

In Praise of Rebellion?

Peter Radford

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There seems to be a consensus that an era ended in 2008, when the frothy insanity and outright corruption of the American financial system collapsed into a miserable heap taking with it the world economy. Ever since then we have been struggling to replace the discredited ideas that gave rise to that era. We have not, yet, succeeded. This is in part due to the natural longevity of folly as a generation of people whose reputations depend upon their excellence of grasp of that folly linger in power. An era's worth of "Nobel Prize" winners has to leave us before we can fully repair the damage they did. New ideas are in the air. They have not yet coalesced into the underpinning of a new era. So we live in an interregnum fraught with contradictions, uncertainties, and peril. Gramsci's pithy summary echoes well: "The old world is dying, the new is struggling to be born. In this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

One such symptom is the ongoing need to justify that which needs no justification. Or ought not. Surely rampant inequality, both of status and wealth, ought stand as obviously a danger to democracy. And yet we are constantly having to explain why that is true. Why? Albert Camus, as only he could, summed it up well: "On the day when crime puts on the apparel of innocence, through a curious reversal peculiar to our age, it is innocence that is called to justify itself".

That is where we are.

Not in the sense of crime or innocence, but in the sense that the ideas that provided the foundation of the dying era are the ones that need justification. Not the emerging ideas that support the construction of a new era. The lingering concepts, now exposed as hollow failures, force us to expend energy on the past rather than the future. We are required to explain the twist in history that inverted, or rather simply ended, much of the postwar triumph. It was a great error that we must undo.

So what happened?

There was a revolution. An intellectual earthquake that facilitated a silent political coup. Economists were at the heart of it. But most turned a blind eye to the damage as it accumulated.

At the time, it all appeared so sensible. So logical. So inevitable. The shift in emphasis was not supposed to produce the outcome it did. We were told that there was no choice. That 'there is no alternative' became the rallying cry of the radicals. Even though it felt unnerving, our leadership assured us that to continue as things were would undermine the continued accumulation or postwar prosperity. Change was necessary. Or else.

That the change has engendered the very disease, and worse, it was supposed to cure is what we now need to discuss. How we begin that discussion, how we get our voices heard, and how we correct the error of the 1980s, is our most urgent task.

We must undo Camus' reversal. We must recognize that innocence need not justify itself. That onus falls on those who led us astray. It falls on those who argued that the rupture and reconstruction of society was benign — that it would produce more than it consumed. And it falls most particularly on those whose cynical embrace of the radical allowed them to enrich themselves beyond their contribution.

We must tell the truth.

In so doing we must heed the words of Gramsci who told us that to tell the truth is to rebel. We must rebel against failure and the self-aggrandizement of our elite. Those latter day notables, those who led us astray, are culpable for the decline in fortune of the majority. Whether in their corporate offices, in their ivory towers, or in their gated communities, they must be called to account. Their radical vision and their co-option of power produced what we are living through. It produced the listlessness, the lack of empathy, the precarious lives we lead, and the deep divisions that prevent us from progressing in harmony. We live, after all, in the midst of the most prosperous era in human history, and yet it doesn't feel that way for most of us. Why not? What happened to that prosperity? Where is it?

So we begin with understanding the trajectory. How did we arrive here?

Looking back over our small slice of history is to understand its exception. What we refer to as economic growth seems to have exploded into its current form around 1870. That's a mere one hundred and fifty years ago. By any credible measure a totally new trend was established back then. The preceding decades had certainly set the scene. Industrialization was well underway. The social upheaval wrought by the appearance of industry in its modern form altered the rules of life that had evolved only slowly before. Now the pace accelerated. Traditions were torn down relentlessly to open up space for progress. Society and politics were both reconstructed. Privilege was torn from its previous resting place and secured by a new group of notables.

Once unleashed, growth became an end in itself. Gradually its perpetuation took over as the driving force underlying social construction. Politics, international relations, and governance all became more commercial in their orientation. Growth became inevitable. It became normal. Even though a longer view of history suggests otherwise, we expected this new normal to continue. That it is an anomaly is hardly ever seriously suggested. The imperative of growth — of the ever accumulating more — is the defining feature of the era that took off in earnest in 1870.

This rapid growth — usually expressed in the terms economists have persuaded us to use — is the foundation upon which *all* modernity now rests. This growth is itself underwritten by constant discovery and application of technologies that did not exist before. Innovation became our watchword. We take it for granted that our era can be defined as an era of innovation, and that such innovation produces, albeit at the cost of disruption, everything we now enjoy — better health, longer lives, broader cultural exposure, and better day-to-day security of existence. Even our most recent ancestors would not recognize our everyday wellbeing. It is a thing of envy. It is a thing to cherish.

This centrality of continued rapid growth to our modern lives is at the core of our current concern. It has brought with it the great downside of environmental degradation and a future cost that might well offset much of the gain since 1870.

And yet we continue unabated. We are forced to — not to grow threatens modernity in its entirety. The self-perpetuation of the capitalist machinery that produced the cornucopia cannot stop. Else the entire edifice collapses. Economists, by and large, accept this inevitability.

Everything, it seems, sits on this economic foundation. In turn, this has projected economic thought into the center of our discussions. “Economism” to use Kwan’s word has taken over.

How we explain the pivot back in the 1800s, how it gathered pace, how it emerged, and why it ebbs and flows, are all central questions that require technocratic explanation. We have to understand more exactly the elements contributing to modern growth. Unfortunately, we do not. Perhaps the problem is too intractable within the context of current economic thought. Perhaps the toolkit is inadequate. Perhaps the ideology of inevitable growth clouds our judgement and prevents us from seeing. Perhaps all these things. What we know is that our ignorance of the details still bedevils us. That ignorance can be approximated using our modern ideas. But taking the error and turning it into a virtue is hardly a long term strategy for knowledge creation. We need to be served better by our economists.

Why? Because this moment in history, as many have observed, ought to be propelling us towards a future very different from the abject nature of all previous human history. We have, it seems, broken free of what became known as the Malthusian trap. Years of relative prosperity are not, as before, followed by a reversal and return to poverty. Growth is more secure. It is uplifting us towards that fabled Utopia which eluded endless generations before us. It feels within our grasp. We fantasize about the end of work and the possibilities of luxuriating in endless cultural and spiritual improvement. And we long for the permanent security of existence that was denied all our ancestors.

What we sometimes forget as we entertain this moment is the struggle that this short era produced. Growth has allowed us the elbow room to reshape our societies in ways that the constraints of the past disallowed. Most of all, we have created what we call democracies that include even the least privileged people — albeit haltingly and inadequately at times — in the political decision making framework.

As economic growth enabled certain people to rise rapidly in wealth and status it distorted prior social and political equilibrium. Things needed rearranging. In particular, questions of distribution forced their way into debate where previously millennia of tradition had kept them firmly on the sidelines. Traditional elites — aristocratic, monarchic, religious, military, and landed — suddenly had both the incentive and the space to share their privileges. Including the masses became both necessary, as motivation, and wise, as reward, in order to maintain elite benefits from modern growth. This self-serving impulse of the emerging notable class is reflected in the turbulence and reaction to the years after 1789.

They shared. They did not want to. But they did. That sharing reduced, it did not eliminate, the threat of the sort of dire social transformation predicted by the more radical critics of the mid-1800s.

However, the acceleration in growth gave little time for much reflection on the pressing need for a solution to wealth sharing. Whereas traditional societies had set patterns of distribution based upon time honored social structures, modernity had to invent its own distributional values. The battle to reach a so-called fair distribution has ebbed and flowed largely swept along by shifts in technology and the ownership and use of that technology. The machinery question — who owns and benefits from the machines — has dominated discourse since industrialization burst upon the scene. It remains unresolved. It has re-surfaced recently as artificial intelligence threatens to upend the currently settled arrangement of power.

Distributional conflict led, inevitably, to a period of intense ideological creativity and argument. With tradition swept from view, politics was refashioned. Both ends of the political spectrum produced new ideas. Indeed, the existence of a political spectrum in its modern form, was a product of the argument

taking place as growth took its modern form. Fascism, Communism, and classic liberalism all emerged to compete as frameworks to establish and divide power, wealth, and status.

Wallerstein's explanation of the emergence of modern liberalism as the victor seems most apposite. It absorbed just enough from its competitors to soften the retention of power by the notables. Furet, though, might have had more foresight when he said: "For Fascists, Bolshevism is the future of liberal democracy, because Fascists see liberal democracy as the breeding ground of Bolshevism. For Bolsheviks, to the contrary, liberal democracy is the breeding ground of Fascism, because they believe liberal democracy is bound to become Fascist. Consequently, there are three camps, and the one in the middle is merely a passage leading to the two others."

The oscillation between those three camps, but always passing through and periodically settling, for a time, in the middle, defines modern political history. And always, in the background, the debate over distribution provides the energy for argument.

The acceleration of time that rapid growth has produced has also compressed history. Ideological arguments take place within generations and not across them. Eras that used to be timed in terms of centuries are now timed in decades. Couple this with multiple generations co-existing simultaneously — a novelty created by our success in improving our health — and the traditional cohesion of memory and experience has been overturned. We live with multiple generational histories and cultures competing for pre-eminence within each society at once. This complicates politics — inter-generational conflicts muddle the class conflicts modern ideologies sought to resolve.

Nonetheless, some in the early 1980s felt this was all resolved. Or at least settled into a more anodyne acceptance. Liberalism prevailed. Some even imagined that history itself had ended because ideological conflict had abated. Growth, such people argued, was best provided by setting what we call the private sector free with minimal interference from what was perceived as the heavy and incompetent hand of the state. This attitude represented the end of a policy debate that had raged throughout the early 1900s. The rapid rise of state involvement in the economy as a consequence of the failure of laissez-faire during the Great Depression, along with the continued rise in aspiration of the middling strata of society, forced into being a series of interventions in the ways the private sector conducted itself.

This intrusion was deeply resented by the notables whose power rested on their prominence in, and control over, that private sector. An alliance of plutocrats and business leaders emerged determined to undo the policies of redistribution embedded in the reaction to the Great Depression. They rallied behind the ideas of the likes of Hayek and poured funding into scholastic efforts at places such as the University of Chicago to produce an intellectual justification for their rebellion against the state.

The scholars might simply have been purveyors of new ideas, but they were the facilitators of the silent coup that gave the recently ended era its most pronounced character. It was an era of rising plutocracy enabled by the willing architects of modern economics.

In the geopolitical context of the time the battle of ideas was unevenly fought. Especially in America, Furet's insight played out perfectly. Any effort to protect the state's activity was viewed through the lens of it being incipient Marxism. Any effort to bolster social protection against the predations of business was seen as opening the road to serfdom.

Liberalism was recast as neoliberalism, shedding some of those features it had acquired to protect itself from the attacks from more extreme ideologies. Instead, from its origins in Paris during 1938 until its

political breakthrough in the early 1980s, neoliberalism was steadily shorn of concern for the social consequences of undoing the state protections put in place to mitigate the damage done by the Great Depression. Originally conceived by the likes of Walter Lippmann as an effort to soften laissez-faire, it became a full throated advocacy of free markets. Heavily funded by private wealth, neoliberalism was re-purposed as a vehicle for the seizure of power by the emerging alliance of old money whose fortunes had been so damaged by state concern for the middling people, and the new money being generated by corporate pre-eminence in the economy. In Furet's framing, the middle ground, in order to prevent it from being a mere passage towards the left, was shifted radically to the right.

So the end of history in the 1980s was simply the emergence of a radicalization of erstwhile centrism. It was a perversion of the sensibility that had produced the compromises accumulated through the conflicts from 1789 forward through the early 1900s. The triumph of liberalism-as-neoliberalism was the undoing of those compromises. It was the seizure of power by our modern notables in the name of liberty. That is liberty from the state, which hitherto had been the protector of liberty and the focal point of modern democracy. Such an inversion as this is certainly worthy of Camus' scorn.

"Society, there is no such thing" sums up the contradiction that now took the place of the earlier twentieth century compromises. This abolition of society was the simultaneous abolition of citizenry. For without a society there is nothing to be a citizen of. The convenience of this abolition was to become evident only later.

Meanwhile, the end of history was only its abeyance. A new history had begun.

And it is against that history that we must rebel.

Nothing that has happened was unforeseen. We have simply ignored the voices that articulated the likely course we have followed.

Back in 1941 James Burnham published a short book with the title "What Is Happening in the World — The Managerial Revolution". In it he described the demise of capitalism and its replacement, not by socialism which was the great fear in the western world at the time, but by what he called managerialism. He predicted that the economy and society at large would fall into the hands of a class of managers who would administer it in their own interests. They would subject both the old ruling capitalist class and the recently empowered working class. Administration and those who did the administering were to dominate.

In 1946 George Orwell wrote a lengthy critical essay in which he both acknowledged Burnham's courage in articulating his vision and what Orwell perceived as his many errors of judgement. What catches our eye today, though, is Orwell's summary of Burnham's insight. Burnham is suggesting, according to Orwell, that: "What is now arising is a new kind of planned, centralized society which will be neither capitalist nor, in any accepted sense of the word, democratic. The rulers of this new society will be the people who effectively control the means of production: that is the business executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers, lumped together by Burnham under the name of 'managers'. These people will eliminate the old capitalist class, crush the working class, and so organize society that all power and economic privilege remain in their own hands."

We can quibble over the details — the middle class gets scant reference by Burnham because it was triumph of postwar growth and thus postdates his analysis; and the elimination of the capitalist class, like that of Keynes' rentiers is an incomplete project — but the rise of managerialism and the power of corporations is undeniable. The postwar prominence of technocracy, including the economics

profession, is also a truth foretold by Burnham. The subsequent substitution of metrics of cost/benefit and profit for the more balanced inclusion of morality as the driver of decision making in both the public and private sectors fits neatly within Burnham's narrative.

The managerial takeover of power after the neoliberal revolution, along with its technocratic capture of policy making, marks the transition from one part of our era of growth to another.

History was given a new direction. Words like 'liberty' that had played such a prominent role in the early battles over distribution were repurposed to invert their meaning. The abolition of citizenry as a framework for policy making and its replacement by a specialized conception of the 'individual' is an instance of such an inversion. This new individual was set free from the state's heavy hand and allowed to express its freedom within the open marketplace. That was the sales pitch. The reality was that, thus tossed into the market and shorn of protection, each individual was a hapless target for those with the power to shape events.

Nor was this new individualism accompanied by any compensation for the loss of protection. In Jacob Hacker's evocative phrase a great risk shift took place. The risk landed on the shoulders of newly 'empowered' individuals who, at no time, were given the requisite resources to endure that risk. So they sank. Steadily. Slowly. They were engulfed by, or trapped within, their new liberty. Their lives became ever more shrunken as the costs of operating in the marketplace were dictated and established by those with the resources to offset the risk.

An easily understood example of this shift is the stagnation in the average person's wages throughout the extent of the neoliberal era. Costs rose. Wages didn't. Living standards either froze or declined.

While we might be disappointed by this turn of events, we ought not be surprised.

The extraction of rents by elites is an historic norm. Every time an elite ability to protect its privileged access to rents is threatened, by war, by disease, by arbitrary rule, or by, in our age, democracy, it finds a way to reconstitute itself. Our notables — Burnham's managers and technocrats — having established their intellectual and social authority, steadily extracted disproportionate portions of the wealth being created by growth. But the machinery of wealth creation started to feel the burden of the resultant growing inequality as resources piled up unused and misallocated to excess saving by the new rentier class. In one of histories regular ironies, the search by an elite for ever more suffocated the engine that produces it.

Rent extraction on the scale of the past few decades reduces productivity growth by suppressing demand and consequently investment. That, in turn, reduces the degrees of freedom our elite has for the continuance of power sharing, so it tightens its grip on the state to protect its rents. The illusion of democracy was a victim of this shrinkage. Pre-modern social structures emerged even within what appeared to be a modern social setting. For instance, plutocrats became more overt in their purchase of power. The postwar years of rapid growth and upward mobility were replaced by a reversion to what are recognizably more traditional and static social arrangements. Inequality, both vertical in the sense of wealth and income distribution, and horizontal in the sense of great differences in social status, emerged to undermine social cohesion.

For the majority the march towards Utopia stalled.

The cultural shift in the 1980s from a broadly shared and morally determined outlook to a narrowly focused and technocratically articulated one is the underlying reason we currently wallow in so much unease.

Of course, there were elements of the radical shift before the final neoliberal takeover. The rising armory of method and theories in both economics and management science in recent decades have their roots in the early postwar years. They share both hubris and origins. The emergence of organizational theories during the effort to win World War Two served as a basis for their peacetime repurposing into social experimentation. Economics became performative — it sought not just to understand but to construct economies. Management became scientific rather than administrative. Concepts like efficiency and maximization crept into everyday thought. This cult of efficiency flourished despite an obvious flaw: nothing as open as a dynamic economy or business can ever be considered efficient. The flux destroys the data necessary for measurement. We can never pin down the efficient state. Indeed the entire premiss of growth sits upon the persistence of change, uncertainty, and, ultimately, ignorance of the details necessary for the calculation of efficiency. Alternatively put: efficiency demands stasis, which in turn ends growth, and encourages weakness in the face of endemic environmental uncertainty. Yet efficiency remains at the heart of both economic and business theory and practice.

The capture of business thought by the same neoliberal tendencies that undid economics is one of the greatest errors of our time. It is also one of the most ironic. On the one hand students of business are taught the intricacies of markets and price theory. And on the other, perhaps in the very next class, they are taught how to defeat the market by executing strategies that build moats around potential sources of rents. No one seems to notice the contradiction. Perhaps it doesn't matter, after all our notables adhere to free markets in name only. Free markets are places to consign the fates of the weak. Those with power are able to avoid, or perhaps void, the economics textbook.

The one truly big idea that conjoins economics with business theory is the notion of shareholder value. Built on the same foundation as modern economics and advocated by the more ideologically inclined amongst the early proselytizer's of antistate economics — Milton Friedman being the most obvious example — shareholder value has been the cause of most of the damage done to the middle class during the neoliberal era.

It spawned a whole array of associated management techniques all targeted to give management methods of extracting so-called efficiency from otherwise presumably inefficient processes. The notion of core competency is a prime example. As articulated by Prahalad and Hamel it provided an intellectual underpinning for the elimination from within a business firm of activities deemed peripheral. It morphed into the foundation of all outsourcing. It provided the basis for the gig economy. There is a straight line connecting core competency with the precarious nature of a gig worker shorn of the retirement, healthcare, and other benefits afforded within the old corporate framework. The worker bears the cost, while the rentier reaps the reward. Hardly a modern notion but a reversion of the postwar experience also worthy of Camus' scorn.

Likewise agency theory became the method for 'aligning management and investor interests'. In reality it was the impetus behind the upsurge in compensation for executive management. The alignment of management and investors now manifests itself in the gigantic differential between the pay for executives and the pay for workers. That differential has exploded in recent decades and is hard to justify with respect to business performance. Its basis in classical incentive-theoretic economics is clear. Its impact on wage inequality is even more clear.

But that was the purpose. Burnham's managerial elite has developed, courtesy of economics, an array of ideas that are wheeled out to explain, if not fully justify, the absurdity of the inequalities business has imposed on society.

All this so-called advance in theory within both economics and management ought to have produced, surely, a sharpening of results. The annual flood of well-trained and highly educated graduates into the economy and into the academic ranks has not produced concomitant results. If anything, conditions are worse. We have a surfeit of talent that appears to have no impact on aggregate results. Are we over-educated or is our knowledge simply incorrect?

The structural transformation of the economy on the back of technological innovation and the globalization of capital certainly benefitted the managerial class. Our notables did well. Inequalities soared. Hacker's risk shift reduced the risk borne by business and placed it squarely on those least able to carry the load. Profits rose and wages fell as shares of national income.

The outsized income flowing into the hands of our elite allowed it to purchase influence in the judiciary and media. The notables completed their takeover by dominating the framing of political discourse. They now ensure legislation benefits them. They rig the game to their own advantage. The best example of this is in the American tax code which is a classic example of bias. Taxes imposed on capital are less than those imposed on work. Why? Because, naturally, we need to encourage investment. So capital owners need special treatment. That it doesn't produce more investment is carefully ignored. Likewise, entitlement has become a word of a scorn typifying the dependency on state aid that the elite tells us is a demoralizing and enervating force that undermines economic energy.

It is here that the elimination of effective citizenry via the abolition of society has its greatest effect. Citizens are, indeed, entitled to the benefits of society. Take away citizenry as an effective concept and it becomes easy to eliminate its associated entitlement. This is why the flow of tax abatements and credits that pour into the pockets of the rentier class are classified as incentives rather than mere entitlements. Rentiers are adept at doublespeak.

Ultimately though, the regime our notables put in place subsequent to the neoliberal revolution failed itself. Its greed consumed the economy's ability to maintain the rate of growth needed to stem discontent. Worse, the myopic and arrogant self-indulgence of the managerial class, by shortening the horizon of focus, failed to adjust to the onrush of a variety of events each of which threatens the hold of the notables on society. At the very least such events as demographic mix and aging, climate change, and the transition into a predominantly service based economy all threaten to destabilize the status quo. These are issues that our elite has no answers to — it has too narrow and self-serving a perspective to create novel responses to systemic crises such as these. Having gutted state capacity in order to cripple it as a countervailing power it now needs to deploy it. In the aftermath of the Great Recession it became obvious that the elite was intellectually bankrupt. Instead, its self-justification and rent-seeking have been on naked display ever since.

The neoliberal era ended with a resounding thud back in 2008. The complete lack of accountability for the damage done to society as a whole sent an equally resounding message to the middling people who had been neglected by the notables — who, naturally, bailed themselves out nicely and justified their actions as necessary in the public interest.

But the public noticed that the public interest appeared not to include most of the public. It did, however, include the managers of the very banks whose incompetency created the disaster. This realization added to the indignity heaped upon the vast majority of people through the decades of corporate

domination. Populist politics started to destabilize what was left of the democratic institutions the plutocrats had not already dismantled. Voters started to express anger that the government had not been working in the interests of the average person for decades. Rebellion began. The radical center failed to deliver to the majority. It is questionable whether it ever intended to do as much. Nonetheless, it failed. Now there must be a reckoning and reconstruction of a true center. What that is remains to be seen.

It is a truism to assert that harmony within a society must be based upon a combination of both mutual respect and dignity of existence. Prosperity can underpin social cohesion too, but respect and dignity are essential. Growth, and our single minded pursuit of it, certainly provided prosperity. The abundance of modern societies is unquestioned. It is the attack on respect and dignity inherent in the blatant rent extraction and lack of empathy for the consequences for their actions that has led our elite to earn the antipathy of the majority of people.

The recent suspicion of technocracy — for instance resistance to measures to cope with the pandemic — by average voters is telling. Having built reputations on their technocratic skills it can hardly be a shock when, as now, people realize that the ship is not right. Those technocratic skills apparently were inadequate. Why believe in them? Did they deliver shared prosperity? Did they control healthcare or education costs? Did they provide an abundance of decent jobs? Did they support average families throughout the technological transitions that have become so normal?

Shareholder value lurks at the center of the web of deceit woven by the elite to protect and justify its privilege. It preaches one creed and lives another. It has divided society. It has produced enormous financial insecurity even in the heart of historic prosperity.

Brad DeLong argues that the modern corporation was an essential innovation in the march towards Utopia. Production, distribution, and invention all needed to be organized. The marketplace as theorized by economists cannot cope with the complexities of such organization. It can only handle the simplest of activities — transaction. Beyond that, as Coase hinted at decades ago, some other form of organization becomes necessary. So DeLong is correct. Corporations perform a socially vital activity. They are the channel through which the flood of prosperity is guided. That places them into the center of power. As Burnham recognized, that creates an incentive to accumulate and deploy that power for selfish reasons. The threat of the misuse of that power went unnoticed by the economists and management gurus of the mid twentieth century. They ignored the work of Galbraith and others who warned of the risks. They ignored Burnham too. Intent on formality and modeling, they dropped power as a skewing factor. They promoted calculation and method over morality and unity as bases of analysis. By so doing they contributed to the inversion wherein the innocent have to justify themselves and the guilty do not.

Camus' disillusionment with what he saw as the nihilism of his era caused him to define and to encourage an act of rebellion articulated, ultimately, in an arrow surging high and hopeful as a defiant emblem of freedom untethered and restored.

That arrow now sits somewhere in a distant field ignored and hidden from common view. The hope it embodied dissipated as the corporate grip slowly stifled and reversed the gains most people had enjoyed during the immediate postwar years. Dissipated, yes, but not lost. We exist now in an interregnum. Voices as disparate as Metternich and Herzen have noted the disjunction that exists between the end of one era and the commencement of the next.

Returning to Gramsci: the morbidity we must reject is the deadweight of our notables and their technocratic enablers in academia, consulting, think tanks, and the so-called professions. They are too heavy a load to bear. To succeed we must all be truth tellers. We must acknowledge what is, not what we wish it is. To restore a semblance of democratic dignity we must first accept the reality of the struggle we must undertake. We must be relentless in exposing the hidden centers of power that distort the expression of the liberal ideal by couching it in an excessive and unrealistic individualism at the cost of collective solidarity.

Nothing as complex as the machinery of our modern economy can be viewed as a simple aggregation of individuals. Such a view is naive and dangerous. It is the emergence and nurturing of diverse and mutually reinforcing liberties that we must cherish the most, not the divisive version that opens us all up to exploitation by those with the power to do so. The sources and uses of power must be incorporated into our understanding of economies. Most of all it is the recognition that so-called economic liberty — the only concern of the neoliberals — cannot exist for the majority without the consideration of these other forms of liberty. We must rebalance society in order to return to the path towards Utopia. That implies confronting, somehow, our elite to undo its stranglehold.

We must assert our right to exist on our terms. We do exist. All of us. And by existing we rebel. The wrongdoers, not the innocent, must justify themselves. Camus' arrow must fly once more.

Author contact: pacr@icloud.com

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