust thanks to the widening of the Overton window, we will notice the way in which it echoes a broad turn to the conspiratorial in public life in America. During the administration of Bush and Obama, Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck were the media personalities suited to provide the account of political reality that was appreciated as an alternative to the one given in the establishment liberal media preferred by coastal elites. It is the internet radio host Alex Jones (locked out of his media platforms on Facebook, Apple, and YouTube as of August 2018, in response to what the corporate governors of these services deemed to be hate speech in violation of their terms of service) who seems their most obvious descendant in the Trump era.

Unlike Limbaugh and Beck, Jones does not aim to give a coherent alternative account of reality, based on a set of presuppositions about how the world works that he and his followers may be presumed to share with followers of the mainstream media. Jones, rather, wishes to call into question many of our most basic presumptions about how social reality works, much as a flat-earther seeks to do for physical reality. Thus, for example, he has promoted an elaborate alternative account of the 2012 shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, according to which it was a "false-flag operation," and the members of the victims' families who make appearances in the media are in fact only paid "crisis

actors." This elaborate plot is interpreted as a pretext for coming to take away Americans' guns. Jones pretends, like the flat-earthers in their view of NASA, that there are forces in the world that are not only diabolical enough but also powerful and clever enough, to make ordinary people believe more or less anything. It is only by crossing over to the alternative, socially stigmatized, low-status but nonetheless titillatingly "alternative" accounts being offered by the self-styled outsiders, Jones or the representatives of the flat-earth movement, that one can see things as they are.

We are caught, in trying to make sense of what has been generically called online "trutherism"—which can include everything from September 11 conspiracy theories to accounts of Sandy Hook such as that described above, to flat-earth theory—between a cautious historian's concern to not overlook continuities with long-standing historical legacies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to face up honestly to the radical transformations that the internet has brought on. The Republican candidate in the 1964 presidential elections, Barry Goldwater, had an enduring interest in UFOs, and in the 1970s began pushing for the US government to release its purported secret files concerning them. It was in reference to Goldwater and his followers that the historian Richard Hofstadter wrote his groundbreaking 1964 essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." (Hofstadter, 1964). Americans did not need the internet in order for conspiracy theories to become a central element of national political debate. Hofstadter himself traces the genealogy of this "style" back to at least the early 19th century. The ground that Goldwater and others prepared was already particularly fertile for the thriving of personalities like Alex Jones, now enhanced by the communicative superpower of the unrestricted internet.

For the creationists, the elite authorities are simply the members of the scientific establishment, promoting their own hegemonic vision of the world. For the flat-earthers, the elite authorities are a secret cabal, perhaps wealthy bankers, perhaps the same as are held to be spreading chemtrails with the aim of total global mind control. Though not in itself xenophobic or anti-Semitic, flat-earth theory does deploy tropes familiar from the conspiracy theories associated with these ideologies, and it is not at all surprising when on occasion we find them overlapping with flat-earth theory in the worldview of a single individual. In traditional creationism, there was the wariness of established institutions and their claims to know the truth, but there was no presumption of the power of these institutions to be able to *hide* the truth. The difference between these two species of alternative social movement may in the end be one of degree, but it plainly tracks the transformations that have taken place elsewhere in political life with the rise of Trump: the near-total disappearance of a shared space of common presuppositions from which we might argue through our differences, and the presumption that one's opponents' views are not so much wrong as diabolical.

If we were to agree with Feyerabend, then the proliferation of theories positioned as alternatives to science must count as an unqualified good,

regardless of the content of these theories. Holistic medicine, numerology, proletarian genetics, flat-earth theory, creation science: all of these are more or less on a par with one another as alternatives to the hegemonic version of scientific rationality. Yet, in spite of the fact that Feyerabend himself wishes to abolish the myth of apolitical or nonideological science, he does not fully recognize that these various alternative theories may appear variously more or less propitious in different political contexts. It is not just a matter of letting 100 flowers bloom; one must also pay attention to which sorts of flowers bloom in which soils. I have already suggested that flat-earth theory has surged in the most recent period as a sort of scientific correlate of a much broader global trend of political illiberalism, and of growing suspicion of traditional authority that now regularly crosses over into conspiracy theory. It would be hard to imagine a healthy liberal democracy in which flat-earth theory is a viable contender, among others, against the hegemony of scientific reason. We do not need to fall back on any simplistic conception, of the sort that Feyerabend abhors, of the superiority of one scientific theory over another as consisting in its superior correspondence to the way the world in fact is, in order to be confident not only that round-earth theory is better than flat-earth theory, but also that it would be better off without flat-earth theory as its competitor. Flat-earth theory is unworthy to join this contest, even as an underdog.

Is there anything at all that can be said in its favor? It is, certainly, a significant fact about the phenomenology of human life on earth that we experience it as if it were taking place on a flat surface under a dome-shaped sky. For the great majority of human history, this was not only the phenomenology of human experience but also the standard folk-cosmological account of our place in the world. Martin Heidegger captured this primordial character of our orientation in the world in his critique of the Cartesian view of the spatiality of the world as something pregiven and obvious, and of objects and indeed our own bodies as simply placed or inserted in this pregiven spatial world. In his 1927 *Being and Time*, the philosopher observes that "there is never a three-dimensional multiplicity of possible positions initially given which is then filled out with objectively present things. This dimensionality of space is still veiled in the spatiality of what is at hand." (Heidegger, 1996 [1953]). Thus, he explains by way of illustration,

> the 'above' is what is 'on the ceiling', the 'below' is what is 'on the floor', the 'behind' is what is 'at the door'. All these wheres are discovered and circumspectly interpreted on the paths and ways of everyday associations, they are not ascertained and catalogued by the observational measurement of space.
>
> (ibid.)

Heidegger's language is obscure, but his point is profound: we do not start out with a conception of ourselves, and of our surroundings, and ultimately

of our planet, as inserted into some pregiven spatial expanse. Rather, we get our very concepts of spatial notions such as "above" and "below" from our deep preconceptual experiences. Above is the sky. Below is the earth. No wonder, then, that flat-earth theory is the default model of the cosmos in human history. It sufficed for the purposes of highly developed civilizations such as ancient China, which included an advanced practice of maritime navigation. Even without any knowledge of the long and distinguished past of this cosmological model, we have our immediate experience, and it is humanly difficult to be told by experts that our immediate experience is not what we think it is.

We witness this difficulty again and again, across numerous examples of what Margaret Wertheim has called, in the course of her revelatory research on the subject, "outsider physics." (Wertheim, 2011). Outsider physicists do not want to be told that the basic constituents of reality are some new sort of entity that is not encountered by direct experience and can be detected only through the work of experts with their complicated, and expensive, equipment. And so they reject quarks and bosons in favor of something much more familiar, such as smoke rings. In the case of flat-earth theory, there are no alternative entities to ground the account, but only an insistence on phenomenology rather than empiricism, even if some semblance of empirical evidence in favor of the theory is scraped together ad hoc. In this, flat-earth theory ends up bearing a curious similarity to young-earth creationism, to the extent that it wishes to preserve something that is existentially dear—faith in the case of creationism, phenomenology in the case of flat-earth theory—but is not quite self-aware enough to grasp that it is this existential matter that is at issue, and not some mundane matter of fact. And so, again, it agrees to compete on the home field of science, where the rules are empiricism and valid inference, and therefore where it is fated at the outset to lose at a game for which it has signed up without having learned the rules.

Why would any outsider accept such a contest? To do so is irrational, in a much more profound sense than simply holding the wrong theory to be true. To do so is to not fully understand the nature of the thing to which one is committing oneself, mistaking a question of existential devotion for a question of fact. Here, the judgment of irrationality comes not from a disagreement over facts, but rather from a *turning away* from facts that are already known, or, to anticipate a notion that will be of central importance in Chapter 9, facts that are known without being known.

There is, as we have been seeing in this chapter, a historically well-established tendency to reject the conception of truth as fact, in favor of a conception of truth as something internal, something felt, when it is clear that the facts are not in one's favor. This move can have significant political implications. The George W. Bush administration's manipulations are often said to have inaugurated a "post-truth" era. That certain claims may be morally true while empirically false is, however, an idea far older than

Bush. It is in play in the lexical distinction in Russian between two different sorts of truth—*pravda*, which in principle must be grounded in fact, and *istina*, which is somehow higher than fact. This distinction was inverted by the Bolsheviks, who with no apparent irony gave the name of *Pravda* to the newspaper that didn't so much report on what was the case as describe what they would have liked to be the case. A similar transcendence of the merely empirical helps to explain the reaction, in 16th-century Spain, to the fabrications of the Jesuit historian Jerónimo Román de la Higuera, author of the so-called *Falsos cronicones*, which purported to document the antiquity of the Christian faith in the Iberian Peninsula. When it was discovered that he had made it all up, that there had been no martyrs or miracles in Spain in the first few centuries after Christ, Higuera was not denounced as a fraud; instead, the empirical falsity of his chronicles was taken as a sign of their power to convey a deeper truth. He had succeeded—by invention, by writing, and by telling a story—in retrojecting Christianity into Spain's distant past, which is surely a far greater accomplishment than simply relating facts.

Famously, Nietzsche called for a "transvaluation of all values." What he had in mind was a coming era in which human beings would stop lying to themselves and one another, would be brave in the face of the truth. What less visionary and less brave followers, indeed myopic and craven followers, have preferred to do with Nietzsche's call is instead to transform him into the prophet of a coming era of inegalitarianism, in which only the strongest survive or thrive, based explicitly on a rejection of liberty and equality, the core rational principles of Enlightenment philosophy. Much of the current disagreement about Trump among American voters has to do with which sort of character the president is: a lowly fraudster or a larger-than-life transvaluer of values. It does not have to do with whether or not he is telling the truth in a narrow empirical or factual sense. And so, frustratingly to many opponents, simply pointing out that he is speaking falsehoods can do nothing to set him back. The only principle he consistently follows is something like what the logicians call the "Principle of Explosion": once you have allowed falsehood into your argument, you can say whatever you want.

One thing that historical perspective shows is that earlier eras have been much more subtle and profound than our own in articulating post-fact views, in particular, post-fact views that are at the same time very much committed to truth, even if it is the truth grounded in unreason, such as that of Kierkegaardian faith. Instead, today post-fact irrationalists just make up the flimsiest lies, such as that dinosaurs and Jesus Christ walked the earth together, and pretend that they believe this, when we know they do not, and they know we know they do not. Trump says one thing, and then its opposite a few hours later, but otherwise acts as if he has the same theory of truth as everyone else. This is a ratcheting up of irrationalism to levels unprecedented in recent history.

When in 2004 a member of the Bush administration reportedly scoffed at those who continue to live in the "reality-based community," many were

alarmed (Suskind, 2004). But this stance did have the virtue of grasping and playing on the real difference between deep commitment to bringing about a world that matches what one most values, and submitting to the world as it is because the facts require us to do so. The administration official who coined this phrase lined up with those many thinkers throughout history who have conceived truth as something that can be willed. This is debatable, of course, and we have been debating it for thousands of years. But it is a world away from the dirty conspiracy mongering of the flat-earthers, of Alex Jones, and of those they have helped to propel into political power.

Notes

1 For an example of a scientific, evolutionist account of such a process, see D. C. Garcia- Bellido and D. H. Collins "Moulting Arthropod Caught in the Act," *Nature* 429, no. 40 (May 6, 2004): 6987. For a pseudoscientific, creationist account of the very same process, see David Catchpoole, "Moulting Arthropod Fossilized in a Flash!" *Creation* 27, no. 2 (March 2005): 45. Exclamation points are generally not typical punctuation in scientific publications, and may serve as a rough shibboleth for distinguishing them from their pseudoscientific imitations.

2 In fact Tertullian's version was rather different, namely: "Prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est," that is, "It is altogether credible, because it is absurd." See *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1956), 18.

3 For a particularly compelling recent account of the mendacity of the Trump regime, and of the cultural and political developments that fostered it, see Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

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6 Conviction, Contemplation, and "Making a Difference"

Matthew Pianalto

> It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous, wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations, too.
>
> – Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1993 [1849], p. 6)

Every time I read the above lines from Thoreau's essay, I experience a moment of relief—a comforting sense of permission from moral authority to engage without guilt in my "other concerns"—followed by a great deal of distress and frustration as I wonder whether the rest of what he says lets any of us too easily off the hook. How is it possible today for those of us living in an imperfect yet powerful society to wash our hands of the many wrongs in which we are, as citizens and consumers, in some way complicit? If it turns out that we cannot (realistically) wash our hands of those wrongs, does this mean we are duty-bound to devote our lives to the eradication of them? What form would such devotion have to take? And what room would such a duty and such devotion leave, if any, for those "other concerns"?

In the abstract, these might be regarded as questions about the stringency or "demandingness" of moral duty. But when we start filling in details—on the one hand, about war, poverty, drug epidemics, refugees, political turmoil, factory farming and climate change, and on the other hand about family, work, personal projects, and goals—the questions start to take a more pressing and personal form: how do we fulfill our moral responsibilities, perhaps especially those that are somewhat vague, that concern problems somewhat remote from our everyday lives, or that are institutional or collective in nature? And how do we balance our moral responsibilities with our other practical responsibilities and projects, which may include matters of personal conviction?

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By a "personal conviction," I do not mean simply a belief that is strongly held, settled, or firm. Many relatively trivial beliefs might have those features insofar as they involve matters of settled fact or general principle that we are unlikely to revise or abandon. In a previous essay, I characterized *moral* convictions as "those moral beliefs that flow from, or reflect, a person's central commitments and ideals—those which play a central role in a person's reflection, decision-making, and activity" (Pianalto, 2011, p. 382). However, it would seem—at least in some ways of construing the domain of morality—that one can have convictions other than moral convictions: one might have political convictions, religious convictions, professional convictions, aesthetic convictions, and so forth. Given a narrow view of morality, some of these other convictions might conflict with moral norms, and there are questions about the relationship between moral values and non-moral values and whether or to what extent the latter can ever take priority over the former. On a broader construal of "the moral"—which some will prefer to call "the ethical"—there is a sense in which all of these sorts of convictions are "moral" (or ethical) in that one's central commitments and ideals about political, religious, professional, and other matters shape and reflect how one lives and treats others.

In a sense, all such convictions are "personal" in being those of a particular person (rather than of an institution or organization, which may also be shaped by deeply entrenched commitments or ideals). However, convictions may also be personal in the sense that they differentiate us from others, often along lines that are ethically significant but controversial and difficult to settle—whether we construe "the moral" narrowly or broadly. (In this regard, the boundaries of the moral are yet another controversial issue, at least for moral philosophers.) Convictions will often reflect where one stands on contested issues that cannot be settled by the available evidence or arguments, but to which one has a devoted position. Again, this suggests a distinction (at least of degree) between strongly held beliefs about practical issues—say, strong opinions about issues that are distant from one's own life and sphere of influence—and convictions that regularly guide one's substantive decisions about how to navigate the world and its myriad problems and values. I may believe quite firmly that Neil Armstrong did indeed land on the moon, but I don't waste my time arguing with the gentleman who shows up on my university campus every spring with a poster detailing why in fact the moon landing was a hoax. My conviction with respect to such events is that not every argument is worth pursuing, not every issue is worth debating, and with Nietzsche (1974 [1887]) that "I do not want to wage war against what is ugly.... *Looking away* shall be my only negation" (p. 223). I have better things to do than argue with the moon-landing-hoax man. But on other campuses with other controversial "free speech" figures raising hell, were I to invoke this conviction as a reason simply to look away from the spectacle, I might be accused by others of irresponsible moral indifference to the harm that

the speaker's message poses. Such a case then raises the questions I posed at the outset: how are we to balance personal convictions—such as either my Nietzschean conviction or the contrary convictions that have something to do with preventing harm and ensuring that universities are safe places for serious intellectual inquiry—with other moral (ethical) demands and responsibilities?

If Thoreau is to be taken as a guide here, there must be a way to answer the questions with which I began that also allows us to pursue our own versions of the Walden experiment. Otherwise, as Thomas Merton (1966) quipped, we become "prisoners of every urgency" (p. 102). But when pitted against matters of justice, devotion to our own idiosyncratic projects may seem self-indulgent.[1]

Merton was born in France, educated at Columbia, and became a Trappist monk in 1941 when he was 26, moving from New York to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. He wrestled mightily with questions about moral and social responsibility, especially as they related to his own apparent withdrawal from the world. However, he rejected the medieval view of monastic life as a withdrawal from (or contempt of) the world, especially in the last decade of his life in the 1960s.[2] There was no honest sense, he claimed, in which one could "turn his back on Auschwitz or Viet Nam [sic] and act as if they were not there," not even in a monastery. He offers a rather shocking assessment of our predicament in the United States, as it stood some 60 years ago:

> We are living through the greatest crisis in the history of man; and this crisis is centered precisely in the country that has a made a fetish out of action and has lost (or perhaps never had) the sense of contemplation.
>
> (1998, p. 161)

This is shocking because we have been conditioned to think that honoring our convictions *necessarily* means "doing something," and that "doing something" means taking action that has measurable results. This leads sometimes to outright contempt for all that appears to be inaction. For example, consider on the one hand the ways in which some right-wing critics of "liberal" universities mock professors for sitting in their ivory towers engaged in abstruse and useless studies (when they aren't actively corrupting the youth), and, on the other hand, the way in which some liberals mock evangelicals who sincerely extend their "thoughts and prayers" to the survivors of mass gun violence rather than supporting stricter gun regulations.

This concern to take action might also explain some of the behaviors we bemoan and yet also engage in on social media, which offers us quick and easy ways to sign a petition, join a cause, and take a stand. These may be small acts, but they are something, and they are public. Unfortunately, social media can also exacerbate the problem we like to think our use of it is solving, making us ever more "prisoners of every urgency," while also

perpetuating and reinforcing dogmatic (hence anti-contemplative) thinking. Michael Lynch (2019) writes:

> …we are often ignorant about what we are doing on social media. We think we are exchanging information or knowledge—we are testifying to the credibility of something. But often we are not doing that at all. We are, without knowing it, expressing our emotional states and our attitudes. And that also makes it easy for social media to spur blind conviction. By sharing our outrage or our emotional attachment to some claim of fact, we signal to each other that the tribe must commit to it. We signal to each other that it should be a matter of conviction, that it should be part of our story. And we signal that it would be dangerous to change our minds.
>
> (Chapter 3)

Of course, social media can provide positive opportunities for connection, discussion, organization, and dissemination of ideas. But as Lynch makes clear, if we are not mindful of how we use social media—and of how it uses us—we are at risk of falling prey to an illusion, one in which everyone is sharing, and thus doing their sacred duty, but no one is really listening. At the extreme limit, we have all been "snoozed" or "unfollowed" by all of our "friends" who don't already think just like us and are each simply shouting into the virtual void or are simply preaching to the choir. In either case, our attempts to take action are at risk of collapsing into absurdity.

* * *

How else can we stand by our convictions except through effective action? I want to work toward a way of thinking about Thoreau's remarks that avoid getting us ensnared in an endless chain of infinitely demanding moral obligations that leave no room for considering each person's distinctive character and circumstances.

One way to do this is to expand, or perhaps explode, the idea of action that crowds out contemplation—or simply thought—from our range of responsible options. Iris Murdoch argues forcefully for the ethical significance and reality of the "inner life" in *The Sovereignty of Good*. She shows that profound changes in perspective can occur in the inner life that may be largely indiscernible in the arena of action in the ordinary, external sense. These changes can be the result of an inward effort to see another person or situation in a different, perhaps more charitable way.[3] Of course, these inner actions may lead to "real" external results further down the road. But the important point for Murdoch, and for us, is that thought *is* action, and externally-imposed or self-imposed pressure to achieve "real world" results has a tendency to allow no room and allot no value to such inner work.

However, in order to appreciate the full thrust of Murdoch's point about inner life, we have to be careful not to fall into the old habit of saying that its significance is ultimately revealed by an external payoff. In her example of M, who initially thinks poorly of her daughter-in-law D (and "that her son has married beneath him"), Murdoch sets up the case such that M's behavior never changes even as her attitude toward D undergoes a significant transformation (2001, p. 17). Even when M thought poorly of D, she adhered to a standard of action that forbade her from letting her negative views about D show in her actions. Her outward action was always considerate and "beautiful." So, when M comes to see D as happy and free-spirited rather than as crude and simple, she does not need, in a sense, to change how she treats D. Her behavior toward D remains as proper and friendly as ever. What has been gained, if anything, is something internal: M can act in these ways toward D without, as it were, having anything to hide, because she has learned to look at D through the eyes of love rather than the eyes of stern duty or resentment or disappointment. Even when M thought poorly of D, her actions showed a kind of integrity; she refused to let her private opinions about D get in the way of treating her well. However, now that her view of D has been transformed, she achieves a deeper and more complete kind of integrity in which her thoughts about D cohere with the way that she treats her. Such an "internal reward" may or may not have an external payoff, but its value does not depend upon there being one.

Murdoch's ideas about the reality and value of such inner thought and work connect to Merton's worry that our obsession with action and results in the face of "every urgency" leads to moral corruption and despair. Merton expressed this concern while commenting on the following quote from Gandhi:

> The business of every God-fearing man is to dissociate himself from evil in *total disregard of the consequences*. He must have faith in a good deed producing only a good result…He follows the truth though the following of it may endanger his very life. He knows that it is better to die in the way of God than to live in the way of Satan.
>
> (*My Non-violence*)[4]

Merton goes on to worry that an overweening concern with actions that produce results and that "have consequences" tends to promote short-sighted thinking and planning. This focus on results can lead us to compromise our own values.

Now, it is easy to focus too much on the latter, heroic part of the Gandhi quote, in which disregard for the consequences seems to pit moral (or pious) action against self-interest. Here the call to dissociate from evil is a call to accept that doing so may have negative, even fatal, consequences for us. The good person is willing in the right circumstances to make that kind of sacrifice. However, the heroic situation is a limited case, and if we are to

dissociate from evil in total disregard of the consequences, then such heroic achievements or sacrifices aren't what we should be thinking about in the vast majority of situations. If Gandhi's point holds, it also holds in cases in which our efforts have no consequences or "make no difference" in the external world. The point here is not that consequences do not matter; Gandhi was surely concerned with effective action. The point is rather that in order to be good, one must dissociate from evil, *even if it doesn't make a difference*.

We see this concern about making a difference and the despairing corollary that it doesn't matter what one does if it doesn't make a difference in various contexts. One might come to believe that certain arguments against meat-eating are correct but think that given the scale of American agribusiness, it makes no difference whether one continues to eat hamburgers.[5] Another meat-eater will soon be born to take one's place. Or we might think that it makes little or no difference how we consume energy at a personal level, since any effective response to climate change requires massive institutional and corporate changes.[6] So, making any change in our own actions and habits would not be worth the trouble.

One response to this kind of thinking is to encourage us to change our sight lines a bit and not to conflate making a *small difference* with making no difference at all. The defeatist thinking above is not always correct. Perhaps we can be encouraged by some data that shows how our individual small difference-making aggregates into a big difference once a certain number of small difference-makings are combined.

A related response focuses on indirect influence. If I make a change, even though it makes little or no difference, this may motivate others to think about the issue and possibly make changes, too. The difference one can make is to draw attention to the issue, set an example, or be an ethical "pioneer."[7] Such a response captures some of the merits that Thoreau and Gandhi also saw in civil disobedience.

However, as important as such responses are, they don't answer the darker questions: what if the small differences we make are swamped? What if the people within my small circle of influence are not just highly unlikely to be influenced by my decisions but will likely receive my own efforts with hostility, disdain, or mere indifference? What if there really is no external difference that we can make? As long as the reason for doing anything is measured exclusively by the external difference it will make, we are sowing the seeds of our own despair and enslaving ourselves to circumstance. We are also giving ourselves permission not to feel bad about our own hypocrisy. The only kind of positive answers we can give to such questions and problems are those that invoke ideas about integrity, honesty, and related virtues. Even when there appears to be little or no difference that our actions and decisions can make in the world, they still make a difference to our own character.

The value of virtue turns out to be notoriously difficult to articulate, especially once one comes to appreciate that the external fruits of virtue can

be achieved in various ways without virtue—through aping, medication, willpower, and sometimes simple dishonesty and concealed hypocrisy. The Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers all offer us a kind of spiritual or mental health as a reward for virtue. Various religious ethics promise some kind of salvation. Of course, in each case a kind of paradox arises: if we seek virtue for the sake of its rewards, then we are at risk of failing to attain both, because the virtues require us to be attuned in skillful and mindful ways to the challenges to which we are responding, and not to be focused on ourselves or what we are getting out of our action. So, in order to avoid paradox, we have to resort to seeming platitudes that nevertheless aim to disabuse us of the motivational pitfalls of self-defeating egoism: "virtue is its own reward." It is also helpful to forget that virtue can, at times, be quite costly: bravery can get you killed.

Murdoch takes a different, more austere approach: virtue is *pointless* (2001, p. 96).[8] I take Murdoch to mean that the search for an abstract account of the value of virtue—i.e., the "point" of virtue—is misguided. Every psychological, moral, and religious consolation is to be distrusted, because consolations distract us from the demands of virtue. For Murdoch, these demands are not abstract and ill-defined calls to "make a difference" but instead calls to cultivate our ability to pay attention, lovingly and humbly, to the people and the concrete difficulties in our own lives, as well as to "the unsystematic and inexhaustible variety of the world" which makes the Good, on her view, indefinable. Attempting to systematize virtue or the good is a mistake. Value is revealed through loving and humble attention to the particular, and appropriate action follows from this.[9]

None of this is to say that we should abandon all hope that our actions will make some kind of difference for those to whom they are directed, or that we should not reassess our approach when our efforts seem not to be working in the way we had anticipated. Gandhi, as well as Merton, both speak of "faith in a good deed only producing a good result." This kind of moral faith might strike some as naïve. However, a modest and non-dogmatic interpretation of it is that even when a well-chosen "good deed" does not produce the hoped-for result, it does not thereby become an evil act. It may yet serve as an example of human dignity and moral resolution in the face of great evil.[10]

Furthermore, the call for attention to the particular is not to be understood as the claim that we should focus on our own (small) problems rather than the "big" problems in the world. That would presuppose that there is some tidy, general way to separate the two. Rather, what Murdoch and Merton suggest is that virtuous action requires a kind of *detachment*. Merton (1966) explains that detachment is not to be understood as passivity or indifference but instead as "concentration of attention on the subject of the act itself, not on the results or the consequences" (p. 105). If we are continually trying to peek around the corner or to the top of the summit, checking up on our action and its progress toward the anticipated goal, we run the risk of sabotaging our own action.

In this sense, to act in a detached manner means accepting the extent to which the consequences of our actions are out of our control. We focus instead on what we can control. We pay attention to our choices, our words, the ways in which we interact with others. We focus on what we are doing. Such attention inevitably means also paying attention to the consequences of our actions in the sense that we must pay attention to how the situation of which we are a part is unfolding. However, this is a matter of paying attention to what we are doing rather than eyeing or anticipating some definite, final outcome. Merton (1966) adds, "We are not responsible for more than our own action, but for this, we should take *complete responsibility*. Then the results will follow of themselves, in a manner we may not always be able to foresee" (p. 105). This suggests yet another reason not to be always peeking around the corner, fixated on some end result; if we are too sure we know what the positive result we are seeking looks like, we might leave ourselves no room to recognize positive results that we had not anticipated. The point here is not to promote uncritical optimism—of course, there are situations in which the ineffectiveness of some course of action is a reason to stop or change course—but rather to remain open and receptive to new opportunities and ways of thinking about what happens, even as we act in ways that we hope will add, in one way or another, to the good in the world.

* * *

I began by raising several questions about what it means to honor our convictions, given that we can become painfully and overwhelmingly aware of the various problems in the world and can be taken in by a sense of complicity with respect to many of these problems. Thoreau tells us that it is not our duty "as a matter of course" to respond to any particular moral problem, *but* that it is our duty not to contribute to the problem. However, this line of thought, when coupled with an intense awareness of the various wrongs in the world in which we might in some way be implicated, seems to put us in a moral bind.

The part of this difficulty that interests me relates to Thoreau's allusion to the "other concerns" and "contemplations" that we may feel called to pursue, at the cost of not pursuing certain moral projects that are also available to us. Our convictions include not just *moral* convictions (understood narrowly) but also convictions about the value of family and friendship, art and music, the pursuit of knowledge, and so on. As Bernard Williams (1985) has noted, the demands of moral obligation, especially when made out to be general, universal, and always of highest priority, can come to dominate our life and thought, leaving no room for devotion to other projects and relationships. I will always be under an obligation not to "waste time" doing things that are *merely* morally permissible when there are more pressing moral problems to be addressed (pp. 181–182).

However, there is something deeply problematic with this concern about wasting time when we apply it to the various things about which we care deeply and fundamentally and which enrich human life. One solution might be to try to carve out room for our personal relationships, our devotion to the arts, etc., by holding that there are "special obligations," "duties to oneself," and so forth. Williams rejects such moves as "fraudulent" (1985, p. 182) and elsewhere as "one thought too many" (1982, p. 18). I spend time with my family because I love them and care about them, and if I try to justify the time I spend with them by claiming that I am fulfilling a duty to my family, this very idea distorts what it means to act in certain ways toward them out of loving concern. If I feel compelled to write a novel and try to justify this use of my time by claiming a moral duty to art or to humanity, this starts to look either silly or arrogant or both.

For Williams, the point comes to this: it is moralistic and hence wrong to think that the concept of moral obligation should structure all of our practical decision-making or that the demands of morality must always trump other non-universal, personal commitments, where the latter are constitutive of a person's unique character—constitutive in the sense that those commitments are what make life worth living at all for that person.[11] Williams (1982) calls these "ground projects" (p. 13). Such projects are always at risk of coming into conflict with the demands of impartial morality. However, "unless such things [ground projects] exist, there will not be enough substance or conviction in a man's life to compel his allegiance to life itself" (p. 18).

Notably, ground projects can be moral projects, too. So the potential for a conflict of values is not, for Williams, just a clash between moral values and other kinds of values (prudential, aesthetic, etc.), but is rather a conflict between the demands of impartial systems of morality (both Kantian and Utilitarian) and personal commitment to values and projects that seem out of whack with what the impartial system requires of a moral agent. For example, one's devotion to helping animals or protecting an endangered species might come under moral suspicion as excessive or confused when brought into contrast with more pressing problems of human justice and need.

J.M. Coetzee's (1999) novel *Disgrace* provides a striking example of moral conviction and commitment which may be almost impossible to understand from an impartial point of view. In the novel, David Lurie has been dismissed from his teaching position at Cape Technical University because he had an affair with a student. After leaving Cape Town to live with his daughter on her smallholding in Eastern Cape, he takes a job at an animal shelter. His tasks include assisting the veterinarian, Bev Shaw, with the euthanizing of sick stray dogs and then taking the remains of these animals to a nearby hospital incinerator. Although Lurie takes this job without having any particularly exceptional views about animals or animal rights, he undergoes a profound change in his views about the value of animals that not even he quite understands.

This change manifests in his taking it upon himself, and rather going out of his way, to dispose of the corpses of these euthanized animals at a nearby hospital incinerator. It would have been possible and perhaps simpler to cart the bodies to the hospital immediately after the dogs had been euthanized, before the following Monday, but Lurie knows that this would mean that their bodies would be picked at by scavengers all weekend. Lurie "is not prepared to inflict such dishonor upon them" (p. 144). Lurie also discovers that when he simply left the bagged remains to be disposed of by the hospital workers, they treated the corpses roughly. As the bodies have begun to develop rigor mortis, the workers sometimes beat at them with shovels so as to better fit the bags into the incinerator. Lurie thus decides to dispose of the bodies, in a more respectful manner, himself. Lurie is puzzled by his own decision:

> Why has he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop off the bags at the dump and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway?
>
> For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing.
>
> (pp. 145–146)

But this line of thought is not really satisfying to Lurie. Even if there is something to this idea of standing up "for his idea of the world," this idea is undermined by the connected thought that this is a kind of selfishness or self-indulgence. His reflection continues:

> Curious that a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs. There must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world, or to an idea of the world. One could for instance work longer hours at the clinic. One could try to persuade the children at the dump not to fill their bodies [the stray dogs] with poisons. Even sitting down more purposefully with the Byron libretto might, at a pinch, be construed as a service to mankind.
>
> But there are other people to do these things—the animal welfare thing, the social rehabilitation thing, even the Byron thing. He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it.
>
> (p. 146)

We should take special note of Lurie's conviction that this task must be done by him because it matters and there is no one else who will think to do it. This may not count as a "ground project" in Williams's sense, but it is certainly connected to some newfound convictions about the respect owed to animals that might constitute such a project. Lurie is still in the process of trying to sort out what exactly justifies his actions, and, unfortunately, appealing to

familiar notions of the usefulness of his actions or the difference they make in the world (e.g., to the reduction of animal suffering) provide little help. Rather, those ideas only threaten to undermine his conviction.

If the previously examined ideas of Merton, Murdoch, and Williams amount to anything, there comes a point when this nagging self-doubt would no longer be a sign of conscientiousness and instead would show that one had become imprisoned by ideas about consequences and obligation that, rather than promoting responsible moral thought, instead have led to mental paralysis and pointless feelings of guilt. Lurie's conviction that it is important to dispose of those dogs' corpses in a respectful manner arises, quite naturally, out of his attention to various features of the situation, revulsion at the disrespectful treatment of the bodies by the hospital workers, and a recognition that he is specially placed to do what he thinks must be done in order to avert that treatment. The idea that, beyond this, his action must somehow be justified in the grand scheme of all things is, one might suspect, to ask too much. In meeting that demand, what else can one say or think ultimately other than what Lurie thinks—that this act is done for the sake of "his idea of the world"? But even that might be, as Williams puts it, "one thought too many."

* * *

Thoreau recognized that we cannot demand all things of all people, but that we should at least avoid "gross inconsistency" and hypocrisy. We can approach his challenge without falling into the trap of moralism by taking our own convictions and circumstances rather than some generalized set of obligations as our starting point. Do I condemn factory farming but still eat factory-farmed meat? Do I bemoan the time-wasting and uncivil nature of discourse on Facebook and then spend hours scrolling furiously through my feed? What general obligation is there to pay any attention at all to what happens on Facebook? In cases like these, there are solutions that usually will not interfere too much with our other projects; in fact, withdrawal of support in some cases will *open up* time for those other pursuits: less time on social media equals more time to do other things. In other cases, the solution may not be so clear or easy; hence, the need for contemplation and the Walden experiments of the world.

In *Walden*, Thoreau (1995 [1854]) recognized that others viewed his own peculiar experiment as a selfish use of his talents and resources. He claims to have tried being involved in charitable work and found that those he tried to help preferred not to be helped by him. He concludes that such an occupation "does not agree with [his] constitution" (p. 47). Although we might balk at this and accuse Thoreau of special pleading, the surrounding points seem crucial to a serious and charitable reading of this as an attempt at understanding himself and trying to make sense of what a person *ought* to be doing in the world in which there are many things worth doing. Thoreau insists, "You must have a genius for charity as for any thing else"

(p. 47). This notion of "genius" shows up throughout *Walden* and refers to a person's unique abilities and skills, which make each of us suited for different sorts of occupations, and lead some of us to feel "called" to devote ourselves to particular projects or professions. The implication here is that taking on a task for which one lacks the requisite "genius" is unwise.

Thoreau speculates,

> Probably I should not consciously and deliberately forsake my particular calling to do the good which society demands of me, to save the universe from annihilation; and I believe that a like but infinitely greater steadfastness elsewhere is all that now preserves it.
>
> (p. 47)

Again, we might at first find this self-serving; Thoreau is free-riding on the good works of others! However, if Thoreau is right that we are not all equally suited to various tasks, then it is not self-serving to decline a call that one is not well-suited to answer. Certainly, there is the risk of self-deception, self-indulgence, and making poor excuses; the simple fact that one is acting on a personal conviction does not render one immune to moral criticism. Hence, Thoreau hedges his position with a "probably."[12] For if there were something specific that Thoreau could do, right now, "to save the universe from annihilation," he should probably stop planting beans and do that other thing first.

However, we should perhaps not be too quick to frame apparent conflicts between our particular "callings" or "projects" or "genius" and the broader problems in our society and world as necessarily taking the shape of sharp dilemmas. Although some might worry that Thoreau's position is insensitive to contemporary concerns about various forms of privilege and social injustice, we should recall the general condition Thoreau specifies in "On Civil Disobedience": "If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations, too." As Merton notes, even the monk who in one sense withdraws from the world can do so with the understanding that such a person remains part of the world. One may even, as Merton did by speaking on the issues of his time in his writings, continue to be engaged in certain ways with the world. Importantly, Merton did this not by forsaking his particular calling or genius, but by following it.

Notes

1 On this problem, see, e.g., Williams (1982).
2 See "Is the World a Problem?" in Merton (1988).
3 See Murdoch's (2001) extended discussion of her example involving M and D in "The Idea of Perfection."
4 Qtd. in Merton (1966, p. 102).

5 See Fischer (2021) for discussion of this issue, esp. Chapter 7.
6 See Johnson (2003) for an illustration of this line of thought. For distinct responses to Johnson's argument, see Raterman (2012) and Sahar (2016).
7 Cf. Johnson (2003, p. 285).
8 Murdoch's thought is inspired in many places by the work of Simone Weil, especially Weil's writing on the relationship between attention and virtue. See Weil (2002). Weil's life and thought certainly bears the marks of a person overwhelmed by her own convictions and her lively, painful awareness of the suffering of others.
9 Elsewhere in *The Sovereignty of the Good*, Murdoch writes of moments that can shock us into the requisite kind of humility, such as moments of awe or attentive appreciation of nature.
10 Cf. Frankl (2006).
11 On the problems with moralism, see Taylor (2012).
12 For more on the issue of responsible conviction, see my earlier essay (Pianalto, 2014).

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7 Bad and Good Beliefs? On the Role of Conviction in Religion

Adrian Hermann

Introduction

Since the early 20th century, a clear distinction between conviction and belief has never been central to the academic study of religion. Nevertheless, this distinction might serve as an underestimated analytical tool for understanding conflicts about religion in modern democracies, both on an individual and a societal level. In this chapter, I will develop a perspective on the role of conviction in religion, starting from the hypothesis that religious "belief" is labeled as "conviction" in situations of *individual crisis or exceptionality* as well as *collective critique or praise*. Looking at religious beliefs as convictions, therefore, allows us to explore how they are classified as particularly "bad" or "good" religion. Rather than denoting a specific *phenomenon*, I suggest that the concept of conviction in the study of religion should point us to a perspective that is interested in "degrees of persuasion". Speaking about religion in terms of conviction, then, is to address the question of the degree to which a person clings to a certain belief.

We can observe this usage of the term in a rather unsystematic way in much of the literature of "religious fundamentalism", for example. The sociologists Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman write:

> Sometimes the term fundamentalist is used to describe any group that takes religion seriously or that views religion's role in public life to be greater than the labeler would wish it to be. The term also might be used for those who are too religiously confident or who engage in any sort of action out of religious conviction.
>
> (Emerson & Hartman, 2006, pp. 128–129)

In this sense, the necessity of distinguishing "degrees of persuasion" when looking at the different ways in which, in the context of religion, the strength of a certain religious belief has been conceptualized has resulted in various terms that indicate that both laudable and problematic consequences may arise from the particular way in which an individual or group puts strongly adhering to their persuasions before basically anything else. In the final section of this chapter, I will explore this point further with reference to recent literature on "fundamentalism" and "(de)conversion".

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Belief, Faith, and Conviction in the Study of Religion

Instead of conviction, there are two other related concepts that have been and still are prominent in academic discussions on religion: faith and belief. While theological approaches continue to employ *faith* as a central term, in the narrower discipline of the study of religion the concept has been sidelined, despite its systematic usage in some central classical texts that are located at the border between theology and religious studies. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's widely read book *The Meaning and End of Religion*, for example, is an early critique of the analytical value of the concept of "religion" that at the same time argues for "faith" as a transcendent universal that stands behind all observable expressions of religious history (Smith, 1964, pp. 154–156; see also Asad, 2001). In contemporary religious studies, however, faith is regarded less as an analytical concept for the academic study of religion rather than as an emic (primarily) Christian term with continuing relevance mostly for the historical and contemporary analysis of Christian discourses. Nevertheless, the 2nd edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* in 2005 reprinted a 1987 article from the first edition that suggests an understanding of faith as an "abstract term with which to describe that attitude of the human mind and spirit of which prayer is the concrete expression" (Pelikan, 2005 [1987]). Here it is treated not as an alternative term for "religion" in general, but rather as an aspect of religious practice that can be found in all traditions. In the more recent *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, faith is described as the "individual aspect of religious allegiance and practice" and is related to trust as its "intensification." At the same time, this article clearly only addresses Christianity, arguing that faith is "especially central" to Protestantism (Hobson, 2016).

One area where faith remains prominent in the broader religious studies context is in general descriptions of religious traditions as "faiths," especially in books like *World Faiths* (Nigosian, 1994), *Six World Faiths* (Cole, 1996), or *New Religions: Emerging Faiths and Religious Cultures in the Modern World* (Gallagher & Willsky-Ciollo, 2021). Here, faith basically functions as a synonym for religion, indicating the fundamental comparability of the historical phenomena treated in these studies.

Belief, on the other hand, has been and remains an important concept in the study of religion (Nye, 2008, pp. 105–128), despite recent literature in both religious studies and anthropology that has been very critical of the concept and the way in which it has often been understood as central to religion (Coleman, 2018). In sum, this critique boils down to the claim that "there is little evidence that there is anything equivalent to Christian belief in other world religions" (Coleman, 2018, p. 2). On the basis of anthropological studies, it is argued both that there are no terms equivalent to belief in the sense of creed as an "explicit set of statements or propositions about what one does or does not believe" in most non-Christian and non-Western contexts and that understanding belief as "deeply interiorized conviction"

is a modern convention which is far less universal than is often claimed (Coleman 2018, pp. 1–2). All this is complicated by the parallel observation that—a slightly different claim—the modern history of globalization over the last 200 years has led to a situation in which "through complicated patterns of influence, the representatives of non-Christian religions have come to speak of themselves in terms of belief" (Lopez, 1998, p. 21) and thus while belief might not represent a human universal, it is modern history that has at least turned it into a universally used concept all over the world. I will explore this aspect in more detail below.

The anthropological critique of belief is loosely connected to more philosophical examinations of the concept, in particular through reference to one of the first major critical studies of the term from an anthropological perspective, Rodney Needham's *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972). In his book, Needham claims—based on an interpretation of the late Wittgenstein's comments on belief (for a critical view of the argument see Streeter, 2019)—that "the notion of belief is not appropriate to an empirical philosophy of mind or to an exact account of human motives and conduct" (Needham, 1972, p. 188), as it does not refer to a universal feature of human behavior or experience. This often-quoted position has, especially over the course of the last two decades, led to a general skepticism toward belief as an analytical category in the anthropology of religion. Building on Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen's (2017) exploration of the so-called ontological turn, Mark Risjord (2020, p. 2) argues that belief has been at the center of the anthropological project of understanding human difference since E.B. Tylor, for whom, incidentally, "belief in Spiritual Beings" (1871, p. 383; see Larsen, 2013; Jong, 2017) famously served as a "minimum definition of Religion." In Risjord's view, it is this idiom of belief that still binds anthropological inquiry to the representationalist framework, which the discipline has been trying to overcome since the *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) debate of the 1980s. Only when differences in ontology are no longer being conceptualized as the philosophical problem of contrasting definitions of truth, but rather as the result of an "ecological relationship to the environment constituted by a specific set of practices" (Risjord, 2020, p. 22), have we actually moved "beyond belief" and toward an anti-representational anthropology that no longer foundationally relies on a culture-nature dichotomy.

Talal Asad, who in an earlier and oft-cited text (1993) had explored the genealogy of belief as part of anthropological imaginations of religion, argues in addition that making belief central to the way modern liberal society treats religion has resulted in it being understood as "at once a privilege (the subject's right to choose his or her belief) and a danger (belief's incitement to violence and intolerance)" (Asad, 2012, p. 43). He links this ambivalence to the secular state's trouble with fostering a "democratic sensibility" that strives toward inclusivity and mutual care, as opposed to the bureaucratic governmental rationality of religious freedom, which he describes as "fundamentally exclusive" (Asad, 2012, p. 56, emphasis removed).

In the related field of the study of folklore, the prevalent understanding of belief as the systematic content of what could be extracted from narratives like stories and legends, Benjamin Gatling argues, was and is mostly the result of "mid-twentieth-century ideas about European folk religious practice" (Gatling, 2020, p. 313). He considers it part of a "popular, implicitly Eurocentric, understanding of religion" which extrapolates Christian ideas to "the world writ large" and is in dire need of decolonial critique (Gatling, 2020, pp. 309, 315). But if, as Gatling (2020, p. 318) suggests, belief is little more than "a pejorative label for another's knowledge," we should shift our attention away from belief as cognitive certainty to observable "forms and practices of believing" (2020, p. 320). In this way, a perspective that understands "believing as social action" and is concerned with "situated acts of believing" accomplishes the "shift from a reified, object-oriented body of propositions to something emergent, negotiated, [and] contingent" (Gatling, 2020, p. 323).

Despite this mounting critique of belief as a concept, however, in the study of religion, the notion still plays a central role in many contemporary definitional approaches (Nye, 2008, pp. 105–128; Bivins, 2016). In the *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, Brian Clack (2016) argues based on a classical philosophical distinction between a representationalist and a dispositionalist account of the belief that it "may be properly defined as an attitude of propositional assent, the attitude adopted by a person toward a proposition judged to be true." He highlights how in a representationalist perspective "beliefs are continuing representational states stored in the memory," making "the sum of a person's beliefs […] a vast map representing all things that the believer takes to be the case, to exist, and to have occurred" (Clack, 2016). In contrast, in a dispositionalist view, beliefs are seen "less as information-bearing states in the mind and more as dispositions to behave in particular ways and therefore as pieces of outward physical behavior" (Clack, 2016). He also stresses that not all beliefs are "held in the same fashion, and distinctions need to be drawn between occurrent and nonoccurrent beliefs, between the degrees of belief, and between the depth of ingression of belief" (Clack, 2016). For him, confidence in a proposition is the measure of the degree of belief, while centrality of a particular belief in a belief system is expressed by the depth of ingression (Clack, 2016). These points are particularly relevant for developing the concept of conviction into an analytical perspective, as I will attempt below. In addition, the dispositional account of belief—inferring beliefs on the basis of what we see a person do—also provides a link to an understanding of belief in the context of labeling processes. This will help us understand conviction in the context of the labeling of "bad" or "good" religion, as explored in the next section.

On this basis of his general account of belief, Clack then attempts to distinguish "religious beliefs" as either "attitudes of assent to certain propositions concerning super-empirical entities and events" (in a representationalist perspective) or as a particular form of activity based on a "lack

of evidence," an asserted "moral import," and a claimed "unassailability" (Clack, 2016). He mentions in closing that the concept of belief has also played an important role in attempts to define religion, especially in the context of so-called substantive definitions where, for example, "belief in the supernatural" is seen as central to religion (Clack, 2016), referring to a tradition of defining religion that is still being added to.

Markus Altena Davidsen (2020, p. 234, emphasis removed) has recently suggested a substantive definition of religion as follows: "all those beliefs, practices, experiences, narratives, and discourses that assume the existence of transempirical agents, worlds, and/or processes." He puts this understanding into practice in his work on "fiction-based religion," a term with which he describes religious activity that draws on and is based on fictional narratives like *Star Wars* and the *Lord of the Rings* (Davidsen, 2013, 2016). Here he connects a focus on beliefs with the existence of concrete practices that express those beliefs. Since for him not all forms of persuasions regarding "transempirical agents" qualify as "religion," Davidsen has to propose a close connection between "beliefs" and certain forms of practices. He describes as "elemental religion" two things: "(1) practices that assume the existence of supernatural agents in a straightforward literal sense; (2) the assumptions (or first-order beliefs) that underpin these practices" (2016, p. 525). In the end, therefore, one of the reasons that Davidsen has to rely on the language of "literal" belief and its necessary expression through practices ("I take the *sine qua non* of religion to be practices that assume the existence of supernatural agents," 2016, p. 524) is that speaking about belief alone is not "strong" enough to identify those set of persuasions that qualify as religion.

As indicated by Clack in his general account of belief, then, one of the problems that plague definitions of religion that rely on belief is that talk of belief can be used to describe a large variety of loosely or strongly held persuasions. This is also apparent, for example, in a classical text on the subject by William James published in 1889. In his "The Psychology of Belief," he uses "belief" to refer to "every degree of assurance," while at the same time describing "conviction" as the end of a spectrum, where it represents "the highest possible certainty" (1889, p. 321; see Scheer, 2020, pp. 202–203). In the rest of his article, James is then most interested in the emotional qualities of belief, which he sees as strongly connected particularly with religion (James, 1889, p. 343). Can we turn this imprecise talk of a spectrum of belief into a more useful analytical perspective and make use of the concept of conviction to do so?

Degrees of Persuasion: Conviction as "Bad" and "Good" Religion

In light of this state of discussion about faith and belief in the academic study of religion, what is gained by adding the concept of "conviction" to the mix? As mentioned, conviction has never been a central analytical term

in this discipline. No entries on "conviction" can be found in any of its main dictionaries and handbooks. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore the analytical possibilities of the term conviction in studying religion, based on the already formulated hypothesis that it is in situations of *individual crisis or exceptionality* as well as *collective critique or praise* that religious "belief" gets labeled as "conviction". Looking at religious beliefs *as* convictions, therefore, prompts us to explore how academic studies as well as the broader societal discourse is concerned with the identification of "bad" and "good" beliefs. The goal here is less a philosophically sound account of belief and conviction as concepts, but rather a pragmatic suggestion on how these terms might be helpful for concrete research in the study of religion.

The perspective I suggest is markedly different from understanding conviction as a primarily positive description (e.g., "a man of conviction" as a statement of admiration), which represents another existing way of framing conviction that appears in particular in popular religious literature (e.g., Yarbrough & Adams, 1993; Exley, 2005; Copan & Craig, 2007; Collis, 2019; Tyson, 2020) as well as in popular political and business writing (e.g., Newell, 2009; Mohler, 2012; Mulcair, 2015). While there are a lot of accounts of conviction as a positive personality trait ("A Man of Conviction," e.g., Stubhaug, 2010), and this biographical perspective on conviction also appears quite regularly in descriptions of religious figures, in the following I want to experiment with a different understanding of conviction regarding religion. Conviction might help us address the necessity of having a criterium for distinguishing between "degrees of belief," as also suggested by Clack above and in the description of fundamentalism cited in the introduction to this chapter, where Emerson and Hartmann (2006, pp. 128–129) see "fundamentalism" as referring to religion being taken "too seriously" or to individuals seen as "too religiously confident" in their actions. If applied to religion, then, exactly because of its oscillation between positive as well as negative assessments of an individual's or group's degree of religious belief, conviction could provide a useful analytical perspective on the intensity of religious commitment.

In this sense, conviction on the one hand points us to "how the threat of radicalization is built into our own conceptualizations of belief" (Sherwood, 2015, p. 42). It would appear then, that in the context of religion the term mainly serves as an alternative term for "fundamentalism." But on the other hand, there is a strong tradition in religious contexts of positively describing as conviction the firm holding on to one's persuasions in light of adversity. Especially because of this double valuation, which disrupts the negative value judgments of terms like "fundamentalism," conviction might be able to provide a useful alternative analytical lens.

In developing this further, we can refer to a recent work by Monique Scheer. In her book *Enthusiasm: Emotional Practices of Conviction in Modern Germany* (2020), she argues for a process-oriented account of conviction. According to her, it might be helpful to understand conviction less

as a "state of absolute certainty, the one end of the emotional spectrum of belief" and rather as referring to "a process, the practice of making things real" (Scheer, 2020, p. 203). In her own analysis, she then proposes the term "enthusiasm" as an analytical category to "see and to critique emotional practices of conviction" (Scheer, 2020, p. 204), which helps us understand how conviction is mediated through emotion. She then builds on this connection between belief and emotion and explores how religions use "institutionalized practices to ensure it [i.e., belief] is regularly renewed" (Scheer, 2020, p. 202). While in what follows I cannot develop her emphasis on emotion further, in a parallel exploration, and building on Scheer's proposal to look at conviction as a "process" rather than as a stable state of persuasion, I suggest that understood in this sense the term can be a useful analytical category for the study of religion. We could use the lens of conviction to focus on how religious beliefs are discussed variously as a laudable personal stance (a form of "good religion" compatible with modern democracies), or as "bad religion" that stands outside reasonable discourse. Conviction as a description of the intensity of belief does not in itself already carry a value judgment, especially because it can be understood as referring both to "good" and "bad" conviction. As "identity-reflecting commitments" (Lynch, 2020, p. 139), convictions then serve to position both individuals and groups in a particular social context. Analyzing the religious landscape through the lens of conviction thus highlights how the democratic imaginary implies value judgments which, inasmuch as they are directed at religious beliefs, often are based on a rhetoric of "good" and "bad" religion (Smith, Führding & Hermann, 2020).

In addition, once again taking up the problem and critique of the concept of belief, the process-oriented perspective advocated by Scheer can also be fruitfully brought in conversation with the work of anthropologist of religion Tanya M. Luhrmann (2018, 2020), who stresses that religious commitment is best understood as a phenomenon of constant learning and continuous effort. She takes her discipline to task for writing as if the subjects of anthropological investigations never doubt the reality of the supernatural and the certainty of their beliefs (Luhrmann, 2018, p. 303):

> [I]t does not make sense to interpret the apparently unquestioning acceptance of gods and the ancestors as a conviction that supernatural beings are always present, available and active. People may talk as if the gods [are] straightforwardly real, but they don't act that way—not in the Bible belt, not in medieval England, not in Fiji and not among the Nuer. People behave as if making the invisible other real enough to impact your life in a positive way takes effort.
>
> (Luhrmann, 2018, pp. 304–305)

In her fieldwork, empirical studies, and theoretical writings, Luhrmann (1989, 2012, 2020) has over the last 30 years explored how religious people

learn to see the world the way that their religious traditions suggest it to be. Her focus is on the relationship between the firm convictions people hold and the effort it takes them to sustain their faith through everyday practices and rituals. While she follows the newer cognitive science of religion, which claims that "in some fundamental way, belief in the supernatural is easy for humans"—as we tend to see agents everywhere, "faces in the clouds and eyes on cars"—, she contrasts its results with the thesis that "faith," as "the sustained, intentional commitment to the deliberative belief that an invisible other is real," is hard and requires constant work (Luhrmann, 2018, p. 313). Drawing on philosopher Neil Van Leeuwen (2014), Luhrmann (2018, p. 312) argues that humans have "a faith frame and an everyday frame, a way of thinking when they reason about the supernatural, and a way of thinking when they reason about the ordinary world of rocks and dogs and kitchen tables." She takes this to indicate that "religious beliefs and mundane beliefs are held with different "cognitive attitudes'" (2018, p. 308), which means people will evaluate them on the basis of different evidence, have different reasons for their commitment to them, and infer different things from them. All this points to the effort that is involved in creating and maintaining belief, which Luhrmann has explored both ethnographically and through psychological experiments. In her work on evangelicals in the US, she highlights both the important function of a variety of widespread prayer manuals and constant attempts at "speaking with God" in inner conversation both at church and in everyday situations, which leads to an understanding of religious commitment as—at least in part—a kind of "skill that can be cultivated, for which some may have more of a proclivity or talent than others" (Luhrmann, Nusbaum & Thisted, 2010, p. 75).

Drawing on Scheer and Luhrmann and bringing the concept of conviction into play, which they both don't use as a central notion, we can, therefore, say the following: Considering the complex philosophical debates about what constitutes belief and how we should understand this concept, and in light of the anthropological critique of the term, making use of "conviction" exactly in its ambivalence and as a term that indicates degrees of religious commitment might be fruitful. Focusing on conviction highlights one aspect of the complex discussion about (religious) belief, which is that degree of certainty is an ambivalent feature of how belief is understood in modern democratic societies. On the one hand, we find it laudable if someone displays unwavering conviction toward something. At the same time, conviction in the sense of resolute commitment to a particular position is seen as problematic.

With Scheer and Luhrmann, we can recognize that paying closer attention to degrees of persuasion is necessary to understand contemporary religion because continuing commitment is hard. An either/or perspective on belief is replaced with the empirical question of how belief and conviction are created and maintained, especially in the light of adversity. This also

is fruitful for developing further theories of religion like the one provided by Davidsen by moving beyond the problem of having to insist on "literal" belief in the abstract in order to call something "religion". The process-oriented perspective that emerges from engaging with Scheer and Luhrmann shows us instead how we need to understand belief as performative and something that needs continuous work. It is this work that allows religious beliefs to become a "part of the identity of those who assert them" (Luhrmann, 2018, p. 309).

Belief and Conviction in the Global Discourse of Religion

From a global historical perspective (Bayly, 2004; Osterhammel, 2014), recent studies have demonstrated that an understanding of beliefs—as subjectively held propositions—as central to religion is a key aspect of the establishment of the modern global concept of religion and the "world religions"-discourse since the 19th century (Masuzawa, 2005; Cotter & Robertson, 2016). Simultaneously, the concept of religious freedom was globalized in the same timeframe and implies that from a governmental perspective private, individual belief is the preferred and modern form through which religion should be expressed in democratic societies (Fallers Sullivan et al., 2015; Wenger, 2017).

Belief and the Global Discourse of Religion

In recent literature on the global history of religion two positions have been advocated by scholars of religion (Hermann, 2016). On the one hand, some have been speaking of a modern or global discourse of religion that has emerged in the last few centuries (Wank, 2009, p. 126; Bergunder, 2010, p. 53; 2014, p. 4; Josephson, 2012, p. 5; King, 2012, pp. 48, 52), indicating "the ubiquitous presence of religion in the cultural global worlds of the twenty-first century" (von Stuckrad, 2013, p. 6). Others have questioned whether concepts similar to "religion" can be found in non-Western (as well as ancient European) languages and cultures. Summarizing the latter position, Brent Nongbri (2013, p. 2) has argued that

> no ancient language has a term that really corresponds to what modern people mean when they say "religion'. […T]erms and concepts corresponding to religion do not appear in the literature of non-Western cultures until after those cultures encountered European Christians.

In the end, these two seemingly contradictory positions can be combined in the view that while "religion" as a concept did not have equivalents in premodern languages, cultures, and time periods, a modern understanding of "religion", mainly influenced by Christian ideas and European colonial conquest, has over the two last centuries emerged globally, and has been

appropriated all over the world (see Matthes, 1993, p. 21; DuBois, 2005; Bergunder, 2021; Maltese & Strube, 2021).

In a now already classical article, Donald S. Lopez Jr. (1998) has shown how this emergence of a global discourse of religion is connected to the spread of the concept of belief. He highlights the "generally unquestioned assumption that adherents of a given religion, any religion, understand that adherence in terms of belief" (1988, p. 21). In reconstructing the "world's religions" from the perspective of belief and implementing this understanding in the context of colonial power relations, the global emergence of a modern understanding of religion goes hand in hand with the establishment of belief as religion's central characteristic. This is what brings Lopez (1988, p. 21) to state that in today's global society, "representatives of non-Christian religions have come to speak of themselves in terms of belief." In fact, he argues, "[b]elief" is, or has become, perhaps the most common term we use to describe religion to one another […]" (Lopez, 1988, p. 21).

In this sense, we can understand belief on the one hand, as in the anthropological critique mentioned above, as a problematic concept to "write against" (Lindquist & Coleman, 2008), while on the other hand tracing the historical developments which have turned belief into a global and universalist concept, as "the measure of what religion is understood to be" (Lopez, 1998, p. 33). From a somewhat different theoretical perspective, sociologist Peter Beyer (2006, p. 96) can thus speak of religious belief as the "power medium of the global religious system," which indicates the way in which religious communication in today's world is dominated by professions of "faith".

Belief and Religious Freedom Talk

The global understanding of religion as belief is closely connected to the concept of religious freedom (Sherwood, 2015). In her 2017 book *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal*, historian of religion Tisa Wenger (2017, p. 2) argues that "religious freedom talk" has served to "delineate what counted as religion and so helped map the distinctions of race, nation, and religion across the cultural landscapes of an imperial world." Looking inward to how Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Native Americans, and African Americans defined their own identities to "assert racial and imperial prerogatives, to defend subaltern traditions and identities against the power of the majority, and to (re)categorize the terms of their peoplehood as they navigated the stormy civilizational waters of an imperial world" (Wenger, 2017, p. 2), and outward to the Philippines, where local elites used religious freedom talk for articulating new Christian identities under colonialism, she shows how closely coupled ideas of religious freedom were to the assertion of both Protestant and white superiority. At the same time, they "provided a valuable way for some marginalized minorities to defend their own traditions and perhaps even to maintain

their own identities under imperial rule" (2017, p. 239). In the idea of religious freedom, then, we can trace how political concepts based on a modern understanding of "belief" have served to remake traditions all over the world into the "religious" landscape we find ourselves in today.

In this sense, Yvonne Sherwood argues that an unstable concept of belief forms the basis of the attempts of modern states to grant religious freedom as an inner state of belief of the person: "Modernity is the time when the mystery goes inside, to the inner sanctum, the "core" of the person. It is the time when the holy is privatized as "her belief'" (Sherwood, 2015, p. 32).

The Value of a Conviction Perspective

In the remainder of the chapter, I want to demonstrate the possible analytical value of what I have suggested so far. I will do so by looking at some exemplary literature on "fundamentalism" and "(de)conversion" and argue that making use of the category of "conviction" can help us push debates on these issues further analytically.

"Fundamentalism" as Bad Religion

The study of fundamentalism has been a significant subfield of studying religion over the last 40 years. At the same time, as an analytical concept, "fundamentalism" has been plagued by terminological vagueness and has been questioned in its cross-religious and cross-cultural applicability (Emerson & Hartman, 2006, pp. 130, 141; Wood, 2014). What seems clear, however, is that fundamentalism has mostly been framed in relation to modernity and the development of religion in the context of the modern (democratic) state. Martin Riesebrodt (1998, p. 207) has famously described fundamentalisms as "patriarchal protest movements" that emerge as a result of modern societal transformations. He characterizes fundamentalists as radical traditionalists (1998, p. 177) and thus highlights how their goal is the maintenance of a (neo)patriarchal social order, especially upholding social control of women (1998, pp. 203–204). At the same time, the modern character of fundamentalism is expressed in its adaptation to modern society and especially in the adoption of "modern technology and techniques" (Riesebrodt, 1998, p. 204) in spreading and sustaining its influence.

Especially in much of the now already classical literature on fundamentalism that is connected to the "Fundamentalism Project,"[1] it is easy to see how the concept serves to call attention to the perceived dangers of religion and the threat of religious violence (e.g., Marty & Appleby, 1993; Almond, Appleby & Sivan, 2003). In the most recent book in the series, a later addition and revised summary of the work of the 1980s and 1990s, fundamentalisms are described as originating "in reaction to secularization and the marginalization of religion" and as being concerned with creating

a "religious alternative to secular structures and institutions" (Almond, Appleby & Sivan, 2003, p. 90). They are characterized by "defending and conserving religious traditions and traditional ways of life" while at the same time achieving these aims "by crafting new methods, formulating new ideologies, and adopting the latest processes and organizational structures" of modern society (Almond, Appleby, & Sivan 2003, p. 92).

In looking at this literature, it is interesting to note that the notion of conviction, just as in the study of religion more generally, does not take on a prominent role in the subfield of the study of fundamentalism. Neither Riesebrodt nor the six volumes connected to the Fundamentalism Project make use of the concept in any terminological sense. To some extent, then, this literature takes both the concept of belief and (where they use the word) an understanding of conviction as a firmly or deeply held persuasion for granted.

What might become visible if we reframe the problem of fundamentalism as a problem of conviction in the sense developed above? In highlighting both the processual nature of religious belief and the work involved in maintaining it, as well as the positive or—in this case—mostly negative evaluation of a high degree of persuasion, conviction as a perspective on conservative movements of religious protest makes it possible to integrate their study into a general outlook on the fate of religion in modern liberal democracies. Insofar as the literature on fundamentalism can be understood as an attempt to make sense of religious adversity and (sometimes violent) reactions against modernity and the modern secular state, and especially against the circumscribed role of religion in the democratic state, this perspective allows us to a certain extent to move beyond the a priori value judgments inherent in prominent work both on fundamentalism and on the fate of religious belief in secular society more generally, as represented by, for example, Charles Taylor's *The Secular Age* (2007). Instead of a purely negative evaluation of religious conviction as too strong, and as therefore "fundamentalist" and something that modern society pushes to the margins and makes difficult, as Taylor argues, the more general concept of conviction and the realization that high degrees of religious persuasion, also in modern society, are something which has to be created in complex processes of learning and maintained regularly, opens up a perspective on those movements and positions labeled "fundamentalist" that allows us to address them as located on a spectrum of degrees of persuasion.

This also is compatible with the position of sociologist Steve Bruce (2000, pp. 116–117), who argues that "fundamentalism," i.e., "people taking religions very seriously," should be considered the default position of religious persuasion and the democratic refrain from evangelistic fervor, in contrast, makes the modern liberal position rather "strange and remarkable." Reframing this not on the basis of an essentialist understanding of belief, but rather in connection with the process-oriented understanding

of religion articulated by Luhrmann and Scheer, we can bridge the gulf between "fundamentalist" convictions (that are seen as negative from the perspective of the societal majority) and laudable convictions as the basis of religious and political activism (seen as compatible with liberal and democratic values). The two are no longer completely distinct, but rather two sides of the same coin.

Jonathan Mair has argued in regard to the revival of Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Mongolia that belief as a particular content of persuasion seems to not be too relevant for his interlocutors (2013, p. 451), while they at the same time "constantly emphasize the importance of having faith or belief, and having as much of it as possible" (2013, p. 454). Rather than understand these Buddhists as "fundamentalists," which in any case makes not much sense as they don't put excessive value on particular tenets, Mair (2013, pp. 450, 453) suggests that we should reconstruct "styles of belief" that must be learned and cultivated in a particular way. This would allow us to move from a universalist model toward a "comparative anthropology of belief" which makes "an effort to describe with precision historically specific modes or styles of belief" (Mair, 2013, pp. 464, 450, emphasis removed).

If it is not a high degree of persuasion as such that can be seen as problematic, but we rather should pay close attention to the societal context in which this certainty is embedded, conviction as a perspective might help us understand something about the role of religion in modern democracies and conflicts around it. In addition, the outline of the argument presented here allows us to see that while there is much to be learned from the detailed definitory work done in the study of fundamentalism, the subfield, in general, might be based on an understanding of belief that is far too rigid and does not take into account the processual nature of religious persuasion. Recognizing this makes it possible to develop a better theory of religion that lets us both focus on questions of the role of religious belief in modern democracies while at the same time addressing "holes in conceptualizing and understanding fundamentalism" (Emerson & Hartman, 2006, p. 138). In realizing through a conviction perspective that religious belief should always be understood as creating and maintaining varying degrees of persuasion, attempts at measuring fundamentalism can move beyond a simplistic either/or evaluation, religious doubt is no longer seen as equivalent to secularization, and the context that helps maintain conviction and the plausibility of the "faith frame" (see Luhrmann, 2018, pp. 310, 315–315) is given particular attention. This is because conviction, as I have suggested to understand it here, points us to the paradoxes and ambivalences inherent in the ways religious belief and freedom of belief have been understood in modern democracies and connects these realizations to the current state of research into the global discourse of religion and the central role the concept of belief plays in it.

(De)Conversion as a Transformation of Conviction

Interestingly, much of the existing literature on conversion and deconversion equally does focus little on the concept of belief and does not make terminological use of conviction. Even more strongly than in the debates on fundamentalism, however, religious belief as a category is taken for granted, often in the formulation of "religious beliefs and practices" (Rambo & Farhadian, 2014, p. 17) which are at the center of interest in this subfield. In a recent chapter on "Deconversion" for example, Heinz Streib (2014, pp. 271–272) suggests "intellectual doubt, denial, or disagreement with specific beliefs" as one of five criteria of a concept of deconversion and then goes on to describe six possible trajectories of deconversion, all of which indicate a transformation in an individual's "religious belief and praxis" or "system of beliefs and rituals." He then goes on to propose a complex and socially contextualized understanding of deconversion. However, in his work, as in other literature on deconversion, just like in the rest of the chapters of the *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Rambo & Farhadian, 2014), the concept of belief is mostly taken for granted and not examined in its own right. It seems that even if change in beliefs is the central topic of this literature, what religious belief *is* and *how it works*, is seen as largely unproblematic.

An understanding of conviction that highlights a process-oriented understanding of religious belief and varying degrees of persuasion might, therefore, equally be helpful for this field of research, as it is in regard to fundamentalism. For one, it contributes to moving beyond the crisis model of deconversion (Streib & Keller, 2004, p. 184), as beliefs are no longer understood as basically fixed until moments of doubt, but rather as a performance that is continuously re-confirmed. In this sense, existing typologies of deconversion narratives (Streib, 2014, pp. 286–287) could be complemented by a closer focus on how in the transformation of religious beliefs and during changes in their intensity, a person's evaluation of the value of conviction oscillates between the ascription of "good" and "bad" religion to their former, current, and future religious affiliations.

Conclusion

While conviction has until now not served as an important analytical category in the academic study of religion, this chapter has tried to show how a perspective that focuses on this notion might generate valuable insights into the fate of religion in modern democracies. I have argued that it is exactly the ambivalent role of conviction in the context of religion that allows the concept to express a process- and performance-oriented perspective on religious belief. Speaking about religious beliefs *as* convictions makes it possible to explore how they are classified as particularly "bad" or "good" beliefs while pointing us to "degrees of persuasion" and therefore helping

us move beyond a simplistic understanding of belief as either present or absent. This investigation highlights once again how, on the one hand, religious belief is a category in need of critique, while, on the other hand, it forms a central aspect of the modern, democratic imaginary of religion. It is in this sense that the role of conviction in religion—as an analytical category—has not yet been explored and has a place in future research.

Note

1 The "Fundamentalism Project," funded by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and directed by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ran from 1987 to 1995 and produced five comprehensive volumes on conservative religious movements from a global perspective. A sixth volume (Almond, Appleby & Sivan, 2003) appeared in the same series at the University of Chicago Press, providing an updated perspective after the events of September 11, 2001.

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8 The Psycho-Social Function of Moral Conviction

Jennifer Cole Wright

Setting the Stage: Morality as a Regulatory System

Human beings are deeply social creatures—we live (and have always lived) together in groups, from small indigenous tribal communities and villages to large modern cosmopolitan cities, states, and nations. Living together in this way requires complicated and adaptive systems of cooperation, which are captured within the development, adoption, and enforcement of what I call *socio-cultural normative structures* (i.e., sets of interrelated beliefs, values, practices, etc. that are normatively grounded by shared conceptions of "the good") that allow members of the group to function well as both individuals and as a part of the communal whole (Bicchieri, 2006; Wright, 2018a, 2021a).

These structures, while essential, are also dangerous. They only function well—facilitating harmonious and cooperative co-existence—when there is a high degree of conformity to them amongst group members. But this introduces vulnerability to abuse through bias, error, and corruption. Avoiding this requires the dynamic (and at times precarious) balancing of two opposing responsibilities.

The first is protecting group members from undue harm, injustice, and oppression by rejecting, prohibiting (and punishing) *deviant* beliefs, values, and practices. In other words, a group's adoption of shared beliefs, values, practices, etc. must ideally function to protect the group from suffering the harm, injustice, and oppression that results from people thinking, valuing, and behaving *wrongly*.

The second is, at the same time, holding open the space for individuals within the group to be *individuals*. That is, they must respect the individual autonomy/agency (the *personhood*) of individual group members by providing sufficient space for them to freely choose, to be unique and creative, and live differently (e.g., act in non-normative ways).[1] And they must be flexible enough to allow organic change—i.e., for a diversity of new and different beliefs, values, and practices to be introduced and explored by members of the group.

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This flexibility and adaptability are essential not only for the well-being of individual group members but it is also essential for the well-being of the groups themselves. Only by introducing opportunities for growth and change through the freedom of individual choice and expression can groups *as a whole* be alerted to and protected from bias, error, and corruption, and benefit from advancements in our understanding generated by creative exploration and ingenuity—even if not every change introduced and explored turns out to be an actual improvement.

How do groups dynamically balance these opposing pressures, determining which new beliefs, values, and practices represent acceptable (even desirable) diversity, and which are instead forms of potentially harmful deviance that must be shut down? Elsewhere (Wright, 2021b) I've argued that this is the essential function of *morality*, which works to establish the "boundary" conditions necessary for determining what can/cannot be regulated (i.e., "normed") by socio-cultural normative structures, as well as how such regulation can/cannot be carried out.

According to this view, morality is a double-sided regulatory system. On the one side, it involves *protecting against deviance* ("freedom from") by placing constraints and demands upon socio-cultural normative structures in order to protect and promote the welfare of their group members—i.e., to prevent undue suffering, injustice, and oppression from manifesting, and being perpetrated by, the introduction of deviant beliefs, values, and practices.

It does this in (at least) two ways. First, it protects against deviance by safeguarding well-functioning socio-cultural normative structures—i.e., by protecting them against the internal and external intrusion of harmful beliefs, values, and practices that threaten (intentionally or otherwise) to undermine their healthy functioning. Second, it acts as a corrective against socio-cultural normative structures that are biased, in error, and/or have become corrupted—i.e., when existing shared beliefs, values, or practices cause (directly or indirectly) more harm/suffering than happiness/well-being, more injustice than justice, more oppression than freedom, etc. for its members, or for members of other groups likely to be impacted.

On the other side, it involves *promoting diversity* ("freedom to") by protecting the unregulated, "free" space that is generated by our moral agency and personhood, allowing individual differences to exist, even flourish, within otherwise heavily "normed" social environments. In other words, it protects the intimate normative space that our need to be *individuals*—unique and meaningfully separate from everyone else—necessitates; the space a person needs to believe, value, and behave as she would prefer without sanction or regulation from any of the groups to which she belongs. This space encompasses the freedom of individual group members to have and engage in non-normative (and even, to some extent, anti-normative) beliefs, values, and practices—and, so, to be different from other members of their group(s), and to experience themselves as such.

Located here are those beliefs, values, and practices that are generally best not socially regulated or "normed" by socio-cultural normative structures, but instead left open to each individual member's own creative and independent choice (e.g., range of personal preferences), as well as those beliefs, values, and practices that *must not* be socially regulated or "normed" by socio-cultural normative structures—i.e., those beliefs, values, and practices and opportunities for choice that must be protected from undue social interference (e.g., basic human rights) because for any group to unduly constrain them, or attempt to take them away, would be to fundamentally undermine group members' personhood.

At this point, one might wonder: What generates these "boundary conditions?" Elsewhere I have argued that they are generated by a shared conception of *"the good"* (Wright, 2018b, 2021b). In other words, morality functions to safeguard human welfare and flourishing, which necessarily involves an ever-evolving conception of the "good" of which our lives are a part (i.e., that which makes a life worth living, results in a *well-lived,* flourishing life). Both sides of morality function together to ensure that we create socio-cultural normative systems—systems that allow us to harmoniously co-exist, coordinate, and cooperate—that reflect, represent, promote, and protect not only the sorts of beings that we are but also the sorts of beings we have within us the capacity to become: *beings fully oriented towards the good*.

Introducing Intolerance: A Key Regulatory Mechanism

How does morality serve this double-sided function—protecting against deviance, while promoting diversity? Research coming out of my own and others' labs suggests that one critical mechanism involved is *intolerance*.

Decades of research show that people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds actively (and with little prompting or instruction) identify beliefs, values, and practices as falling into one of the three categories (or "domains")—those belonging to the *social*[2] space that groups collectively negotiate and co-create (what I've been calling the socio-cultural normative structures), those belonging to the unregulated *personal* space of individual diversity, and those belonging to the space of *moral* obligation (a space not open to negotiation or choice)[3]—i.e., that which you must do/refrain from doing to promote well-being and protect from harm and injustice (Killen & Nucci, 1995; Nichols, 2004; Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Turiel, 2000; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Smetana, 1981, 1983; Turiel, 1983, 1998; Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, & Lewis, 2004; Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa, & Smith, 2001; Wainryb, Shaw, & Maianu, 1998; Wright, 2012, 2018a; Wright, Cullum, & Schwab, 2008).

What is relevant here is that, though people disagree about which beliefs, values, and practices fall into each of these domains, once a belief, value, or practice has been categorized into one of them, this consistently and powerfully predicts people's responses to it, especially when it differs from

their own. Specifically, people report being most accepting of, and open to, new and divergent beliefs, values, and practices when they are seen as acceptable *personal* "diversity" (i.e., as belonging to the unregulated space of individual choice) and are least accepting of/open to them when they were seen as unacceptable *moral* "deviance" (i.e., as belonging to the space of unnegotiable obligation)—especially when they are encountered in intimate contexts, such as in a college roommate, romantic partner, or best friend (Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Wright, 2012, 2018b; Wright et al., 2008).

This intolerance comes in a variety of attitudinal and behavioral forms—e.g., people report being highly unwilling to *interact with* (in both intimate and non-intimate settings), *help* (in both low and high-commitment situations), *sit close to*, and *share with* someone with divergent beliefs, values, and practices that they view as unacceptable forms of deviance while being much more willing to do so for someone with divergent beliefs, values, and practices that they viewed as acceptable forms of diversity. They are also most willing to prohibit, censor, shun, and punish deviant beliefs, values, and practices—to prevent them from entering into (and "taking root" in) their shared socio-cultural space—and most willing to condone and support beliefs, values, and practices that they viewed as falling within an individual's free space of choice, even when they didn't agree with them themselves (Killen & Nucci, 1995; Nichols, 2004; Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Turiel, 2000; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Smetana, 1981, 1983; Turiel, 1983, 1998; Wainryb et al., 1998, 2001, 2004; Wright, 2012, 2018b; Wright et al., 2008).

To summarize, one of the key ways that morality regulates our socio-cultural normative structures—creating space for people to be *different* from the group, to have and engage in non-normative, "divergent" beliefs, values, and practices, while restricting those beliefs, values, and practices viewed as potentially harmful to, or corruptive of, the group's well-being—is by modulating people's tolerance levels when they encounter those beliefs, values, and practices. When people identify a new or different belief, value, or practice as a form of diversity they welcome it (or are at least willing to let it be, even if they don't agree with it or feel like adopting it themselves), but when they identify it as a form of deviance, they reject it, along with the person who holds or engages in it.

The Plot Thickens: Meta-Ethical Pluralism

The fact that classifying divergent beliefs, values, and practices as deviant activates intolerance introduces an important concern. Once something has been labeled deviant, the space for conversation, debate, and disagreement becomes greatly restricted (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Wright, 2012; Wright et al., 2008), effectively closing off the space for individual choice.

But as imperfect beings, incomplete in our knowledge, vulnerable to error and corruption, we can never know for certain that our assessment of divergent beliefs, values, and practices as "deviant" was correct—what if we do so when they are actually *not*, thereby prohibiting someone from believing, valuing, or doing something that they should have the space to believe, value, or do?

Yet, on the other hand, the consequence of not labeling divergence as deviant—of failing to protect people from the potentially pernicious effects—is also risky. Perhaps by failing in our vigilance, we will allow something genuinely harmful, unjust, or oppressive to become a part of our socio-cultural normative structure. As our long history of unjust, oppressive, and harmful beliefs, values, and practices can attest, once something has become an accepted part of our socio-cultural normative structure, it can be very hard to dislodge, despite the harm done through the suffering, injustice, or oppression it manifests.

This makes viewing something as deviant (as a *moral* transgression) a very tricky issue—territory that must be navigated with caution. Previous research suggests that one way we do this is through the meta-ethical "grounding" (i.e., the source of authority) we attribute to the belief, value, or practice we have classified as deviant.

Specifically, the question is whether people treat the deviant belief, value, or practice as being "objectively grounded" (i.e., its deviance determined by objective, mind-independent facts about the situation, the world, and the nature of human beings; similar to scientific facts) or as "non-objectively grounded" (i.e., its deviance being more a matter of its inconsistency with the individual's or group's pre-existing beliefs, values, or practices—so, "deviant" relative to the individual or group).

Research coming out of my lab and others shows that people are *pluralists*, meta-ethically speaking. That is, they ground some deviant beliefs, values, and practices objectively while grounding others as non-objective (Pölzler & Wright, 2019, 2020; Wright, 2015, 2018a; Wright, Grandjean, & McWhite, 2013; Wright, McWhite, & Grandjean, 2014; Wright & Sarkissian, 2013). As odd as this might sound, what the evidence suggests is that this "metaethical pluralism" performs a much-needed function—i.e., it provides a way to categorize an issue as *deviant* (as morally wrong) without the hazards of completely shutting down the space for individual choice and exploration. In other words, it appears to allow people to entertain the idea that particular beliefs, values, or practices are morally wrong without being accompanied (at least initially) by the attitudinal and behavioral intolerance that typically follows.

Specifically, our research found that those beliefs, values, and practices that people had categorized as deviant, but grounded non-objectively were treated with significantly less attitudinal and behavioral intolerance (measured in the same ways discussed above) than those that people had objectively grounded. People were more willing to privately and publicly

support—and less inclined to privately or publicly shun/condemn—deviant beliefs, values, and practices when they viewed them as being non-objectively grounded. They also responded to others with deviant beliefs, values, and practices in a less hostile manner and were more willing to interact with and help them—even though they still viewed them as believing, valuing, or doing something that was *morally wrong*—when they grounded that deviance non-objectively (Pölzler & Wright, 2019, 2020; Sarkissian, Parks, Tien, Wright, & Knobe, 2011; Wright, 2015, 2018a; Wright et al., 2013, 2014).

Of particular relevance for our discussion here is that we found a strong link between people's meta-ethical grounding and their reports of "perceived level of consensus"—that is, the degree to which they believed that other members of their group agreed with them about the belief, value, or practice being "deviant." Specifically, we found that the more agreement people perceived there to be within their group about whether a particular belief, value, or practice was deviant, the more likely they were to ground it objectively, and vice versa (Wright et al., 2014).

This makes sense when we consider that morality is functioning as a regulator of divergence (Wright, 2021b)—it is not simply about protecting against deviance, but also about promoting diversity (i.e., maintaining a protected space for individual personhood to flourish). This means that even when it comes to potentially deviant beliefs, values, and practices, people understand that individuals—as moral agents—must be given a certain amount of "normative space" to disagree, to think for themselves. In the interest of avoiding abuse, the space for dialogue, choice, and disagreement must be held open long enough for the group to become sufficiently clear that the belief, value, or practice in question is indeed deviant.

But how do we know when sufficient clarity has been achieved? One potential sign is when enough of our fellow group members weigh in on the same side—when there is a consensus. As Calhoun (2000) has argued, civility requires us to treat those with divergent beliefs, values, and practices with respect—up until the point where social consensus has been achieved, and then we are no longer required to do so. Thus, when consensus is (or is perceived to be) reached, it becomes reasonable to no longer tolerate the deviant belief, value, or practice in question. And indeed, our research suggests that objective grounding and perceived consensus work together—i.e., the more consensus people perceive, the more likely they are to give an objective grounding, and objective groundings are more likely to receive high consensus ratings.

We also found that it is people's perception of consensus, not the objective grounding itself, that predicts their level of intolerance (Wright et al., 2014; see also Goodwin & Darley, 2012). This suggests that an important signal people use to determine if a belief, value, or practice they view as deviant can be safely rejected is whether it counts as an "outlier." When people think that everyone else in their group believes, values, or does the same

things, then anyone with deviant beliefs, values, or practices can safely be considered a *transgressor*—making intolerance a justified response (see also Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

To summarize, meta-ethical pluralism allows people to acknowledge the possibility that a particular belief, value, or practice may be deviant without yet requiring (or even being allowed to require) the censorship, prohibition, and intolerance that typically accompanies this classification. It holds open the space for group members to consider what is at stake, to debate with one another about the nature and status of the divergent belief, value, or practice until a collective "reflective equilibrium" is achieved—at which point, the full force of intolerance can be activated.

Enter, Stage Right: Moral Conviction

Of course, sometimes in order to move an issue either solidly into—or, for that matter, out of—the space of moral obligation (the space of deviance) there need to be people who push *harder* than everyone else. These are people who operate outside the boundaries of consensus—people who often work hard to generate, or manufacture, consensus. And this is where *moral conviction* comes in.

I have argued elsewhere that moral conviction involves (and, thus, can be measured along) two distinct dimensions (Wright et al., 2008). The first dimension—i.e., *belief structure*—is the cognitive structure underlying people's moral beliefs and values. Specifically, people with strong moral convictions view deviance as being objectively grounded (Goodwin & Darley, 2008, 2010; Kohlberg, 1986; Skitka, 2010; Turiel, 1983, 1998; Wright & Pölzler, 2021).

The second dimension—i.e., *belief intensity*—is effective in nature. Moral conviction is about more than just believing something is deviant, it is about believing that *strongly* (Skitka, 2010; Wright et al., 2008). While effective strength has been found to influence our attitudes and behaviors across a range of domains (for reviews, see Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Petty & Krosnick, 1995; Visser, Bizer, & Krosnick, 2004), it plays an especially important powerful role when it comes to judgments about perceived moral transgressions—beliefs, values, or practices that are viewed as unjust, as causing unwarranted harm and suffering.

Not only do people report holding many of their beliefs about deviance more strongly than other beliefs, but this effective intensity *interacts* with their beliefs to generate particularly strong attitudinal and behavioral intolerance (Skitka, 2010; Wright et al., 2008)—among these, their attitudinal reactions to what they perceive to be deviant beliefs, values, and practices, their willingness to interact with, help, and share resources with those who hold or engage in them, their willingness to shun or punish them, their willingness to seek resolution of disagreement, and their overall suspicion for legal and political processes that are perceived as supporting deviant

beliefs, values, and practices (Mullen & Skitka, 2006a, 2006b; Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Wright et al., 2008).

While simply believing certain beliefs, values, or practices to be deviant is enough to generate increased intolerance, people with strong moral convictions express significantly more attitudinal and behavioral intolerance toward those beliefs, values, and practices than people with weak convictions. And, importantly, this additive effect of conviction appears to only be present when it comes to the perception of *deviance*—people's level of conviction does not predict increased intolerance when it comes to divergent beliefs, values, and practices viewed as either disobeying existing socio-cultural norms or as acceptable forms of diversity (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008).

Importantly, a conviction can fuel intolerance even in the absence of evidence of consensus—for example, people become even more willing to speak out against a belief, value, or practice they view as deviant when they perceive themselves to have the minority opinion (Hornsey, Majkut, Terry, & McKimmie, 2003; Hornsey, Smith, & Begg, 2007; Jetten & Hornsey, 2015), especially when in a polarized environment (Reifen Tagar, Morgan, Halperin, & Skitka, 2014). That said, a conviction can also be accompanied by—and perhaps brought on—a strong perception of consensus. In other words, people with a strong moral conviction may also tend to believe that others agree with them (even when, in truth, they actually do not). And our research suggests that this false perception of consensus, coupled with viewing the issue in question as objectively grounded, fuels people's strong negative affective reaction to the belief, value, or practice that they view as deviant (Wright & Pölzler, 2021).

As I discussed earlier, one function of morality is to protect against deviance—to prevent undue suffering, injustice, and oppression from manifesting and being perpetrated by deviant beliefs, values, and practices—and it does so in (at least) two ways. First, it safeguards well-functioning socio-cultural normative structures; second, it acts as a corrective against socio-cultural normative structures that are biased, in error, and/or have become corrupted. Importantly, the features of moral conviction discussed above—strongly held beliefs that the identified deviance is *objectively* wrong, an aberration not to be tolerated (a view also believed to be widely shared by others)—are well suited for both types of moral function.

For example, people with a strong conviction about the death penalty, gun ownership, and the use of animals in research (currently accepted/legal practices) as being morally wrong expressed a high degree of intolerance toward their *continued presence* in existing socio-cultural normative structures, believing that they should be abolished immediately (Wright et al., 2008, 2014; see also Passini, 2019). Similarly, people with a strong conviction about discriminatory hiring practices, prostitution, and abortion (currently not accepted/illegal practices) as morally wrong expressed a high degree of intolerance toward their *potential inclusion* in existing socio-cultural normative structures (Wright et al., 2008, 2014). In both

cases, moral conviction serves to protect people's socio-cultural normative structures from beliefs, values, and practices viewed as morally wrong—as unjust, harmful, and oppressive.

Having a protective force such as this within our communities is obviously critically important. The healthy functioning of socio-cultural normative structures depends upon this sort of "gate-keeping," so to speak—people willing to risk social criticism, ostracization, even rebuke (and in some cases, physical harm—even death) in the interest of dismantling existing harmful beliefs, values, and practices and/or blocking the introduction of new ones, i.e., spearheading social change (Hornsey et al., 2003, 2007; Jetten & Hornsey, 2015).

And there is no shortage of brave, dedicated, outspoken moral exemplars that we could point to—people who have dedicated their lives to stopping the harms of sexist, racist, and homophobic beliefs, values, and practices; standing up against political and economic corruption, demanding that we change existing or block new legislation that unreasonably damages the world we live in and the people that live in it, especially those left deeply minoritized and vulnerable by these beliefs, values, and practices (Colby & Damon, 1992; Moore, 2006, 2011; Morselli & Passini, 2010, 2012; Oliner, 2003). Some of these exemplars held deviant beliefs and values, and engaged in deviant practices, themselves before coming to see them as deviant and taking up the cause to change them (Wright, Hoffmann, & Coen, 2018).

Yet, such "stalwarts" can also pose a danger to society, pushing for and condoning violence as a means to create social change (Workman, Yoder, & Decety, 2020)—or worse, pressuring communities into continuing or adopting harmful beliefs, values, or practices, protecting corruption, espousing vicious beliefs, values, and practices, or blocking others from accessing the diversity of beliefs, values, and practices necessary for them to thrive (Alcoff, 2007). And while some people push for these things from a transparently self-benefitting orientation—a perverse desire to hold onto power/status/wealth at the expense of others—others do so from a place of ideologically-driven righteousness, with the wholehearted belief that they have the truth on their side (Garrett, 2019; Reifen Tagar et al., 2014; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017).

This risk makes moral conviction a troublesome bedfellow. Given the imperfection of our moral knowledge—our vulnerability to ignorance and error—conviction always runs the risk of becoming unreasonably dogmatic and oppressive, on the one hand, or irrationally rebellious, on the other (Workman et al., 2020). The question we are left with, then, is how do we foster moral conviction in a way that works to our benefit, while avoiding its dangers? This is where the importance of virtue comes in.

Virtue: Orienting Moral Conviction Toward the Good

Thus far, we have discussed the challenge of balancing the need to protect communities from deviance and yet at the same time maintain adequate

open space for diversity—and for the possibility of changing and improving existing beliefs, values, and practices, correcting for error and corruption. Especially given the risk posed by strong conviction—and the serious possibility of further harm and suffering it could inflict (even unintentionally)—we need a sort of "guiding light," a reliable way to gain moral knowledge and minimize the possibility of error and abuse.

And here we return to the view that our socio-cultural normative structures are normatively grounded by shared conceptions of "the good," an understanding of ourselves as moral beings pursuing "the good life." Elsewhere (Wright, 2008, 2018b), I have argued that we gain moral knowledge as members of groups—not only because we learn through the group which beliefs and values to have and which practices to engage in but also because the process of learning and imitating our group's existing beliefs, values, and practices leads to the development of capacities necessary to critically reflect upon, improve, and even replace those very beliefs, values, and practices (see also Churchland, 2000).

In other words, by becoming a member of a group, we become an active participant in maintaining and protecting a shared socio-cultural normative structure, which naturally creates opportunities for moral growth, i.e., the discovery and development of new moral knowledge and/or the use of existing moral knowledge to create and adopt new beliefs, values, and practices. And this happens (or so I've argued) in large part, through *virtue*.

As moral agents, we must do more than learn to "follow the rules" of our groups and communities by adopting shared beliefs, values, and practices—we must learn where the space of freedom lies. In other words, what divergence from the group is an acceptable form of diversity, and when does it cross over into deviance? At the heart of these challenges lies coming to understand what it means to be moral agents, beings whose lives are grounded and guided by a shared conception of "the good." This means we not only have to learn from our families and communities about morality—we have to learn how to *be moral*.

At the core of learning how to be moral are the virtues. One of the things members of our group teach us when they communicate various beliefs and values and engage in various practices, is what it looks like to be moral—i.e., to do the right thing, what is called for—which requires (among other things) being honest, respectful, brave, generous, patient, loyal, compassionate, and so on, when it is called for us to be so.

We learn by observing and participating in daily communal life what virtues such as these look like, as well as when and how they are to be displayed, by and to whom. And because this is done and witnessed repeatedly across a wide range of people and situations, we come to recognize the shared system of beliefs, values, and practices held by the entire community—things everyone agrees are *good* to believe, value, and do.

Imagine that as a child, you work every weekend with your family—and other members of your community—at a soup kitchen run by your

neighborhood church and generally hear people you know talk about the importance of giving to, and caring for, those whose need is greater than our own (without expecting anything in return). In being a part of all this, you are learning about generosity and compassion—and the importance of being generous and compassionate. You are learning that there are certain ways of being generous and compassionate, such as working on weekends in a soup kitchen to feed those who are food insecure. But even more importantly, you are learning that it is *because* working at the soup kitchen is a way of being generous and compassionate that it is a common community practice—and that ways of being generous and compassionate are *valued* by your family and community.

Learning this implies that you, too, as members of the community, should not only donate time at the soup kitchen—and act in other ways that are generous and compassionate (because they are valued, and because you are thus expected to)—but also that you should likewise value it. And by repeatedly doing certain things *because* they are generous and compassionate, and by coming to value being generous and compassionate more generally, this sparks an internal motivation orienting you toward generosity and compassion—you become motivated to improve and extend your virtue practice, being generous and compassionate in ways and situations that you have not yet before.

Thus, while it may be through a *particular* set of expressed beliefs, values, and practices that we learned how to be generous and compassionate, this knowledge, once imparted, is nonetheless not restricted to the set of expressed beliefs, values, and practices from which it was gained. Instead, we come to recognize within our community a whole range of different ways of being generous and compassionate—all of which are connected as, and only matter insofar as they are, *ways of behaving generously and compassionately.*

This is critical because in coming to value being generous and compassionate, we come to understand that it is *this* (being generous and compassionate) that ultimately matters, not the specific ways in which they are expressed. And since things like donating time every weekend at the soup kitchen (and other shared beliefs, values, and practices) matter only insofar as they are ways of being generous and compassionate, this opens us up to two critically important opportunities for moral learning: first, the opportunity (as mentioned above) to recognize that there are many different ways of being generous and compassionate, some of which may as yet be unknown; second, to the opportunity to recognize that existing patterns of being generous and compassionate may actually *not* be so (at least, not fully). Both of these open the door to possible improvements, revisions, and replacements to our existing beliefs, values, and practices, changes that are not capricious or ill-intended but instead are grounded in, and informed by, the virtues—and the underlying conception of "the good" they serve—that they were intended to embody and express (e.g., see the discussion of the practice of men holding doors open for women in Calhoun, 2000).

Consider an example given by Annas (2011) of a boy who learned about bravery by witnessing one of his parents chase off an aggressive dog. In witnessing this, the child recognizes that what his parent did was brave—as would be any parent chasing away an aggressive dog that threatened their child—and that it was a *good* thing to do, because it protected him from harm. And he may also notice (either then or later) similarities between that particular action and all the other ways his parents, and others, protect him from harm—which eventually generalizes into all the ways that members of his community protect others from harm.

In other words, he would eventually come to realize that lots of different *ways of being brave* can be found within his community and occur whenever situations in which bravery is called for arise—that *bravery* (or courage), as expressed through a shared pattern of beliefs, values, and practices, is valued by his community. And as a member of his community, he would thus likely come to also want to *be brave* whenever it was called for.

He may even eventually come to value bravery not simply because it is valued by his community, but because it is valuable *in its own right*, insofar as it helps to keep members of his family and community safe from harm. And this might lead him to evaluate beliefs, values, and practices intended to express, promote, and display bravery (to determine whether they actually do so, and if so, how), as well as to explore new forms of bravery, ways of being brave that he has not yet witnessed, that are not currently a part of his shared patterns of beliefs, values, and practices—all of which could ultimately lead to the revision of those beliefs, values, and practices and/or the introduction of new ones, thereby expanding his understanding of what it is to be brave, fed by his desire to be so.

Expanding this story out to virtues in general, as people become oriented toward virtue, provides an essential foundation for our shared systems of norms, serving as a critical safeguard of our socio-cultural space, as a mechanism through which the balance between diversity and deviance can be productively maintained. Among other things, it becomes clear that beliefs, values, and practices that express, promote, or display virtue (especially those virtues most valued by our group) should be allowed to flourish—even when they diverge from existing beliefs, values, and practices. Likewise, beliefs, values, and practices (including existing ones) that threaten, impede, or act against virtue should be discouraged, if not prevented altogether.

And even more importantly for our purposes, virtue serves as an essential fuel and guiding force for moral conviction. To the extent that we understand (and feel motivated by) the actual underlying importance of certain beliefs, values, and practices—namely, that they are thought to embody, align with, and/or express the virtues necessary to promote and protect our shared conception of "the good"—we are more likely to stand in the right relationship (a relationship of "critical reverence") to those beliefs, values, and practices (Clark, 2000). By this, I mean that we understand (and are

motivated by) the sacredness of our shared beliefs, values, and practices as—*and only as*—reflections and embodiments of those virtues. And our conviction to defend them from bias, error, and corruption is grounded by that understanding. The flipside to this is that our conviction can just as easily be rallied by the call for correction—the need to alter, replace, or remove beliefs, values, and practices that we have come to see as unintended distortions (or intended perversions) of those virtues. Conviction thus becomes rooted in, and driven by, a shared vision of a world in which families, communities, states, and nations protect and promote the thriving of all their members—minimizing the presence and effects of harmful, oppressive, and unjust beliefs, values, and practices, while allowing diversity to flourish.

In other words, one way of thinking about it is that not all moral conviction is truly *moral*, in the sense that not all conviction is fueled, grounded, and guided by a truly universally shared conception of "the good" (i.e., that which makes a life worth living, results in a *well-lived,* flourishing life)—one that reflects, represents, promotes, and protects not only the sorts of beings that we are but also the sorts of beings we have within us the capacity to become.

Notes

1 Note that while I contrast the group vs. the "individual" here – and throughout the paper – in actuality the balance between conforming to existing norms vs. exploring new ones happens at both the individual and the group level. Members of a group can work creatively together to introduce change, and individuals can crack down and insist on enforcing norms.
2 Also referred to as "conventional" space by some researchers.
3 Notice that both the "personal" and "moral" domains found in previous research (including my own) are encompassed by the account of morality that I've provided here. In other words, my view is that the personal domain is not actually an entirely separate domain, but rather one of the regulatory sides of morality.

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9 Moderating Conviction Through Civility in Education

Deborah S. Mower

Introduction[1]

A widely used phrase, emblematic of our time and memorialized on bumper stickers, proclaims that "If you are not outraged, you are not paying attention." What I find interesting about this phrase is its vagueness. It references no particular issues but calls for generalized outrage at anything and everything. This phrase is a nice model for the concept of conviction, which is not limited by any particular content but is the attitude or stance one takes toward a belief one holds. Convictions are central to action, for we are motivated by and guide our choices and activities by the convictions we hold. For example, my environmental convictions influence my daily choices from the purchases I make to the foods I eat, to which bin I select when discarding a can. Convictions organize our lives through motivating pledges and service, whether it is merely a few hours to engage in a protest, a standing commitment to volunteer weekly, or the dedication of our careers and life's work. In many cases, convictions are so strongly held that they become core elements of our identities and character. Convictions drive our individual choices toward self-improvement in starting new exercise regimes, limiting vices or destructive tendencies such as alcohol dependency, or motivating the choice of a non-traditional student to seek an advanced degree late in life. And with increased attention toward moral problems such as redlining,[2] convictions can make us moral champions, explaining problems, illustrating needs, and defining solutions to spur us collectively down the road of moral progress. Although convictions are often shared and can bring people together in the pursuit of common causes and activities, they just as often lead to division and strife. It is because convictions motivate and guide our actions, organize our lives, ground our identities, and shape our character that they can lead to incivility, anger, intolerance, non-engagement (avoidance), and violence toward those who appear to hold differing views and commitments.

Because this Janus-faced nature of conviction has extreme effects—both positively and negatively—on individuals as well as our society, scholars are increasingly interested in the relation between conviction, civility, and our

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ability to engage in the democratic process (Calhoun, 2000; Cohen, 2009; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1998; Kingwell, 1995; Ladenson, 2012; McGregor, 2004; Sellers, 2004; Shaffer, 2017). Democracy depends upon the ability of citizens to engage in substantive conversations and debates about choices of living and policy matters that govern us all. But the ability to engage in civil discourse about complex ethical issues seems to be in decline. We can observe this trend at the macro level through studies on changes in citizens' willingness to engage socially with others from differing political perspectives (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012) as well as changes at the micro level in our personal lives—each of us has "that crazy uncle" with whom we can no longer have meaningful conversations about life choices or discuss politics—with unbridgeable divides.

Psychologists have also recently turned their attention to conviction, examining correlations with particular behaviors (e.g., likeliness to vote, willingness to engage in activism) and offering theoretical descriptions of characteristic properties based on observed patterns (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2008; Skitka & Wisneski 2011; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2012; Wisneski & Skitka, 2016; Wright, Cullum, & Schwab, 2008). Several psychologists have recently proposed that moral conviction has the properties of universality, objectivity, autonomy, and emotional intensity, among others (Skitka, 2010, 2014; Skitka, Washburn, & Carsel, 2015). Similar to psychologist Linda Skitka and her collaborators, I define conviction as an attitude or the stance one takes toward a belief one holds, where that attitude is characterized by specific identifying properties. Based on decades of teaching ethics and observing students present moral convictions in both speech and writing, I propose the additional properties of normative clarity, justification, and completeness. This collective list of proposed properties—universality, objectivity, autonomy, emotional intensity, normative clarity, justification, and completeness[3]—allows us to characterize moral conviction more completely.

Although psychologists have begun to theorize about the nature of moral conviction, they have not explored the conditions under which convictions are built, revised, or moderated, whether the content of the conviction alters, whether the properties of conviction can be altered in nature or lessened in degree or the effects of sustained interventions. In this chapter, I argue that both the properties and content of conviction can be modified through a sustained educational intervention. I describe the design of an applied ethics course built around cases from the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (IEB), detailing specific assignments and activities.[4] The course itself is composed of a series of "steps" and I describe the goals and outcomes for each as well as the way in which this process of teaching civility affects the properties of conviction. As students learn more about a host of ethical issues, quite predictably, their views change. In some cases, students develop convictions on issues where they formerly had no position (either because of complete unfamiliarity with the issue or because they were deeply

conflicted). In other instances, students revise their views and decide that a former belief was mistaken. And sometimes students' views about an issue remain unchanged, yet they experience a profound shift in the attitude they take toward those beliefs. Although the moderation of conviction is demonstrated within an educational setting and with undergraduate students, we can transport these lessons to other ages[5] and other contexts, which I will address at the end of the chapter.

Course Design

I designed an applied ethics class based on the cases released each fall for the Regional IEB competitions.[6] The Ethics Bowl cases are written by a national case writing committee, and they reflect current issues and ethical problems ripped from headlines—truly some of the most vexing problems faced by our society. The cases are written to highlight the perspectives of multiple individuals or groups, the complexity of the ethical issues, and the tensions between multiple competing moral values, goals, or obligations. Each case is typically a full page or more and includes a mixture of background information, factual details, quotations from experts, and descriptions or quotations from interested parties to represent a range of perspectives.[7] As an applied ethics course, students first study moral theory and then focus on the 15 cases for the remainder of the semester. But it is also a debate class and a class that focuses on policy and solutions.

The constellation of these approaches provides a unique way to moderate moral conviction by teaching civility. Although "civility" is a word commonly used, there is little agreement on its meaning. In popular language, civility is thought by many to capture politeness or the rules of etiquette. However, stemming from the history of ideas and as used by scholars (Mower, 2021), civility is a virtue that governs our interactions with and treatment of others as it relates to belief. As a quick and dirty description, civility is a collection of values, criteria, and expectations for governing the exchange of ideas when interacting with another. Discussions with others that follow standard procedures (e.g., providing another time to answer one's question rather than launching into a monologue) allow both parties to participate, interact, and adopt various roles within the discussion (e.g., questioner and responder). Discourse stemming from civility, where individuals direct and guide their interactions according to the values, criteria, and expectations for governing the exchange of ideas, is referred to as "civil discourse." Similarly to how the rules of a soccer game allow the players to coordinate themselves in the activity of a game, civility allows individuals to coordinate themselves in the activity of analyzing belief, whether it is a discussion of government tax proposals, when the next community fundraising event should occur, or whether to take a vacation in the midst of a spreading pandemic. As a virtue governing our interactions with and treatment of others in the activity of belief evaluation, civility can be learned,

practiced, and cultivated over time. When taught as a series of steps within a process, students develop civility as an orienting attitude that guides not only how to engage in evaluating beliefs but also how to interact with others while doing so (Mower, 2019). This method of teaching civility provides the conditions to moderate both the content of beliefs and the properties of conviction.

The class is open to all students and serves as one of the many ethics courses in philosophy that supports General Education. It draws widely across campus, attracting students from engineering, law, English, criminal justice, biology, psychology, economics, classics, political science, and philosophy. It is billed as Ethical Policy Debates and students offer a variety of reasons for registering. As one might expect, students are eager to study the questions that interest them most. Philosophy students want to examine the philosophical and ethical issues of cases. Economics students want to weigh the efficacy of particular models and implications. And pre-law students—seeking glory in the rhetorical battles of courtroom dramas—wish to enhance their oration and debating skills. Many students register for the class simply because they are interested in the current culture wars in the news. Most of the students expect to study theoretical debates, but relatively few register because they themselves want to engage in debates. Some students are so reticent to speak only hefty point values on assignments and much encouragement during office hours can coax a comment out of them in class. Consequently, the student demographic is diverse in majors, abilities, interests, and desire to engage in debates.

As one might expect, I begin by focusing on basic argumentation through critical thinking (Buechner, 2012). As critical thinking is widely taught within philosophy, this involves teaching students about the distinction between premises and conclusions, what makes arguments strong versus weak, and basic fallacies of reasoning. For example, students examine classic fallacies such as hasty generalizations, slippery slopes, or circular arguments. Many students are hesitant to evaluate arguments as they want to respect the views and opinions of others. One goal of this section of the course is to encourage students to treat arguments, claims, and expressed beliefs as the kinds of things which can—and should—be analyzed. Ideas and claims are independent from the persons who hold them—whether it is one individual or thousands—and students learn that one can respect the right of others to hold opinions and also engage in the analysis of those opinions as separate entities. Some students also falsely believe that ideas and beliefs are unanalyzable, not due to a misguided view of respect but the mistaken belief that there are no objective means of evaluation. Consequently, a second goal is to provide students with widely accepted methods, standards, and conceptual tools used to evaluate ideas, claims, and arguments. Students use and apply these critical thinking tools daily for the remainder of the semester through assignments, in class discussions, formal debates, oral presentations, and papers.

The second step is to teach students specific skills for analyzing ethical arguments. A widely used method (not unique to me) is to identify the components of arguments that present ethical norms, ideals, values, or goals as providing what we might label a "General Moral Principle or Claim" (a "GMP" for short-hand reference). For example, an argument might present a criticism of one who was loyal at the expense of honesty. This ranking of virtues could then be stated as the general claim that "Honesty is more valuable than loyalty." And, of course, there are components of arguments that present what are intended to be factual claims (whether the factual claims are *true* is a separate matter). For example, one might state that the GDP has declined since 2016, that the rate of cities sinking under their own weight will accelerate in the next ten years, that the religious right endorses abortion access restrictions, or that Pfizer has developed a vaccine that thwarts the COVID-19 variants. These claims, which often comprise the bulk of an argument, tend to fall into general categories of content such as biology, psychology, economics, history, religion, etc., and can be labeled "Specific Factual Conditions or Claims" ("SFCs" for short). One clear benefit of these categories and labels is that it helps students identify and separate normative and factual claims, aiding their analysis. Students can avoid the pitfalls of statements that appear to be factual, but are normative claims in disguise (such as "abortion doctors murder more innocent American citizens each year"), as well as identify the type or category of information (e.g., sociological data about the beliefs of particular religious groups) they would need to seek to verify the truth of a statement.

The third step is to use these components in what I call the "Reverse Thought" exercise (which is unique to me). I give students sample Ethics Bowl cases and have them work in groups to identify the various argument components from above. Students begin by identifying the conclusion, which provides a statement of what one ought to do. We label such a statement the "Specific Moral Principle" (or "SMP" for short) because it presents a normative claim about what should or should not be done in this particular case. For example, one might argue that "In the San Bernardino shooting,[8] Apple was wrong not to provide the FBI with the codes to yield "backdoor" technology access to the phones of the suspected shooters." Now the real work begins. Working like jurists seeking evidence, students must specify what someone would have to think, believe, and assume in order to make such a claim. Cataloging the various SFCs quickly impresses upon students the vast amount of information and knowledge that we often assume and take for granted within an argument. Cataloging SFCs also makes it clear to students how disagreement over a single factual claim quickly leads to opposing conclusions. For example, Sarah might believe that it is possible for Apple to bypass the encryption used in iOS8 phones and so might conclude that Apple *should* meet the FBI's request. But Bill—in complete agreement with all other components of Sarah's argument—might believe that it is not possible for Apple to retrieve a user's password

given the encryption systems in iOS8 phones and hence conclude that Apple *should not* (indeed, because they *cannot*) meet the FBI's request. This disagreement turns on a single factual claim about what is possible to access within specific encrypted information.

The process of identifying GMPs helps students specify the precise moral claim deliberately. For example, is the criticism of one who was loyal at the expense of honesty expressing a ranking of virtues, or a slightly different view, which is "One should be honest in all cases and without exception?" In order to decide between these different versions of general principles, students have to weigh what evidence would support one interpretation over another. For instance, if Bill claims that dishonesty is harmful and provides multiple examples, then this provides good reason to think he is relying on the GMP that "One should be honest in all cases without exception." In contrast, if Bill claims that dishonesty is harmful but discusses some examples where violating loyalty was also harmful, Sarah might reasonably infer that he is assuming a generalized rank order of one virtue over another (rather than the claim that there are no exceptions to honesty). This process of evaluating possible GMPs in light of the evidence of SFCs expressed (or assumed) in an argument requires students to specify the normative claim and to accurately characterize (as best one can) another's moral beliefs or commitments. Further, it underscores the lesson that individuals may agree on all factual claims yet disagree in their conclusions merely because they relied upon slightly different GMPs—each of which is well-grounded within a widely accepted moral theory. Perhaps most importantly, this process helps students reconstruct arguments as being reasonable, thereby encouraging them to view the persons who espouse them also as reasonable.

After grappling with these difficult exercises, we move to the fourth step. This part of the course introduces students to a plurality of moral theories or frameworks for decision-making. Because cost-benefit analyses are often familiar to students from prior economics or political science courses, we begin with utilitarianism and examine both Rule and Act versions of the theory. We next turn to Kantian Deontology, because so many students find the focus on intentions and the universality of moral obligations highly intuitive. We examine Aquinas' version of Natural Law Theory and spend some time detailing the Doctrine of Double Effect and how it is commonly used in moral decision-making. Because students often have a passing familiarity with a Hobbesian version of Social Contract Theory, we explore Rawls's version of contractarianism highlighting the use of the Veil of Ignorance as a concrete tool for generating principles. We next consider the Ethic of Care, focusing on Nel Noddings' particular version. Building on the Care Ethicists' emphasis on relationships and characterological traits such as empathy, we turn next to Virtue Ethics. Making use of Aristotle's account, we discuss a host of virtues and the use of the Golden Mean approach to guide individual decisions as well as the construction of character. Lastly, we examine W.D. Ross's account of Deontological Intuitionism

to help students understand the range of moral commitments and types of obligations and to develop a method for weighing competing or conflicting moral duties.

Because this is not a course in theoretical ethics, the first goal is to introduce the theories in sufficient detail so that students can begin to apply them. As they continue to use the theories, they gain a better understanding of the theories themselves and their correct application. The second goal is to present a broad array of moral theories as plausible and legitimate alternatives for systematic moral decision-making. While many students may have previously studied only utilitarianism or social contract theory, this survey demonstrates that there are many systems or families of moral theories. The students gain knowledge not only of the theories, but most importantly, of their own former ignorance. They are often surprised that there are so many moral theories, and at the discovery that they find several intuitively appealing. Despite this discovery, students often lapse into using whatever moral theory they either had formerly learned (e.g., contractarianism) or that tends to best support their own views (even if only seemingly). However, because students must apply moral theories in each subsequent class, they become more comfortable with unfamiliar theories merely through increased exposure and required practice in their application. As they become more comfortable with all the theories, they are increasingly able and likely to adopt a "new" theory (e.g., making an argument from Virtue Ethics). By the end of the semester, the students are able to make arguments using all of the moral theories and understand when one theory might provide better theoretical resources for a given case than an alternative theory. For example, Care Ethics allows one to examine the current needs of individuals as well as the nature of needed care, which provides interesting insights into resolving the burnout of caretakers or the phenomenon of moral distress in healthcare (in ways that Kantian Deontology cannot).[9] And while students may not ever feel an affinity for a particular theory, they can understand how the theory provides a systematic way to frame issues, guide decision-making, and navigate conflicts.

A class discussion on the sources of disagreement and how the various theories offer support for differing moral beliefs (using two example cases) prepares students for upcoming disagreements and conflict analysis. Subsequent weekly interactions with fellow classmates discussing cases (explained below) illustrate how views that differ from one's own can be well-grounded by an alternative moral theory. This experience demonstrates that while their former beliefs and judgments (derived through any one particular normative framework) may be moral, they are clearly not the only way that one can think about and approach an ethical issue.

With all the above conceptual tools, skills, background moral theories, and preparation for disagreement in place, we turn next to analyzing Ethics Bowl cases and building arguments (Ladenson, 2001). Each week we study two new cases and I divide the class up into working groups, with at least

one group (group numbers and size depend on the overall class size) for each case. It is common for everyone—students included—to read or hear about a moral dilemma or issue and instantly come to a judgment without thinking too deeply about the issues or seeking additional information. To combat this tendency, I developed an assignment as a form of "guided questions for deep analysis" that students use both for individual work and group discussions.

The first question on the analysis assignment requires students to identify various stakeholders within the case ranging from persons, groups, and systems and at the individual, local, state, regional, national, and international/global levels—even considering future persons' generations from now. Students often approach cases from their personal standpoint, thinking about how a new proposed law would affect them individually, or how they personally would feel if their relative had been killed in the San Bernardino shooting from the example above. The process of identifying stakeholders encourages perspective-taking.[10] Students may ask themselves questions such as "if I were one of the workers whose job might be threatened, what would I think about the moratorium on drilling in national monuments and parks?" The continued hunt to identify stakeholders has a "de-centering" effect in that the dominance of their own perspective recedes as they consider the perspective of other stakeholders. Further, while some groups or persons mentioned in the case are obvious, the perspectives of or the impact on others may not be immediately apparent. For example, what appears to be an ethical issue that affects only two parties may have long-term ramifications for another group, and sometimes a proposed resolution may require resources that would impose a burden on a third party. Getting students to think through the practical implications for those with a stake in the case—whether it be direct or indirect—helps them see the complexity of the issues, resources needed, and the scope of the possible resolution.

The second question requires students to detail and explain all relevant ethical concepts that capture the viewpoint of particular stakeholders. For example, students might explain whether the case involves instances of influence, coercion, or force, and whether they take economic, physical, or psychological forms. They are also encouraged to apply concepts that highlight or elicit unique aspects of the case. For example, a student may explain how the concept of self-defense either changes the moral issue or helps to identify something morally important (that may not have immediately been apparent). Next, the students write a short paragraph explaining which moral theory they think best applies to the case. They detail how it represents the range of perspectives from the stakeholders they previously identified, accounts for the majority of the concepts they identified, and provides a resolution. Although it is not required, students often present an argument that contrasts two or more theories. Students deepen their understanding of the ethical theories by explaining to themselves why one

theory provides a conceptual benefit, offers further insights, or resolves issues uniquely for the given case.

The final component requires students to list possible questions that might be asked within the debate, ranging from simple questions about the moral permissibility of some action or proposal to intermediate-level questions contrasting the competing aims, goals, or interests of various stakeholders, to complex questions about implementing a public policy. As students brainstorm possible debate questions, they discover additional aspects of the case they had not initially considered. For example, in a case that examines whether voluntary and non-medically necessary amputations should qualify for state-funded disability claims, students need to expand their questions to additional stakeholders beyond merely considering the person seeking the disability claim. Although they may not have initially included taxpayers in their list of stakeholders, a question about whether taxpayer money should fund non-medically necessary amputations makes taxpayers, as a group, salient and encourages students to expand on their former answers. A question about whether body imaging and identity are necessary for psychological health requires students to reexamine the concept of medical necessity. Similarly, a question about whether one's conception of identity (and how one's body reflects that identity) is voluntary and if other identity-based voluntary surgeries (e.g., rhinoplasty, gender affirmation surgery, or liposuction) should be similarly funded pushes students to consider the consistency of their claims. By merely thinking of increasingly more complex questions, students revise their own positions and lead themselves into a deeper analysis.

Prior to class, students complete the analysis assignment individually which then provides the basis for our shared classroom group activity. Working in their assigned group for the week, the task for the day is to develop consensus for their group answers to each of the questions. Understandably, students often have quite different responses and disagree about who the stakeholders are, what moral concepts are best to use, and which moral theory is best to apply. Through their conversation, students present discuss and make an argument for how and why they analyzed the case, offering reasons and sharing their justifications with others. Discussing multiple answers turns students into an informative resource for others by demonstrating details another failed to consider and offering alternative interpretations of facts within the case. Further, students become a corrective resource by offering opposing positions and supportive reasons for them, highlighting holes in another's analysis, misapplied or misunderstood concepts, or an inadequate understanding of a moral theory. In circulating amongst the students working in groups, I commonly overhear one student explaining to another how she has misapplied the concept of coercion or how he has not fully appreciated some aspect of a moral theory (e.g., the emphasis on long-term rather than merely short-term consequences). By the end of the class period, students have developed a collective set of answers

to the Analysis questions (including consensus on which moral theory best applies to the case), discussed what additional facts they need to know, and divided up research tasks amongst the group in preparation for the next individual assignment.

To prepare for the next class, students individually complete the Research Assignment. Each case includes multiple hyperlinks with references, and the first part of the assignment requires students to catalog various facts from those hyperlinks as their initial research foray. For example, the hyperlinks might include a *New York Times* article that presents a timeline of the issue or history of the relevant laws, articles for cultural context, or interviews to provide key statements from stakeholders or experts. Delving into these sources demonstrates to students that there are many details to discover about the case, and they uncover specific technical terms and concepts that require further research.

The second assignment component requires students to list any technical terms and to offer a concise definition to explain the concept to a layperson. For example, when reading an article cited in the case (each case contains multiple hyperlinks), students might come across the distinction between "horizontal" and "vertical" business models or the concepts of "psychopathy" and "sociopathy," which require additional research to define and explain those terms. This component ensures that students themselves have a functional understanding of the technical concepts that inform the case and that they could engage in a discussion using the concepts without overly complex terminology.

Next, the students must find a minimum of three additional resources beyond those listed in the hyperlinks, using research databases, materials studied in former classes, or their developing expertise in their majors as applicable. Students complete what is, in essence, a focused or guided scavenger hunt for resources.[11] The amount of research needed to be fully informed would be staggering for any one individual, but the previous division of research tasks by the group not only lightens the load for each but also encourages students to capitalize on their former studies and their "expertise" in a topic area. A student who previously took an economics class that examined the impact of incarceration rates on African-American communities and the perpetuation of poverty could easily access an article studied in that class and include it as one of the three additional sources. This student might search only for additional sources that address the economic cycles of poverty. Similarly, a pre-law student familiar with legal journals could hunt down details of physician-assisted suicide in particular states' laws (e.g., Oregon) and relevant laws in other countries (e.g., the Netherlands). By capitalizing on materials studied in former courses and collaboratively dividing up the needed research, students again serve as an informative resource for others. After amassing a minimum of three sources, each student creates a short bibliography for reference and a brief annotation with relevant details pulled from the articles. For example, a

student may have come across a particularly telling statistic, or an interview by a world-renowned expert from whom a short quotation provides a "mini-argument" or collection of reasons that the student found insightful. Prior to the next class, students upload their individual Research Assignments to shared Blackboard threads, so that the entire group can access and review technical terms, bibliographic sources, and research details.

In the next class period, we hold our debates on the two cases students have been working on throughout the week in their individual and joint Analysis and Research Assignments (e.g., a case on oil drilling in the artic, and a case on mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies). I divide the students into three groups: a Presenting Team, Opposing Team, and Judges. We use the standard format of the Ethics Bowl debate competition both to provide structure (speaking times, procedure, etc.) and to set expectations for the purpose and tone of the debate. Unlike the highly competitive emphasis on the use of communicative strategy and rhetoric in the art of persuasion as commonly practiced across many debate formats (e.g., the National Speech & Debate Association), the Ethics Bowl structure and point scoring system prioritize deep conversation between the teams and with the judges as well. To begin the round, I randomly choose one group of students as the Presenting Team, which means that their case (e.g., oil drilling in the artic) will be first. The students do not know the question that will be asked about the case (the question reveal is always quite fun). After receiving the question, they have a few minutes to brainstorm their answer, recall their research, and build their case. The presenting team then has ten minutes to present their argument in response to the question. After a few minutes to prepare, the opposing team has five minutes to pose questions for additional clarification, challenges to the way the first team presented some evidence or interpreted details from the case (e.g., a neglected group of stakeholders), tests of counterexamples or thought experiments or requests for a greater explanation on practical policy implementation. The presenting team has a short period to brainstorm, followed by a five-minute response to the opposing team's concerns, interpretations, and challenges. The judges then may ask the presenting team any follow-up questions stemming from the commentary, present new objections and challenges, offer alternative scenarios to test the consistency of students' reasoning across cases, or challenge how the other students have applied one of the moral theories. After reflection on the overall quality of the contributions by both teams, the judges complete their score sheets, which concludes the first debate. We turn to the second case of the round (e.g., mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies), and the student group working on that case for the week becomes the presenting team. The whole process is repeated, and the winning team is that which earns the most points across both debates in the round.

There are many benefits to having students serve in rotating positions as judges and on presenting and opposing teams in weekly debates. The

first benefit is the consistent practice in critical thinking and moral theory application which develops greater facility. The identification of fallacies and quick development of objections and counterexamples as well as the extraction of information, beliefs, moral claims, assumptions, etc., from real-time, fast-paced, dynamic, oral arguments is tenfold more difficult than reading a text with the luxury of time and review. The weekly practices provide students with the opportunity to develop critical thinking and moral theory application to a new level through rapid-fire conversation. The second benefit is the increased familiarity with public speaking. One of the largest hindrances in developing the ability to engage in conversation about complex ethical issues is the anxiety, uncertainty, and fear that many individuals have in making deeply held beliefs public. The weekly debates provide basic practice in public speaking—albeit to a small audience of classmates rather than complete strangers—and render it non-threatening through repeated exposure, whereby it becomes both routine and familiar. What was once frightening becomes tolerable (and sometimes, even enjoyable) by scheduling opportunities to practice that are structured and consistent.

The third, and perhaps most important, benefit is practicing in civil discourse. The goal of civil discourse is the development of understanding by regulating communication to focus on components of claims and arguments (rather than emotional outbursts, personal attacks, or attempted domination). Disagreements provide the opportunity to practice civil discourse, and the weekly competitions provide this in spades through their structure (Gaffney, 2012). To maximize students' exposure to conditions of difference and the possibility of disagreement, I also shuffle the student groups each week. Weekly shuffling ensures that students are exposed (as far as the class demographic allows) to alternative viewpoints from different experiences, starting assumptions, intuitions, religious beliefs, and political views. While it is important to create opportunities for disagreement, it is just as important to provide structural parameters to ensure that disagreement remains civil. Because the groups are continually shuffled, students are highly aware of the fact that they must work with another student again later in the semester—perhaps even the following week. This provides an incentive to listen carefully and earnestly to the arguments and suggestions another student makes, to seek mutually agreeable solutions, to avoid needless inflammatory language and derogatory terms, and to control one's temper (Laverty, 2010, 2012). The structure of this standing and repeated reengagement with other students on assignments and within debates encourage civil discourse in the face of disagreement, as does the immediate exchange between students within a debate. Because students serve on both presenting and opposing teams within each debate, students on the opposing team are highly aware that overly harsh criticism and uncivil behavior toward the presenting team will come back to haunt them when they present the next case. Because these are immediate, iterative exchanges

in which students change roles, they take special care to present their objections and concerns in clear and focused ways, using non-inflammatory language to evaluate the arguments and to point out areas for further conversation rather than belittling others or engaging in personal attacks.[12]

The final segment of the course requires students to develop an individual research project on one of the fifteen cases studied over the course of the semester. Through a sequence of individual writing assignments (e.g., abstracts, outlines, and drafts), students develop their own solution or "policy proposal" to the case. While the students may use any and all of the collaborative research that groups posted to Blackboard, they conduct their own research as well as part of crafting their individual proposals to resolve the ethical issues within the case. After completing drafts of their proposals, students give an oral presentation to receive feedback for further development. Depending on the case topics, I invite students from other classes (enticed with extra credit), faculty with relevant expertise, and interested administrators. For example, one year, a case addressed various models of university academic dishonesty policies, which clearly is of interest to administrators. Students give a formal 20-minute explanation of their policy proposal using presentation software (such as PowerPoint, Keynote, or Prezi), followed by a 15-minute Question and Answer session in which they must defend the moral theory they used, interpretations of data, details of their proposal, and the efficacy of their proposed solution.

The first goal of these assignments is to make students an "expert" on one of the cases. While they learn an astonishing amount about all 15 cases, they clearly develop the deepest understanding of the issues by focusing on a single case, conducting additional solo research, and developing their own viewpoints and arguments. The second goal is to develop individual student "ownership," both of the research and the proposed solution. All previous work on argument development and proposed solutions has been collaborative and required consensus (or at least, majority agreement). In contrast, these latter assignments require greater student investment in the research project, sole responsibility for developing arguments, and a *very* public presentation that displays aspects of one's identity including knowledge level, commitments, values, and political affiliation. No longer may students hide behind others within their group; they now must each stand alone and face scrutiny for specific beliefs, core identity, and broad reputation.

Consequently, the third goal of these assignments is to help students become more comfortable with individual scrutiny and criticism. Students know they will each give an oral presentation and then take the role of critical yet supportive audience members for others. Although no single event can make an experience familiar, this activity provides students (both as presenters and as critical audience members) with a positive experience of criticism. Further, it demonstrates that challenges to beliefs, interpretations of data, commitments, and values need not be negative, personal criticisms

but are part of the very process of critical review and should be expected. Because the oral presentation is the only opportunity to receive feedback on proposal drafts (they do not submit the draft for written feedback), students recognize that any criticism received is their only chance to clarify and develop their proposal. Consequently, students often turn the question and answer session into a discussion by using their audience members as resources, quizzing their questioners on their confusion or concern (which I encourage). While no single event can inculcate a changed attitude, this positive experience is necessary to transform how one responds to future scrutiny and criticism.

Moderating Conviction

Teaching this course is always rewarding because of the changes I observe in classroom dynamics, student interactions, and the students themselves. In order to assign a specific case to students for their individual policy proposal, I have them create a ranking of which cases they would most prefer to work on coupled with an explanation for the ranking. While some students choose case topics based on familiarity from former coursework, just as many select cases that they have no familiarity with. Many explain that they would prefer a particular case because they are conflicted and want to mull over the issues more deeply. Others explain that they prefer a particular case because they know exactly where they stand on the case and are deeply passionate about defending their position. Although a few students hold the precise viewpoint from the beginning of the semester to their submitted policy proposal at the end, it is rare. Most commonly, students still endorse a particular position (e.g., that policy Y should be allowed) but adopt a more sophisticated version with modifications, conditions, and protections for negative outcomes (i.e., a much less extreme version of their former position). Although less common, students will completely change their position. Memorably, one student requested a case because he "found it laughable" that anyone could hold position X on the case. At the end of the semester, he offered a very sophisticated and passionate argument that position X was the best ethical solution. The changes I observe in students from the start of the semester to the end are profound: they have a greatly expanded knowledge of the ethical issues and facility with moral theories, new-found confidence in presenting their own views and their reasoning, increased ability to engage in civil discourse, and moral convictions on a variety of topics, both formed and revised.

Although psychologists have not yet done empirical work on the effects of sustained educational interventions, this course illustrates how the properties of conviction can be modified and suggests future empirical work. Linda Skitka (2010), building on the research of her research colleagues, postulate that moral conviction is characterized by the properties of universality, objectivity, autonomy, and emotional intensity. They define "universality" as

holding a belief with an attitude of absoluteness, where the belief is treated as applicable to all persons. "Objectivity" is defined as holding a belief with the attitude of self-evidence, where the belief is treated as an obvious and non-contested fact. Beliefs treated as being ideals independent of or transcendent to the authority of experts, social groups, or institutions are "autonomous." Moral convictions have a higher emotional intensity both in specific emotion (such as anger vs. disgust) and degree of affect.

I propose that moral conviction is characterized by three additional properties—normative clarity, justification, and completeness—that help to distinguish it from other cognitive states. "Normative clarity" is the affirmation of specific values. What distinguishes conviction from dogmatism is the ability to identify and affirm normative values separate from abstract principles or vague ideals. "Justification" is the property of accessible reasons to support belief. What distinguishes conviction from commitment is the endorsement of supportive reasons and the accessibility of those reasons to both the individual and others. In contrast, commitments may be felt as forceful and motivating yet either have opaque reasons or lack reasons to support them; typically, one cannot explain why one holds a commitment either to oneself or others. "Completeness" is holding a belief with the attitude of confidence. What distinguishes conviction from the mental states of belief or knowledge is neither mere assent (ala belief) nor truth (ala knowledge), but an attitude of confidence or assurance based on high probability.

This course demonstrates the powerful effect of teaching civility as a process of steps within education and the changes it yields in moral conviction. As a consequence of working collaboratively with other students and the constant practice of civil discourse, reduced emotional intensity toward specific beliefs is quite common. While students may flush, have a shaky voice, or speak with high passion while discussing an issue (e.g., Georgia's abortion laws) early in the semester, all students are able to converse calmly by the end. While their beliefs about abortion laws may be held with higher emotional intensity than other beliefs, the reduction in emotional type (anger to determination) and degree is pronounced.

While students may have treated a belief as "objective," or obviously true and non-contested, at the beginning of the semester, the survey of moral theories, "guided analysis" and extensive research assignments, and increased exposure to disagreement within groups and debates provide ample evidence that the particular belief they hold is contested (as a point of fact). Further, research assignments demonstrate the complexity of factual conditions, and the analysis assignments, group work, and debates all demonstrate alternative positions held by reasonable persons making use of a different normative framework (which is itself moral). While students may not change the content of their conviction (e.g., may still believe that Georgia's proposed abortion ban is morally correct), they are unlikely to treat that belief as uncontestably and obviously true; greater awareness of complexity, nuance, and moral positions induces greater intellectual care.

Students are also less likely to treat beliefs as autonomous ideals by the end of the semester. While they may still believe that morality as a whole is separate from the whims and fancies of legislators or the proclamations of religious leaders, they have a greater awareness of the complexity of moral beliefs and greater insight into the grounding of moral beliefs and ideals. The "reverse thought" exercise demonstrates how moral ideals may be shared but interpreted and applied differently across persons, and the survey of moral theories demonstrates that the mere appeal to or use of one moral theory does not establish moral authority over alternative ideals grounded in other moral theories.

Whether students treat beliefs as being universal, or applicable to all persons, is unaffected by the course design. Rather, the property of universality varies greatly with the student and the particular topic content. For example, a case that queries whether individuals with advanced Lou Gehrig's Disease (also known as ALS) should have access to physician-assisted suicide is often treated by students as being a highly individualistic decision. Students are hesitant to make policy proposals that would apply to all (beyond a "policy" of letting individuals decide), yet are much more likely to believe that abortion bans should apply to all. Consequently, it is clear that this course design alters three of the four properties of moral conviction identified by psychologists.[13]

Although the course design reduces the prevalence or lessens the effect of the properties of emotional intensity, objectivity, and autonomy, it greatly increases normative clarity. The combined effect of studying moral theories, completing the analysis assignments, and the constant evaluation through conversation in group work, debates, and oral presentation helps students to not only clarify the values they hold but also to affirm specific values as central. Studying moral theories provides students with a collection of value concepts to use in identifying the moral issues they find concerning in a case. Learning about the systematicity of the theoretical frameworks allows students to weigh and prioritize values. And the constant analysis in assignments and group interactions requires students to explain and defend particular values over others.

The course also greatly increases justification. When pressed as to why they hold some position at the beginning of the course, students are rarely able to offer a coherent answer. They may give a collection of reasons, but those reasons are often individually unclear and collectively incompatible. By the end of the semester, students can offer focused, clear reasons that provide support for a belief, and which are comprehensible to both themselves and others. As Rawls (2005) puts it, students are able to offer "public" reasons that other individuals can comprehend—even if they do not share the belief—rather than group-based or idiosyncratic reasons (e.g., religious beliefs that require faith or mystical experience). The weekly group discussions over the individual assignments, the group collaboration and strategic research in preparing for the debates, the presentation

of evidence and arguments in weekly debates, and the oral presentations with a defense in response to audience criticism all provide students with motivation for and practice in justification. Students want and actively try to convince others to share their specific beliefs as well as a particular approach for a solution and they quickly learn that others in the group are not persuaded to follow along without relevant, clearly explained, public reasons. Further, the students prepare potential arguments to use in the weekly debates knowing that whether they succeed in convincing the other team and the judges of their position depends on the quality of the reasons they present. And as I rotate among all the groups during the case analysis and preparation time listening to their developing reasons and giving advice, I hear students actively discussing which reasons would provide better support for a particular claim—and why. This constant practice in developing, refining, strengthening, and clarifying reasons increases the justification for their moral convictions.

Lastly, this course design increases the property of completeness. As students learn more about each case through their individual and collective research, they gain a breadth of information across evidential types and disciplinary areas, access to the "all things considered" judgments of experts, and a depth of detail. While no human can attain all information, the substantial increase in access to relevant information—along with practiced analysis in concert with others—raises confidence or the feeling of assurance in holding a belief. As Mill (1859/1965) explains

> the steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it;....knowing that he has sought for objections and difficulties, ... and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter—he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process. (272)

The process of seeking information and collaborating with others in analysis lowers the probability of error and raises the probability that the belief is accurate. The more robust the process, the greater the attitude of confidence or assurance that one has a "complete" belief that can withstand objection, scrutiny, challenge, and doubt. Consequently, it is clear that this course design builds or strengthens conviction by increasing all three properties of normative clarity, justification, and completeness.

Conclusion

Civility, when taught as part of a process in an educational setting, provides conditions to moderate conviction. Interestingly, students revise their

convictions, either in the content of what they believe or in the attitude that they take toward an unchanged belief content. Just as often, students lack convictions about some issues, either due to the uniqueness of the issue or because they are conflicted, yet develop them as a consequence of this course. Although the moderation of conviction occurs here within a specific classroom, these lessons create awareness of the value of civility, develop specific skills and actions to follow, and instill a habitual attitude or orientation of civility toward scrutiny, disagreement, and criticism. Whether students maintain civility as an orienting attitude once the class ends requires conscious work and effort, yet it is an intellectual virtue that they can wield in any personal or professional context.

This model of teaching civility to moderate conviction could be transported easily to other classrooms as well as to other contexts (e.g., Human Resource orientations or company retreats to develop new skills). Duplication of the methods described here in other contexts (e.g., a company retreat) depends on the nature of the possible interactions between individuals and the length of time that they will engage. While it may not be possible to implement each of the steps described above in non-educational settings, the "bare bones" approach described below should approximate these outcomes with sufficient interaction and time. First, participants must work within groups on some joint project(s). Second, group activities must provide opportunities for participants to be both informative and corrective resources for each other. Third, even if individual work is required, some work should be collaborative. Fourth, consensus should be the goal for most projects and activities. Fifth, some activities should involve a "-de-centering" method or component. Sixth, group projects must be well-grounded in research and facts. Seventh, participants must have positive conditions for disagreement. Eighth, there must be various incentives for positive and supportive behavior. And finally, there must be many opportunities to practice civil discourse.

Conviction has many positive benefits in motivating our self-improvement, coordinating our moral actions, and driving social change, yet the dark side of conviction with its attendant incivility, anger, intolerance, non-engagement (avoidance), and violence all too often obscures its positive outcomes. Teaching civility as an orienting attitude in a process holds great promise for modifying the properties of moral conviction. Uncovering the conditions that moderate conviction building and revision is extremely valuable to individuals, educators, and citizens everywhere. We can share the conviction that the more we learn about moral convictions, the better able we will be to capitalize on their positive benefits.

Notes

1 Sincere thanks go to the editors of this volume, Anke Finger and Manuela Wagner, for their guidance in the development of this chapter and especially

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2 In the United States, redlining is a discriminatory practice in which financial institutions restrict or deny mortgages to individuals seeking housing in particular neighborhoods, many of which had high minority populations, deeming them as too financially risky because of their minority population. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 made the practice illegal in the United States. For more information, see: https://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/supmanual/cch/fair_lend_fhact.pdf.

3 Skitka and her research colleagues actually discuss six potential characteristics, and include justification among them. However, on her account, justification functions more as a consequence of the four properties of universality, objectivity, autonomy, and emotional intensity. Although we each use the term "justification," my definition and conception of this property differs significantly from hers.

4 Although this course was designed around college-level materials, the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) provides material suitable for younger students. For more information, please visit: https://nhseb.unc.edu. Particular activities within this course design could be modified easily to fit the appropriate age and skill level of the student based on the given materials. For example, sixth grade students need not be directed to scour research articles from economics journals, but could be instructed to search for opinion pieces on the web or given particular websites by their teacher to explore.

5 See Endnote 3 on appropriate materials for the high school level.

6 For more information on the Regional and National competitions, please visit: https://www.appe-ethics.org/about-ethics-bowl.

7 To access a sample full list of cases, please visit: https://www.appe-ethics.org/assets/docs/2019-REB-Cases-Revised.pdf.

8 This is a sample comment one might make for purposes of illustration. For more information (or a refresh on the details of what happened in the case), see Leswig (2016).

9 For examples and discussion of moral distress, see Fumis et al. (2017), Gutierrez (2005), and Lamiani et al. (2015).

10 Perspective-taking (both cognitive and affective forms) is an important ability for the development of and empathy. See Oswald (1996) for further discussion. There are interesting intersections between the cultivation of both civility and intercultural competence for democratic citizenship. For these intersections and discussion of additional abilities, values, and virtues in a holistic model, see the Council of Europe's 2018 *Reference Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture, Volume 1* in particular.

11 For additional perspectives on how scavenger hunts can be used within both online and in-person courses and how it develops collaboration and research skills, see Camacho and Legare (2015), Chalmers (2003), Jones et al. (2017), and Islam (2017).

12 This is a well-studied phenomenon in behavioral economics, sociology, and psychology with iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games. In iterated games, individuals know that they will have repeated interactions with the same persons in contexts where their current behavior might elicit later punishments by others. In such contexts, they moderate their behavior, yielding higher levels of

cooperation, civility, or trust (depending on the game format). For examples and discussion, see Macy (1991), Moisan et al. (2018), and Murphy and Ackermann (2015).

13 Skitka and her research colleagues postulate that the content of the belief does not constitute what makes something be a moral conviction; rather, it is merely an attitude (with specified properties) one takes toward a content and identified on the basis of those properties. I agree that moral convictions must be identified by properties rather than contents. However, based on my observations of students in this course over years, the property of universality (treating beliefs as universal) seems to depend *entirely* on the content (and is likely a cultural phenomenon). Consequently, I suspect that universality is a mirror of cultural beliefs about particular contents but is not a property of moral convictions themselves.

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10 Intellectual Humility, Conviction, and Intercultural Citizenship Education

Manuela Wagner and Michael Byram

Introduction

One of the major purposes of education is for students to become engaged and active citizens. We, as many others, argue that our interconnected world with its complex and global problems requires students to be not just citizens in their own communities but "intercultural citizens" concerned with transnational issues (Byram, 2008). Nothing could have demonstrated this interconnectedness and the urgent need for collaboration at the global level more pressingly than the global health crisis created by Covid-19 which at the time of the writing has already caused 4,762,089 million deaths (WHO, 2021, September 29). In a brief about this crisis, UNESCO (2020) emphasized the importance of intercultural dialogue:

> Whilst underscoring humanity's interconnectedness and interdependency, COVID-19 has also led to a rise in discrimination, inequality, and vulnerability, putting pressure on the capacities of societies for intercultural understanding at a time where solidarity and cooperation are needed more than ever.
>
> (¶1)

Specifically, this report identified four main problems: (1) amplification of social inequalities and vulnerabilities, (2) xenophobia and ethno-racism, (3) gender-based violence, and (4) discrimination against non-citizens. Education can and should play a part in overcoming these problems, developing students' abilities in collaborative, intercultural, and interdisciplinary problem-solving, but at the same time, we also observe frightening tendencies of division and competition in debate and action over important issues. Lynch (2021) described this as a tension between ideals:

> Politically speaking, this tension manifests itself as a familiar conflict between two democratic ideals. One ideal is that of the committed, engaged public - citizens with convictions who are willing to lobby and vote for them. Democracies strive for this ideal because an apathetic

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> electorate is an obviously ineffective electorate. Yet it is also an ideal that citizens should listen to, and deliberate about, each other's convictions. (p.139)

Listening and deliberation need to take place both in private and in public discourse, and when these ideals are abandoned, political actions threaten democracies, as was seen in events such as the insurrection at the Capitol in Washington, DC, in the USA in January 2021 and parallel events in other societies such as the protests of the "gilets jaunes" in France from 2017.

Collaboration and interaction which are manifested in intercultural citizenship (ICit) need a common moral foundation. In philosophy, we find a related concept of "moral cosmopolitanism – i.e., the egalitarian and universalist assumption that each human being is equally morally relevant and that all human beings form a morally relevant community…" which has an impact on "…the role and responsibilities of individual agents in the contemporary global context" (Hellinger, 2020, p.2).

As Lynch says, convictions are important as a foundation for active citizenship. On the other hand, convictions can be problematic when we lose the ability to critically examine the connections between our convictions, our identities, and our actions. One approach to dealing with the negative effects of what could be considered blind convictions is through "intellectual humility" (e.g., Johnson et al., 2017; Whitcomb et al., 2017) which helps us evaluate information and engage in deliberation about important topics, and in an attempt to address the lack of listening and deliberation about important issues, the project *Humility and Conviction in Public Life* launched a series of outreach and research initiatives to investigate the role of intellectual humility and conviction in public discourse (https://humilityandconviction.uconn.edu/blank/mission/). The main question the project attempts to address is "How is it possible to combine principled commitment – the sort of commitment people show on issues such as religion or morality – with intellectual humility about those very commitments?" (Lynch et al., n.d., p.1). This general question becomes the basis for specific questions in education as we will show below.

With a different starting point, the theory of ICit (Byram, 2008) has addressed similar problems. ICit grew out of a philosophy of education – and foreign/world language education in particular – which connects to the German tradition of "politische Bildung" and "Demokratielernen" (Himmelmann, 2001). In ICit, it is argued that schools and other educational institutions should equip learners to be active citizens in their communities not only after they leave education but also while they are in the midst of education. At the heart of this view of citizenship is the notion of "critical cultural awareness" defined as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of an explicit, systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 2021, p.90).

There are obvious similarities between this and intellectual humility in the willingness to question one's own values and convictions, and in this chapter, we bring together the framework of ICit through which we prepare students to become active citizens in an interconnected world, with the concept of intellectual humility. In doing so our main purpose is to analyze each and show how each can enrich the other and thereby become an improved foundation for pedagogy.

We shall first explain conviction, intellectual humility, and ICit, and then provide an example of a transnational project in which students develop and then apply their intercultural competence and intellectual humility in an action project in their community.

Conviction

In this section, we take a closer look at the characteristics of convictions and how they might be connected to students' identities and actions, and thereby to ICit. In another, earlier article, Lynch (2017) made a connection with Dewey and argued that convictions are needed for democracies to function:

> Dewey knew that democracies can't function if their citizens don't have conviction — an apathetic electorate is no electorate at all. But our democracy also can't function if we don't seek, at least some of the time, to inhabit a common space where we can listen to each other and trade reasons back and forth. And that's one reason that teaching our students the value of empathy, of reasons and dialogue, and the value and nature of evidence itself, is crucial — in fact, now more than ever.
>
> (¶ 18)

Lynch's position is then that convictions are crucial to democratic processes but are also full of tensions, with the potential to prevent debate.

Pursuing the connection with education, Pritchard (2020) linked conviction to self-confidence and argues that conviction should be fostered in education to encourage self-confidence:

> Here is another goal of education that we would surely find compelling, which is to enable students to have self-confidence, and thereby to have the strength of their convictions. We do not want our students to be wracked with self-doubt, nor do we want them to be the kind of people who are willing to change their minds at the drop of a hat (or, perhaps worse, at the first sign of any resistance to their opinions, such as in their peer group).
>
> (p.398)

However, while it is easy to agree with the benefits of strong convictions outlined by Pritchard and linked with Lynch's comments above about the

idea of a "committed and engaged public," there are possible negative consequences of convictions as a consequence of their moral dimension.

For we take convictions to be a particular kind of belief, which includes a moral conviction or attitude, an "attitude(s) that people perceive as grounded in a fundamental distinction between right and wrong" (Skitka et al., 2021, p.347), and which is "characterized by two interrelated metacognitions: perceived objectivity and universality" (ibid., p.352). People believe their convictions to hold true in different places, times, and cultures, and have "morally convicted attitudes" (ibid.). Lynch (2019) distinguished convictions from beliefs, saying that convictions are more than "strongly held beliefs" and that we do not need convictions for all our beliefs: "I don't *need* conviction for anything I'm absolutely or logically certain about" (p.54). Convictions, furthermore, do not need to be linked to reason or backed up by evidence. In fact, Lynch claims, "Convictions make it practically rational to be epistemically irrational" (2019, p.67). It is, therefore, possible to be convinced of something that is not linked to truth or reality, to have "blind convictions." This is a dangerous state of affairs, and Lynch makes the case that these characteristics of convictions and the nature of social media make the latter "a very effective blind-conviction machine" (p.73), as groups form affinities based on (blind) convictions that are already part of a narrative.

A second significant dimension of convictions, which also differentiates them from beliefs, is their relationship to identity. Convictions are "identity-reflecting commitments" (Lynch, 2021, p.139).

Convictions show others how we want to be perceived by them and indicate how we want to perceive ourselves:

> (…) our convictions signify to others what kind of person we take ourselves to be or aspire to be, and they reflect our self-image of being that kind of person. It is this fact that makes a conviction feel certain to us, whether or not it really is.
>
> (Lynch, 2019, p.55)

The relationship between our convictions and our identity explains, in turn, why convictions can have such a strong influence on our actions and behaviors (Lynch, 2019), as has been shown in empirical research. Skitka et al. (2021), conducting an overview of research on morally convicted attitudes, shared evidence that "moral convictions are associated with perceived stronger obligations to take a stand, which in turn predicts intentions to engage in specific forms of activism and collective action" (p.354). According to Skitka et al., such activism is related in turn to political engagement, intolerance of differing views (see also Wright, this volume), and unwillingness to compromise. Skitka et al. (2021) also reported that there is some evidence of a further risk related to the conviction, namely that we tend to falsely assume that others agree with us (see also Wright, this volume). In

either case, people with strong convictions tend to react more negatively to those with different beliefs and values.

Since convictions have such authority over how we see ourselves and want others to see us, it is not surprising that those with strong moral convictions tend to be intolerant of those who don't share their convictions (for an overview, see Wright this volume). Considering that we take convictions for granted and that they are linked to our identities and group affiliation, it follows that convictions can guide our actions, some of which can be intolerant and negative. While not all convictions lead to negative outcomes, it is important in a functional society for us to understand why we believe what we believe and to be able to support what we believe with evidence, whether outcomes are negative or positive.

Perhaps more importantly, we have learned from recent experience just how dangerous it can be when intolerant convictions are articulated as fake news which is not questioned and corrected. As Lynch made an argument in 2017, during the Trump presidency, which is equally valid in other political contexts and times:

> Overcoming toxic arrogance is not easy, and our present political moment is not making it any easier. But if we want to live in a tolerant society where we are not only open-minded but willing to learn from others, we need to balance humility and conviction. We can start by looking past ourselves — and admitting that we don't know it all.
>
> (¶ 19)

In other words, one way to counteract the development of intellectual arrogance and (blind) convictions is to foster intellectual humility, which we explore in the next section.

Intellectual Humility

In this next stage of our argument, we introduce intellectual humility and its connections to convictions as well as to ICit, beginning with a question raised by Pritchard about his own view that conviction and self-confidence should be pursued through education, namely that there is a potential problem of coherence for educators:

> But does not intellectual humility stand precisely in opposition to self-confidence and conviction? Indeed, is not manifesting self-confidence and conviction the kind of thing that the intellectually arrogant, and thus intellectually viceful, person does? Relatedly, if there is this tension between, on the one hand, intellectual humility as an intellectual virtue, and, on the other hand, self-confidence and conviction, then how is the educator to coherently educate for both? Must they

> sacrifice one of these goals at the altar of the other? If so, which one? Or is there a way of reconciling these goals of education?
>
> (2020, p.399)

Pritchard's questions take us directly into the implications of the philosophical work for educators who need to find answers to how teaching intellectual humility (IH) can counteract negative aspects of conviction while also supporting the benefits of convictions. Pritchard himself argues for "an account of (intellectual) humility that involves an accurate conception of oneself in the relevant respects, involves no pretense, deceit or inauthenticity," (2020, p.403).

This notion of IH involves then a hard look at oneself, and Dillon (2021) surmises, "In an age dominated by narcissistic self-absorption, egoistic self-promotion, and arrogant disregard of other persons, humility might seem to be precisely what is needed to counteract self-valuing gone awry" (p.57).

A second conceptualization of IH useful for education comes from Whitcomb et al. who developed 19 "predictions related to a variety of activities, motivations, and feelings" of a person who is intellectually humble (2017, p.520 – see appendix). These are comparable to elements of intercultural competence in our model of ICit which we describe below. For example, prediction 1 "IH increases a person's propensity to admit his intellectual limitations to himself and others" (p.521) and prediction 10 "IH increases a person's propensity to revise a cherished belief or reduce confidence in it, when she learns of defeaters (i.e. reasons to think her belief is false or reasons to be suspicious of her grounds for it)" (p.524) are related to characteristics of "critical cultural awareness" which include "make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refer to an explicit perspective and criteria; [be] aware of [our] own ideological perspectives and values and evaluate documents or events with explicit reference to them" (Byram, 2021, p.90). Whitcomb et al.'s Prediction 11 "IH increases a person's propensity to consider alternative ideas, to listen to the views of others, and to spend more time trying to understand someone with whom he disagrees" (p.524) corresponds with components of intercultural competence that require us to compare and interpret different sets of values and beliefs. Other predictions can be connected to collaborations among students which are crucial in the notion of ICit as we shall see below. Consider, for example, prediction 5 "IH increases a person's propensity to defer to others who don't have her intellectual limitations, in situations that call upon those limitations." Deferring to others, when appropriate, not only fosters positive relationships and thereby has a positive influence on collaboration but it is also positively connected with knowledge acquisition. Acquisition of knowledge is further supported by other aspects of IH, for only if we are aware that we don't know something and don't wrongfully believe that we know something, will we be open to learning something new.

Intercultural Citizenship

The modeling of intercultural competence and ICit has been influenced by the notion that intercultural dialogue is an important component of education. For example, the Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organization with 47 member states that was founded in 1947 to uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe, recognizes the power of intercultural dialogue to address societal problems in its White Paper of 2008 entitled "Living Together as Equals in Dignity." The White Paper led to the creation of the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018) which helps educators to foster the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical understanding, which students need to engage in intercultural democratic dialogue. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also adopted goals of global competence in their assessment of students from many parts of the world in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests (https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2018-global-competence.htm).

In parallel with these developments in intercultural dialogue, the notion of ICit (Byram, 2008) builds on a model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997, 2021) developed initially for world language educators to systematically and intentionally teach and assess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and criticality students need to become intercultural mediators or "intercultural speakers". The latter is a phrase that deliberately contrasts with imitating "the native speaker" which has dominated language teaching for many decades. Mediators or intercultural speakers are not only able to communicate with people from different cultural contexts, but they are also able to help people from different contexts communicate with each other. The extension to the concept of ICit was made by adding elements of "active citizenship" or "political and civic engagement" (Barrett & Zani, 2015).

ICit education is important with regard to the questions we cited from Pritchard above, but it is often misunderstood. For example, students might think of ICit as what someone engages in when they have multiple passports, rather than something that can be learned in education (e.g., Golubeva et al., 2017), as demonstrated in a number of published projects (e.g., Byram et al., 2017).

To clarify what is involved, it is important to distinguish between "being bicultural" and "acting interculturally". People who *are* bicultural feel at home, and are accepted, in two different but similar cultural groups. They identify with both groups and are identified and accepted by others as members of both groups. People with the competence to *act* interculturally are those who have certain competencies which allow them to engage with others from other cultural groups, to discover their beliefs, values, and behaviors – their culture – and cooperate with them, or to help others who do not have (as much) intercultural competence to do so (Byram, 2008). While being bicultural clearly has some advantages, such as being able to live in different

cultural contexts, intercultural competence is the more desirable and realistic goal in education. It helps students to transfer and apply their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to unknown situations (Byram, 1997, 2021).

What do students need to know to act interculturally and become successful mediators? First, they need to have language competence: linguistic competence or knowledge and skill in using language as a system, sociolinguistic competence or knowledge and skill in using language in socially appropriate ways, and discourse competence or the ability to produce and understand texts. Second, students need to develop intercultural competence, which is more than a matter of skills and knowledge, and the definition of competence used emphasizes the inclusion of values and attitudes:

> [competence is] the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context.
>
> (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 32)

The different dimensions of intercultural competence are thus defined as:

Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.

Knowledge: specific knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general knowledge of processes of societal and individual interaction

Skills of interpreting and relating: the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it, and relate it to documents from one's own.

Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Critical cultural awareness: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of an explicit, systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Each of these is described (Byram, 2021) in terms of teaching and learning objectives and presented in a diagram of the model which emphasizes that critical cultural awareness is placed at the center of intercultural competence since this is the crucial educational objective (See Figure 10.1):

ICC is thus a combination of language competence and intercultural competence. Intercultural competence (IC) can be taught and learned across the curriculum, whereas ICC is taught and learned above all in world languages classes.

A comparison of ICC, and in particular the characteristics of IC, with work in education for citizenship and democracy (Himmelmann, 2001,

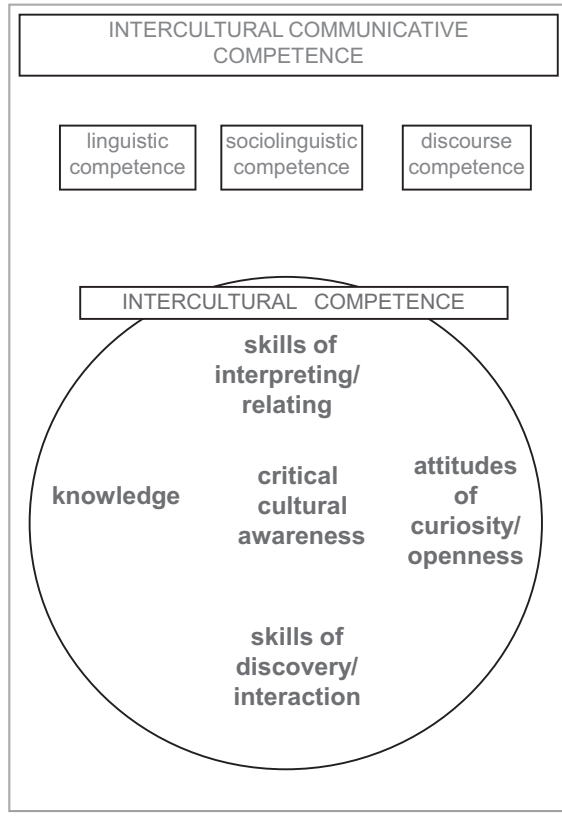

Figure 10.1 Model of intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997, 2021)

2003) revealed both similarity and difference. There is much similarity in competencies for interaction with others in society but education for democracy and (national) citizenship emphasizes, in addition, the competencies needed for taking civic action. On the other hand, intercultural competence when linked to language teaching and the acquisition and use of foreign/world languages (ICC), turns learners' gaze and activity to the world beyond the national borders present in education for (national) citizenship. Combining these two aspects of education led to the concept of teaching for ICit. This means that students (a) acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and criticality related to intercultural competence, which enables them to interact with or mediate between people from different cultural contexts and (b) apply their intercultural competence in the here and now to solve a problem and take action in their local or global community.

The theory of ICit has been successfully applied in numerous educational contexts, at different levels of education, in different subject areas, and in interdisciplinary and transnational as well as local contexts (e.g., Byram

et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Students have, for example, collaborated with students from another country (or with students from different contexts within the same country) to analyze and address a societal issue they deemed important. Tackling a problem in the here and now by taking some action in their community – and not just thinking about it within the classroom – means that they apply their intercultural competence to act as "intercultural citizens". In retrospect, such projects include characteristics which can be illuminated by reference to the analysis of intellectual humility by Paul and Elder (2002) and Whitcomb et al. (2017) and its application in education, and we now move to providing an example of how IH and ICit can be combined explicitly to help students critically examine and become aware of their own strong beliefs and moral convictions.

Combining Intellectual Humility and Intercultural Citizenship

Intellectual humility shares with the concept of intercultural competence the emphasis on being aware of others, and as we shall see below, we believe that characteristics of IH that are related to how we interact with others are helpful in education for ICit. In other words, in an era in which students are bombarded with fake facts, and in which blind convictions and intellectual arrogance counteract our ability to listen to each other and engage with each other in meaningful ways, we look to the virtue of intellectual humility to help prepare our students to become engaged and informed citizens.

In order to use the concept of IH in intercultural dialogue and citizenship, we look at research that has been done to operationalize IH in education, as well as theoretical explorations of characteristics of IH that can be operationalized in the classroom. Garcia and King (2016) offered suggestions for how to support IH in education, developing "genuine self-understanding, mutual understanding, and healthy civic discourse" (p.219). Others emphasized the importance of IH in work on critical thinking (e.g., Paul & Elder, 2002; Hazlett, 2016; Kidd, 2016b). Paul and Elder (2002) in particular discuss traits of IH, which we can connect to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and criticality of intercultural competence, for example, the trait "Students discover their own false beliefs, misconceptions, prejudices, illusions, and myths. They use this knowledge to gain better command of their minds" (Paul & Elder, 2002, p.30) can be found in "critical cultural awareness" in intercultural competence. Others include "3. Students suspend judgment about matters of which they are ignorant." and

> 8. Students demonstrate awareness of and concern for the fact that they have been socially conditioned into the belief systems and worldview of their culture and nation (and naturally see their culture and nation

> as "correct" in its views). Students actively seek and carefully study the viewpoints of other cultures to gain new knowledge and insights.
>
> (p.31)

These are similar to the attitudes of curiosity and suspension of (dis)belief and to the concept of critical cultural awareness in intercultural competence.

On the basis of such analysis, we have applied IH in world language and mathematics education (Wagner et al., 2019a; Wagner & Álvarez Valencia, 2022), and there is evidence that teachers found the integration of IH useful for the success of their work. For example, one teacher stated that she found it "wonderful" that her students learned that they did not need to know everything. This echoes the perspective Watson (2021) takes on what she refers to as "answer-oriented education systems" where teachers ask questions and students are expected to answer. Watson considers this problematic because it prevents students from developing IH. Instead, she argues, we could design educational practices in which student questions are equally valorized and support the development of students' IH.

The teachers just cited were working with a model of ICit that has important connections with (critical) pedagogies that foster an environment in which students are curious, ask questions, co-investigate, critically evaluate, and finally take action.

A New Pedagogical Model in Education

We have seen in a number of ICit projects that students' beliefs can change. For example, middle and high school students have engaged in transnational collaborations through the internet between Argentina and Denmark to devise a plan for how to protect the environment (Porto et al., 2017); university students in the UK and in Argentina collaborated to reflect on the Malvinas/Falkland War at the 20-year anniversary (Porto & Yulita, 2017); high school students of Spanish in the US acted as imaginary mediators for newly arrived immigrants from different backgrounds from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Mexico (Bohling et al., 2016; Wallace & Tambarello-Noble, 2018). In all these projects, it could be observed that students had changed their perspectives, changes which can now be seen as related to the acquiring of intellectual humility.

More recently, therefore, we have deliberately applied Whitcomb and colleagues' "predictions related to a variety of activities, motivations, and feelings" of those who are intellectually humble (2017, p.520) (see appendix) in a project in which we worked with high school teachers of German and Spanish and Mathematics (Wagner & Álvarez Valencia, 2022), and we now share an example based on prior projects but geared toward developing a questioning attitude toward others and one's own strong beliefs and convictions by fostering students' IH and intercultural competence.

The example we present below is written in a way that does not specify a language level or age group. It sets out the general principles and structure which can be adapted to particular cases in different school subjects or university courses.

The unit deals with the Covid-19 pandemic that, at the time of writing, is still ongoing at various levels of severity across the world. It started at the beginning of 2020 and caused lockdowns in places all over the world. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it clearly showed how interconnected the world is, and also revealed glaring inequities within and across national borders. We chose the topic of Covid-19 because there had been a number of incidents that showed how convictions of different groups caused conflicts and led to protests and other consequences (for more information see news articles cited in the unit below). The guiding question for the unit is "What are some convictions related to the pandemic that people held in different contexts and that led to conflicts/problems?" Students are encouraged from the beginning and as the unit develops to think of an "action in the community" they wish to plan in the course of the unit. For example, students were encouraged to consider creating a website with information on Covid-19, a blog, conducting radio interviews, drafting information to provide to their family members, etc.

Throughout this unit, teachers engage in activities with students that facilitate reflection about the origins of beliefs and convictions. For example, teachers can elicit first thoughts on how strongly students identify with "our" convictions and how much they think those with different convictions identify with "theirs". Understanding connections between convictions and identities is a first step toward being able to take a step back and analyze our feelings when we feel threatened, when we are confronted with a conviction that does not match our own. The goal is to use one's critical cultural awareness and intellectual humility to become curious about the origin of and reasons and support for our convictions.

General Structure

Preparing an account of the topic

Step 1: Discovery about our community and preparing an account for 'them' (ICit)

Step 2: Discovery about our partners' community in order to know how to prepare i.e. what 'their' existing assumptions might be (IH)

Note that we investigate our own context (we/our/us) and another (unknown or less known) context (they, their, them) to gain a better understanding of our own context and the existing knowledge, but also possible preconceptions, prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions about our own and another context.

Comparing, contrasting, and critically reflecting on the two communities

Step 3: Presentation of 'our community' to them and discuss similarities and differences (ICit)
Step 4: Joint critical examination (IH)

Preparing and taking action

Step 5: In teams, preparing actions for our respective communities (ICit)
Step 6: Taking action in our own community (the action is different from what it would have been if we had not had an intercultural perspective (ICit)
Step 7: Reflection on learning (specifically on an understanding of how convictions influence our own actions and those of others (IH and analysis of convictions)

This general structure is developed from projects on ICit. Steps 2 and 5 are an addition to intellectual humility. Step 8 is another addition from the perspective of intellectual humility and analysis of convictions.

Each step may have variations within it and may take longer or shorter time depending on age and language levels.

Preparing an Account of the Topic

Step 1: Discovery about our community and preparing an account for "them" (ICit)

Activating prior Knowledge and Possible Preconceptions

What do we know about the Covid-19 pandemic? This step should bring to light existing convictions students might have. For example, students might identify the convictions that "Vaccines are more dangerous than the virus," or that "Personal freedom is more important than fighting the virus together."

Next, students complete an activity related to the IH prediction "IH reduces both a person's propensity to pretend to know something when they don't and their confidently answering a question whether or not they know the answer (think: "male answer syndrome")." (See appendix for this and further IH predictions referred to below). For example, students start filling out the first parts of a KWL chart (See Figure 10.1) which reflects what they know (K), would like to know (W), and have learned (L); they can do this either alone or in pairs. KWL charts are much used but we modify

the KWL format to add "S" indicating the sources students use. Sources are important as students can use them to evaluate the reliability of the information. Furthermore, sources provide the opportunity for others to check and interpret the information for themselves. This could be accompanied by questions such as, "How confident are you that your knowledge is correct? Is your knowledge backed up by evidence? What is the source of your knowledge?" Conversations about the reliability of sources and how to check this are an important part of such activities, as students thereby gain information and digital and media literacy. This step of interpretation, comparison, and analysis helps students gain knowledge from different perspectives.

Looking at different sources supports students' intellectual humility as they gain a better understanding of what they know and what they don't know while giving credit where appropriate to sources. If students learn information (from different sources and different perspectives), which is contradictory to their convictions, teachers can stimulate reflections that might help students be open-minded rather than feeling threatened by this new information. For example, students are asked to find evidence to support a different position. They can also be asked to hypothesize about possible reasons why someone might have a different opinion on the topic. As we will explore later, the technique of asking students to act as experts and representatives of a different position can help them distance themselves from their own position without feeling threatened since they don't defend a conviction they hold themselves and thereby don't feel threatened in their identity.

Students complete the KWL charts either alone or in pairs (Figure 10.2).

As the next step, students get together in groups and debrief what their findings were. Sample reflection questions include, "What did other people know that you did not know and vice versa?," and "How will you go about learning what you need to know?"

K: What do you know?	W: What would you like to know?	L: What did you learn?	S: What are your sources?

Figure 10.2 KWL chart: What we know, like to know, learned, and our sources

This step aligns with the aims of IH as students reflect on their own knowledge and that of others. It is important that students are encouraged to compare and reflect on their knowledge in a cooperative rather than competitive way, as it could otherwise have a negative effect on their development of IH. The goal is to ask students to be genuinely curious about the combined knowledge that exists within the group and to ask about the origins of that knowledge. This might lead to the acknowledgment that sometimes what was considered factual information could not be backed up by evidence, and thereby create another opportunity for convictions to come to light.

Reflection question:

Which are the three things you found most surprising/interesting?

Can you explain why you were surprised? What caused the surprise/interest?

Did this raise questions for you about your own existing ideas?

Did learning more about the topic from others help your understanding?

Are there findings about which you would like to learn more?

Which strategies will you use to learn information representing various different perspectives?

In anticipation of the next step, prior knowledge about the subtopics of Covid-19 is activated by raising the following questions:

Why do you think the pandemic spread the way it did?

Do you think any beliefs that people held were problematic? If so, which ones? Why?

> Here we foster students' curiosity and open-mindedness, an attitude that is a component of Intercultural Competence and that is also related to IH.
>
> (e.g. Whitcomb et al., 2017)

Step 2: Discovery about our partners' community in order to know how to prepare i.e. what "their" existing assumptions might be (IH)

Our emphasis in this step on students comparing different perspectives and understanding how "their" perspective differs from and is similar to "ours" is one of the components of intercultural competence.

> **Intercultural competence**
>
> Interpreting and relating: the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.

Group work

The main focus of the following activities is to interpret information from another context and relate it to one's own. Students thereby evaluate information, gain knowledge and discover their assumptions. The webpage https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus. is an informational website by the US government. Similar websites are likely to be available in the partners' contexts.

This is related to IH through students discovering their own limitations.

IH prediction:

IH increases a person's propensity to defer to others who don't have their intellectual limitations, in situations that call upon those limitations.

Activities that can support IH in group work include the following. Individually, students create a mind map reflecting on which sub-topics are important to solve their problem/prepare for their presentation. In small groups, they discuss their mind map with their colleagues in their group. Together, they decide which topics their mind maps have in common, and add comments to each sub-topic. Now they share with each other the topics they feel they have knowledge of. Then they identify who can help with which topic and which topics still need to be covered. Together they make a plan for how to best use everyone's strengths to solve the problem/complete the task.

Whole group:

In the whole group or "plenary," (when the problem is "solved"/the presentation is prepared/the task is completed) students are asked to share their reflections during the group work using such questions as:

What was helpful about identifying what you know about the topic?
Did you learn more about what you know and what you still need to find out? How?
How was it helpful to work in your team?
Did you learn from your team?

Comparing, contrasting, and critically reflecting on the two communities

Step 3: Presentation of "our community" to them and discuss similarities and differences (ICit)

In this step the purpose is to develop in students the element of intercultural competence referred to as "discovering and interacting:

Intercultural Competence

Discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Students from context A do a presentation of "our community and Covid-19" to the students from context B (whether in another country or in the same country). This can be rehearsed in class first and then presented to partners. Students then compare the information in the different contexts. What were the similarities? What were the differences? What are some reasons for the differences? The goal is for students in both groups to continue the critical analysis of their own context begun in Step1 but now enhanced by familiarity with the perspective of their partners.

The next step is for students to investigate further what has been said in their own context before discussing this with their partners in the other context.

As independent work, students read information about how misinformation was spread related to Covid-19. They also read about protests against and for Covid-19 measures in their contexts. They think about the consequences.

Students read a variety of articles. Below are some sample articles.

Fighting the spread of Covid-19 misinformation

https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/fighting-the-spread-of-covid-19-misinformation/

Coronavirus: United States protests against and for lockdown restrictions

https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-52344540

Biden's next fight: Anti-vaxxers jeopardize plans to protect United States against Covid

https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/10/biden-covid-vaccine-anti-vaxxers-us.html

Similar articles will be available in the partners' contexts for example:

European governments face rising protests against COVID measures: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kww6pM6jS58

Students then write a summary of what they found and bring it to class.

Step 4: Joint critical examination (IH)

In class, students have the task to consolidate and synthesize the information they have acquired (e.g. for and against lockdown restrictions, for and against vaccines). They prepare a second presentation that they can share with their partners. This could be done in groups in a variety of ways, e.g. recorded debates, info-graphs, and posters.

Students then prepare two to three questions that they plan to ask their transnational partners to get more information about the topic in their

partners' context. The goal here is to stimulate curiosity as an element of intercultural competence and, as they encounter information that might not match their expectations and convictions, they begin to realize elements of intellectual humility.

Intercultural competence:

Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures, and belief about one's own.

IH prediction:

IH increases a person's propensity to consider alternative ideas, to listen to the views of others, and to spend more time trying to understand someone with whom he disagrees.

Now students meet with their partners virtually, in "mixed groups," and present to each other their findings from their own contexts.

When the other group presents, students take notes. They think about whether there is any surprising information concerning their partners' context. They also think about what questions they have about the other context or their own after they heard this new information. Finally, they are asked to write down a few statements related to Covid-19 they believe to be true. These findings are called "Preliminary findings."

The mixed groups then compare and contrast the findings in the different contexts and try to explain similarities and differences. When they find interesting differences they do more research. For example, they look for statistics concerning different topics and also read news articles and other information. They are asked to provide the sources and comment on the reliability of the sources as well.

Other questions they try to answer include: What might be the underlying convictions or representatives of them on the different sides of the issues at hand? Why might people believe what they believe?

This can first be done in groups in one context, and there can be another event in which the groups present to each other. As an activity after the event, each student looks at their preliminary findings and adjusts them in light of any new information.

Now that students have identified (blind) convictions as one of the reasons for conflicts, the instructor/teacher creates a class discussion about convictions; the teachers in the partner group do the same. For example, students can review what convictions they encountered in their research. They can then try to define convictions and distinguish them from beliefs. The teacher can supply some information about convictions in the form of "Here is what some researchers found….." Students can then think about

possible positive and negative consequences of convictions. Do the students think these convictions are backed up by reasoning and by specific information? What other reasons can people have for holding those convictions?

Finally, students can reflect on what circumstances would make convictions more likely to have positive or negative consequences. The teacher can also ask what behaviors and attitudes could be helpful in our attempts at understanding our own convictions as well as those of others. If IH is not brought up by students themselves, the teacher can ask "Is someone who believes they know everything, more or less likely to question their conviction? Do you think it's important to know why we have certain convictions?."

Preparing and taking action

Step 5: In teams, preparing actions for our respective communities (ICit)

Mixed groups return to working together with the goal to prepare a presentation of what they learned from their conversation with their transnational partners. What did they learn? What might they not have learned if they had only looked at their contexts? Was there anything that was surprising?

> ICit: Learning from collaboration with transnational partners and applying their intercultural competence to prepare for action in the community.

Now the students work in mixed groups of "us" and "them" to create an "intercultural" document analyzing the two contexts.

Then they prepare in mixed groups an action that will take place in their own communities and create informational material to share with their communities. For example, they can prepare informational materials about the best tools for the prevention of infection with Covid they identified in their interaction with their partners. They can plan informational sessions that fit the context of their community.

This is the step where they apply everything they have learned in their interactions and research using their intercultural competence, especially their critical cultural awareness: their "ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of an explicit, systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries."

This step is especially important as the action element is student-centered and requires students to reflect on their own beliefs and convictions and determine what convictions they are willing to act upon. As we have seen above, convictions are linked to actions and identities. In considering their planned action projects, students reflect on potentially negative consequences of convictions as well as the positive ones.

Step 6: Taking action in our own community (the action is different from what it would have been if we had not had an intercultural perspective (ICit)

As "intercultural citizens," students take action in their own community. Perhaps they include information they learned from their partner. The task is to include references and evidence for their decisions of what action to take and what information to share in the community.

They might for example decide to write a letter to their representative to change legislation based on specific evidence or there may be other "actions in the community" that they plan and carry out. Students in other projects mentioned earlier have devised many different actions, as described there, and experience shows that this is a step that can be safely left to the students to work through in their own ways.

Step 7: Reflection on learning (specifically on understanding of how convictions influence our own actions and those of others (IH and analysis of convictions)

> This step is an addition to previous work from IH and seeks to develop a reflection not only on what students have learned and done but also on how their IH has been a crucial element of their cooperation with others.

Related to the following four IH predictions (see appendix), students can complete the activity below.

IH increases a person's propensity to revise a cherished belief or reduce confidence in it, when she learns of defeaters (i.e. reasons to think her belief is false or reasons to be suspicious of her grounds for it).

IH increases a person's propensity to consider alternative ideas, to listen to the views of others, and to spend more time trying to understand someone with whom he disagrees.

IH increases a person's propensity to have a clearer picture of what he knows and justifiably believes and what he neither knows nor justifiably believes.

IH increases a person's propensity to hold a belief with the confidence that her evidence merits.

Students write a journal entry at home or in class answering the following questions:

1 You investigated several statements about Covid-19 in _____and in _____. Were there statements you believed before but changed your mind about after your investigation? Please explain.

2 What were the reasons for you changing your mind?
3 Do you think you have all the evidence you need to know the "correct" answer to your question now? In other words, do you know for sure you know whether the statement is true or not? If so, how and why? If not, what else would you need to do to find out?
4 What was the most important lesson for you in this activity? Did you learn something you consider important? If so, what was that? Is there something you would now like to share with your friends who have not completed this activity?

Conclusions

It is more important than ever to foster students' ability to work together with people from different cultural backgrounds and people with different beliefs or convictions. Research on convictions shows that we tend to be (a) intolerant of convictions that don't match ours and (b) reluctant to change our convictions as they are tied to our identity and our self-image. Moreover, convictions tend to compel us to engage in activities or to prevent us from the action when it is needed. This makes it all the more important that we help our students to become aware of their convictions so that they can make conscious decisions about how they want to engage in their local, national, and global communities.

Because convictions are beliefs that do not need to be supported by evidence – becoming blind convictions – there is less of an incentive to reflect upon them. In addition, because of the link between convictions and identity, changing convictions can be painful. However, if we want our students to thrive in this interconnected world, they need to learn to listen to each other, be open-minded, admit that they don't know everything so that they can evaluate information and gain new knowledge, make and admit mistakes, give credit to others when due, and ask for help when they don't know something. They also need to be aware of the underlying reasons for their convictions so that they are not in danger of blindly following the convictions of others and engaging in actions that are not backed up by evidence. Ultimately this may impact their identity and self-image: how others see them and how they see themselves. They need, then, to be intellectually humble, intercultural citizens who are active in their community engaging in actions based on mature reflection stimulated by working with people of different geographical places and cultural identities.

In this chapter, we have offered a possible example of how the concept of IH and the model of ICit can be brought together in pedagogical work and enrich each other to help students reflect on the role of convictions in people's actions. This is an important development from our previous work on ICit, because we have demonstrated the potential of the relationship in principle, and we propose to apply in practice projects such as the one presented in this chapter to study whether students indeed learn to critically examine their own and others' convictions.

Appendix

Whitcomb and colleagues' 19 "predictions related to a variety of activities, motivations, and feelings" of a person who is intellectually humble (2017, p.520).

1 IH increases a person's propensity to admit his intellectual limitations to himself and others.
2 IH reduces both a person's propensity to pretend to know something when he doesn't and his confidently answering a question whether or not he knows the answer (think: "male answer syndrome").
3 IH reduces a person's propensity to blame and explain-away when confronting her own intellectual shortcomings.
4 IH decreases a person's propensity to set unattainable intellectual goals.
5 IH increases a person's propensity to defer to others who don't have her intellectual limitations, in situations that call upon those limitations.
6 IH increases a person's concern about her own intellectual mistakes and weaknesses.
7 IH reduces feelings of anxiety and insecurity about one's own intellectual limitations.
8 IH decreases a person's propensity to excessively compare herself to others intellectually.
9 IH reduces the intellectual aspect of the self-serving bias in a person, which is, very roughly, the propensity to attribute to oneself more responsibility for intellectual successes than for intellectual failures.
10 IH increases a person's propensity to revise a cherished belief or reduce confidence in it, when she learns of defeaters (i.e. reasons to think her belief is false or reasons to be suspicious of her grounds for it).
11 IH increases a person's propensity to consider alternative ideas, to listen to the views of others, and to spend more time trying to understand someone with whom he disagrees.
12 IH increases a person's propensity to seek help from other sources about intellectual matters.
13 IH increases a person's propensity to hold a belief with the confidence that her evidence merits.
14 IH increases a person's propensity to have a clearer picture of what he knows and justifiably believes and what he neither knows nor justifiably believes.
15 IH reduces a person's propensity to expect or seek recognition and praise for her intellectual strengths and accomplishments.
16 IH reduces a person's propensity to treat intellectual inferiors with disrespect on the basis of his (supposed) intellectual superiority.
17 IH tends to decrease focus on oneself and to increase focus on Others.
18 IH increases a person's propensity to accurately estimate her intellectual strengths.

19 IH decreases a person's propensity to be obsessed with his strengths and to boast about them.

(Whitcomb et al., 2017, pp. 521–534)

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11 In Pursuit of the Dialogic Classroom

Designing Spaces for Conviction

John Sarrouf

> The weight of these sad times we must obey;
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
>
> – Edgar, King Lear, Act 5, scene 3

An Observation

In the Fall of 2017, fellow researcher Dr. Jill DeTemple and I found ourselves sitting in the classroom of a dear colleague who was teaching the origins of Islam and the beginning split between Sunni and Shia Muslims at the battle of Jamal. Largely a masterclass in storytelling, the session was punctuated by moments when the professor invited students to ask or answer a question, which is to say, it was punctuated by lengthy silences. When the silences became too awkward, a student – one of three who always stepped into the void – was willing to offer a thought, perhaps ask a question, and occasionally proffer an original idea. The teacher, though obviously ambivalent about hearing from the same students every time, was equally relieved that someone was saving the moment, creating a dynamic, and moving the conversation forward.

At the end of the class, we sat together in the empty lecture hall and explained the reason for our visit. We had been awarded a grant from the University of Connecticut as part of Templeton's Intellectual Humility initiative to understand whether the use of dialogue in the classroom could help cultivate intellectual humility in students and create more openness, curiosity, and engagement.

The professor reflected for a moment: "That would be nice. I would love to see that."

Pause.

"But to be honest, mostly what I wish is that more of my students were willing to offer an opinion or share a conviction. I need to find a way to get more than just three students engaged."

That fall, my collaborators and I found ourselves in over 25 of our beloved colleagues' classrooms across five institutions watching the same dynamic play out, repeating the same conversations.

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"Humility for some would be such a welcomed relief, but there are some students whose voices I wouldn't recognize if they called to me across the quad. It's those students that I need to get talking."

An Origin Story: In Search of Intellectual Humility and the Development of Conviction

I am the co-Executive Director of Essential Partners, a conflict transformation and bridge-building organization based in Cambridge, MA that has been supporting communities to constructively navigate some of the world's most divisive conversations since the late 1980s. We have worked across the globe using Reflective Structured Dialogue – a dialogue approach that I will explain in more detail later – to support conversations in post-civil war Liberia, interfaith dialogue in Nigeria, conversations about human sexuality in the Anglican Communion, firearms in American society, Abortion rights, and myriad other polarizing topics that threaten the thriving of pluralistic and diverse communities.

Over the last 15 years, we have increasingly been asked to bring our approach to college campuses to support extracurricular and campus life conversations, often teaching students, administrators, and some faculty to facilitate difficult dialogues. After many workshops, a couple of professors would stay behind to question how they might use these methods in the classroom to make more open and engaging spaces for learning. The Templeton Foundation's call for proposals seemed the perfect opportunity to answer the question: could we transform our classrooms into engines of curiosity, open engagement, and intellectual humility – and as we discovered – incubators of conviction?

I use the term conviction without strict boundaries, as a facilitator and teacher interested in both the **development** and **engagement** of ideas that people believe to be true, ideas that are both identity-shaping and motivating. I think of the discovery of a conviction as Polanyi describes

> …the function of philosophic reflection consists in bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid; that I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding…
>
> (Polanyi, 2002, p. 280)

And as Pianalto says, "we do not simply want to know what a person takes to be certain; we also want to know what beliefs play a central role in that person's outlook." The engagement of a conviction is most important because "the representation of knowledge for an audience is absolutely central to the construction of knowledge." (Bass & Elmendorf, 2009).

For partnership in this endeavor, I turned to Professors Lauren Bartold (Philosophy, Endicott College), Jill DeTemple (Religious Studies, SMU), Margie Deweese-Boyd (Social Work, Gordon College), Ian Deweese-Boyd (Philosophy, Gordon College), Jonathan Garlic (Dentistry and Stem Cell Research, Tufts University), Hariet Hayes (Sociology, Bridgewater College), whom I had worked with over the years who had been using dialogue in various ways to pursue similar goals in their institutions.

What started as an action research project to understand if the dialogue in the classroom could inspire intellectual humility in American college students has become a five-year mission to change the way people teach so that students can find their own voices and engage their emerging and diverse ideas in learning communities otherwise known as college classrooms.

We wanted to know if people can be invited through designed spaces and an intentional process of inquiry to reflect on their latent values, stories, and intuitions as a way to develop newly formed, articulated, and more deeply understood convictions. By marrying the invitation to develop convictions, while holding them publicly with humility, could educators build spaces of deep engagement necessary to educate involved, thoughtful citizens in a pluralistic, dynamic, and thriving democratic society? This chapter draws on that initial research as well as many years of facilitating dialogue across the world to address these questions.

Observing the Need and Imagining the New

We began the study by observing professors in action in the classroom to understand the felt need, to see the norms of discourse, and understand where dialogic practice might be supportive. It was then that we learned – as demonstrated in the opening vignette of this chapter – that the need was for more space to develop convictions and not just humility; that in fact the two might be deeply and inversely related. The more some students could step back, the more others were invited to step forward. And we believed the principles and processes of Reflective Structured Dialogue might be the perfect vehicle for this transformation.

The deeper we got, the more we realized that far from the headlines about major protests on college campuses and heated shouting matches in classrooms or lecture halls, (see articles like the-surprising-revolt-at-reed and The coddling of the American Mind (Bodenner, 2017)) most students were asking themselves if they belong on campus at all. Do they have a place in the conversation? Anything to contribute? They look around and see a few students with formed identities and ideas, able to share them forcefully and wonder, "How did I get here? And do I belong?" This is especially true for underrepresented minorities and first-generation students (Gopalan and Brady, 2020). Indeed, one of the most striking results of our early data was an overwhelming positive survey response among students.

Eighty-six percent of students either agreed or strongly agreed that "the opportunity to dialogue in this classroom helped me feel a sense of belonging in this class" (Dialogic Classroom, 2017).

I sympathize. I am a 50-year-old dialogue practitioner with a small nonprofit in Cambridge and I wonder, "What am I doing writing a chapter in a book about conviction authored by world class academics and researchers?" It took months to finally get to this point in the chapter because of my own lack of confidence in my convictions. It took years of my own speaking with colleagues and friends to build the connections between my thoughts and experiences. It took me sharing these ideas informally on walks and over dinners to have the sense that there is a story to tell. It took watching people's reactions and getting encouraging feedback to get over the fear that I am missing something and the terror that if I write a chapter I will prove I do not belong.

Imagine an 18-year-old in a college classroom – the idea of speaking feels like life or death – and in a way, it is. Challenges to a student's convictions are felt as a threat to their identity (Lynch, 2019). It is about self-worth and the claiming of place. It is about being seen and recognized. It may be about the hopes and dreams of generations to have achieved this place. Is it any wonder that the classrooms we visited were largely silent? With this at stake, is it any wonder that the vast majority of the students we witnessed have taken to heart the false wisdom that it is "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt"?

The question then for us as educators, leaders, or citizens is whether we are implicitly or explicitly telling students that their stories are welcomed, their beliefs legitimate, and their worldview authentic and worthy to be heard. Are we creating the space for students to recognize and tell their stories, connect them to their values, share their beliefs, and offer them as convictions? Can we deliberately cultivate spaces for the development and sharing of convictions and do so in a way that encourages us all to hold those convictions with humility? This is what my colleagues and I set out to do.

Reflective Structured Dialogue as a Pedagogy for the Development of Humility and Conviction – The Dialogic Classroom Defined

Reflective Structured Dialogue

Reflective Structured Dialogue was developed from an action-based research project pursuing models for dialogue on diverse political issues in response to the highly polarized public discourse of the 1980s (Chasin et al., 1995). The primary purpose of Reflective Structured Dialogue is "to pursue mutual understanding and improved communication that enhances curiosity, respect, and trust - especially where people differ deeply about

treasured values, identities, and beliefs." (Stains, 2016, p. 115). It is also to help break from the dominant discourse on issues that have become overly polarized, enforcing a choice between two simple answers to a complex dilemma that requires many perspectives. Conversations get stuck in destructive patterns that are hard to break. This is damaging for relationships and the community; however, if you shift *how* people have a conversation, you can change the relationship. Changing relationships changes what is possible to speak about and what is possible to learn, create, and accomplish together (Chasin et al., 1995).

To make this shift takes some intentionality and involves

- **Preparation** for the conversation
- **Reflection** on one's own and others' perspectives
- **Shared purposes and agreements** that guide the conversation
- **Questions** that elicit fresh information
- **Structured** exchanges interrupt old patterns, enhance thoughtful speaking and listening
- Opportunity to **explore genuine interest** in the other

(Essential Partners Training Materials, 2020)

The title of this chapter is deliberately set in architectural terms – "designing spaces…." In our dialogue work, we teach that every choice you make in designing a dialogue will invite certain ways of being and discourage others, and that it should be rooted in a very specific purpose (Pearce, 2005). The classroom is no different. If you set the chairs up in rows looking toward the front of the room, people will look at the front of the room; if you make a circle of chairs, people will look at each other. If you ask a yes or no question, you will get a yes or no answer. So, professors must think of themselves as designers of learning spaces.

Dialogue as a Pedagogical Approach

Beyond mutual understanding and an improved discourse, the vision and purpose of the dialogic classroom are to design learning spaces that help students develop their convictions and share them publicly with humility so that others will engage the fullness of their ideas.

If every choice we make will invite some ways of being and discourage others, then the architect of the classroom must ask, "what am I intentionally designing that will invite trust, belonging, and relationships and discourage their opposites - distrust, factionalization, polarization - and importantly for this chapter - silence and disengagement?"

The dialogic classroom has three major components for teachers to use to create this space: *The dialogic container* – purpose, agreements, intention and connection; *dialogic conversational structures*; and *dialogic inquiry*. All of these components working together, if designed well, invite students

to develop, discover, share, and refine their convictions with humility in community with their fellow students. Each invites a deeper understanding of self and others and establishes patterns of discourse that build trust and belonging in the classroom creating a community of learners. The following section outlines and explains these components.

The Dialogic Container – Purpose, Connection, Intentions and Agreements

The Centrality of an Explicit Purpose

Professors in the dialogic classroom explicitly welcome differences in experience, identity, worldview, culture, learning styles, etc., as integral to the overall success of the class. Transformative learning should put students in spaces where "worldviews radically different from their own are encountered and appreciated." This encounter with disparate ideas requires that people share convictions and have them engaged by others (Palmer and Zajonc, 2010, p. 107). If we are going to ask our students to engage in conversations about challenging topics and reveal their convictions in such a public and vulnerable way, we must be clear and explicit about this purpose. This means taking the time at the beginning of a course to speak about this as well as creating opportunities and rewards for sharing divergent experiences and ideas.

Building Connection Before Content

In order to pursue mutual understanding and improved communication and trust, the dialogic classroom invests significant time in creating a palpable level of connection and ever-deepening sense of relationship between students before delving into those more difficult topics where trust is fundamental to people's ability to engage (Lewicki et al./Interpersonal Trust Development 1005). Relationships between students are cultivated through multiple stages of personal sharing intentionally designed to reveal connections and weave the "varied and flexible bonds of affiliation" (Herzig, 2002) that exist in a classroom. This creates what Lewicki and Tomlinson (2000) call Identity-Based Trust that supports students acting on behalf of one another because of internalized shared goals and values. We teach professors to invest more time than they normally might by offering invitations

- Speak about a wise person in your life that has inspired you to do the work you do in the world.
- Please share an object that would help people in the group understand something of what you value in the world or would help explain some important part of who you are and what you care about.

- What is one routine you have that you look forward to every day, week, or month?
- One skill you have that you could teach someone else and one thing you really wish you could learn?

(collectively developed by the Associates of Essential Partners)

These questions, when asked from the beginning of a group's time together, allow students to author their own story, break stereotypes, reveal unexpected connections, and lay the groundwork for more complex sharing of narratives that are important to classroom discussions on difficult and polarizing topics that will come later in the semester.

Some professors have worried that these are a distraction from the real work of learning; they are not. These are fundamental designs that send signals to participants that this is a space where the creative, intuitive, intellectual, and personal can come forward; where convictions come in their nascent form to be nurtured and supported.

Mutually Constructed Communication Agreements and Personal Intentions

The creation of a set of norms or communication agreements is an important part of the dialogic classroom as it helps create the container for the kind of deep sharing that is required. We advocate for professors to take the time in the classroom to jointly create agreements through any number of exercises designed to help students imagine and articulate the circumstances under which they would share. An exercise called "Moments of Dissent" is one such exercise. It invites students to imagine that they are:

> …in this class and the teacher asks a question. The first seven responses to the question have all generally been in agreement with each other about one way of thinking or looking at the problem. As you've listened, you've realized that your thinking/experience/beliefs/worldview are different from everyone else who has spoken up until this point. You want to be able to share your opinion--your story--because you want to be understood; because it is important for people in the class to hear different ideas; because you want to get reflections or reactions to what you have to say; because you think people are missing something important. In this moment, you've got to make a decision as to whether to share that thought/story/belief/idea.
>
> (Moments of Dissent, https://whatisessential.org/resources/building-agreements-moments-dissent-exercise)

We specifically call them agreements and collaboratively build them to encourage buy-in from students and support their internalization. Some agreements that are often created are:

- Confidentiality regarding people's stories
- One speaker at a time
- Respect time boundaries and share airtime
- Avoid attempts to persuade
- Speak for yourself and not on behalf of others
- "Pass" or "pass for now" will be accepted
- Acknowledge your distractions and limit them as much as possible

There are endless iterations of agreements like this, connected to purpose, and meant to be revisited, updated, and modified as needed.

The same exercise invites students to build for themselves a set of personal intentions for their time in the room. Intentions are individual orientations to the common space of ideas that allow students to individualize their class participation. Some students will have to build an intention to push their own sharing beyond what is normal for them and others to step back and listen more. The dialogic classroom invites professors to regularly check in with students about their own growth in these areas. These check-ins are opportunities for professors to encourage students to build their own convictions and humility. Class participation is no longer ill-defined and implied, defaulting to the number of times one raises their hands, but explicitly articulated and individually driven.

Dialogic Structures for Conversation

Fundamental to the creation of spaces for developing conviction or the empowerment of an individual to bring forward their story are conversational structures or protocols that invite time for reflection, equality of sharing, and particular patterns of speaking and listening. Drawing upon narrative theory, Sara Cobb defines empowerment as "a set of discursive practices that enhance the participation…." (Cobb, 1993, p. 250) of an individual to speak on their own behalf.

Imagine the difference between asking a question of the class and expecting an answer right away and asking a question and giving students two minutes to reflect and write on that question before ever opening the floor to responses. What is invited? What is discouraged? Immediate responses invite the first thing to come to people's minds, ready answers, fast processors beginning and dominating, i.e., people with developed convictions who are ready to step forward. The power of the first speaker is invited, setting a tone that then cues everybody after as to the correct way to respond. If students do not have time on their own to reflect, the first speaker frames the conversation, limiting its scope, and indicating the "right way" to answer the question. Cobb explains that "the first speaker is greatly advantaged in this process. The first speaker gets to frame the dispute. The second speaker is left in a dilemma. If they submit to that framing, their participation is diminished, and so they are disempowered. If they do not

respond within that framework, then their speech seems irrelevant and incoherent, and so their participation is diminished" (Cobb, 1993, p. 252).

When given time for reflection and writing, the invitation is for deeper thinking, a greater likelihood that slower processors will offer an opinion, making diversity of thought more likely. A short reflection time opens up the possibility that a student who had never thought about the question before will get to hear their own thoughts before they hear the thoughts of others. Any dialogue facilitator gets used to hearing people in dialogues preface an answer with "perhaps I answered the question wrong, but I thought of this differently…" and then go on to read what they had written, rather than editing or staying silent altogether. This is even more important in culturally diverse spaces. The shift is simple – the results are profound.

A structure like time-limited speaking makes explicit the invitation for every student to share their response to the question with both a container for those who might be used to taking up too much space, and an invitation for those less likely to believe their opinion has value; "this is your time - we want to hear from you." Again, we see in the structure an invitation for some to speak with greater humility and others with greater conviction.

Below is a grid of structures with their purposes that we use in our trainings (Table 11.1):

Preparation

Structured preparation furthers the development of convictions by asking students to mine the deeper memories, experiences, and influences that have shaped their beliefs. Assignments in advance of a conversation help students craft their own narratives. Guided meditations on a topic or value sorting help students build an internal framework for their understanding so that they come to class with greater confidence to speak about their ideas.

Dialogic Inquiry

The power of inquiry to support a deeper understanding both of another person, and more importantly, of oneself is a hallmark of the dialogic classroom. We break dialogic inquiry down into (a) prompting questions from the professor and (b) inquiry between students.

Dialogue Questions

Questions from professors in many classrooms tend toward the analytical and rhetorical. In our observations, for the majority of the questions asked, it was clear that the professors already knew the answers; they were more of a test of knowledge or logic. Sometimes questions followed the "socratic method" – a series of questions where the professor took the student down a path predetermined by the professor as a way of proving a

Table 11.1 The Dialogue Structures (Essential Partners Training Materials, 2020)

	What this structure invites	*What behaviors or communication it discourages*	*The purpose of using this tool*
Time-limited speaking	Equal time for all participants; keeps timing on track so all speakers get a turn; resilient listening (we can hang in b/c we know how long we have to listen to others)	Some people from dominating or taking up extra space; the fullest version of our stories	To equalize the time for all participants; fairness
Go-round	Predictability; ensures that each person will get their turn;	Feeling unsure about how or when to enter the conversation; can discourage more organic-feeling conversation; the same person going first	Creates a clearly defined process and order for participants' responses to a question
Pause between speakers	Honoring what we've heard; preparing to listen to the next speaker	Jumping in too quickly, in a way that may feel like we weren't listening at all – just preparing to speak;	Helps support listening; slows down the conversation, which is especially helpful in the virtual space (audio delays and talking over), and when conversations get heated
Time to think/ write/ speak	Reflection and preparation; introverts or internal processers are honored; writing is a helpful tool for processing emotions and making meaning (especially helpful in more divisive conversations)	Extroverts taking up all the space and being the first to speak; speaking without thinking!	Giving participants an equal chance to be the "first speaker." The power of the first speaker is that they set the direction, tone, etc. for the conversation; everything that comes after that is a reaction/response to the first speaker; by thinking/writing before speaking, we give each participant the opportunity to be their own first speaker.

No cross-talk during opening questions	Reflection, listening, curiosity, and deeper conversation; gives each speaker a chance to be heard without questions or interruptions	Reactive questions/ responses and interruptions; the conversation following just one person's story or one person's experience taking over the conversation	To allow more of the conversation and a deeper level of sharing before moving into more free-flowing dialogue; tight to loose structure helps set expectations for listening and speaking; builds curiosity

point or teaching the class some particular way of looking at a problem (Pekarsky, 1994). Often these questions were set up as ambushes leading students into logical conundrums only to pull the rug out from under them and prove their faulty logic. I have fallen into these patterns myself as it was largely the way I was taught. But it was obvious why most students in the classes we observed steered clear of being entangled in one of these exchanges with the professor. When they did engage, it was clear that some were trying to, as one student put it, "hit the teacher target" or guess what the teacher had in mind as the right answer rather than delving deeper into their own thinking.

Questions in the dialogic classroom have a very different purpose and take a different form. This series of dialogue questions help students probe and examine their fully formed beliefs or form them if they are latent and unarticulated. A classic dialogue question arc will begin with an invitation for a narrative that connects the stories of students' to their beliefs, helping them find the roots of their convictions within their lived experiences. "Stories connect us to one another, help to shape our identities" (Hooks, 1994, p. 76) and help students follow the thread of their own thinking's origins.

> Could you tell us about a life experience you've had that has shaped your perspective or beliefs about the role of firearms in your community?
>
> (This asks for lived experiences that are at the root of convictions)

The second question invites students to work at the level of values that drive convictions.

> When you think about the proper role of firearms in your community, what matters most to you?
>
> (This invites sharing at the level of values rather than analytical reasons for a position)

The third question in the arc asks students to delve into the complexity of their thinking to make their convictions more nuanced by asking where there are gray areas or areas where one value conflicts with another value. This is especially important in polarized conversations where expressing uncertainty could be seen as disloyalty to one's expressed side (Becker, 1995, p. 145)

> In what ways do you experience mixed feelings or feel pulled in different directions on the issue? Where are the places where one of your values bumps up against another value?
>
> (This invites more nuance and complexity and with it intellectual humility)

These questions take the student on a journey through their own convictions-from the origin stories of their lived experiences, to their underlying values, to the complex ways in which they live their values in context.

Inquiry between Students

In most classrooms where dialogue is not the predominant pedagogy, I have observed that inquiry between students – if it happens at all – more commonly falls into the category of the challenge or "push back" – those questions meant to point out the flaws in the argument or places of disagreement. In contrast, the dialogic classroom reserves a moment of suspension of judgment (I don't claim a lack of judgment, but rather the invitation to suspend judgment long enough to be curious), what writing theorist and teacher Peter Elbow describes as a shift from methodological doubting to methodological believing. The first "teaches us that we can test or scrutinize points … bring logic to bear and see hidden contradictions." The second

> …teaches us to try to understand points of view from the inside. … When someone says what seems all wrong, the most productive response is often merely to listen and not reply at all. Teachers can productively insist on short periods of silence after a controversial point has been made.
>
> (Elbow, 2008, p. 8)

We ask students to enter into the answers of their fellow students to explore and deepen their understanding. We invite the shift linguistically from "Yeah, but what about…" to "Huh, interesting, tell me more about…"

We have come to think of curiosity as a propellant for the development of convictions, because when students ask each other questions, they invite a deeper exploration into the origins of others' beliefs, making more

connections between their beliefs and their own experiences and values, and acknowledging the complexities or limits in their own thinking. When people push back, the impulse is to resist and defend. So, for a period of time within a dialogue, we only invite questions of genuine curiosity – questions that come from students' own desire to understand more deeply someone who is different from them. A genuinely curious question is twice blessed; it serves those asked by helping them understand themselves more deeply as well as being understood by others, and it serves the asker by providing nuance and a deeper understanding of those who are different. This deepens the connections built earlier on in the course and as dialogue continues, relationships build toward "compassion and empathetic connection" (Becker, 1995, p. 146).

The dialogic classroom is a pedagogical approach that builds relationships and trust, prioritizes engagement, explicitly invites students to be co-creators of the classroom experience, uses structures to build a culture of equity in discourse, and centers the experiences and voices of students all in the service of helping students develop and share their convictions with humility.

Data Supporting Dialogic Design in Classrooms

Does this shift in approach actually achieve these lofty goals? Data from our original study and observations and experience teaching this approach to hundreds of professors all across the country since suggest that it does. During the pilot, we taught four two-day workshops at the four participating institutions to cohorts of professors from a wide range of disciplines – mostly social science and the humanities, but also STEM and health sciences – and coached them through the semester as they brought the work into their courses. In all, 72 professors participated in the training. After each semester, we interviewed a total of 17 faculty members about how dialogic approaches had or had not changed their teaching. We also gave a mixed-methods survey to 418 students over three semesters in order to measure their reactions to dialogue in the classroom, including markers of intellectual humility and conviction.

After teachers had started using dialogic approaches in their classrooms, we interviewed them and surveyed their students, asking questions like

- In this course, has your willingness to speak in class increased or decreased over the course of the semester?
- Over the course of the semester in this class, have you been more willing or less willing to ask your classmates direct questions?
- Over the course of the semester in this class, have you been more willing or less willing to openly disagree with your classmates during dialogues or discussions?

- Did dialogues in this classroom help you feel understood by classmates whose opinions and backgrounds differ from yours? (see appendix for final student survey)

As related to the development of student convictions, what especially stood out were the ways students talked about: (1) an increase in their willingness to speak, (2) their fuller sense of belonging in class, and (3) their eagerness and ability to speak and listen across differences.

Willingness to Speak

Because we are searching for convictions that are shaped and expressed in the classroom discourse, students' willingness to speak is significant. When asked if their willingness to speak had increased or decreased over the course of the semester, 63% of the 148 students responding to the Fall 2018 survey reported that their willingness to speak in class "increased a little" (38%) or "increased a lot" (25%).

The students noted the link between the shift in pedagogy as the reason for their own shifts in willingness to step into the public discourse of the classroom. When asked why they were more willing to speak, 43% of students named being given time to reflect before contributing, 44% cited an atmosphere of openness, 34% noted that they knew they wouldn't be interrupted, 48% acknowledged that "hearing different experiences made it easier to add my own," and 38% noted that "going around the circle made it easier to know it was my turn." (Dialogic Classroom, 2018).

In response to the question, "In this course, have you seen changes or transformations in how others engage in your class? If YES, please describe." participants responded:

> As we had more dialogues the class became more open and willing to talk to each other rather than the professor.
>
> (Student, Dialogic Classroom, 2017)

> Before, NO ONE wanted to talk. Over the semester, we had the quietest people join the discussion.
>
> (Student, Dialogic Classroom, 2017)

Belonging in Class

The investment at the beginning of a course in building purpose, connection, intentions, and agreements leads students to "almost universally report a strong sense of belonging in class, relating it to getting to know classmates better, class experiences that invited listening, and environments that encouraged a sense of comfort and trust between peers" (DeTemple, 2020, p. 760). Students shared, "We became comfortable with one another and I

knew they would be understanding and interested in answering honestly" (Student, Dialogic Classroom, 2018).

When asked if "The opportunity to dialogue in this classroom helped me feel a sense of belonging in this class," 91% of respondents from the combined pool from Fall 2017, Spring 2018, and Fall 2018 (n=411) either somewhat agreed (43%) or agreed (48%) (Dialogic Classroom) as can be gleaned from the quotes of students below.

> I began the semester off shy, but eventually have grown comfortable talking to everyone.
>
> (Student, Fall 2017)

> I started to trust everyone in the class - I felt heard and that and I felt people wanted to listen. I wasn't afraid of letting my past come out and let people learn from what I've been through.
>
> At first, many were very hesitant to engage in discussion because it seemed uncomfortable to discuss many of the topics because they were very difficult. By the end of the class, many were more open to discussing. When there was a more difficult topic, people were hesitant to say anything because they were thinking, not because they were nervous to engage with their peers.
>
> (Student responses, Dialogic Classroom, 2017)

Eagerness and Ability to Speak and Listen across Differences

Regarding a willingness to engage across differences, we heard similar stories: "Having an open, respectful and friendly environment helped ensure that both I and my classmates understood that a question wasn't an attack on their ideas or opinions, but an attempt to answer their stance more thoroughly or to point out a new perspective (Student, Dialogic Classroom, 2018)." Dialogic structures stood out to students as having an impact on their willingness to engage across differences. Participants reported they spoke more because they were given time for reflection, that they believed their classmates would be respectful, hearing different experiences made it easier to add their own, and going in a circle made it easier to contribute.

Perhaps because of that sense of belonging or the feeling of comfort that comes with it, students reported high levels of willingness to speak in class. There was a significant statistical correlation between self-reported willingness to speak and a self-reported sense of belonging in class (p. 449), a self-reported time in which the student shared personal identity to give perspective (p. 454), a self-reported willingness to ask direct questions (p. 413), and an expressed interest in wanting dialogue in other classes (p. 473).

We even saw the link between humility and conviction when we were puzzled to find in our first set of responses that the dialogic classroom had

induced some students to speak less. Were students somehow put off by the structure or reticent to be vulnerable? In our next round of surveys, we found our link. Student comments showed awareness of their own change in behaviors "I always talk in class and it was nice to have others speak up for a change" (Student, Dialogic Classroom, 2018) and "I always talk in class and I learned to pause and listen instead" (Student, Dialogic Classroom, 2018).

This evidence and years of facilitating in the most difficult situations bear out the theory that the space we create in our classroom invites some ways of being and discourages others. These choices can be made with deliberation and a deep sense of purpose in mind to evoke and invite the deepest levels of sharing, belonging, and engagement. We can invite some newer voices to step forward and encourage more dominant voices to step back. With the right amount of investment and intentionality, we can disrupt the dominant narrative to make space for the new and emergent convictions of our students.

Reflections, Questions, and Challenges to Building a Movement

Moving beyond the study itself, building on the last several years of teaching, observing, and advocating for this shift in pedagogy, this journey into the dialogic classroom has returned me to my roots in the arts. The dialogic classroom more closely resembles my time on the theater stage, in the dance studio, or in an improv workshop than a college classroom where the professor's expertise is centered and information is consumed. It is perhaps for this reason that I find inspiration for making spaces for conviction in teachers of theater, dance, and writing.

Creative impulses, the spark of inspiration, and the formation of conviction are subtle and delicate. The willingness to make a connection between thoughts, try them on, speak them into the air, and to understand whether they work needs the creation of an intentional space, cultivation, and practice. Skepticism and critical thinking are useful for a more advanced thought – a thought ripe and ready to be honed and crafted into a finished product. But for the latent idea – the newly forming thought – the student just emerging into the public space with a notion to share, what is needed is someone listening for the kernel of an idea that could be nurtured and fed. Pruning too early will kill the impulse. The theater with its ethic of play has much to teach us here. We experiment, we fail boldly, without any expectation for the finished product to arrive on the first day of rehearsal. William Ball, the Artistic Director of the American Conservatory Theater teaches in his seminal book – "A Sense of Direction" that the director must say yes to the first three ideas that come into the actor's head – the first three impulses they have. In doing so we are saying yes to the impulse to create, the impulse that will give life to a performance and inspiration itself. Say

"no," and you are cutting off the creative source. More important than the right idea is learning to form ideas and share them. What about bad ideas? Don't worry about them, Ball argues, the rehearsal process will weed out bad ideas (Ball, 1984, p. 118). Likewise, convictions that do not hold some truth will be abandoned over time through reflection and dialogue. Pianalto argues, "the constraints of reflection, discourse, and humility contribute to the development of responsible conviction" (2011, p. 382). And our own study bore this out when to the question "On more than one occasion, I reconsidered my viewpoints based on others' perspectives," 20% reported that the sentence described them slightly well, 35.3% responded that the sentence described them moderately well, 26% responded that the sentence described them very well, and 9% responded that the sentence described them extremely well.

Thus comes the invitation to dwell in the unknown and the imaginative. As the writer and comedian John Cleese says in his book Creativity – a short and cheerful guide,

> It is…very important that when you first have a new idea, you don't get critical too soon. New and 'woolly' ideas shouldn't be attacked by your logical brain until they've had time to grow, to become clearer and sturdier. New ideas are rather like small creatures. They are easily strangled.
>
> (Clease, 2020, p. 62)

When we do look for feedback or critique of ideas, again, I think the arts inform us, in particular, Liz Lehrman's Critical Response Process that gives us a model for supporting this kind of development. The basic stance of the process is to leave the control for the critique in the hands of the artist –- what does the artist want to achieve and what in a process of review will support the questions they have about their own work (Lerman, 2020). What if our classrooms and dialogues were more about people leading their own critiques? What if we treat an idea as a work-in-progress, as if they were a dance performance out for the first showing to fellow artists.

Some Pushback

It is important to name the critiques of this approach. There are people who push back against the reliance on stories – lived experiences are marginalized as anecdotes and convictions as opinions. People will rightfully say that someone's experience does not replace scientifically collected data. And yet, it is an important piece of data from a single data point – and more importantly – it is that person's life story. When brought into contact with 20 other stories – all fully told – it does in fact become a collection of data points important to reckon with. bell hooks makes a similar point as she transcribed a conversation with theorist Henry Giroux:

> GIROUX: You deny that students have experiences, and you can't deny that these experiences are relevant to the learning process even though you might say that these experiences are limited, raw, unfruitful, or whatever. Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages and cultures that give them a distinct voice. We can critically engage that experience and move beyond it. But we can't deny it.
>
> (hooks, 1994, p. 88)

And these stories impact how people sift through and make sense of data. Certainly, two people can look at the same set of facts and come to vastly different conclusions.

But what about fake facts?

I could be cavalier and say "I don't care about fake facts – that is not my job as a teacher." But, of course, that's not true. The question is whether that is my only job. It is also my responsibility to encourage students to develop original thinking, build their own lens on the world, and engage with others. It is important to help students understand why they are drawn to a particular fact. Fake facts only have influence or traction because we have eyes to see and ears to hear them. Dialogue teaches us that it is more important to help our students understand and articulate what motivates them than to correct them. If these expressions are "blind convictions" – those convictions that are unexamined and unintegrated, then we know the remedy is through intellectual humility, by way of reflection, deliberation, and dialogue (see also Wagner and Byram, this volume).

I understand the objections to these ideas. In a world where purposeful distortion of reality for political manipulation and control is rampant, it is scary to speak about suspending judgment long enough to believe someone else's reality. I want us to remember that the first-year students in our classrooms did not come to our schools to subvert the truth as a tool of one political party or the other. They came to learn and grow, to develop self-authorship and convictions, and to become full and productive citizens. As Palmer and Zajonc (2010) argue "We should attend to the cultivation of our students' humanity at least as much as we instruct them in the content of our fields" (p. 102). We make space for the development of their thinking and connecting their stories to impact the world. We can create classrooms where more than three people speak and the rest are silent.

In this era of fake facts, we have become too concerned with correcting the record, hoisting our tranche of evidence into the center of our conversations, and drawing boundaries for what cannot be said. This is, of course, ineffective. A near-universal medical consensus about the efficacy and safety of the COVID vaccine has not changed the core convictions of a large percentage of the American population. But more importantly, it does not serve the ends of a conversation – not the point of learning, nor the deepest purposes of higher education.

I recently taught a group of mid-career fellows from Israel studying for the year in America, helping them build frameworks, strategies, and skills for civil conversations on topics that would certainly – in fact had already – come up through the course of their fellowship. They were reflecting on how much more they are willing to speak openly, fully, and with complexity about their beliefs when being asked genuine questions to understand rather than questions meant to persuade them. Several fellows critiqued that "staying curious might be easy when you agree with someone or when you disagree but don't really care. How do we maintain this stance of curiosity when we are most provoked and when we feel we have most at stake?" Therein lies the justification of the dialogic classroom – the creation of spaces where curiosity is invited/agreed to/structured for these very moments.

Ideally, we only have classrooms where students feel they have much at stake. We have to assume we will have differences in beliefs about the things that concern us the most. In fact, we take as a presupposition that we learn best when we are in learning situations where a diversity of opinion is encouraged (Palmer and Zajonc, 2010). There is no need for a commitment to curiosity for people who agree or on topics we don't care about. It is the very moment when our core beliefs are most challenged that these commitments to dialogue are fundamental. It is when the stakes feel high that students who are less likely to share need the invitation and structures that the dialogic classroom provides to develop and share their convictions publicly.

Where We Go from Here: Conclusions and Recommendations

My colleagues and I have continued to teach hundreds of professors across the United States and in countries like Bosnia and Turkey, where this shift is even more profound. We have adapted this for use with middle and high school teachers in civics, language arts, and STEM. We are learning that at different ages, the need to make space for conviction is even more important, and the tools we must teach and the path we must lay for them are even more deliberate.

Much of what this journey toward the dialogic classroom has provided me as a teacher – and peacemaker – is the permission to go beyond what I originally thought possible. I no longer have to be the generator of ideas in the classroom. I no longer have to ask all the questions, nor leave to chance or "chemistry" the sense of belonging or camaraderie that I once had the illusion had something to do with my charisma at the front of the room. I no longer have to look beyond the three raised hands at the front of the class, hoping and praying that someone else will answer. I have a pathway to evoking, and more importantly, my students have a pathway to connect and share their own deep beliefs, wisdom, stories, and convictions. I have learned to pause longer and let students sit in the reflective silence that nudges them from their reticence and into the public square of their fellow

classmates to try an idea for the first time – the latent conviction breathed into existence because a fellow student simply asked for more of them.

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12 Conclusion

Making a Difference for (Self-)Reflection and Dialogue

Manuela Wagner and Anke Finger

As we are writing this conclusion, war is raging in Ukraine. Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and thereby started what is already known as "the largest conventional military attack on a sovereign state in Europe since World War II" (CNN, 2/24/2022). Apart from the heinous war crimes that are reported every day worldwide, another phenomenon has taken on grotesque qualities: fake news, whether broadcast intentionally or unwittingly, are flooding the Internet. Pro-Russia outlets have been shown to spread the news that shows "crisis actors" in Ukraine faking war scenes, i.e., "happy, healthy people who are merely playing the role of terrified or deceased war victims for the cameras" (Dale, 3/10/2022, ¶ 2). While misinformation is spread on both sides (see Thompson, S. A. and Alba, 3/3/2022), Jennifer Mercieca, a researcher focusing on propaganda, stated "Information warfare was always going to be a part of this" (cited in CNN, 2/26/22). Mercieca continued that "Obviously the Russians have been highly evolving their information war operations over the last five or six years. We certainly have seen the effects of that on US politics, on Brexit, on other kinds of campaigns around the world" (Subramanian, 2022). Peter Singer, a strategist from New America pointed out that "[a] key to information warfare in the age of social media is to recognize that the audience is both target of and participant in it" (as cited in New Thompson, S. A. and Alba, 3/2/2022).

What role, if any, does conviction play in the context of false data? The chapters in this volume shed light on several connections. In Chapter 1, Michael Lynch creates a link between convictions, defined as "identity-reflecting commitments" and believing "Big Lies." While Big Lies, such as "the elections were fraudulent and Covid-19 is a hoax," have been connected with violent actions, such as the January 6, 2020, insurrection, or with inaction, i.e., refusing to be vaccinated during the Covid-19 Pandemic, what is more dangerous is that they "encourage people to be contemptuous of the social-epistemic rules that govern core democratic institutions" (Lynch, this volume). Anke Finger points to the role of conviction in manifestos, an "increasingly prolific literary, artistic and sociopolitical genre since the 19th century." As Jacob Ware (2020) has emphasized

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> Over the past few years, several major far-right terrorist attacks have been accompanied by detailed, published manifestos, which outline ideology, motivation, and tactical choices. Given that such manifestos are rapidly becoming an essential part of far-right violence, they urgently require more detailed analysis.

Manifestos are just one genre worthy of investigation concerning socio- and geopolitical atmospheres. As Christiane Heibach has shown, the psychological significance of atmospheres, especially media atmospheres, contribute significantly to "conviction building" and can inspire or wreak havoc on audiences unwilling to or unaware of the complexity of contexts and their mediation. How many different formats of mediation can lead to the absurd, fueled by pseudoscience, are demonstrated by Justin E.H. Smith who established that humanity today is just as fascinated by the spurious as in the past and ready to place faith in the counterfactual.

Faith and religion inform the next two chapters in our volume. Matthew Pianalto sees convictions as "*moral* convictions," as "those moral beliefs that flow from, or reflect, a person's central commitments and ideals—those which play a central role in a person's reflection, decision-making, and activity" (Pianalto, 2011, p. 382). He illustrates the importance of focusing on inner activities, such as contemplation and reflection based on one's values. Adrian Hermann understands convictions as a process- and performance-oriented perspective on religious belief. His reading thereby allows for a more nuanced understanding of degrees of persuasion rather than solely applying the concept of religious faith, and he investigates the role of conviction to provide "valuable insight into the fate of religion in modern democracies." Jen Cole Wright's discussion of the "psycho-social function of moral conviction," then, raises the pivotal question of when the diversity of opinion becomes deviant opinion, bringing into the discussion issues of liminality and of in-between spaces that focus on variation. Indeed, "how do we utilize moral conviction to our benefit, while avoiding its dangers?" Agreeing to certain norms of virtue is one possibility to enact convictions, especially when there is room to debate the same norms and allow for aforesaid diversity of opinion.

This is particularly central to educational contexts. In the last section of the volume, authors contemplate the role of conviction in education. Deborah Mower shares an educational intervention through a class on civility, which she demonstrates can moderate the content and the properties of moral conviction. Manuela Wagner and Michael Byram have a similar goal, i.e., to provide opportunities for students to become aware of and investigate their convictions through a curriculum that helps them develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to engage in intercultural dialogue, also applying intellectual humility. John Sarrouf, in the final chapter, reports on a phenomenon he observed in college classrooms: Students, perhaps because they lacked conviction, did not speak up. Through an intervention

based on a dialogue model, he and his colleagues provided the space for students to express their convictions and, equally importantly, to listen to those of their classmates.

Overall, the chapters in this volume demonstrated that conviction deserves far more attention than it has received so far, both in research and in practice. At the very least, becoming aware of and understanding convictions opens the door to further reflections of how we have come to be and who we are. However, given the strong connections between convictions and actions, including both actions that can be heroic and those that can be horrific, it would indeed be dangerous not to gain more insight into this multifaceted concept. While there are unlimited possibilities for research we hope this collection has suggested, we posit that the following questions especially warrant further investigation: When and how does conviction form? What role does education play? Can an awareness and understanding of one's convictions lead to better communication between those with differing convictions? How is conviction related to upbringing, identity formation and flexibility, to cultural and group affiliation, and to relationship-building? Do the formation, communication, and display of conviction correspond to certain patterns of personality? Do we require a comparative analysis of conviction building from cultural points of view? Do different languages put a variety of valences on words that convey conviction? What would a truly intercultural investigation of conviction look like? One forward-looking example, by way of early American history, is Ajay Kumar Batra's development of conviction as a method for or approach to reading, in the interest of paying tribute to Abraham Johnstone's "black politics of respectability." By seeking to counteract "dead ends" of "archived subjects," Batra meticulously ventures to "reanimate [Abraham Johnstone's] belief that another life was possible." According to Batra, reading with conviction is

> an approach that can [...] recast archival dead ends as sites of utopian communion, sites where absence, fragmentation, and distortion render obsolete the protocols of recovery and, in doing so, position us to relate to our subjects of our research differently – to come to know them not as subjects of power or agents of resistance but as savvy, conspiratorial fellow believers in the attainability of a more just world.
>
> (Batra, 2020, pp. 346–347)

Directions for the next steps in the research of conviction as a human characteristic are manifold and, we believe, an interdisciplinary necessity. More disciplines and areas of inquiry are invited to join the conversation we started here, and we hope that both qualitative and quantitative, multilingual, and international contributions will further nourish this debate and investigation. We don't propose conviction research as a solution to ending wars, misinformation, pseudoscience, religious fundamentalism,

autocracy and dictatorships, discrimination and racism, or to climate-change denial all of which will likely, unfortunately, tragically continue for now. However, at the very least we need to investigate how convictions nurture and fuel both constructive and destructive actions such that observing the seeds of convictions is supported by evidence and findings that include self-reflection and cognition alongside the deep emotional currents that undergird all convictions.

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