Living with the Mess

The Tyranny of Philosophy and Democratic Chaos

Taylor Thiessen

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Dr. Stuart J. Gray, Jr. & Dr. Robin M. LeBlanc

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"One would have to have a seriously deranged personality to consider tidiness the highest virtue." [1]

Raymond Geuss, *Who Needs a Worldview?*

[1] Geuss, *Who Needs A Worldview?*, xvi.

I. <u>The Sock Drawer</u>

After dinner one night, you decide to go for a walk outside. When you return home, you intend to get ready for bed, heading into your bedroom to change into your pajamas. Naturally, you open up your sock drawer in order to find your favorite pair of fuzzy socks to warm up before bed. Instead of seeing your socks, you find that it is filled with your pants, neatly folded. "Wait, where are my socks? And what's in my pants drawer?" are your next questions. With a slight panic onsetting, you open the pants drawer, finding your fuzzy socks alongside all of the other pairs, exactly as you last remember them to be when they were in your sock drawer. Did someone break into your house just to switch these two drawers? Your door was locked, but that does not rule out the possibility that someone else was there. Did you accidentally put them in the wrong place? Did you do this intentionally and merely forget that you had done so? How did this happen? If it was someone else, who? How did they do this without you knowing? And why? Perhaps most importantly, how can you make sure that it *never happens again*?

I think that the main reason this kind of experience, should it happen to us, would penetrate our psyche so deeply is because our bedrooms, homes, and clothing drawers are *private*. As a result, this story represents a sort of personal crisis. Like all private things, we intend our sock drawers to be for our eyes only (or, perhaps, for those whom we trust enough to live with), so it scares us when we find out that we were wrong. While this story is absurd in some ways (yet it is certainly *possible*), it reveals that we too often believe that we alone have control over our own private lives. It profoundly alarms us when our beliefs—in this case, that our sock drawer is safe and secure—are, even if only temporarily, shattered. It terrifies us when we realize that we no longer can (or maybe, never truly could) control something that we assumed we alone could control. Another possibility for such a crisis, and perhaps one familiar to most people, is simply the loss of socks. Upon an

inability to find your favorite socks, despite *knowing exactly where they were supposed to be*, one might find themselves experiencing panic as well. Upon realization that something has gone utterly wrong, we ask ourselves questions such as the ones articulated above: What happened? Who did this? How could this have happened? or How could I have prevented this?

It is also important to note that our notion of the sock drawer as personal, private, and secure is our own construction. The sock drawer is this way only because we decide it to be so. If you *really* desired to, you could create alternative methods of storing socks: such options include a box in the closet, storage outside of your bedroom, or even in some public space. You could even refuse to use any drawers at all for clothing. As a result, we may say that there is a sense of *chaos* underlying the drawers: there is no inherent *order* for storing our socks. But social orders are orders: we feel *as if* the sock drawer is inherently a private thing requiring some degree of order. This feeling of order only arises because we have a way of convincing ourselves that this is how sock drawers are "supposed to be." Social norms are a significant aspect of what drives our beliefs and are what often convince us of so-called "truths." Thus, when we think of the sock drawer (or anything, really) as "supposed to be," it implies a norm, and a norm implies at least some broader, social (or even metaphysical) expectation and an underlying assumption that order is implicitly better than chaos.

One of the central claims of this paper is that our belief systems—our *worldviews*—are like the sock drawer in this story. There is a sense of chaos underlying the human experience, and our worldviews are the drawers that we use to create order in what would otherwise be a messy life. Like the crisis of the sock drawer, various crises expose our worldviews' failure to coherently describe the whole of the universe through a singular framework. The mess of a difficult and chaotic life often brings about trying events. These events, like the sock drawer, have the capacity to legitimately challenge and expose our worldviews as unable to explain everything that we thought they could. It is in these situations that the mess of the world presents us with a critical choice: we can either

sweep the mess under the rug or live with it. The chief aim of this paper is to illustrate the problems that arise when we spend our lives hiding the mess that the world presents us with while showing what it might look like to "live with the mess" instead.

In our response to the sock drawer crisis, it would seem that we have this same choice. "Hiding the mess" for the sock drawer would mean spending the rest of the evening trying to discover suitable answers to the questions that you have about your clothing's rearrangement. It would mean ignoring the potential violation of your sense of privacy that the crisis poses. It would mean *reorienting* either yourself or the problem so that you can explain it away as insignificant. This is not as simple as "changing your perspective." Rather, it is utilizing your worldview (or adding aspects to it) in order to reason your way out of the problem. Hiding or even ignoring the mess is thinking with an inclination towards order and *coherence* in these situations; it is an attempt at creating order while believing that such order is not created but discovered as the underlying structure to the world.

So, what then would it look like to live alongside the mess, or, as the title of this paper says, to "live with the mess?" If ignoring and hiding the mess is thinking with an inclination towards order and denying chaos, then living with the mess is creative thinking in a way that acknowledges the chaos. In the sock drawer story, this might look like merely going to sleep despite the new and unexplained arrangement. Living with the mess is embracing chaos in the face of uncertainty. It is creating a way of thinking that allows us to still *go on* when our worldviews fall apart. It is creatively navigating the problem and moving forward with your life without falling prey to the tendency to keep one's life in a constant state of order. If you are feeling particularly creative, you might just say, "I guess this is my new sock drawer!" This is the chief goal of this paper: to speculate on what thinking in this way might look like, to illustrate a way of thinking that is flexible, admirable, and democratic. That is to say, a boundary violating and contextually-malleable way of thinking itself *is*

democratic. I aim to make clear the possibility of a way of thinking that does not bow to excessive tidiness; one that is incomplete and always becoming, yet useful.

It might seem, intuitively, that you could just "clean up the mess" in the sock drawer story. Why wouldn't this merely be putting things back where they belong? It is important to note that by "the mess," I am not referring to the mess of your socks being in the wrong place, but rather the "messiness" of the situation you must face up to: someone moved your things around. The mess, then, can never *really* be cleaned up and "fixed," but is merely swept under the rug, hidden or ignored. We are unable to truly clean up the chaos of the world. We are only able to ignore it or face up to it.

All of this is not to say that worldviews are "bad," but rather that if we are to live brilliantly in the face of chaos, we must realize the failure of our worldviews to achieve their aspiration. Life is a testament that nearly everything will inevitably be outside of our control.[2] The only thing that is within our sphere of control is our response to the stimuli around us. However, this is even potentially misleading as we cannot always control ourselves and the context that we respond to is itself out of our control. Our worldviews are characterized by an aspirational agency: they are definitional attempts to simplify and (epistemically) control the chaos of the world by orienting oneself within it. One only needs to orient and find herself on the map if she is lost and desires to know where she is; one only grabs the stair railing if she is at risk of falling down or, even, attempting to stop herself from falling.

It is also important to say that there may be a third type of response to the sock drawer crisis, which we might call "living in an abyss." I will only discuss this possibility briefly. With this

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[2] The stoics, for example, understood just how much is outside our sphere of control. See Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book 1, Chapter 1, which is titled, "About things that are within our control and things that are not." Epictetus writes that we "attach" ourselves to external things such as "possessions" or "our body" and that these externals weigh us down. Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, 5.

type of response, we might totally abandon any agency that we may have. This is an incredibly disorganized form of reorienting. Living in an abyss would mean thinking with an inclination towards the chaos so as to reject any form of order altogether due to the perceived meaninglessness of the world. I introduce this possibility only to distinguish it from "living with the mess."

This paper will first describe "the mess": how the world is far more chaotic than it may initially appear, and how far we, as individuals and as a society, are often willing to go in order to systematically and exhaustively orient ourselves in a way that makes sense of our lives. I will trace the roots of our debt to coherence to Plato and expose the tyranny that prevailing values in philosophy pose to our contemporary thinking.[3] This will specifically elucidate how it is that we go about orienting ourselves through worldviews, aspiring to use metaphysics of various sorts to exhaustively evaluate the whole of the universe through a single lens. I ultimately argue that this is not only an impossible task, but also an undesirable one.

The paper will then shift to specific exploration of the ways that consistency and coherence can introduce new problems, despite their intended purpose to solve problems for us.[4] I will use neoliberalism as a case study, as it provides perhaps the most promising and powerful recent attempt

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[3] By "the tyranny of philosophy," I do not mean to say that doing philosophy is somehow harmful. In fact, I will go on to describe why it is that we must continue to study philosophy and other humanities later in this paper if we are to live brilliantly in the face of chaos. I aim to point out how philosophy, narrowly construed as purely an application of certain values, is itself a certain worldview that is driven by consistency and coherence from the top down, just like a tyrant. Thus, Plato's conception of philosophy as following where reason leads and accessing the forms through dialectic is tyrannical—we are not beholden to coherence. On the other hand, Nietzsche's understanding of philosophy as asking new questions and changing the subject matter of our thought is not tyrannical. The "tyranny of philosophy" might be, then, better described as "the tyranny *in* philosophy." Philosophy itself can is not the tyrant. Rather, the values that dominate philosophy are tyrannizing it: philosophy is only the tyrant when narrowly construed. By the "tyranny of philosophy," I am pointing out that *philosophy is the victim* of tyranny, rampant with settled causal values like coherence, consistency, and logic. For purposes of clarification, I will henceforth refer to the tyranny of philosophy as the "tyranny in philosophy."

[4] Consistency, coherence, and logic are all different technical terms. I will use "consistency" to mean the compatibility of our views: whether or not our beliefs contradict each other or not. Coherence refers to the whole, describing whether or not our worldview is ordered and forms a distinct *unity*. Finally, logic will refer both to formal systems of logic, such as the predicate logic of Bertrand Russell and others in classical philosophy, as well as the idea that thought has some inherent guiding structure that applies universally.

at articulating an authoritative worldview that might "cleaning up the mess," especially through its claims to coherence. As a prominent framework that is closer to a commonly-held political ideology than an individual understanding, I will describe how neoliberalism may appear to offer a well-organized and coherent worldview, but ultimately is, as all of our worldviews most likely are, riddled with inconsistencies. I will also discuss prominent critiques of neoliberalism, pointing out the ways that these critiques may *also* create problems for democratic life because of their reliance upon consistency and coherence. This will show that, even if the tyranny of values like consistency and coherence solves certain problems for us, it also brings about as many or more new issues to which we must respond.

After discussing worldviews' failure to achieve their aspiration of cleaning up the mess, I will provide an alternative: living with the mess. I aim to illustrate what political philosophy and life as a whole might look like if we were to abandon our commitment to coherence as a highest value, overthrowing a tyranny perpetrated by a particular type of philosophical thinking. Drawing on a multitude of thinkers from diverse areas of philosophy, such as Søren Kierkegaard, Raymond Geuss, and Hannah Arendt, I will demonstrate what living with the mess might look like. Starting with individual decision-making, I will move to political thinking and the future of philosophy in order to envision admirable yet practical ways of living with the mess.

Finally, I will consider the widespread impacts should we be unable to live with the mess, highlighting specific reasons why avoiding or hiding the mess may appear to work in certain individual situations but is ultimately harmful for democratic politics. I focus first on private and individual life before shifting to larger concerns, which concludes with a call for us, as a demos, to acknowledge and live with the chaos of the world. Drawing on Plato, I will illustrate how an inability to embrace chaos could bring democracy to a swift end. If democratic citizens desire that

democratic life persist and flourish, I ultimately claim that it is imperative that they learn to live with the mess and interpret themselves accordingly.

II. The Mess

Prima facie, the world appears to be organized: we have governments, religions, families, and relationships that govern and structure our action in various ways, reaching across public and private life. I will argue that, upon further consideration, the world is more chaotic than it may initially appear, revealing how far we as individuals and as a society are often willing to go in order to systematically and exhaustively orient ourselves in a way that makes sense of our lives. Next, this section will precisely discuss how it is that we go about doing this through "worldviews," using metaphysics to exhaustively evaluate the whole of the universe through a singular unity.

A. Order & Chaos

One does not need to look far to see the fragility that characterizes contemporary life. Our brittle attempts at orientation are as fragile and delicate as the chaos that we seek to cover up. "The tension between the growing global dimension of capital, regional inequality, and territorially anchored intensities of religious faith that increasingly issue in state and nonstate modes of terrorism" is continually more prominent.[5] Climate issues, driven by capitalism's need to utilize resources no matter the delicacy of their existence (take oil spills, for instance), show how far people will go in trampling the world, often with an unwillingness to consider what the repercussions might be. The fragility of our structures is only becoming clearer with time. The 2020 Presidential Election was so fragile that Senate hearings, investigations, and public outcries were needed in order to

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[5] Connolly, *The Fragility of Things,* 32.

"protect" the results.[6] Surely, if such institutions were strong and unthreatened, we would not even need to consider the language of "protection." The 2021 attacks on the Capitol highlighted that not even our own government could protect and defend our elected leaders from a small, even *slightly* coordinated onslaught. Our world is characterized by this chaos—this messiness—and yet we so often assume that our private lives are somehow existentially secure and tidy.

We are able to maintain such assumptions only because we use our worldviews to position ourselves in a manner that places a barrier between our private lives and the chaos that exists outside our private spheres. Political philosopher Raymond Geuss refers to this positioning as "orientation" to the world.[7] The idea here is that the chaos of the cosmos disorients and places us in a state of disarray. Therefore, we are made to feel that we must orient ourselves in this mess, finding meaning in order to see and act coherently. The word "orient" originated as a way of positioning something so as to align it with the east, where the sun rises.[8] This act itself places a sense of structure onto the world; the sun becomes a guide, mapping out direction. Geuss certainly alludes to Friedrich Nietzsche in his use of "orient," as Nietzsche famously begins his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* with the main character walking outside and proclaiming to the sun: "You great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?"[9] Here, Nietzsche rejects Platonism, as Plato uses the sun to represent the idea of the Good, which illuminates the realm of the forms, where objective, absolute truth exists. This realm, for Plato, is more real than our physical lives. This realm is the reality that is *most* real, as the sun, allegorical to this absolute truth (and used for orientation),

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[6] Note, too, that both sides were trying to "protect" the results—the democrats protecting Biden's victory from President Trump's attempts to discredit it, while Trump himself was "protecting" what he claimed the "true" results were, before (according to him) Biden stole it.
[7] Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 37.
[8] "Orient: Online Etymology Dictionary."
[9] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 3.

illuminates the world and shows us how we should act, what we should think, where we should go, and who we objectively are.

Nietzsche's slight to this idea brings humans into his picture of truth, indicating his contention that it is not truth that exists independently of us, but rather that truth is a concept that people create for certain intentions and goals. Nietzsche's wording supports this as well, as he says that Zarathustra leaves "his" cave, rather than "the" cave that Plato describes.[10] Nietzsche individualizes Plato's cave, thus individualizing and challenging the concept of a universal, objective truth: individual interests drive truth-making. Despite Nietzsche's widespread influence on western philosophy in late modernity, we still cling to the idea that a metaphysical truth of some sort can provide us with a stable, coherent, and final orientation. Geuss is largely following Nietszche's thinking, critically responding to the prolific inclination that we require complete orientation in our lives.

Geuss utilizes Nietzsche's critiques of Plato, illuminating a thread of claims to order in the history of western philosophy. Socratic thought was, on some level, an attempt to reach a common and reliable means of organization through rational argumentation, claiming that we can all defend our ideas, choices, and methods through a sufficiently objective mode of reasoning, often referred to as "dialectic." In Plato's case, after combining dialectic with metaphysical truth, dialectic becomes a common means of finding and understanding *the* truth: the singular and *only* truth. Geuss refers to this as the Platonist's Blackmail: "if you do not have a guide to action that is absolutely certain and absolutely universal, you have nothing at all."[11] The Platonist's Blackmail simplifies a complex reality to a simple, organized choice: discover exhaustive, absolute, and final orientation, or subject yourself to total chaos and intellectual delinquency, living at random.

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Geuss, *Reality and Its Dreams*, 60.

It is important to mention that accepting any level of orientation to the world (or, perhaps to even use the language of "orient") implies some alternative state of *disorientation*. One only needs to orient herself and get her bearings in the world *if* she is otherwise lost or not standing on (intellectually) "stable ground."[12] The need to orient itself implies a state of chaos that we *feel the need to escape*. As I mention earlier, one only needs to find herself on the map if she is lost; she only grabs the banister if she is at risk of falling down the stairs. The sock drawer illustrates this idea: a dresser is a solution to a need. Before they have a drawer, your socks might be on the floor, sitting in a pile, packed into a box, or unmatched and strewn everywhere in a mess. The purpose of the drawer as an organizational construction implies some alternative state of disorganization and our desire or need to escape it. However, life beyond the confines of our own walls is a testament that many things will inevitably be outside our sphere of control. The only thing that really may be within our control is our response to stimuli around us. Even Nietzsche acknowledges that, although it need not be exhaustive, we need *something* to help us make our way through the chaos.[13] For him, this means affirming our lives as they are and will be while creating our own values. For most of us, this process entails the formation of a consistent worldview that explains away and organizes the messy aspects of the cosmos and human experience.

Nietzsche is right to say that we need values to orient ourselves in a chaotic world, but it turns out that people are not as willing to go as far as he is. Most people do not want to think about how—or let alone, realize that—the world might be an abyss below the fragile tightrope of the life that we walk, lacking any inherent moral structure or scaffolding underneath it. For the few who

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[12] Nothing about this process is really about intellectual ground, though. Nietzsche invites us to consider that Plato's project is just an assertion of a way of viewing, rather than an uncovering of truth—so there is no intellectual ground for him, only perspectival viewing. This is really, then, also about the social recognition of "deserving ground" or the place of coherence in social order and others' judgement of us.

[13] Nietzsche writes that "honesty [about human existence] would lead to nausea and suicide," implying that we could not survive without some intellectual barrier between our lives and the abyss.
Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 163.

may consider this, it is no easier to accept that our values could merely be a brittle attempt at escaping its fragility. For this reason, we turn *created* value into *discovered* value through organized, metaphysical systems of thought. In other words, rather than creating our own values, we essentially "subscribe" to someone else's (that they created for us) and come to eventually feel that we "discovered" them as if they were objective or absolute.[14] In other words, we posit a safety net that may or may not actually be under the tightrope, laying a faulty barrier between our private lives and the chaos underneath.

For those of us who live in liberal-democratic societies, our form of governance certainly does not improve our condition. Democracy, arguably the most prominent form of governance today, was critiqued by Plato and others for hundreds of years for being itself too chaotic.[15] If the cosmos is already chaotic enough, why would it help us to make our messy position into a messier one through our governance? It was clear to the founders of the United States that their world, especially as a democratically governed one, would not be any less chaotic.[16] It was for this very reason that they intended to structure the Constitution in a way that would protect the long-term stability of the government from democracy's messiness. Voting rights restricted to the elite, multiple barriers between the populace and lawmaking, and general checks and balances were all

[14] This, coincidentally, is a conventional interpretation of the transition from Pre-Classical/Homeric Political Thought into Classical/Greek Political Thought. Homer's *The Iliad* gives us insight into a cosmos without an inherent, just order and even provides one of the earliest glimpses of the concept of "making" justice, specifically through the cities on Achilles' shield (Book 18, 478-608). When Plato enters the scene, however, he abstracts this chaotic cosmos into a reified, organized one where we do not make values but discover them.

[15] Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* both critiqued democratic politics for the passion and instability of the people, claiming that democracies are chaotic. Modern thinkers such as Baron de Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau followed on such critiques by offering various responses. For Montesquieu, democracies needed to be small to combat such chaos, amongst other things; for Rousseau, democracy leads to dependence on others and material inequalities. Of course, for him, a certain form of democracy would fix these problems, but he would claims that a democracy that does not closely resemble his social contract would be unstable.

[16] The *Federalist Papers* are largely responses to various critiques, such as those of the Greeks and modern thinkers, to explain how the American Constitution mended such chaos. Upon later recognition that the writers of these defenses were themselves there for the creation of the Constitution, it can be reasonably inferred that the Constitution's features were themselves intended to be responses to such critiques and the potentially chaotic elements of democratic governance.

clear attempts to respond to the chaos of the direct democracy of the Greeks. The founders knew that the government would need to provide some structure for orientation and public life. In order to finally address the potential for mob-rule seen in the Greek direct democracies, they posited equal rights and a clear constitution. By implementing these rights in the constitution, the founders were able to directly limit the state's power and explicitly list certain freedoms that citizens would receive. Thus, the mob that caused Socrates' execution in the Athenian democracy may be less likely in the American democracy: rights were an absolute and universal trump card, the newly imagined safety net underneath the fragile walk of life.[17] Yet after positing moral equality, we then act as if that these rights are not created, but discovered as an absolute underlying order. It is the combination of enlightenment rationality with the human impulse to orient ourselves in the world that results in a skewed form of Nietzsche's value creation (or perhaps more commonly, value "discovery") in accordance with rational principles. As Geuss points out, this "natural" rationality is merely a form of neo-Platonism.

To challenge the Platonic framework of metaphysics and worldviews, it is helpful to return to pre-Classical sources, as these texts can be helpful in thinking about the mess and how to live with it. These sources precede the Platonic "revolution" in philosophy and show how humans were able to live in an agonistic world that lacked any sense of order. It isn't insignificant that Nietzsche explores this notion himself in *The Birth of Tragedy*: he believes that the Homeric and Hesiodic Greeks were heroically facing up to a chaotic cosmos and tragic existence. A helpful image for this thesis is the Greek Titaness, Mētis, who was the mother of wisdom and distinguished herself through a cunning and crafty nature. Hesiod writes of how Mētis "knows the most" and that

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[17] Perhaps such understanding was useful at one time, but it is easy to see how "human rights as a universal trump card" could create other issues. For example, concern about climate change might involve a non-human entity taking precedence over human rights. Yet forsaking human rights as universal and absolute would be devastating for contemporary societies.

"exceedingly wise children would come from her."[18] Mētis eventually became a Greek word that roughly translates as "cunning" or "crafty" wisdom. *Mētis* was highly desirable for the Greeks, as it was a form of practical knowledge gained from experience. Odysseus was widely regarded as exemplifying *mētis*: he was a cunning warrior who typically just knew what to do in facing crises.[19] This quality of knowledge can be easily contrasted with *technē*, referring to technical knowledge, driven by some practice or principle.

A dichotomy between *mētis* and *technē* can inform Geuss' response to the Platonists and their blackmail. Geuss suggests that we need not assume that there be singular and systematic theory that guides us at all times. If we use different pieces of information or ways of thinking to guide action *in different scenarios* instead of a singular, all-encompassing, rational framework, it does not follow that we are then intellectually delinquent, living "at random." This is a very *mētis*-based way of thinking, rather than a technical one. Geuss puts it nicely in explaining why it is that we feel that we *need* worldviews:

> Whatever unity our drives, impulses, projects, beliefs, and commitments have is one that we have constructed. This construction is one to which we have a strong tendency and perhaps a deep commitment—a commitment so deep that it generates an illusion of necessity and, perhaps, even of the ontological preexistence of what it seeks—but to what extent it can succeed is always an open question, subject to the vagaries of the world and the accidents of history.[20]

Geuss is not saying that construction is *bad*; like Nietzsche he thinks that we need some orientation, just not that it need be complete or final, or the same for all. He would have us consider *which* constructions are "possible and desirable" and "at what cost and under what social and individual circumstances."[21] It is noteworthy that this is a sort of pragmatist approach, in contrast to a

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[18] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 75.
[19] For instance, Odysseus was able to escape the Cyclops, Polyphemus, and was not fooled by the Sirens in the Odyssey. These recurrent successes were a product of Odysseus' cunning mētis.
[20] Geuss, *Who Needs A Worldview?*, xv.
[21] Geuss, xvi.

metaphysical one; the question is not, "for what reasons are these events occurring?" but rather, "how do I go on?" The focus here is not on what constructions there are, or even "what is." The focus is on *which* possible constructions will *work*—which constructions will help us with the issues at hand. Geuss goes on to later point out that in crises, we do not want a theory that perfectly corresponds to the world. In crises, we just want to surpass the barrier ahead.[22] Orientation, then, would not be a "what," but a "how."

Odysseus and his mētis provide the perfect example of this "how." The *Odyssey* presents an Odysseus that is merely trying to get back to Ithaca, using his practical wisdom "on the fly' to address a number of unpredictable situations. Odysseus is not interested in the "*why*." Instead, he problem-solves in an instantaneous, localized manner, with each challenge always being a mere barrier to the "going on" and getting home to Penelope. The *Odyssey* even refers to Odysseus as *polutropos*, meaning "poly-tropic" or literally a person "of many paths."[23]

Geuss' approach, with Odysseus as an example, sounds much more like *mētis* than Socratic dialectic and rational argumentation ever could have, and, through comparison, reveals the Classical Greek way of thinking as far closer to *technē*. Socratic dialectic is a kind of game that we can play—it is a practice based on certain rules and conventions. If we think with *mētis*—with practical experience and pragmatic understanding while attending to context and particular circumstances of the situation we find ourselves in—we might be able to achieve what Nietzsche envisions and create our own value in a liberal democracy that was supposed to allow personal idiosyncrasies to flourish, instead of corralling them into a metaphysical structure or worldview that would eradicate individual, aesthetic self- and value-creation. However, as politics become more and more complex and chaotic, mere values aren't enough for us. We don't just want to orient ourselves, grabbing the stair railing or

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[22] Geuss, 17.
[23] Liddell, "A Greek-English Lexicon."

finding our place on the map. We probably want to know that wherever we go, we can hold the railing (or find one quickly). Today, when nearly all Americans agree with the liberal ideal of universal human rights, and after countless thinkers devoted the past century to producing theories of justice that rationalize it, then groupthink, copying others, or buying into the status quo is easy.[24] In the face of potentially devastating democratic chaos, the Platonist's Blackmail presents us with an overly simplistic and easy choice; that is, upon a quick glance, complete orientation is easy to choose over utter chaos. This is what a "worldview" is: we want to be able to say, "my ideas don't just work for me in this context, but anywhere and everywhere for anyone and everyone."

A. Beyond Consistency

A worldview is a "*vue d'ensemble*" or a "*weltanschauung*," a metaphysics that we use to judge and see the "whole" of the universe.[25] Specifically, we search for the "right" view of the world, citing consistency and unity as evidence of our rightness. This is what I will mean by "worldview:" a *unitary* and *whole* framework by which one evaluates the world and whole of the universe, emphasizing internal consistency and an totalizing approach. Worldviews don't just imply the lack of tension, but also that certain ideas accord with each other and appear compatible when juxtaposed. Many scholars agree that we have an obsession with consistency, especially in philosophic contexts, but I will also contend that worldviews are not just about logic and contradiction (i.e., "how do you reconcile x with y?") but also about creating a *package* that fits together well. [26] There are at least three

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[24] It is worth pointing out here that Nietzsche's dragon with scales of "long-created value" looks far more real and attractive with this in view. The dragon was an image in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that Nietzsche used to illustrate that previously created value is a dragon that must be slain in order to create new value. Thus, when nearly everyone buys into the same idea (universal human rights and justice as absolute), it is easier to see the dragon as a strong creature that rules over us and is easy to follow rather than a terrifying beast that must be slain.
Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 17.
[25] Geuss, *Who Needs a Worldview?,* xiii.
[26] Geuss, xix.

ways in which our common conception of a worldview goes beyond mere consistency and branches into less logic-based values such as *coherence*.

First, our obsession with consistency in worldviews creates an instinctive response within us, leading us to attack instances of possible contradictions in others. It is important to specify that this is not referring to the intellectual critique of contradiction, but rather an inclination to critique when we have the *slightest* sense that contradiction could arise. A common occurrence of this phenomenon is when become surprised that someone combines seemingly opposite ideas, even if it is logically possible to do so. For example, one might see how a Nietzschean Christianity is *possible*, intellectually speaking. That is to say, Nietzsche's ideas and Christian doctrine, despite their apparent tension, could be logically reconciled. However, we would be still surprised that these two apparent opposites are combined at all. More importantly, in most circumstances, we may nearly force the person with this worldview to give their own Apology (or at least, it is usually our expectation that they would). This is why politicians, even moderate ones, may be accosted for voting with their party on one bill and against it on another. Some of these combinations may still intrigue us, perhaps because examples like Nietzschean Christianity, or a combination of political left and right, go against our seemingly "'natural" disposition that the two different approaches *belong apart*. Perhaps we might occasionally even feel slighted or jealous that someone else has better intellectual fancywork than us. This is the moralizing of the law of non-contradiction: it is only when we see the consistency of our thought as part of our moral value that inconsistency must always be morally reprehensible. To demand that the political world lack any contradiction would be naïve at best, and potentially harmful at worst.[27] As a result, the Socratic method—defending our ideas, choices, and dispositions through some imagined system of order (in this case, rational argumentation)—is not

[27] I will further explain consistency and coherence's threat to democracy later in the thesis.

merely a tool that we have to defend ourselves, but rather a process that is recurrently forced upon us when we are asked to defend our being or explain away complex thought and simple inconsistencies.

Second, we may often attempt to reduce individuals' views down to a central idea or framework. This certainly occurs in social science: the law of parsimony and Occam's razor would have us default to the simpler explanation for various problems. However, a far more prominent example of this is when a person completes different acts in different scenarios for different reasons. Prima facie, this may seem perfectly normal and common. However, this occurs often in the realm of politics, as we can have difficulty classifying combinations of political views that do not coherently align with one singular party. Just as representatives may be asked to *explain* the inconsistency after voting in accordance with their party's platform on one matter, but against it on another, this also creates difficulty for us to *classify* them. In our attempt to organize the world, we seek to categorize and orient someone in a way that makes sense to us. In fact, in the case of inconsistent representative voting, analysts have even created lists of the representatives who are most likely to do so.[28] This list is another de facto classification. We want to know, "are you farther left, or right?" rather than forcing ourselves to account for the idiosyncrasy *within* individuals. This is one reason that political polarization has led to an abundance of new issues for democracy. We are less willing to listen and deliberate because compromising means accepting ideas from the "other" position. If we are unable to coherently classify an individual, we can lump them into a large category in the middle: "independents" or "moderates." Our debt to coherence—the idea that our worldviews must be a unified set, centered around some main idea—makes it morally reprehensible to do anything other than reject the views of our political opponents. This way of thinking alone

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[28] For instance, see "Here Are the Members of Congress Who Vote against Their Party the Most," by Phillip Bump.

goes far beyond mere consistency, making clear a prolific inclination to treat worldviews as unified sets that are structured around some central or chief idea.[29]

Third, just as our reasons must cohere, our *acts* themselves must cohere as well. For instance, a common Louisiana billboard says, "*Real* Christians Obey Jesus' Teachings." This may be obvious that authentic Christians would want to obey the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that it exists as an advertisement at all and the emphasis on the word "real" (especially in its geographic region), would imply that its message is actually passive aggressive. It reflects a southern Evangelical Christian rejection of new values in Christianity, fundamentally saying, "if you aren't doing Christianity *this* way, then you are contradicting yourself." In other words, proponents of this sign take a single, contingent act of interpretation and extrapolate it into a larger framework, claiming that if a single act contradicts Jesus' teachings, then you must be rejecting his teaching as a whole. This manner of treating ideas does not allow for any dimensionality in humans and does not account for the mistakes that people make, implying that if an act contradicts an idea you claim to believe, then you must not truly believe in that idea. This affinity forces our worldviews to be all-encompassing, unitary guides for how we live rather than mere amalgamations of the ideas we utilize more flexibly or pragmatically in a *metis*-like fashion.[30]

As a result of this understanding of worldviews, it is unsurprising that some scholars often describe worldviews as an input, a computational process, and an output.[31] This approach reifies human interaction and decision-making as an unrealistically predictable processes: stimuli cause us to

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[29] It is worth noting that not *all* of us have such inclinations (or any of these inclinations, for the matter). There are certainly individuals that do not search for some inherent or central idea within worldviews. I am not claiming that *everyone* has such inclinations, but rather making clear ways that certain individuals might conceive (and *have* conceived) of worldviews as things that are beyond consistent sets of beliefs.

[30] Note that this is the middle ground: it isn't the Platonist's Blackmail choice between complete and inflexible visions and random baskets of ideas. Rather, it is our individual experiences and daily lives that focuses which ideas we draw on in any given moment.

[31] Such as that of Ken Funk, who diagrams it as such.
Funk, "What Is a Worldview?."

compute through the criteria provided by our worldview, outputting the proper action or response. While, as I say, these are ways that worldviews go beyond consistency, it is important to note that these negative effects are driven by the dominance of consistency. Our aspiration to be contradiction-free in our thought leads to a desire for an overall sense of coherence and cohesiveness within us.

If worldviews are this limiting and their impact this extensive, we might wonder why they are so prominent. I contend that worldviews attract us because judging the whole of the universe with one framework is simple. It cleans up the mess and allows us to avoid facing up to the chaos of the world. It not only tells us where we should be, who we should be, and what we should do, but it also allows us to predict these things for others.[32] This fantasy of control governs our intellectual landscape, as we epistemically place a lens over the world, explaining why things are how they are. We become masters of the universe, having an answer to every question with one framework and moralizing consistency as an implicit defense. With a worldview, no one can take away your control, so long as you can fend off all the critiques, give your own apology, and prove that your thoughts are consistent. With a worldview, we can pick our messy intellectual socks up off the floor and place them exactly where we want them to be. We like worldviews because they orient us, letting us epistemically manipulate and make sense of the entire cosmos from the comfort of our bedrooms.

III. The Failure of Consistency

If the structure of worldviews is driven by values such as consistency and coherence, then it would be useful to illustrate how these values are often more burdensome and challenging than they are helpful. Neoliberalism serves as a best-case and worst-case example: it is perhaps the most

[32] Worldviews allow us to clean up from a surface level, at least. You can never clean up fully.

admirable recent attempt at a will to power, claiming to offer an ordered and tidy view of the world, yet it creates new and unique ways of detracting from the various, flexible ways in which we might create meaning in our lives. Like many other worldviews, a sense of implicit logic drives neoliberalism, making claims to correspondence to the world and internal consistency as evidence to its truth. Scholarly critiques of neoliberalism show that, despite neoliberals' claim to the contrary, the worldview is riddled with inconsistencies and fails to prove the existence of any underlying order in the world. Some of these same critiques, ironically, are based in similar causal values—consistency, coherence, logic, etc.—and often respond by offering a *different* claim to underlying order. I will lay out two different critiques of neoliberalism, one by Wendy Brown and one by William E. Connolly. The former will chiefly rely on a created political concept—the *homo politicus*—and claim that it is an unchanging and absolute unity, fully describing the human condition in politics. The latter will largely base his critique in neoliberalism's claims to self-organizing practices; that is, Connolly will critique neoliberalism for its assumption that the world will organize itself and result in some order.

A. Neoliberalism as a Worldview

The neoliberalism, or perhaps more accurately, neoliberalism(s), that pervades contemporary culture is not the same singular "Neoliberalism" espoused by early neoliberal intellectuals. Most scholars attribute its creation to the likes of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, but the neoliberalism that carries notions of privatization for public services, deregulation, a small social state, and leashing labor is already far beyond what these original intellectuals envisioned.[33]

[33] Leashing labor refers to the restraining of labor; it is the never-ending specialization of work to the point that there is no diverse labor. This is undemocratic because of restriction of labor to a narrow context rather than a creative and free understanding of labor or even a Marxist reflective one, where we create and recreate ourselves with our work. Neoliberalism contains this specialization, where we are objects and human capitals—tools—for a specific and narrow contribution to society instead of a holistic involvement.

Early forms of neoliberalism aimed to distance market activity from politics, with the goal of dealing a death-blow to any chance of return that European fascist or totalitarian power may have had. As scholars such as Wendy Brown point out, neoliberalism today goes beyond this original aim. Oligarchic, crony capitalism and the dominance of financial powerhouses, with state and policy-manipulated sectors, was not at all what Hayek had in mind. Michel Foucault described neoliberalism as a reorientation—literally a "new-liberalism"— driven by the *homo œconomicus*: the human as a firmly rational and self-interested agent. This is one of the primary values of neoliberalism: the principle of anti-paternalism. This principle states that the individual is sovereign over his/her self, referencing rationality and self-interest. In other words, individuals are masters of their own lives, knowing their own interests better than anyone else. The other significant aspect of neoliberalism that I will focus on is its economic view, or the idea that the market self-regulates.[34] William E. Connolly refers to this as neoliberalism's faith in "self-organizing" processes.

Neoliberalism aims to offer a coherent "take" on the world, giving its followers a response to any critique. Their worldview contains an assumption of metaphysics and underlying order; that is, humans are sovereign and rational, and markets are self-organizing. There is an implicit logic here: these neoliberal claims are correspondence claims, as they base their truth value in their correspondence to the "real nature" of things in the world. If humans actually *are* self-sovereign and rational, then the neoliberals are right. If markets *do* regulate without human intervention, then neoliberals' claims are correct.[35] Like all worldviews, it uses values like consistency, coherence, and logic to defend its truth.

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[34] Neoliberalism is obviously far more complex than these two ideas (anti-paternalism and self-organizing markets), but as neoliberalism is not the chief subject of this paper, I will use this as a starting point.

[35] Notice that neoliberalism, at this point, has already departed from Geuss' understanding of how we should think. The interest centers around what *is* in the world, and whether their understanding reflects that reality. Geuss' understanding, on the other hand, would have neoliberals frame their lens through the context (such as, ironically, Hayek originally did in defending against the threat of fascism).

Spurred by Hayek, these two principles eventually morphed into the contemporary neoliberalism that we know today. This neoliberalism is far more complex than a simple two-slot approach and entails a pervasive rationality. After applying subsequent reasoning to early neoliberal principles, it isn't difficult to eventually build a worldview that runs wild with tangents and incohering aspects. The "implications" of these two principles create an approach to all other areas of life. Individual self-sovereignty is appealing when defending against the threat of fascism, but once other factors from religion, politics, and society come into the picture, it is no longer clear that this value is still valuable. This is how a simple understanding of a narrow avenue of life can lead so easily to a view of the totality: the value cannibalizes any alternative values in pushing its ideas and explanatory vocabulary into every area of human life. These varying tangents and strands of thought that stem from Hayek's ideas creates a complex and scattered sense of neoliberalism. This is why I say "neoliberalism(s)" instead of "Neoliberalism"— there is no singular "capital 'N' Neoliberalism." As Brown and Connolly show, neoliberalism is riddled with a complex, often contradictory understanding of the cosmos despite its aspiration to consistency and truth.

B. Consistency-Based Critiques

Wendy Brown highlights neoliberalism as a reaction to Keynesianism that converted our vocabulary from chiefly non-economic descriptions to predominantly economic ones. Her position follows Foucault's vocabulary, describing neoliberalism as marking the *homo œconomicus*.[36] Brown's departure from Foucault's observations is the *homo politicus*, the conception of the human as a distinctly political being.[37] In other words, she would say that, in a democratic world, it is most

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[36] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 35.

[37] This refers to Aristotelian thought. The *homo politicus* is drawn from Aristotle's *Zoon Politikon*, the political animal. I will later show how Brown slightly misuses Aristotle's understanding.

useful to think of humans as inherently political beings. After neoliberalism's revolution, she claims that the *homo œconomicus* is overtaking (and, in many ways, has already overtaken) the *homo politicus*. She thus aims to describe how the answer to the question, "what is a human?," is continually shifting to an answer that is ever more reduced to our economic interests. The phrase, "human capital," demonstrates this. Brown and similar critics of neoliberalism oppose this shift because the dominance of the *homo politicus* allows for the existence of the *homo œconomicus*, but the opposite is not always true.[38] We instead become "entrepreneurs of the self," where one must continually improve her value to society and maintain one's portfolio in order to preserve relevance in the market. This "governing rationality," as Brown calls it, changes what it means to be a democratic citizen because of the desire for competitive positioning. It shifts the focus of political and social life away from fulfillment, meaning, and self-creation towards money, competition, and return on investment.

In past dominant social structures and modes of thought, even throughout the dominance of a framework like Christianity, Brown claims that the *homo politicus* persisted. For her, the *homo politicus* as the answer to the question, "what is a human being?" leaves the question open ended, while the dominance of the *homo œconomicus* provides a concrete and absolute answer: humans are capital, valuable insofar as they are advantageous to capitalist production and service.

I will soon return to Brown's departure from Foucault's vocabulary, but before doing so I will point out how Brown uses consistency herself as a value to structure her critiques. Throughout her works, Brown repeatedly uses the language of "logical consistency" to invalidate neoliberalism. In one instance, she describes how such logic lies with the narrow idea that power is merely

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[38] Brown says, "man is political because he is a language-using, moral, and associational creature who utilizes these capacities to govern himself with others. Even during the long centuries between antiquity and modernity, when these very capacities became suffused with the project of serving God, man continued to be defined by them," Brown, 91.

coercion, and that freedom is merely the lack of law. She makes it abundantly clear that she is thinking of neoliberalism as contradictory and inconsistent in describing the neoliberal project:

> [A] curious combination of libertarianism, moralism, authoritarianism, nationalism, hatred of the state, Christian conservativism, and racism. These new forces conjoin familiar elements of neoliberalism (licensing capital, leashing labor, demonizing the social state and the political, attacking equality, promulgating freedom) with their seeming opposites (nationalism, enforcement of traditional morality, populist antielitism, and demands for state solutions to economic and social problems). They conjoin moral righteousness with nearly celebratory amoral and uncivil conduct. They endorse authority while featuring unprecedented public social disinhibition and aggression. They rage against relativism, but also against science and reason, and spurn evidence-based claims, rational argumentation, credibility, and accountability. They disdain politicians and politics while evincing a ferocious will to power and political ambition.[39]

Brown points out how neoliberalism is not a product of internally consistent and contradiction-free thought. It is a product of various forces with their "seeming opposites." She is not wrong to later describe neoliberalism as a "Frankensteinian creation."[40] It is a mess: a bottomless and potentially chilling sock drawer of ideas that has no obvious, coherent organization or structure. This is one of the reasons that Brown may refer to neoliberal thinking as a "rationality" rather than a "framework." Brown intentionally capitalizes on Nietzsche's "will to power" language to expose that neoliberal rationality is a contradictory swindle. She points out that it is a narrative that is not coherent nor absolute, although it poses as such.

Beyond her diction, however, Brown's methodology itself treats neoliberalism as a unitary, yet inconsistent, worldview. Despite acknowledging that neoliberalism spurred in a number of directions after Hayek, pointing out the inconsistencies that resulted, *she still treats it as a singular whole.* Thus, she is operating under the notion that such ideas are *meant* to fit together in some way, that such ideas were *intended* to exist only in conjuncture with one another. Brown is thinking at the worldview level rather than analyzing actors, interests, or even specific ideals and beliefs posited by

[39] Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism,* 2.
[40] Brown, 10.

neoliberalism. For Brown, these narrower neoliberal ideals only matter insofar as they fit with the whole. Yet she has already pointed out that these very ideals come from a number of understandings of Hayek's original thought, and thus *were not meant to fit together*. They were a product of various neoliberal forces and do not come from Hayek alone. Why, then, would she take neoliberalism to be a singular unity? It is better characterized as a messy amalgamation of different understandings of Hayek. Thus, critics must be specific about which aspects of a messy, contradictory neoliberalism that they aim to criticize rather than referring to a singular whole. Neoliberalism is not a failed, crooked sock *drawer*. It is the intellectual equivalent to a *pile* of dirty socks on the floor or hidden in a drawer. Brown's decision to treat neoliberalism as a distinct unity reveals consistency, logic, and coherence as the causal values behind Brown's own thinking—which poses an underlying order that she assumes can defend her methodology and subsequent critique. As a result, it is unsurprising that Brown would respond to one unity (neoliberalism) with another: the *homo politicus*.

The *homo politicus* may initially appear not to be a claim to underlying order. It may seem to be a creative description of humans, or a forward looking vocabulary to influence how we think about our political lives. Brown means "*homo politicus"* as a deeper description, though, implying that neoliberalism is deconstructing what it *means to be human* because *homo politicus* is the conception of humans as political *by nature*. This is Brown's attempt at her own worldview. She introduces a new, all-encompassing redescription of the political world in terms of the *homo politicus* and *homo œconomicu*s. Brown's worldview, too, is driven by a sense of inherent logic and consistency, and her aspiration to coherence leads her to conceptualize the *homo politicus* as unchanging human nature. Samuel Chambers critiques Brown's response to neoliberalism for this reason, as he says that she opposes "one subjectivity (political) against another (economic)."[41] Neoliberalism is not a merely

[41] Chambers, "Undoing Neoliberalism," 706.

economic project, even if it has economic effects. Pitting the *homo politicus* against the *homo œconomicus* frames politics and economics as separate unities, idealizing one and demonizing the other. Brown's critiques rely on this idealized conception of the *homo politicus*—her contemporary interpretation of Aristotle's *zōon politikon*[42]—as underlying order to human nature. To achieve the aspiration of Brown's project would be to recall some pure form of the *homo politicus*—one that perhaps never existed. As Chambers points out, this *homo politicus* is, as a subjectivity or will to power, no different in principle than what he calls the *homo politicus neoliberalis*. The *homo politicus* as a subjectivity merely means that there are a multitude of different types of the *homo politicus*, one of which is the neoliberal creation of *homo politicus neoliberalis*. If the *homo politicus* definitionally leaves human nature open-ended, why is *homo politicus neoliberalis* methodologically different than what we might call Brown's *homo politicus antineoliberalis*: both are attempts to recreate human nature in different ways.

Chambers ultimately argues that Brown's analysis leaves us less able to engage with the forces of neoliberalism because of the subjectivity of the *homo politicus*. Rather than attaining an extensive understanding of neoliberalism and how to respond to its effects, she leaves us grasping for some imagined whole that is not there. She leads us to misunderstand and demonize the labor world for which her undergraduate readers are often preparing to enter. She exposes us to the aspects of neoliberal ideology that are deeply ingrained in our psyche, yet when she provides her own response, she posits the *homo politicus* as an identity that we *once had*. Her readers would then look backwards to never actually find the pure *homo politicus* because it is an idealized form of humanity that probably never existed.

Like Chambers, I think that Brown's text reveals vitally important aspects of neoliberalism's effects in the contemporary world. Wendy Brown is not *wrong*. In fact, within Brown's context of

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[42] Her interpretation, then, leads her astray from an Aristotelian understanding of human nature and the nature of it as something that we can change.

contemporary democracy, she raises relevant and timely concerns about our direction as a society and the pervasive nature of neoliberal rationality. However, if we are to respond to neoliberalism in a way that does not rely on a fleeting subjectivity as a claim to an underlying structure of the cosmos, then Brown's analysis may create more issues than it solves. What I explain as the "tyranny in philosophy," or the dominance of consistency and coherence, leads Brown to engage with neoliberalism as if it were a unity. As such, she uses the same criteria—consistency and coherence—to critique neoliberalism. However, because neoliberalism is not a singular unity, but rather a set of loosely connected ideas and subjective branches of thought, she leaves us disillusioned and disempowered to competently engage with neoliberal forces. Brown's analysis, as useful as it may be for understanding the forces of neoliberalism and their threat to contemporary democracy, packages a sloppy set of ideas as a united whole. We then try to combat the effects of neoliberalism by trying to grasp what is not there; that is, we are left looking for a whole to undo but find only a fragmented group of forces that are complexly interconnected with a variety of contingent interests and agencies.

C. Fragility-Based Critiques

William E. Connolly shares many of Wendy Brown's sentiments about neoliberalism. Yet the intellectual basis of Connolly's critiques of neoliberalism is far different than that of Brown. While Brown relies on a presupposed unity of order that underlies the mess, Connolly embraces the mess and frames neoliberalism as a response to such chaos:

> Neoliberal ideology is drawn to the simplicity of a two-slot system: self-organizing markets with beautiful powers of rational self-adjustment and states as clumsy agents of collective decision. *It thus inflates the self-organizing power of markets by implicitly deflating the self-organizing*

> *powers and creative capacity of all other systems*. And it treats the state as necessarily clumsy and inept by comparison to a singular, utopian image of markets.[43]

Connolly critiques neoliberalism's presupposition of an underlying order to the world that is not actually there. This order, for neoliberals, is the self-organizing power of markets and its utopian idea of markets. This is why Connolly says that if we are driven by faith in self-organizing practices, it is easy to hope that issues out of our control—in this case, markets—would just take care of themselves. Under neoliberalism, such institutions do not need our manipulation, and any state intervention is clumsy. If we are struggling to control our lives, then a framework like neoliberalism seems promising. Neoliberal ideas tell us that the subject alone is sovereign over the self and that things like the market do not need our control because "they take care of themselves." As the Platonist's Blackmail expands into larger groups that share the same ideas, it is easy to become attracted to a worldview like neoliberalism for these reasons.

From this point, Connolly can easily address the same concerns that Brown raises through the *homo œconomicus* without needing to rely on underlying order. If neoliberalism is attractive to us due to our aspirations to control and organize our lives, why wouldn't such ideas naturally pervade our thought processes over time, especially when such ideas are regularly promulgated in the public sphere? The problem is that we then package ourselves as objects that are valuable to the market specifically because we do not control it, since we view it as regulating itself. As Connolly says, "there are pressures that encourage so many to translate experiences of fragility in a neoliberal world into attacks on state efforts to respond to those very troubles….many young people of affluence are pushed in this direction by pressure to *believe* in the stability of the system in which they are preparing to forge specific careers."[44] Thus, we would lose the agency that we believe we have

[43] Connolly, *The Fragility of Things,* 31.
[44] Connolly, 23.

through neoliberalism: we must conform to the market's demands, submitting to it as a pure unity because our material livelihood depends on our ability to engage with it. Unlike Brown's critique of neoliberal *logic*, Connolly criticizes neoliberalism's aspirations and how, in attempting to add meaning to our lives through a realization of self-sovereignty, neoliberalism ends up detracting from our lives through submission to the market's power.

Connolly's understanding and critiques of neoliberalism are far more useful than that of Wendy Brown for responding to neoliberalism in an unpredictable and chaotic world. Rather than understanding it as a whole unity, he simplifies and specifies "neoliberalism" to refer to specific issues with which he is concerned. This allows him to engage with the consistency of neoliberalism, but only in its effects and not in its logic. Connolly treats consistency as a *tool* and does not use it as the only criterion. He then critiques this specific, instantaneous conception of it rather than some imagined whole. Finally, the basis of his critiques is essentially in neoliberalism's faulty presupposition of inherent order through self-organization and the idealization of markets, leading us to conceptualize the challenging effects of neoliberal ideology and the tensions within it without needing some absolute standard for reference.

Connolly's approach is not perfect, nor is Brown's useless, but their distinctive approaches do propose valuable resources for critiquing neoliberalism as a would-be successor to earlier neo-Platonic worldviews. Both thinkers reveal ways that neoliberalism, despite aspiring to a tidy description of the world, often offers inconsistent thinking. Brown's critiques, however, are oriented with consistency and coherence at the top; these values drive almost the entirety of her critique, leading her to treat neoliberalism as a singular unity and respond to it with another. Connolly, on the other hand, *utilizes* consistency to show that equally important aspects of neoliberal ideology undo each other. Consistency and coherence do not rule over his approach to and critique of neoliberalism. This is what "living with the mess" might look like: rather than reverting to an

imagined and pure unity as a standard to counteract neoliberal thought, Connolly responds to the forces of neoliberalism by illustrating its fragility in an unpredictable world.

IV. Living with the Mess

If values such as consistency, logic, and coherence are tyrannizing our intellectual landscapes, then this is precisely the landscape wherein we must think creatively about alternatives to such values. Thus, our intellectual landscapes are precisely where we must "live with the mess." Like Connolly exemplifies, I will illustrate what contemporary thought might look like if we cease to champion consistency and coherence as tyrants of our thought. I propose several real and practical ways to go about embracing chaos in both private and public settings by bringing in both contemporary thinkers and theorists from outside the purview of contemporary politics. In order to avoid combatting worldviews with other unities and opposing worldviews, I incorporate thinkers who are not responding to "worldviews" and similar formulas for thinking. I start with individual decision-making, thinking with Søren Kierkegaard in order to reconsider how we conceptualize risk and often think "too" carefully. I will then shift to an academic setting, combining Raymond Geuss' ideas on the humanities with Herbert Marcuse's concerns about the one-dimensionality of human life in order to champion the humanities as critical to the continuance of idiosyncrasy and embrace of chaos in a democratic world. Finally, I reference Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Nietzsche in order to question the value of our values themselves, providing inspiration for recurrent revaluing of values beyond the tyranny in philosophy.

A. Making the Passionate Choice and Taking Risks Amidst the Mess

The tyranny in philosophy would have us logically think in a critical and extensive manner before every action. Careful thinking, according to reason, could never hurt—it can only lead us to a

refined understanding. Søren Kierkegaard refers to this practice as life in a "passionless age" and cautions against this sort of thinking, arguing that we are usually *too* careful. This not only characterizes life with dullness, since we do not take any risks, but it also changes the character of risk. Kierkegaard notices that the people who do take risks are called smart if they succeed and mad if they fail. He speaks of an ice skater who is attempting to retrieve a valuable jewel on a frozen pond with thin ice to illustrate this idea. In a passionate age, where such methods of thinking are less prominent, the crowds would marvel at the ice skater. The crowds would recognize the risk of death imminent to the skater. Kierkegaard says that the passionate crowds would "applaud the courage of the man who ventured out, they would tremble for him and with him."[45] He later says that, should the skater drown, the crowds would grieve over him. If he secures the jewel, "they would make a god of him."[46] In a reflective, passionless age, Kierkegaard says, such marveling would not occur. He says that people would think themselves to be too "clever" and that it is "unreasonable" or not even worthwhile to skate near the thin ice. Accomplished skaters in this age would skate just as far as it was still safe before turning back. If by some unfortunate chance the ice breaks and the skater dies or is injured, we will not focus on how he almost made it to the jewel. Instead, we will say that he is "mad" or "foolish" for trying such an *irresponsible* task. If he is able to retrieve the jewel and bring it back we will not marvel at his willingness to take a risk, but rather his *skill*. We will say that there was no danger and that he turned just at the moment where he knew it would still be safe. This moment is crucial for Kierkegaard: it transforms "*daring and enthusiasm* into a *feat of skill*," an "unreal trick."[47] We will claim that he is so well practiced that there is no risk; he is smart enough and practiced enough to know the boundaries of the ice's safety.

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[45] Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, 8.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

A contemporary example of this phenomenon is free soloing, a form of rock climbing that utilizes no safety gear or harnesses. If a climber falls and dies, we will say that she was foolish for doing something irresponsible. If she survives and succeeds in reaching the top, we will say that she was so skilled that there was no real risk for her. According to Kierkegaard, this wholly changes the character of our admiration. Rather than admiring the passion and remarkable task that someone has set out to do, we attribute their greatness to *practice*. By doing this, Kierkegaard implies that we are actually admiring ourselves, saying, "after all, with a little practice, everyone could have done as much" (or, "I could have done as much").[48] According to Kierkegaard, we are not admiring the great ice skater or the daring climber, we are admiring their hard work and knowledge, which, if any of us wanted, we could achieve as well. We are admiring ourselves by saying "I could do that too if I tried hard enough."

This change in our admiration entails a pseudo-levelling, giving everyone the same ability for practice and the skill that such training, from this view, will inevitably bring to us. If the ice skater is only great because she practiced, then anyone can practice and be great as well. This is the liberal dream: prejudice aside, it's *perfect* equal opportunity. Yet this sameness does not reflect reality. Kierkegaard even says that the observers have "the eyes of connoisseurs," reflecting the liberal ideal of freedom of specialization: we are all (potential) experts on anything and everything. Kierkegaard responds with a simple, yet practical response: don't get caught up in this rational reflection. Don't get stuck in our heads, trying to determine the best thing to do. Instead, make the passionate choice. His advice shifts from thought to action, and rather than watching and judging risk, he would have us go take our own risk. If this is a rational, reflective, and boring age, strive for a passionate age where you're willing to put something valuable on the line and *do* something.

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[48] Kierkegaard, 9.

Our tendency to try to clean up the mess instead of living with it amplifies our conception of risk. Our very thought of worldviews as things that are unitary and coherent biases us towards reason and away from passion. Our aspiration to control, combined with our worldviews, creates a conflation of safety and responsibility. In other words, what we will think of as the "responsible" thing to do will almost always also be the "safe" thing to do. More poignant, perhaps, is the notion that "risky" is also conflated with "irresponsible."

Paradoxically, instead of adding meaning to our lives, the formula for thinking that worldviews provide then detracts meaning by preventing us from acting in potentially risky, yet fulfilling and admirable ways. Taking a risk—buying that home in the town you've always dreamed of, choosing the career path that you hope for but also know to be uncertain, or asking that person who is *slightly* out of your league on a date—could result in meaningful and admirable experiences. Yet our worldviews so often prevent us from doing this because we have to pause and ensure that such action will cohere with the whole.

One way that worldviews prevent us from taking choices is by always requiring another reason to act. Even for less risky but important choices, we keep looking for "signs" that we are making the right choice. Kierkegaard refers to this as "always deliberating and never acting." An example of this is that on average, each Netflix-watching American spends 18 minutes a day merely *deciding* what to watch.[49] This adds up to nearly five whole days out of the year that we are just deliberating on what to watch, waiting for something with a higher chance of return on investment to fall into our laps. We are always waiting, wanting something that might be slightly more entertaining, or provide us with just a little extra pleasure. This is gathering reasons with no end, and at some point we just have to make a decision, a choice—for Kierkegaard, a *leap*. Worldviews may

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[49] Maglio, "Netflix Users Spend 18 Minutes Picking Something to Watch."

manifest this kind of thinking as deliberation without action. By spending so much time deliberating, even if we ever do commit to our desired end, we take too long—that house in the little town was sold weeks ago, the deadline to apply for that uncertain job long gone, that person you admired is now dating someone else—and we have missed our chance at experiencing something meaningful or creating something for our lives.

In our attempt to live with the mess, we can learn an important point from Kierkegaard here. He points out what is lost when our need for reflection leads us to think excessively before action. Rather than acting with passion and enthusiasm, leaping into choice, we "choke" on our thought until it strangles us. This is a significant challenge to the dominating notion that we should carefully consider options and deliberate before action in order to be consistent. Rather than plugging a potential action into our worldviews and calculating the return on investment, Kierkegaard would have us forsake our settled thoughts in order to act passionately and seek new meaning that we might otherwise disregard. After all, the most meaningful course of action might not always be the safe one, or the one that best coheres with our preexisting beliefs or views: acting with risk and passion puts us in a potentially incoherent position because we do not always step back and reflect on whether a potential act aligns with our worldview. In a society with minimal risks and neoliberal logic, return on investment reigns supreme. Living with the mess, then, may sometimes mean facing up to the chaos by taking a risk or avoiding excessive deliberation by going with your gut and making the passionate choice, combatting any obsession with coherency or consistency tied to a worldview.

B. Poetic Philosophy

Liberalism's lens, like our worldviews, is *one* way of framing our need for worldviews. Because one of the ultimate aims of this paper is to discuss the implications of conventional thought

for liberal democracies, I am examining the fantasy of control that often accompanies liberalism's public-private distinction to explain why it is that we created and continued to utilize worldviews in the ways that we have. It is important to note that there are probably countless other ways of describing and outlining these concepts. In addition to a liberal lens, I also draw on Nietzsche to show how his suggestions for living in an apparently meaningless world could have been coopted by values like coherence. However, one could also think with Nietzsche in a different way than I do and frame worldviews as a product of our weakness, with only a character like the *Übermensch* being strong enough to face up to the abyss of the world. One could think with Karl Marx and describe our need for worldviews as a product of social circumstances, attributing them to the impact of class relations and forces of production on our notions of metaphysical truth. One could think with a Hegelian approach, describing worldviews as a created *power* that responds to a conceived *need*—a sort of utopian impulse—that we may have. All of these senses of worldviews are useful in different circumstances and various aspects of them are associated with and embedded in my own. The usefulness of these other conceptions of worldviews does not weaken mine. In fact, it serves as further evidence that our worldviews are merely tools and that there is no absolute, singular, or correct approach to philosophical thinking. We can use such tools *in circumstances where they are useful to us* rather than trying to use one singular tool for every task.

This is why the humanities are critical to living with the mess. They expose us to a vast array of different approaches, understandings, and avenues of thought of which we would otherwise be unaware: the tools for our intellectual toolboxes. This approach to worldviews—the ability to understand and frame them for a number of different purposes and understandings—is incredibly useful for living in a chaotic cosmos and would be impossible without extensive study of the humanities. Perhaps most importantly, this understanding opens the door to something creative, allowing us to poetically build intellectual ideas and aesthetics.

I will loosely distinguish humanities from other genres of education and scholarship by defining them as disciplines that are aimed at questioning and critiquing our values and interests.[50] Marx spoke of a certain mineralogical sense that we possess, referring to processes of learning in which we "transform ourselves into creatures with interest in 'the beauty and specific nature' of minerals."[51] This sense stands in contrast to a scientific sense, where we are interested in the composition and physical nature of minerals. Humanities (especially philosophy) aims to awaken this mineralogical sense. We do not just want to understand the physical nature of the mineral, but also the beauty or value of it. Hegel, who was an influence on Marx, placed emphasis on the humanities as studies that are interested in "changing the nature and structure of our beliefs, desires, wants, and interests."[52]

Worldviews, driven by consistency and coherence, end up aligning our identity and selfhood with the mineral in science ("this is what I am"), while the mineralogical sense aligns with a created, almost poetic self ("this is what I made out of the human experience"). From this understanding, it makes sense why worldviews might have little use for political philosophy, or at least philosophy how Geuss and Nietzsche might understand it. If the humanities are about fostering our mineralogical sense, then they aim at changing or questioning what we want and desire. If worldviews aim to create a tidy and settled sense of the world through logic, then humanities are dangerous: philosophy might venture to tell you that something that you value isn't worth valuing, unsettling and *mess*ing up the organized structure. This mineralogical sense, where we continually

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[50] I use "humanities" to refer to a number of related disciplines such as philosophy, religion, history, and even certain ways of doing politics, sociology, and other disciplines that are often construed as social science. In this paper, I use "humanities" and "philosophy" often interchangeably, as I see the humanities as grounded in a philosophy of sorts. Thus, when I say "philosophy" in this section, I mean it much more broadly than what we might think of when seeing the kind of work that academic philosophers and political theorists engage in.
[51] Geuss, *Reality and its Dreams,* 160.
[52] Ibid.

revalue things, endangers worldviews because one small, altered belief would create incoherence and could potentially topple the whole system.

Geuss would argue that the humanities are about education and development. This presents a unique challenge to worldviews, as there is little development or progress within them. They aim to offer a final orientation, as "reason" presumably leads you to a settled end that is unchanging. The humanities are not aimed at providing something the student currently wants but rather about calling into question what they want and should want. Thus, in context of the tyranny of philosophy, the humanities may not survive. Should the humanities be able to survive, they may look different. Geuss even goes so far as to mention the possibility of "successors" to the humanities. The values implicit in worldviews would lead us to a philosophy curriculum that is far more historical and backwards-looking, featuring the study of tradition, politics, and contemporary life through texts that are perceived as important, as opposed to creatively changing the subject of our thought. The former is certainly the antithesis of Nietzsche's understanding of philosophy, and it is unsurprising that Geuss might also dislike this possibility.[53] An education void of humanities would promote static worldviews, with any remaining philosophy centered only on the values of our governing rationalities—in this case, logic and consistency—and entrenching each of us in our settled worldview.

This vision of philosophy as distinctively historical and firmly normative looks eerily close to Herbert Marcuse's "one-dimensional philosophy." Understood through Marcuse's lens, philosophy, after being defeated by the tyranny of consistency and coherence, would be one-dimensional. It would be about settled processes, where we use logic and "facts" to reach settled ends; in other

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[53] Nietzsche understood philosophy as the discipline where one asks new questions than before. Geuss has formulated this understanding as "changing the subject," understanding the greatest philosophers to be the ones who changed the subject matter of philosophical discourse.

words, humanities would become a form of science. Marcuse speaks of how thinking, in his time, had already been encroached upon by a positivist orientation of thought that veers toward the physical sciences and aspirations to "certainty and exactness."[54] Philosophy as one-dimensional—philosophy as science—is advantageous to worldviews. Philosophy of clarity and exactness, as Marcuse points out, is "unsurpassable—it is correct."[55] Thus, philosophical thinking turns into "affirmative thought…philosophic critique criticizes *within* the societal framework and stigmatizes [other] notions as mere speculation, dreams of fantasies."[56] Our current society and worldview would become one-dimensional in the sense that we could no longer consider any serious alternatives to its predominant ways of thinking and acting.[57]

It is easy to see that one-dimensionality has already occurred to a degree in philosophy, and this is why my own suggestion to dethrone consistency, logic, and coherence may seem fantastic or overly speculative. While there is some company for my views (for instance, the "continental" strands of critique have worked in part from within philosophy to illustrate its failure as a specific discipline to recognize contingency and positionality), we have already made philosophy one-dimensional, in a sense. Politics is also being pursued as an area of study and knowledge in "scientific" ways to a significant extent: hence the moniker, "political science." Like the technical field of philosophy, political theory (and political science) has also been slow to incorporate the perspectives of continental and critical theory. This explains why my simple aspirations of new and creative philosophical thinking may seem radical and unrealistic. This is expressly why we must preserve the humanities if we are to live brilliantly in the face of chaos. For a subject who acts based

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[54] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 172.
[55] Marcuse, 176.
[56] Marcuse, 172.
[57] For instance, we would have difficulty in conceiving of ways to de-technologize our culture and adopt alternative social practices that require less and less technology as a medium of interaction.

on perfect rationality, following the logic of worldviews, the confrontation of unpredictability and the crises that it brings will upend them. The façade of complete control may make this person feel *as if* her ordered thought is sufficient for orientation and immune to threat. It is easy to see how this person would be utterly shattered by crises, because such individuals have no alternatives to help when their narrow, dogmatic approach inevitably fails. This person is left unable to make sense of the world in any conceivable way despite perfectly following the seemingly secure and riskless path. Life as they know it is derailed and there is no vision on how to proceed: they are unable to *go on*.

This is the inversion of the Platonist's Blackmail. If our worldviews are built on consistency and completeness, then everything crumbles when one brick is removed. This is exactly what occurs when a typical worldview is threatened through some trauma. Trauma specialists found that life crises, especially among adolescents, often threaten our worldviews by casting doubt on simple and small, yet critical, beliefs. According to research on trauma, this often causes us to either abandon our worldviews altogether or "develop irrational beliefs about causation…in order to gain some sense of control or predictability."[58] Ironically, then, worldviews may lead to a life that actually does resemble the Platonist Blackmailer's "intellectual delinquency" and "living at random" due to the irrational and inconsistent action that might follow when a worldview inevitably crumbles. It is the dogmatic approach to consistency and coherence that causes this, not inconsistent thought itself. Living with the mess, on the other hand, means *using* consistency *when it is helpful to do so* and not searching for some inherent logic to use as drawers for our thoughts.

If the humanities wither and its disciplines become scientific, our debt to Plato and excessive consistency will only grow. The humanities' presence delivers a plurality of thinkers, approaches, and understandings of the cosmos. This can only serve to help us, preventing stagnant worldviews and

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[58] Cohen, *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief,* 11.

providing well-read humanities students with an extensive array of alternatives—multiple intellectual, ethical, and political dimensions—to refer to in moments of crisis. This is not to say that the humanities will not be instrumentalized by many for enhancing oneself as a piece of human capital, fully responsibilized, predictable, and/or physically comfortable and secure, but rather to say that their existence is critical to combating complete orientation. Politics must not become a science, and life's meaning should not be viewed solely through the lens of a single worldview if we are to address the mess in healthy, creative, and poetic ways.

C. The Value of our Values

It may seem to some that an ulterior goal of this paper is to convince others to wholly abandon values like consistency, logic, and coherence.[59] This is not my goal. Coherence is not worthless, and I am certainly not advocating for its expulsion altogether from contemporary use. I am trying to point out that these values, like all values, are not absolute but are tools that are helpful and useful in certain situations, but not in others.

Earlier in this paper, I used a stair rail as an analogy for worldviews: we only need to orient ourselves when we are *dis*oriented, we only grab the banister when we are at risk of falling. Hannah Arendt has also used this language of the "banister," comparing our political thinking to holding the railing.[60] The notion of a banister for political thought is not a subtle one. The comparison itself may appear to belittle worldview-based political thinking, implying that we use our frameworks to move through the mess in a weak manner. This, also, is not my intention for the analogy. In fact, these frameworks are incredible feats and, as neoliberalism illustrated, often result in commanding wills to

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[59] These values are not evil, wrong, or even incorrect. I aim only to show how these values are treated as absolutes when they are in fact best understood as contextually useful.
[60] Strong, *Politics Without Vision*, 1.

power by their creators. Thus, it is important to reiterate that the problem is not that we *use* these frameworks, but rather that we act as if they are universal; once we subscribe, we see them as the only option. In the realm of political theory, this is what Sheldon Wolin calls an "epic theory:"

> By an act of thought, the theorist seeks to reassemble the whole political world. He aims to grasp present structures and interrelationships, and to re-present them in a new way. Like extraordinary scientific theory, such efforts involve a new way of looking at the familiar world, a new way with its own cognitive and normative standards."…yet such theorizing is the construction of a particular vision—what will serve as a banister for those who will make use of it. Hence, it is epic—and epics serve as the textbooks for a people and an epoch.[61]

It isn't wrong to hold a banister, nor is it foolish; sometimes we might sincerely fall down and hurt ourselves. But if we use a single framework as an epic, or as a textbook, it becomes a divine-like source of truth that we refer to as absolutely true.

What, then, might it look like to think without such banisters, without an epic theory? Arendt and Nietzsche have similar responses: in general, they tell us to deconstruct previously created value and create our own. For Arendt, this is judging oneself without reference to preconceived categories or measures. For Nietzsche, it is revaluing our values, or questioning the value of our values themselves. It may seem difficult to achieve Nietzsche's aspiration, as it is difficult to escape the classifications of the social world. This may be the case, but as I have shown, the chief preconceived measure that we use in our worldviews is consistency. Although it is dominant, we need not abandon consistency altogether in order to address Arendt's and Nietzsche's concerns in our own lives. Coherence can be a value that we *use*, but it introduces other issues when it dictates all our other values or when we view it as the essential foundation for them. We may utilize it when necessary, but to search for some inherent sense of coherence in the world is an undesirable task. Applying it to the whole of our worldview is no different. This is what Nietzsche means when he asks us to doubt: he asks us to recognize values that, like consistency and coherence,

[61] Strong, 327.

we might view as absolute. Upon recognition of these values, he asks us to see that they are not absolute, but rather are created and utilized by certain agents for certain goals. Why, then, would we let such values dictate our individual lives? Our worldviews are the suns of our lives, shedding light from the top down, with coherence as king. This is why Nietzsche's line in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is so significant, as he says, "You great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?"[62] Like the sun, what would our worldviews be without those *for whom* they shine? Their value is not metaphysical or universal, but instead is predicated on what they do to us or for us, as individuals.

This paper has certainly been a *revaluing* of certain values like consistency and coherence, amongst others. This revaluing is predicated on questioning the usefulness of these values and judging ourselves without the preconceived measures of consistency and coherence. Such revaluing of our values, however, may seem to create a new problem to which we must respond. If we are not using preconceived measures—if we forsake *all* the scales on Nietzsche's dragon of long-created value—then how do we orient ourselves at all?[63] Sure, we might still use these values *sometimes*, but what do we do (or which other values do we choose), in moments that we previously might have relied on consistency and coherence, despite its tyranny? It is in these moments where Nietzsche's aspirations for us come to fruition and we *create our own* value. We can do this, specifically, by asking new questions than before.

In this thesis, these new questions relate to the opposite of consistency and coherence—namely, the mess. If we are to create new value in the face of the mess and live with it, we must ask new questions about it. For instance, why need there be a negative connotation to messiness? After all, chaos' opposite (order) can carry negative connotations as well, as it often connotes authoritarian

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[62] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 3.
[63] This is, again, a reference to the image of the dragon that Nietzsche uses. I explain the analogy in an earlier footnote.

sentiments. Nearly every modern totalitarian regime has, at some point, been critiqued for its aspiration to excessive order. If state order, especially to such inconvenient degrees, is "tyrannical," why wouldn't the tremendous order that we aspire to have in our own worldviews be any less tyrannical? If *extreme* order carries such authoritarian connotations, why don't we think of chaos as a *freeing* mess in which we can act creatively? This thesis is an experiment in doing exactly this: thinking of chaos as a liberating landscape for creative action. Other new questions about value might resemble the following: what would it look like for chaos to be a "good" thing? What might be beautiful about the mess? What might be special about it? Thinking about such possibly new and previously ill-considered questions is what Nietzsche's creative thinking looks like. These questions acknowledge the chaos of the cosmos and lead us to affirm it as a land of constant becoming. Only then can we live with the mess and use it to create our own value.

Arendt's and Nietzsche's hopes that we would realize and overcome previously created value, if achieved, are incredibly useful for avoiding stagnant thought. While I provide an example of such thinking above and in this thesis as a whole, drawing on their aspirations for us to create our own value is one that could benefit a messy, democratic population for years to come, should we truly ask the questions that were previously unaskable. For if a democratic population is unable to live with the mess—unable to live passionately, to think multi-dimensionally, and to question the value of their values—democracy could come to an end far sooner than we may expect.

V. The Death of Liberal Democracy

Should we, as a democratic society, be unable to face up to the chaos in the cosmos and, more importantly, the chaos inherent in our own system of governance, then we might expedite the end of liberal democracy. To illustrate how democratic life as we know it could come to a swift end, I will examine democracy's tendency towards chaos and the subsequent attempts to order that often

follow. I will first focus on the liberal distinction between the public and private, as it is in private that we feel our own control to the greatest extent. For this reason, we may feel that, even if we resign all control in the public sphere, the mess can still be cleaned up in private. I will illustrate how this may be the case to a certain degree, but how reliance on the little control that we *do* have in private subtly leads us away from liberal values through undue emphasis on orderliness. I will then shift to discussion of democracy as a whole, drawing on Plato to show how a reliance on coherence can easily take us to an undemocratic place, providing examples of how this is already occurring in our own world. This will exemplify how our own aspirations to create order within our democracy are usually, over time, deconstructed by the demos. I will ultimately suggest that, because democracy has always been characterized by an inherent messiness, an inability to acknowledge democratic chaos will limit democracy's lifespan as a predominant form of governance.

A. Gradients of Privacy

At the start of this thesis, I posited that a main reason an experience such as that of the sock drawer story would penetrate our psyche so deeply is because of the privacy associated with a sock drawer and the sense of control often associated with that private sphere. I pointed out that people will often even hide things in that drawer due to his/her feeling that it is, by nature, personal and secure. This is because it is in our private worlds that we feel we have the most control.

One of the most significant political developments that liberalism emphasized was an ontological distinction between public and private. What occurred behind closed doors, barring violations of rights, was no longer the concern of the sovereign. This distinction was inherent, absolute, and undisputed. For many, the public sphere and our participation in it is still a mere box to check, a necessary evil so that we could continue with our happiness and consumption in private (within the bounds of the law made by the sovereign, whomever that happens to be). We look out

into the messy abyss of the public world, and it shows us just how insignificant our agency really is. It is unsurprising that we would then willingly retreat into the private sphere, where we can sit in front of our televisions and ignore the chaos because "we did our time and paid our dues" to the public realm—for example, we followed the law, paid our taxes, and voted in the most recent election. It also shouldn't be unexpected, then, to see this phenomenon of minimal involvement and swift retreat from the public sphere in the contemporary world, given that liberalism (and even democracy, to an extent) has usually privileged the private over the public.[64] We have made the preservation of the private a chief goal of liberal-democratic life.

Even if we feel as if our agency in the private sphere is unending, it is important to note that we do have some agency in the private sphere, because it is ours. Privileging the private sphere allows us to maintain the agency in our homes that we've always wanted to have beyond our own doors. Just as worldviews let us epistemically control and manipulate the world, liberalism's emphasis on the private sphere and its freedom lets us feel as if we can govern our own homes as if they are our own walled-off kingdoms. Yet this is why a structure as simple as a sock drawer can somehow expose something so central to the liberal ethos and fantasy of control: it reveals that *the public-private distinction is not a simple one between two separate spheres*, one behind and one outside our front door. We do not stop our classification at the domestic level, though. We organize our homes into rooms, creating privacy within privacy. Moreover, we don't stop our organization at the room level, as we build closets, dressers with individual drawers, and even place dividers within our drawers. Many homes even feature the notorious "junk drawer," where the random assortment of

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[64] In the early Greek direct democracies, the private was often more important to the demos. A salient example of this occurs after Pericles' funeral oration in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, was an attempt to create more love for the public sphere. Later, once a plague struck Athens, it becomes clear that the populace cared far more about the private. Once the plague threatened their ability to do as they pleased, many Athenians disdained the law and did as they pleased anyway. We can still see this emphasis on the private today, as the same phenomenon occurs with the COVID-19 pandemic. As soon as public wellbeing threatened private freedoms, many people lashed out in response and rejected the law.

otherwise unplaced things can be compiled in a mess and hidden out of sight.[65] Some individuals reported having "a small wooden cup from Finland" or even "tech accessories for long-abandoned products."[66] Perhaps such drawers might even contain a lost sock, or two. Our homes themselves are characterized by gradients of privacy, starting with our living rooms and kitchens and moving towards the dividers within drawers, all to hide the pile of our socks, the inevitable mess. The primacy of the private realm allows us to run rampant with our aspirational agency, all while going nowhere. At the end of the organization, the mess is still there: the junk, the socks, the inconsistent beliefs.

Understood through this lens, mental landscapes and worldviews could be thought of as an extension of the private sphere. After all, the spaces inside our minds are far more private than a bedroom could ever be and *might* be the space where we have the most control. I have already spoken of how we can individually act passionately or create our own new value; we have *some* agency to do these things. However, if we are beholden to previously created values, living under the tyranny in philosophy, we will construct our own mental drawers only to store our socks inside, grasping more and more each day onto the smallest things over which we feel the most control. While this may seem insignificant, our aspirations to control our private lives will eventually cause us to disdain other critical aspects of liberal ideology.

Consider the dominance of the private sphere in context of two significant liberal values: idiosyncrasy and tolerance of that idiosyncrasy in others. Early liberals championed these ideas in order to protect the private sphere. In order for us to each individually and privately live out our own conception of the good life, we must be tolerant of the idiosyncrasy in others who are

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[65] It is notable that this marks our aspiration to (and failure at) self-discipline, one of the greatest neoliberal projects. As social norms invade private spaces we organize our failure to self-discipline by hiding that failure in a drawer.
[66] Weeks, "What Your Junk Drawer Reveals About You."

attempting to doing the same. Many early liberal thinkers championed idiosyncrasy not just in society, but within our individual lives as well.[67] Most of these thinkers also emphasized the importance of tolerance and free speech to preserve the freedom of idiosyncrasy. However, if we are continually resigning from the public sphere in favor of private life, grasping at whatever we can control there, we may not be as willing to participate in the public sphere beyond the bare minimum: following the law, voting, and paying taxes.

It is not novel to claim that privatization destroys the public sphere. Bonnie Honig questions whether democracy is even *possible* with the absence of shared public goods—infrastructure, public spaces, monuments, libraries, etc.—and subsequently argues that privatization minimizes our care for public things. Drawing on psychoanalysts, she demonstrates the capacity of objects and belongings to create tendencies of care and independence for young children. This object-child relationship, for Honig, is analogous to the relationship between public things and democratic citizens: without shared public goods, we have nothing to care for beyond ourselves and our own, private homes. She even draws on Arendt to point out how the French, who once were famed for their great public realm, have since seen a decay in the public sphere due to their emphasis on the "small things within the space of their own four walls."[68]

When extended to worldviews, Honig's analysis is perspicacious and revelatory for the tyranny in philosophy's danger to democracy. To have a shared intellectual "good," a public intellectual thing that we share and care for in our worldviews, would be to undermine the idiosyncrasy that early democrats originally aimed to pursue.[69] While Honig's analysis provides a

[67] John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty*, for instance.
[68] Honig, *Public Things,* 46.
[69] An example of a public intellectual good might be universal agreement that there are fundamental human rights. Either everyone agrees on this and on what follows, and there is no idiosyncrasy, or everyone agrees on the idea but disagree on what follows.

relatively straightforward and tangible solution, sharing an intellectual good would either diminish idiosyncrasy or upend tolerance. Consistency and coherence would force democratic citizens to orient their worldviews in terms of the same idea. Inherent logic could mean that all would potentially share the same worldview: by deducing one thing from another, a democratic society that shares publicly universal ideas would feature citizens that might all share the same worldview (assuming that such a society values consistency, coherence, and logic). In this case, there would be no idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, there might be disagreements about what follows from established truths. Yet disagreements about what follows from this only becomes moralized by the tyranny in philosophy. The tyranny would have us also believe that there *is* something that naturally and inherently follows—*the* right and correct view—and that one's political opponents are inferior and in need of aid because of their erring, inconsistent ways. This position is epistemologically arrogant, essentially saying, "I am correct, and you are not, and I can show that you actually believe what I believe through logic." Thus, the tyranny in philosophy makes it impossible to share public intellectual ideas without totally sacrificing either idiosyncrasy or tolerance.

It is unsurprising that we would then retreat into the private upon such external attempts to control our worldviews. After all, as I have shown, worldviews may be the most private of things, where we feel that we have the *most control*. The consistency and extreme levels of specificity that we pursue in private with our worldviews (and with our goods) leads us to turn inwardly, and even more intensely, to private spaces: we then organize more and more gradients of privacy, making the spaces within our walls the chief sphere for exercising individual power. This also prevents us from interacting with others in the public, especially with those we disagree with, as they potentially threaten the stability of our fragile, structured, controlled worldview. We continue with our worldviews, stashing our intellectual socks in the drawer that we please, all for the sake of tidiness and coherence. Thus, we would never receive enough exposure to other worldviews; the tyranny in

philosophy leads us to focus on the public only insofar as it relates to private life. Foregoing meaningful experiences in the public sphere means little dialogue and even less deliberation between idiosyncratic people. This is already occurring in our own world: increasing political polarization and a general unwillingness to speak with or even tolerate our political opponents, which could both be viewed as effects of our stagnant, settled worldviews and their encroachment on the private sphere, where we can achieve our control fantasies. We sit in our homes, proud of our miniscule contribution to the public world and become more and more entrenched in our own thoughts, weakening our capacities for tolerance. The protection of the private sphere is one of liberal democracy's greatest aspirations, but values like consistency and coherence turn the private into a threat to democratic life as a whole. Worldviews driven by consistency, coherence, and the tyranny in philosophy upend the private sphere, making such intellectual structures undesirable for those of us who would seek to preserve democratic life.

B. Unstable Democracies

While the presence of the tyranny in philosophy in the private sphere certainly creates new challenges to successful democratic interaction, these problems are not indicative of an imminent end to democracy. It is the tyranny's effect on the direction of democracy as a whole, however, that could legitimately threaten democracy in the near future. Drawing on Plato, who is perhaps the father of the tyranny in philosophy, I will describe how an unstable democracy can easily become a tyranny itself.

The direct democracies of the Greeks, beyond the inherent chaos within them, were usually impervious to reason and rational argumentation. Socrates discovered this firsthand through his demise while giving a rational apology for his actions. Plato watched while the public became a mob, their minds already made up before Socrates even spoke. This is why, for Plato, the Apology is a

dramatic representation of how the demos often behaves—they are not able to engage in reasoning, making direct rule by the people irrational or dangerous. The inability of the demos to engage in reasonable decision-making created a central tension in liberal democracy that the founders of the United States aimed to mend in certain ways. Liberal democracy strikes a delicate balance between achieving the democratic ethos of governance by the people, of the people, and for the people, while also preventing the irrationality and passion of the people from bubbling to the surface in political decisions. Democracy has always been chaotic, and the founding fathers largely aimed to reduce democracy's chaos in various cultural and legal ways. From hierarchical oppression through slavery, segregation, and limited voting rights to various measures through the constitution such as checks and balances, representative lawmaking, and federalist practices, the founders put structures and barriers in place to separate the demos from affecting the creation and rule of law in meaningful ways. In the *Federalist Papers*, Publius even references conventional critiques of democracy to defend some of these barriers.[70] The tyranny of philosophy—the tyranny of consistency and coherence as sovereign over our thought—led us towards an impulse to order and coherence, mostly driven by a deep acknowledgement of the messiness inherent in democratic politics. As Honig points out, it seems that we would need some common good—a goal, shared goods or morals—but the universalization of these very things would make idiosyncrasy impossible. This is why liberal toleration was supposed to be the firewall between political and (traditional religious or philosophical) moral forms of authority, separating private moralities from political power.[71]

As politics become more chaotic and complex, the public sphere becomes more difficult to conceptualize and explain with our worldviews. This is where we are often tempted to double down

[70] For instance, Publius responds to the shortcomings of the Greek direct democracies and to philosophical critiques such as those of Baron de Montesquieu.
[71] Many liberal thinkers advanced this idea, but Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* was perhaps the earliest and most prolific modern thinker to argue for toleration, separating private morality from political power.

and find ways to rationalize by changing our conception of politics itself. It is worth wondering if this is exactly what the Trump Administration attempted to achieve in the age of "alternative facts." In facing considerable chaos and opposition, it would be unsurprising for ex-President Trump and his administration to begin changing the narrative of what is relevant to politics or challenging conventional methods of validating knowledge. This sort of challenge, regardless of its success, would allow the agent to continue to epistemically control the cosmos from within a particular, narrow worldview. William E. Connolly actually posits that this behavior is eerily close to tenets of traditional conceptions of fascism, and even goes so far as to describe Trump as an "aspirational fascist."[72] When democratic leaders aspire to order, we often see it as authoritarian or fascist for this reason. When the public world becomes messy and we realize the lack of our own individual agency to control it, we may turn to leaders and give them the power to create order as a result.[73]

When rulers *do* aspire to order, even when the demos has asked them to do so, such as the founders of the United States in their structuring of the American Democracy, the people will often still deconstruct these attempts. After all, as countless critiques of the demos' instability have shown, democracy has always been resistant to order. For the United States, many of the barriers between the demos and governance were deconstructed: there is a way of viewing the history of American politics as a thread of attempts to deconstruct such order and restore power directly to the people. Direct election of Senators, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, and even contemporary calls to abolish the electoral college are all instances of the liberal-democratic ethos aspiring to decompose such order, often in the name of equality or other liberal-democratic values. When we look back on some of these movements (restricted voting rights, segregation, etc.), we now see them

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[72] Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*.

[73] This may seem to invalidate my claim that we care more about the private. However, it is the public sphere that allows our freedoms in private, and a total destruction of public life would upend private life, too.

as fascist, authoritarian, and oppressive. I have no doubt that, should we abolish the electoral college, we will look back on it the same way: an oppressive firewall between the people and true governance. Yet each deconstruction of previously-instituted order brings our democracy closer and closer to the direct democracies that were criticized for so long for their instability.

Upon recognition of continual chaos in democracy (which we need not look far to see today), it may seem that opponents of coherence would be satisfied: the democratic ethos seems sufficient to deconstruct order. Yet as the democratic ethos slowly hammers away at order, democracy will only become more and more chaotic. Democracies such as our own, I contend, will become so messy that their fragility becomes fully exposed and exploited. Such democracies, as Plato points out, are particularly susceptible to tyranny: when the chaos is too much, why wouldn't we turn to an appearingly "wise" king to clean up our messes for us? Plato's prediction for his own democracy would then become true in ours. The tyranny of philosophy then steers our democracy towards a greater tyranny. Upon total recognition of our inability to control the world, when the chaos is too great to explain away, political tyranny begins to slip into our minds as a seemingly easy and efficient way to address this chaos. Plato recognized this in democracy as well, as tyranny can easily emerge from democracy.

As we have already seen through Connolly, contemporary democracy is becoming increasingly fragile, only intensifying the likelihood that it crumbles into another form of governance. This is why Plato, after witnessing the demos indict and kill his friend and mentor, Socrates, for senseless reasons even though he provided sensible reasons for why he should be acquitted, sought out on a "philosophical revenge tour" of sorts. After seeing the apparent irrevocable mess of democratic life, it is unsurprising that a common response would be that we need wise philosopher kings to clean up all of our messes. Plato himself merely "followed where reason led," and it took him to the *Kallipolis*, the "ideal city." Ironically, the *Kallipolis* itself could be

thought of as a tyranny of reason because the philosopher rulers do not deliberate or discuss how the "cave of politics" should be ruled. This city features no considerations from the auxiliaries and laborers, and the philosopher kings only listen to themselves. In contrasting philosopher kings with tyrants, it is easy to see how even the most principled leader can easily become corrupted through appetitive desire, spurring even more desire to possess greater power once in a position of total authority. It is for this very reason that I claim that democracy's lifespan will depend on our ability as citizens, and as a society, to learn how to address democracy's messiness.

If we keep trying to clean up and reduce the messiness, we will only be disappointed when our efforts do little, if anything, to reduce the inevitable chaos. More likely, we will cause more divisiveness and complexity, and reduce idiosyncrasy and tolerance. The way to move forward, should we desire to preserve democratic life, is to acknowledge and affirm the chaos in our lives. It is to live *with* the mess and embrace messy spaces, becoming comfortable in the chaos. Only then, when the instability of democratic life inevitably arrives, would a demos be able to resist the impulse to order and its accompanying tyranny.

VI. Conclusion

The human experience and democratic politics are characterized by an inevitable and inherent mess that is impossible to completely or finally resolve. Yet we think such a thing is possible and attempt to achieve this through worldviews. Driven by the tyranny in philosophy, where values like consistency, coherence, and logical structure of argumentation reign over our thought, our worldviews go far beyond a mere set of beliefs or ideas that we hold dear. In turn, this only covers up the chaotic mess and diverts our attention from important realities which then go unnoticed and unaddressed. I utilize neoliberalism to serve as a prominent example in the contemporary period to show how pervasive the tyranny of philosophy truly is. Some critiques of

neoliberalism also demonstrate the potential harm to contemporary thought and life, should we demand that the world resemble something orderly. If we, as individuals and democratic citizens, are going to address the aforementioned issues and potential for political tyranny, we must learn how better to cope with the mess, aesthetically or creatively, but not metaphysically, by deconstructing and transcending the dominance of orderliness in philosophy and contemporary thought, dethroning consistency and coherence in favor of more flexible values. This is what it is to live with the mess: to create new and meaningful ways to cope with chaos without feeling the need to keep our lives and intellectual sensibilities in a constant state of order. If we are unable to do this, democracy as we know it will dwindle, as Platonic analysis and other critiques of democracy show how easily democracy can slip into tyranny when driven by coherence.

Such understanding leads to further questions about imminent and impending issues that are beyond the scope of this paper. For instance, as technology increases and the dataist state grows, my analysis of agency in the private and public might cause concern about rising levels of machine decision-making. This could have the capacity to remove the already minimal agency that we might still possess in the public sphere: the computers would choose in our place. Yet the more significant questions surround the future of democracy. Do we still live in a liberal democracy if we are deconstructing its order to such degrees? Some may argue that we do not live in a liberal democracy (or a democracy at all), and that we never truly have. An incredibly important question that I do not consider to be in the immediate scope of this thesis regards representative governance that lives with the mess. What might it look like to rule in a way that acknowledges the chaos, or to engage in lawmaking without immediately feeling the need to respond to various disorders? Such governance may be seen as inept in our age. Additionally, it is worth considering how worldviews may differ for women, as the private sphere may not always be a space of control for women, but rather another form of patriarchic control.

Most importantly though, is postulation about what might come next as democracy, however slowly, approaches its inevitable end. What new forms of governance might replace democracy should it come to an end? A tyranny? Technocracy of sorts? Or something new? Some, such as I, may even wonder if it is time to move on and create something new or more useful to the contemporary condition before democracy becomes too unstable to survive. Wendy Brown, in her more recent work, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, revises and expands upon some of the very arguments of hers that I criticized in this thesis. In her newer work, she considers how various forces, many of which are associated with neoliberalism, are making us antidemocratic through deconstruction of the social and political realms. Some readers might prefer to confront these problems with new forms of governance before they inevitably confront us. It may be worth considering and preparing for a new epoch of liberal politics where democracy is obsolete—and that's if we even currently have liberal democracy.

Finally, it may seem to some that I have merely created a worldview of my own. This critique would not be accurate, but it is not far off. In a sense, I have made an epic theory of my own, reframing the cosmos in terms of my observations. This may resemble a worldview. However, I have done so in a way that reflects creativity and flexibility rather than consistency and coherence. This "worldview" need not always cohere; it is open-ended and does not need to always remain in a constant state of order. Thus, there is no way to bring anything "all-encompassing" into my view. By my own definition of worldview, then, I do not have a worldview. Instead, these are all what we might call "sensibilities."[74] I generally feel that the cosmos is a chaotic place and that we often respond to it in ways that ignores such chaos. I generally think that democracy is a messy thing, and

[74] "Sensibilities" is a term that William E. Connolly often uses in place of terms such as "worldview."

that its proponents should interpret themselves accordingly if we are to preserve its lifespan. As Geuss says, "if one wants to call this a 'world view,' then I have no objection to that."[75]

[75] Geuss, 163.

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