

# FRIDAY MORNING: IT'S FIVE SOMEWHERE



[image: Sarah G via Flickr]

This week has been really long. Painfully dragged out. Mid-week snowstorm probably didn't help. But here we are, survivors with another week and yet another Presidential campaign debate under our belts.

I'll keep it short and snappy given how much ugly we've been through.

## **Your information security is only as good as the stupidest person on staff**

"Hello, FBI? I'm new here and I don't have my code. Can you help a girl out?" No joke, that's about all it took for one unnamed hacktivist to get inside the FBI. And yet the FBI demands backdoors into all mobile devices. I can't even...

## **Meet your new immortal overlord: Your self-driving car**

This first graf scares the crap out of me:

The computer algorithms that pilot self-driving cars may soon be considered the functional equivalents of human drivers. That's the early opinion of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration—and so begins our slow-burn acquiescence in the battle of man versus machine.

And not even for the reasons that PC World's editor-in-chief Jon Phillips outlines in his editorial. If a governmental agency recognizes an algorithm as equal to a human, how long before humans are actually subordinate to artificial intelligence? It's bad enough corporations – legal constructs – have nearly the same rights as humans and can live forever. This needs to die on the vine right now – especially since Google is ramping up hiring for its line of self-driving cars.

#### **Speaking of Google...**

- Google's phasing out support for ads using Adobe Flash. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Flash can DIAF.
- Compliance with EU "right to be forgotten" expanding. Too bad U.S. hasn't evolved enough to enact similar legislation.
- Google sees TV experience differently – but it may not be a set-top box. (Why should it be when Chromecast works like a charm?) New approaches may address some of FCC chair's concerns about cable network's black box lock-in.

#### **Busy week on Zika front**

- CDC Director told House Foreign Affairs subcommittee yesterday that Chikungunya virus may model Zika's spread
- CDC's Chief Entomologist

offered 'best guess', Zika transmissions inside U.S. will look more like dengue – relatively small numbers.

- Howler monkeys dying off; is Zika virus involved?
- U-W to research Zika in monkeys; VA-Tech switching gears to examine immune response to Zika
- U-T Galveston working on Zika vaccine, while U-T Austin studies *Aedes aegypti* mosquito in Zika's spread

**Media commentator Douglas Rushkoff interviewed on digital society**

*You left Facebook in 2013. How is that working out for you?*

Professionally, I'm thinking it may be good for one's career and business to be off social media altogether. Chris Anderson was wrong. "Free" doesn't lead to anything but more free. Working for free isn't leverage to do a talk for loads of money; now they even want you to talk for free. What am I supposed to do? Join YouTube and get three cents for every 100,000 views of my video? That is crap; that is insane! ...

A worthwhile read, give it a whirl when the dust begins to settle.

Here's hoping the weekend moves as slowly as this week did. *Huli pau!*

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# TUESDAY MORNING: THE FAT ONE YOU'VE AWAITED

Mardi Gras. The day before Ash Wednesday. Fat Tuesday. In Brazil, it's Carnival – plenty of parades with costumed dancers and samba. In New Orleans, it means king cake, beads, and more parades, but here in Michigan, it means pączki. No parades in the snow, just an icy trek to the Polish bakery for some decadent sweets we get but once a year.

I'm still drafting this, too much stuff to weed through this morning. I'll update as I write. Snag a cup of joe and a pączki while you wait. Make mine raspberry filled, please!

## **Economic indicators say "Maybe, Try Again"**

Asian and European stock markets were a mess this morning. There's no sign of an agreement between OPEC nations on production and pricing, which may lead to yet more floundering in the stock market. Yet one indicator – truck tonnage on the roads – doesn't show signs of a recession in the U.S.

## **UK court cases topsy-turvy: LIBOR Six and a secret trial**

- UK can't hold the LIBOR Six bankers accountable for their part in the 2008 economic crisis because the prosecution was sloppy. It's pretty bad when a defense attorney asks if the prosecution was "making this up as they go along."
- The article's first graf is a warning:

*Warning: this article omits information that the Guardian*

*and other news organisations are currently prohibited from publishing.*

The case, *R v Incedal and Rarmoul-Bouhadjar*, continues to look like a star chamber, with very little information available to the public about the case. The accused have been charged and served time, but the media has been unable to freely access information about the case, and their appeal has now been denied. A very ugly precedent for a so-called free country.

#### **Facebook: French trouble, and no free internet in India**

- Shocked, SHOCKED, I am: French regulators told Facebook its handling of users data didn't sufficiently protect their privacy. The Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés (CNIL) told the social media platform it has three months to stop sharing users' data with U.S. facilities for processing. CNIL also told Facebook to stop tracking non-Facebook users without warning them.
- The Indian government told Facebook thanks, but no thanks to its Free Basics offering, a so-called free internet service. The service ran afoul of net

neutrality in that country as it implicitly discouraged users from setting up sites outside Facebook's platform. Many users did not understand there was a difference between Facebook and the internet as a whole. Mr. Zuckerberg really needs to study the meaning of colonialism, and how it might pertain to the internet in emerging markets.

#### **Boy kicked out of school because of his DNA**

This is a really sad story not resolved by the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA). The boy has cystic fibrosis; his parents informed the school on his paperwork, as they should in such cases. But because of the risks to the boy or his siblings with similar genes, the boy was asked to leave. GINA, unfortunately, does not protect against discrimination in education, only in healthcare and employment. This is a problem Congress should take up with an amendment to GINA. No child should be discriminated against in education because of their genes over which they have no control, any more than a child should be discriminated against because of their race, gender identity, or sexuality.

All right, get your party on, scarf down the last of your excess sweets, for tomorrow is sackcloth and ashes. I can hardly wait for the sugar hangover to come.

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# ON PLURALISM, BERNIE SANDERS, AND THE FIGHT FOR 15

In one of the hot-take pieces on the Democratic primary many people are talking about today, Jonathan Chait – fresh off being certified as a wonk by Paul Krugman – distinguishes between what he calls Hillary Clinton’s “pluralist” approach and Bernie Sanders’ “statist” vision.

Sanders did not so much dispute the efficacy of Dodd-Frank as to broaden the question. His fixation with Wall Street is not systemic risk – i.e., the chance that another crash will trigger an economic meltdown. He frames Wall Street as a problem of political economy, not economy. Wall Street is so big and rich that it is inherently dangerous, and will by its nature corrupt the political system.

Clinton does not believe that. Her political ideal is what some political scientists have called “pluralism.” A pluralist politics venerates the careful balancing of competing interests. It is okay to bring business to the bargaining table as long as there is also a place for labor, environmentalists, consumer advocates, and other countervailing interests. Clinton’s Democratic Party, and Obama’s, is one in which pluralist agreements struck important progress not only in financial reform but also health care, public investment, green energy, and other priorities.

Sanders does not completely reject the products of these pluralist compromises. (He grudgingly accepts them as worthwhile, piecemeal steps.) What he rejects is the political model that treats pluralism as the normal model of

political action. Sanders believes the interest of the public is not divided, it is united, and only the corrupt influence of big business has thwarted it. He consequently vows to smash its power through a combination of a mass upsurge in political activism and campaign-finance reform.

[snip]

A Democratic Party as monolithically statist as the modern Republican Party is anti-government – one in which any defense of free markets or business is dismissed – would look very different than anything within American historical experience. After decades of this being taken for granted, it has finally become necessary to defend moderation as a governing creed.

Let's ignore how Chait caricatures Sanders for the moment, warning of an awful "statist" Democratic party in which "any defense of free markets or business is dismissed," and take his view of Hillary's pluralism on its face.

In Hillary's Democratic party, citizens exercise their influence through various interest groups. There's business (presented here as a monolith), and there there's "labor, environmentalists, consumer advocates, and other countervailing interests," and together they compromise on incrementalist policy about which everyone gets a say.

That is, in fact, how the mainstream Democratic party organizes itself, and Hillary's endorsement by virtually all of the organizations deemed to represent one of these players reflects it. She does have support from business, but she also has support from League of Conservation Voters, Planned Parenthood, Human Rights Campaign, and other big organizations. (There's a breathtaking list of her endorsements here – you have to scroll down



quite a way to get to the institutional endorsements.) This is what that “establishment organization” hubbub was about: that Hillary has the support of the groups deemed to represent the various pluralities of the Democratic party.

On that list are most of the national labor unions. That’s not surprising. Hillary is (still) a favorite to win nomination and after that the general election, and all these organizations are ensuring they’ll have a seat at that pluralist table Hillary sets (though it’s not clear what the unions that backed Obama early in 2008 really got out of the deal; he certainly didn’t deliver the Employee Free Choice Act, as he had suggested he’d try to do). Union leaders endorse early because it ensures they’ll have the ear of the presumptive president.

Even there, as some have noted, a few unions that let members decide who to endorse endorsed Bernie.

But here’s the thing. Just 11.1% of workers were in a union last year. And to the extent that the Democratic party’s pluralism is mediated through these national organizations, it means the views of workers as such are largely represented by organizations they don’t have any stake in, organizations whose workers make 26% more than non-union workers. And we wonder why so few of these workers show up to vote for Democrats?

I asked Chait on Twitter where these more marginalized workers would get their seat at the pluralist table and thus far haven’t gotten an answer.

This question is probably most pressing with regards to the most exciting labor organizing in recent years: the SEIU-backed Fight for 15, which has found a model that works for franchises, and which has also notched a number of key local wins for a higher minimum wage. Importantly, where it succeeds in raising wages for an entire city, people within and outside of the movement structure will do better. But a lot

of workers who would be incorporated at the pluralist table by a push for a living minimum wage are not and would not be SEIU members.

Fight for 15 is an issue where there's a clear policy difference between Hillary, who favors raising the minimum wage to \$12 (which is not a living wage in many areas of this country) and Bernie, who enthusiastically supports the \$15 goal.

Nevertheless, SEIU endorsed Hillary. Jacobin explained the logic shortly after the endorsement.

If Clinton is going to win – because she has to win – then delaying a primary endorsement has no upside. The union would simply jeopardize its spot on Clinton's crowded list of favors to return.

But the access argument is also unpersuasive. In 2007 the union was divided internally over whether to back John Edwards or Obama. In the end the national union allowed its state affiliates to go their separate ways, only uniting behind Obama after Edwards had dropped out after the first round of primaries. Opting not to come out early for Obama didn't prevent the union from mobilizing members and resources for the general election. Similarly, SEIU will be indispensable to the Democratic nominee's chances in November, so it is hard to argue that Clinton could shut the union out.

[snip]

Comments from SEIU's largest local suggest the union is perfectly happy to see Sanders pressing Clinton to take more left-leaning positions. But the labor movement still sees the election solely through the prism of its outcome – not in terms of what Sanders's candidacy represents, or makes possible.

That narrow electoralism could end up harming Fight for 15 – not just the union’s most important campaign, but arguably the most important labor battle happening today. SEIU’s decision to provide the financial largesse for Fight for 15 comes from the indisputably correct observation that unless the labor movement can bring millions of low-wage workers into its fold, organized labor is scheduled for expiry.

Yet before the endorsement announcement, SEIU President Mary Kay Henry told *Al Jazeera* that though the union is expecting “candidates up and down the ticket who are willing to get in the streets and champion this demand,” support for a \$15 minimum wage is not a “litmus test” but an “aspirational demand.”

Over the last three years, SEIU has spent tens of millions of dollars and galvanized the labor movement around an inspiring fight. It has justified this enormous expenditure to its members by correctly arguing that they won’t be able to protect and improve their own standards unless something is done to boost the wages of the worst paid workers.

But if the union actually believed it could win on this issue – if it believed it could *lead* – then a litmus test is exactly what it would be. Clinton would just have to get in line. Members and non-members have shown that they are willing to fight for \$15 and a union. What does it say to them if they now are asked to knock on doors calling for \$12 and a Clinton?

That is, Hillary’s pluralist table, which leaves little space for the overwhelming majority of workers who aren’t represented by a union, had

already dealt away the key policy platform the key voice pulling up to that table has pursued.

Partly that's a testament to the desperation of unions – that they're willing to trade their key issues even to get a seat at the table, and partly that's a testament to the lack of representation for most workers who might sit there.

But having set the table like that, there's little prospect the large numbers of workers who haven't been as active in Democratic politics of late will have much sway in face of the powerful banks who don't appear to have traded away key issues for their time with Hillary.

Notably: these lower income voters, along with the more widely noted younger voters, are precisely those whom Bernie is winning (though as the primary moves to more racially diverse states, that is expected to change).

There's a key failing in the pluralist vision painted by Chait (even taking it on its face): even to win a seat at the table, labor – and really just that fraction of workers who enjoy union representation – had already started compromising, well before the bankers even sat down for their scotch.

And no matter how this primary ends up, that's not something that's sustainable, particularly not in the wake of the financial disaster that pushed so many people closer to the edge. If Clinton is going to win with a pluralist table, there needs to be, for both electoral and social justice reasons, a seat, a lot of seats, for all the workers who have fallen by the electoral wayside in recent years. Bernie has gotten their attention. What does Hillary plan to do to keep it?

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# THURSDAY MORNING: BETTER THAN A WEEK

You know the joke: 4:30 p.m. is better than an hour away from 5:00 p.m., right? Thursday is better than a week away from the weekend. For folks traveling home for the Lunar New Year holiday in China, there are four days left to get home, and the train stations are crazy-full. But today is better than five days away from family and friends.

## **Goldman Sachs questions capitalism**

YEAH. I KNOW. I did a double-take when I read the hed on this piece. In a GS analysts' note they wrote, "There are broader questions to be asked about the efficacy of capitalism." They're freaking out because the market isn't acting the way it's supposed to, where new entrants respond to fat margins generated by first-to-market or mature producers.

I wonder how much longer it will take them to realize they killed the golden goose with their plutocratic rewards for oligopolies? How long before they realize this isn't capitalism at all?

## **Whistleblower tells Swiss (and banks) to get over themselves on whistleblowing**

Interviewed last week, former UBS banker Bradley Birkenfeld said, "We have to make some changes in Switzerland – it's long overdue ... The environment there is hostile toward people exposing corruption." Birkenfeld's remarks prod Swiss lawmakers currently at work on whistleblowing legislation. When passed, the law is not expected to offer protections employees have in the U.S. and the UK (and we know those are thin and constantly under attack). But perhaps the law will prevent cases like Nestle SA's suit against a former executive who disclosed food safety risks. That suit and another alleging a former UBS employee libeled the bank may be affected assuming the EU adopts the same approach toward whistleblowing and

corruption reduction.

### **"Computer failure" at IRS halts acceptance of tax return e-filings**

No details about the nature of the "computer failure" apart from a "hardware problem" or "hardware failure" appeared in any reports yesterday afternoon and overnight. The IRS expects to have repairs completed today to allow e-filings once again; filings already submitted are not affected.

### **FBI agent on new car purchases: entering 'wild, wild west'**

Four cybersecurity experts spoke at a meeting of the Automotive Press Association in Detroit yesterday, one of whom was an FBI cyber squad agent. The feedback from the speakers wasn't reassuring, apart from the observation by a specialist from a start-up automotive cyber security firm that they did not know of a "real world incident where someone's vehicle was attacked and taken over remotely by someone hacking into the vehicle." A lawyer whose firm handles automotive industry cyber threats undercut any feeling of relief with an observation that judges aren't savvy about cyber crime on vehicles. I think I'll stick with my old school car for a while longer.

### **The Repair Coalition formed to protect the 'Right to Repair'**

Speaking of old school car, I hope I can continue to get it repaired in the future without worrying about lawsuits for copyright violations. We've already seen tractor owners in conflict with John Deere over repairs, and exemptions to copyright for repair have been granted only after tedious and costly effort, and then to the farmer only, not to their mechanic. Hence the emergence of The Repair Coalition, which takes aim at repealing the DMCA's Section 1201 – terms in it make it illegal to "circumvent a technological measure that effectively controls access to a work protected under [the DMCA]."

It's long been an American ethic to "Use it up,

wear it out, make do, or do without," an ethic we need to restore to primacy if we are to reduce our CO2 footprint. Repairing rather than tossing goods is essential to our environmental health, let alone a necessity when wages for lower income workers remain stagnant.

That's a wrap – I could go on but now we're better than a day away from Friday. Whew.

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## **THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM PART 5: ARTISTIC AND INTELLECTUAL ELITES AND THE RISE OF FASCISM**

Previous posts in this series:

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 1:  
Introduction.

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 2:  
Antisemitism

The Origins of Totalitarianism: Interlude on the  
Tea Party

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 3:  
Superfluous Capital and Superfluous People

The Origins of Totalitarianism: Interlude on The  
Commons

Capitalism Versus The Social Commons (published  
at Naked Capitalism; discusses privatization  
using Rosa Luxemburg theory)

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 4: Humanity  
under Totalitarianism

## The Origins of Totalitarianism: Interlude on Right-Wing Authoritarianism

Arendt uses the term “elites” to mean the highly trained and educated intellectuals in Germany and Austria, and artists and composers and writers who together make up the intelligentsia. She begins by describing the breakdown of the class structure in those countries, “...when the smugness of spurious respectability gave way to anarchic despair....” The elites hated the pretensions of the bourgeoisie, hated the class structures they imposed to support their positions and oppress the rest of the people, and hated the bogus morality they proclaimed in public and ignored in private. For decades, they assaulted the bourgeoisie, sometimes with satire, sometimes more directly, with attacks against their conventional religion and philosophy. They welcomed the First World War, hoping that it would wipe out the existing culture. After the war they rejected restoration of the prior structures.

Arendt attributes two desires to individual members of the post-war elites: the desire for anonymity, for losing themselves in the midst of the people; and a yearning for violence to wipe out any remaining influences of the old bourgeoisie morality and respectability.

These people felt attracted to the pronounced activism of totalitarian movements, to their curious and only seemingly contradictory insistence on both the primacy of sheer action and the overwhelming force of sheer necessity. This mixture corresponded precisely to the war experience of the “front generation,” to the experience of constant activity within the framework of overwhelming fatality. P. 331.

The violence of the totalitarian movements was attractive to these elites precisely because it seemed to be a “...kind of philosophy through which to express frustration, resentment, and



blind hatred, a kind of political expressionism which used bombs to express oneself, which watched delightedly the publicity given to resounding deeds and was absolutely willing to pay the price of life for having succeeded in forcing the recognition of one's existence on the normal strata of society." P. 332 Arendt refers to this as a temporary alliance between the mob and the elites. In Part 3, we saw the distinction between the mob and the masses. The former are the unemployable, who at least shared some of the morality and attitudes of the class to which they once belonged or aspired to. The elites were thrilled to see the mob attack respectability, for example, when the steel barons were forced to accept the housepainter Hitler.

Arendt claims that the elites believed that all of the theories they were raised to accept had failed utterly and spectacularly and had caused enormous damage. Even the bourgeoisie had only the public appearance of morality. In private their morals were those of the mob. It thrilled the elites to see the academic theories that had nurtured them, theories like dialectical materialism, replaced with crackpot ideas and conspiracy theories. In this atmosphere it was wonderful to shove the faces of the bourgeoisie in their hypocrisy, and to express the anger and cruelty hidden behind their public faces. There were no limits to this decadent idea, as the French writer Celine showed in his *Notes for a Massacre*, in which he proposed to kill all the Jews.

Andre Gide was publicly delighted in the pages of the *Nouvelle Revue Frangaise*, not of course because he wanted to kill the Jews of France, but because he rejoiced in the blunt admission of such a desire and in the fascinating contradiction between Celine's bluntness and the hypocritical politeness which surrounded the Jewish question in all respectable quarters. How irresistible the desire for the unmasking of

hypocrisy was among the elite can be gauged by the fact that such delight could not even be spoiled by Hitler's very real persecution of the Jews, which at the time of Celine's writing was already in full swing. P. 335.

The current form of this idiocy is the ranting from the Republicans about political correctness. We don't have time for political correctness, says Trump, merely speaking more frankly than his dog-whistle competition, and handing out a license to his followers to express their misogynist, homophobic, racist and other irrational hatreds.

Arendt also tells us that the elites recognized that the bourgeoisie were deeply cynical about the government. They operated it for their benefit in secret, and publicly claimed that all of their policies would benefit the rest of society. This blatant hypocrisy added to the hatred of the elites for the rich. Once they were content with the teachings of Karl Marx, who thought that the state would wither away. After WWI, that wasn't radical enough for the elites. They wanted action at the price of anarchy and violence. But when the leftists tried to overthrow the bourgeoisie and the post-WWI government, the Social Democrats sicced the right-wing Freikorps on them and killed them and their intellectual leaders, including Rosa Luxemburg.

Of course the project of dismantling the 19th Century morality and certainty of the middle classes continues today among some of our elites. Just look at the ideas about truth espoused by Richard Rorty (a follower of John Dewey), or the attacks on fundamentalist religion from Sam Harris and others, or this from the New York Times Magazine:

In person, [Rachel] Bloom comes across as someone who takes honesty to its natural conclusion. "I like deconstructing things, .... I like

cutting the legs out from under something that feels secret. Something that's like – 'Oh, breasts are sexy.' They're floppy, Jell-O-filled sacks! In high school, I was once watching the surgery channel and ended up watching a breast reduction. The inside of a breast is disgusting. It looks like the inside of a couch."

Arendt's elites have been playing this game of *épater le bourgeois*, shock the middle class, for decades, and there is no end in sight. It's a fun game, with no physical violence, and no real effect on politics or public life. Today, it's pretty much self-neutering. Elite discussions of performance art or post-structuralism are irrelevant to the lives of practically everyone.

There are many lessons in Arendt's story for the Sanders wing of the Democratic Party and for Trump Republicans. Among them is the simple fact that the rich and powerful people will use every tool to preserve their power and wealth.

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## THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM: INTERLUDE ON RIGHT- WING AUTHORITARIANISM

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The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 4: Humanity under Totalitarianism

The concept of authoritarian personality was introduced in 1950 in a book by Theodore Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brusnik, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*. They were looking into the question whether there was something about Germans that made them unusually susceptible to Nazism, which an important concern in the wake of WWII. Their theory is based on Freudian ideas about the personality, and was heavily criticized for this and other reasons.

Hannah Arendt makes one oblique reference to this work in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

The Leader principle does not establish a hierarchy in the totalitarian state any more than it does in the totalitarian movement; authority is not filtered down from the top through all intervening layers to the bottom of the body politic as is the case in authoritarian regimes. The factual reason is that there is no hierarchy without authority and that, in spite of the numerous misunderstandings concerning the so-called "authoritarian personality," the principle of authority is in all important respects diametrically opposed to that of totalitarian domination. Quite apart from its origin in Roman history, authority, no matter in what form,

always is meant to restrict or limit freedom, but never to abolish it. Totalitarian domination, however, aims at abolishing freedom, even at eliminating human spontaneity in general, and by no means at a restriction of freedom no matter how tyrannical. P. 404-5.

This marks the difference between a totalitarian movement and a totalitarian regime: in the latter, all semblance of human nature is subordinated to the will of the leader.

Bob Altemeyer began researching authoritarian personalities in 1965 and worked out a somewhat different approach which he published in a 1981 book *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*. In 2006, he wrote a layman's version *The Authoritarians*, and made it available on the internet for free. Here's a link. He says there are authoritarian followers and authoritarian leaders.

Authoritarian followers usually support the established authorities in their society, such as government officials and traditional religious leaders. Such people have historically been the "proper" authorities in life, the time-honored, entitled, customary leaders, and that means a lot to most authoritarians. Psychologically these followers have personalities featuring:

- 1) a high degree of submission to the established, legitimate authorities in their society;
- 2) high levels of aggression in the name of their authorities; and
- 3) a high level of conventionalism.

This idea has taken hold among liberals and leftists, perhaps in part because of John Dean and his book *Conservatives without Conscience*, which is based in part on Altemeyer's work. A common explanation of the rise of Trumpism is

that his biggest supporters are right-wing authoritarians. A recent poll conducted by Matthew MacWilliams for UMass Amherst included a few questions designed to test for authoritarianism. The results were plain to him:

I've found a single statistically significant variable predicts whether a voter supports Trump—and it's not race, income or education levels: It's authoritarianism.

That's right, Trump's electoral strength—and his staying power—have been buoyed, above all, by Americans with authoritarian inclinations. And because of the prevalence of authoritarians in the American electorate, among Democrats as well as Republicans, it's very possible that Trump's fan base will continue to grow.

MacWilliams probably meant right-wing authoritarianism which is Altemeyer's term, and which is well-defined. For a thorough description, see this post by the excellent Paul Rosenberg or this one by John Dean.

Like most personality traits, everyone has some share of it, and some a lot more than others. Here's an on-line version of an instrument for measuring one aspect of this trait. Even if you don't want to answer, it's interesting to read the questions and think about the issues they raise. Here's a description of the questions on MacWilliams' poll:

These questions pertain to child-rearing: whether it is more important for the voter to have a child who is respectful or independent; obedient or self-reliant; well-behaved or considerate; and well-mannered or curious. Respondents who pick the first option in each of these questions are strongly authoritarian.

I think it's important to avoid treating personality as permanently fixed, for example, to say simply that some people are just authoritarian and other aren't. I think personalities can change, and that at different times and in different circumstances, personality traits vary in their influence over our behavior. Take another look at the poll questions, and ask yourself whether your views on those questions have changed over time. Before I had children, I would have answered the poll questions unequivocally, but now I see the value of both sides of the choice. If I were answering them on a scale, I'd be closer to the middle than I would have been before I had kids. This accords with Altemeyer's findings. P. 67 et seq. It's also worth noting that the questions Altemeyer and other researchers use are more nuanced, cover more ground, and use a sliding scale, as in the online version I linked above.

There are other reasons people might differ on those questions. Perhaps people think they are doing their children a favor by choosing to raise them to be respectful, obedient, well-behaved and well-mannered. If you are trying to find a job in this lousy economy, those might seem like pretty good goals to set for your kids. Of course, they'd miss all the creative jobs, but think of all the wonderful and high-paying jobs there are in hospital administration right now.

Adorno et al. suggest that the social environment plays a large role in the expression of this personality trait. I can't find anything like that in Altemeyer's online book, but it seems right to me. There have always been authoritarian people, and there isn't any reason to think there are more or fewer today than in prior times. I've known plenty, but their authoritarianism operated only on a small scale, aggravating their employees with nit-picking comments and derogatory language, or being brown-nosers, exercising exaggerated control over petty matters, lording it over their kids, and generally getting in the way of smooth

cooperation.

Most people probably have mild cases of authoritarianism, or are mildly unauthoritarian, and generally that seems to work pretty well. Suddenly it seems as though the constraints are gone, and people sound more and more aggressive about their authoritarian issues. People say this is a Republican problem, but as MacWilliams notes a significant number of Democrats apparently support Trump as well. Presumably these are Democrats with authoritarian leanings. In the post WWI period across Europe there was a breakdown in the social and institutional structures that contained authoritarianism, which turned out very badly. Altemeyer is worried that the authoritarians are a grave danger to democracy. P. 2.

I think the important question is not whether many Trump supporters are authoritarians, it's whether the circumstances facing a many people encourage acting out authoritarian impulses at a national political level. That's a good reason to look at Arendt's description of the rise of the Nazis as I did in Part 4. And take a look at this interview with Rick Perlstein. Perhaps we can learn something useful.

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## **TUESDAY MORNING: CHASING THE CLOUDS AWAY**

Hope by this afternoon all the major thoroughfares are clear and transportation nearly back to normal along the east coast. You'd think by now we'd have developed and installed self-maintaining highways that melt ice and snow, right?

For now, let's dig.



### **A former Goldman Sachs exec parts company with CenturyLink**

They called it “creating an environment that was unproductive,” and maybe it was – a diversified telecom organization may not be a great fit for an investment banker, leading to some less-than-productive discussions. But a nearly unanimous vote said Joseph Zimmer, retired GS exec, should not apply for re-election to CenturyLink’s board of directors. Wonder if the rumored-but-not-completed acquisition of Rackspace had anything to do with this rocky situation?

### **Retail Mixed Bag: Wal-Mart retrenches, Staples rethinks, Shoes.com kicks butt**

The Arkansas-based retailer is closing up its 102 Wal-Mart Express stores, as well as a few of its full-sized stores. Were the smaller stores simply too much overhead, or were they cannibalizing sales from larger stores, or did Amazon finally cut into Wal-Mart’s sales enough that Wal-Mart needed to reduce?

Staples, one of the two largest big box office supply retailers, changed up some of its senior management while indicating it may back out of its proposed merger with the other mega office supply retailer, Office Depot. The merger has not received approval yet from the USDOT. This unresolved deal may be a bigger liability in terms of expense by now, especially when all retail sales have slowed down.

Shoes.com is looking for cash to make some acquisitions. This Canadian online shoe retailer is bucking the retail trend with a strong uptick in sales in spite of stiff competition from Zappos and Amazon.

All three retailers mirror a turn-down in consumption – even Shoes.com. If retail was doing well, there’d be less need to close brick-and-mortar stores or buy up market share.

### **Six GOP Senators suck up to ISPs while annoying broadband users**

Quel surprise: a handful of GOP Senators sent a letter to the FCC saying that standard broadband

speeds are arbitrary, and most users don't need the current baseline speed.

I'd like to know why some tech media won't name names. Fortunately, The Hill listed the signatories. Senators Roy Blunt (MO), Steve Daines (MT), Deb Fischer (NE), Cory Gardner (CO), Ron Johnson (WI) and Roger Wicker (MS) wrote,

"Looking at the market for broadband applications, we are aware of few applications that require download speeds of 25 Mbps ... Netflix, for example, recommends a download speed of 5 Mbps to receive high-definition streaming video, and Amazon recommends a speed of 3.5 Mbps."

The stupid, it burns almost as much as the visible corporate whoring. Like nobody in their world has multiple users in a household sharing service or online gamers or emerging technology which does need increasingly higher speeds. Hope these folks aren't on committees for cybersecurity issues – wait, what? Every one of these six dipschitz is on the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet. *~screaming into pillow~*

I can't with this. I must change gears or go insane. Keep the wheels on the road, kids.

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## **MR. PRESIDENT: TRUMP'S VOTERS ARE CHANGING REAGAN'S**

# TERMS OF DEBATE

A lot of people are talking about this comment from Barack Obama on the Democratic primary.

**GLENN THRUSH:** I mean, when you watch this, what do you – do you see any elements of what you were able to accomplish in what Sanders is doing?

**PRESIDENT OBAMA:** Well, there's no doubt that Bernie has tapped into a running thread in Democratic politics that says: Why are we still constrained by the terms of the debate that were set by Ronald Reagan 30 years ago? You know, why is it that we should be scared to challenge conventional wisdom and talk bluntly about inequality and, you know, be full-throated in our progressivism? And, you know, that has an appeal and I understand that.

I think that what Hillary presents is a recognition that translating values into governance and delivering the goods is ultimately the job of politics, making a real-life difference to people in their day-to-day lives. I don't want to exaggerate those differences, though, because Hillary is really idealistic and progressive. You'd have to be to be in, you know, the position she's in now, having fought all the battles she's fought and, you know, taken so many, you know, slings and arrows from the other side. And Bernie, you know, is somebody who was a senator and served on the Veterans' Committee and got bills done. And so the—

For example, Greg Sargent argues this represents Obama siding with Hillary's more "realistic" approach to policy.

Obama is basically trying to pour cold water on the loftiness of Sanders'

argument, by nodding to the “appeal” of promising another transformative moment, while suggesting that Clinton’s more constrained view of what can be “delivered” is more realistic, and that this is actually an attribute that recommends her for the presidency.

I’m struck, though, by Obama’s description of what makes Hillary more “realistic:” the terms of debate that Reagan set 35 years ago.

He’s making that argument, of course, in a year where Reagan’s party has utterly failed to sell its voters on any of the insider candidates for the president: especially not the son of Reagan’s Vice President. This is a year when what once got called Reagan Democrats are supporting a loudly racist protectionist, Donald Trump.

A lot of people are ignoring this fact, and failing to consider what it means for this election and potentially even for “reality” in its aftermath. Indeed, a lot of Republicans are rationalizing supporting Trump over Ted Cruz based on their claim that Trump doesn’t have any ideology, ignoring that Trump espouses economic views that largely conflict with the neoliberal doctrine of both mainstream Republicans and Democrats.

The growing likelihood that Trump will win the nomination and run on his protectionist policies won’t change what incumbents get reelected in the House – and therefore the likelihood that, if a Democrat does win, any legislative agenda will be bottled up in the Congress. But it will change what the Republican party claims to support, and the expectations its voters have of it.

Indeed, one of the only times anyone in this race was able to get Trump to change his public stance came when Bernie Sanders called him on his claim that wages were too low in this country.

Donald Trump, billionaire Republican presidential frontrunner, has changed his mind about wages: Americans aren't earning enough. He's also not keen on Wall Street. The shift has Trump on a collision course with Democrat Bernie Sanders – while oddly agreeing with many of his points.

"Wages in are [sic] country are too low, good jobs are too few, and people have lost faith in our leaders. We need smart and strong leadership now!" Trump tweeted on Monday.

[snip]

"[T]axes too high, wages too high, we're not going to be able to compete against the world. I hate to say it, but we have to leave [the minimum wage] the way it is," Trump said at the time. "People have to go out, they have to work really hard and have to get into that upper stratum. But we cannot do this if we are going to compete with the rest of the world. We just can't do it."

Sanders, a senator from Vermont and self-described socialist, used those comments to criticize Trump while appearing on CBS Face the Nation on Sunday.

"This is a guy who does not want to raise minimum wage," he said of Trump. "In fact, he has said that wages in America are too high."

Trump lashed back at Sanders, tweeting: "[Bernie Sanders]—who blew his campaign when he gave Hillary a pass on her e-mail crime, said that I feel wages in America are too high. Lie!"

There's a reason Bernie's attack worked and the feeble attacks launched thus far at Trump from the right have not: because Trump needs to

promise the non-college educated white voters who are the key to his popularity that he will improve their lives, and while they may not be college educated they're not so dumb as to believe they need a pay cut.

Of course, the same dynamic that has made Trump such a strong candidate also drives the willingness of voters to support a socialist. Bernie just offers a different solution to the economic woes that 35 years of cuts have brought.

A substantial and very motivated part of the electorate, on both the right and left, is telling pollsters Reagan's rules have failed. Particularly in the face of a Trump candidacy, Democrats will have to decide whether they want to use that as an opportunity to free themselves of those terms of debate, or take ownership of them moving forward.

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## **GOVERNOR SNYDER: YOU WERE NOT HIRED TO BE JERRY LEWIS**

On Tuesday, self-described wonk Rick Snyder used much of his State of the State speech to take responsibility for poisoning Flint's children. Though by the end of the week, Snyder was limiting the extent of his responsibility because the "experts" didn't exercise "common sense." (See video [here](#).)

"The department people, the heads, were not being given the right information by the quote-unquote experts, and I use that word with great trial and tribulation because they were considered experts in terms of their background, these are career civil servants that had strong science, medical backgrounds in

terms of their research,” Snyder said. “But as a practical matter, when you look at it today and you look at their conclusions, I wouldn’t call them experts anymore.”

[snip]

This is something that we don’t consider just what one person did, let’s look at the entire cultural background of how people have been operating,” Snyder said. “Let’s get in there and rebuild the culture that understands common sense has to be part of it, taking care of our citizens has to be part of it.”

[snip]

The Republican governor added: “What’s so frustrating and makes you so angry about this situation is you have a handful of quote-unquote experts who were career service people that made terrible decisions in my view and we have to live with the consequences with that. They work for me, so I accept that responsibility.”

It’s a very curious argument for a guy who – still! – gets treated as someone who puts policy over ideology, in spite of the years of serving as Dick DeVos’ puppet approving of bad policy over and over. (In the same appearance, Snyder took credit for things President Obama’s Administration has given to Flint, including Medicaid expansion under ObamaCare, but that’s a long-standing schtick of this governor.) Effectively, a guy whose entire political gimmick is that he relies on experts is now saying those damned experts didn’t exercise enough common sense.

Yes, Governor. The experts did not exercise enough common sense.

But something else Snyder did this week drives me even crazier than his equivocation over

wonkdom, just as it became clear his particular approach to policy – especially his insistence that emergency managers can fix the pervasive problems of Michigan’s cities – had poisoned Flint’s children.

Rick Snyder channeled Jerry Lewis, the telethon guy.

In the middle of his speech – and in his website dedicated to this issue – Snyder solicited donations.

If you’d also like to aid Flint, please go to [HelpForFlint.com](http://HelpForFlint.com) to volunteer or donate. If you are a Flint resident who needs help getting the water you need, go to [HelpForFlint.com](http://HelpForFlint.com).

Hell, Snyder’s not even as competent as Jerry Lewis! Because while two of the links Snyder includes on his site go to sites dedicated to helping the people of Flint deal with this crisis – one to Greater Flint’s Community Foundation and the other to a United Way fund specifically set up to benefit Flint – Snyder’s third donate link goes to the Red Cross’ general SE MI site, such that any funds donated might go to other entirely worthy causes but not Flint.

Anyway, here’s why this has been bothering me all week.

First of all, Rick Snyder is worth something like \$200 million, and while he returns his gubernatorial salary, he brings in around \$1.9 million a year. So this is a guy making making \$36,500 a week asking people who (using the Michigan average household, not individual, income) \$48,500 a year to donate to help Flint. Your average Michigan household is doing almost twice as well as your average Flint household (average \$25,000 a year) – so it is certainly within their charitable ability to help their fellow Michigander. But clearly the kinds of donations that Rick Snyder could afford would go much further to helping Flint than the kind of donations most Michiganders could afford.



But here's the more galling thing.

We got into this position because Michigan (under a Democrat, originally, but expanded under Snyder, then reinforced after voters of Michigan rejected that approach) has decided to deal with the ills of its cities a certain way. Not only doesn't the state help out, it instead has shifted revenue sharing away from cities, which has created fiscal emergencies in many of them, which Snyder has then used to bring in state appointed "experts" to dictate to the locals what to do. The measure of those outsiders is always "fiscal responsibility," not overall well-being or even fiscal sustainability (or what some people might call "common sense"). The result is that – with the possible exception of Detroit (though even there, the human cost has been breathtaking) – city after city sells common property off and takes away services, including things like policing and ... clean water ... as a way to meet those fiscal responsibility goals. Many of the cities so treated – Flint is one of but not the only archetype – keep having serial emergencies without any solutions to the underlying problems of disinvestment and segregation.

It was only a matter of time before the state's emergency managers started doing real damage to the people living in the cities as a result (and the damage Snyder's serially experimenting and corrupt state-led schooling replacement has been at least as bad).

From my understanding, Michigan has decided to approach its cities this way for two reasons. First, segregation: Michigan is a badly segregated state (though on that count, Flint is nowhere near as bad as many cities in Michigan). And for too long, Michigan's politicians – Democratic and Republican – have shied away from sharing state resources broadly, for either services or schooling, which has meant that as white flight left cities without revenue bases and as globalization hit Michigan more generally, those cities spiraled downward. Quite

simply, the state wouldn't do what Snyder wants to Michiganders to do informally, share between the more fortunate and the less fortunate.

How bizarre is that?!?! That Snyder thinks we more fortunate Michiganders should share with the less fortunate (we should!!), but he won't use policy to make it happen?!?!? Effectively, he is suggesting the well-being of some of the state's children should be at the whim of charity, not government policy.

But the other reason Snyder pushed through his initial emergency manager law and then re-upped it after voters rejected it is to enable certain kinds of policy outcomes. The best known of those is the breaking of the unions and with it the slashing of both wages and pensions that used to provide a middle class living for many public servants. But in some cases, the ability to have an appointed manager make decisions based solely on economic responsibility has made it easier to loot those cities, a golf course here, an art museum there, much of a downtown there. And both the ideological outcome – busting the unions – and the looting have beneficiaries, people like Dick DeVos (net worth \$6.9 billion, and whose ideological goals Snyder has placed ahead of Michigan's well-being) and Quicken Loans owner Dan Gilbert (net worth \$3.7 billion). Gilbert, in particular, has benefitted coming and going, as he got to influence how properties, including foreclosures his own company owned in Detroit, got dealt with.

And of course, Snyder pushed his expanded emergency manager approach to solving the problems of cities like Flint even while he was cutting taxes for businesses like DeVos' Amway and Gilbert's Quicken.

So, even at a moment when his preferred approach to dealing with real problems of a manufacturing state like Michigan resulted in the poisoning of Flint's children, Snyder was calling for charity rather than demanding that the policy of the state ask its billionaires to invest in cities rather than looting them. (It's important to

note Grand Rapids is better off than almost any other Michigan city in two ways: it is not majority African American, and it benefits handsomely from Meijer, DeVos and fellow Amway billionaire Van Andel family investments in the city, giving us access to arts and sports opportunities most cities of our size would not have).

Which brings me to one thus far enduring mystery about the Flint crisis.

There was one moment during this crisis when Snyder asked his rich beneficiaries to pony up some charity rather than asking the middle class.

Last year, at a time when the State acknowledged there were probable carcinogens in Flint's water but still maintained any lead in the water reflect normal seasonal variation (!!), Snyder brokered the donation by a still unnamed corporation of 1,500 water filters to some faith leaders in Flint.

Dave Murray, a spokesman for Snyder, confirmed that the filters, distributed by the Concerned Pastors for Social Action, came from a "corporate donor that does not wish to be recognized but cares deeply about the community."

The donor "worked with the governor to provide 1,500 faucet filters to be distributed to city homes," Murray said in an email.

The state's involvement in the filter distribution was never publicized and pastors told The Flint Journal-MLive Tuesday, Sept. 29, that they were asked by staffers in the governor's office not to speak about it.

[snip]

"Those filters came from the governor," Poplar said. "The governor seems to be the one with the golden key" to make

something happen, she said.

Pastors involved with the giveaway of the filters, which were designed to remove total trihalomethanes (TTHM) as well as lead from water, said they accepted the condition that they not discuss the state's role in securing the equipment, said the Rev. Allen Overton.

Overton and the Rev. Alfred Harris said they thought the arrangement was odd, but did not want to jeopardize receiving the water filters, which Flint residents waited in line for and which were given away in just three hours.

Now, the most likely corporate donor, both because of its potential liability for the fouling of the Flint River and because it obviously was testing the water the city of Flint was releasing, would be GM. Though that doesn't seem to match the redactions in the emails released earlier this week. (See PDF 65)

>> On Sep 2, 2015, at 3:13 PM, Hollins, Harvey (GOV) <hollinsh@michigan.gov> wrote:  
>>  
>> As you know, [REDACTED] donated 1500 kitchen water filters for Flint residents as a way of providing added comfort amid concerns about Flint's water quality. [REDACTED] do not want any publicity or credit for the donation.  
>>  
>> The filters were delivered to the Concerned Pastors organization, who held an event yesterday to give away the filters. Residents were invited to come to a central location to pick up their filter. The Concerned Pastors targeted low income Flint residents.  
>>  
>> More than 1500 households showed up yesterday to pick up a filter; the Concerned Pastors exhausted the donated supply in 4 hours with 200 people still waiting to get a filter.

But I find it remarkable that the only time Snyder has actually asked any big money entities to donate in this affair was at a time when he was trying to make it all go away by shutting up the activists and leading a small portion of residents to feel better about the taste and appearance (though not necessarily the content) of their water.

That donation, like Snyder's appeal for a sense of common good not backed by actual policy, was all show.

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# THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM PART 4: HUMANITY UNDER TOTALITARIANISM

Previous posts in this series:

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 1:  
Introduction.

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 2:  
Antisemitism

The Origins of Totalitarianism: Interlude on the  
Tea Party

The Origins of Totalitarianism Part 3:  
Superfluous Capital and Superfluous People

The Origins of Totalitarianism: Interlude on The  
Commons

Capitalism Versus The Social Commons

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Please note: the last post in this series was  
published at Naked Capitalism. It tries to  
explain privatization in terms of the forces  
that produced imperialism, and discusses Rosa  
Luxemburg's ideas.

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In Part 3 of The Origins of Totalitarianism  
Arendt takes up Totalitarianism. She starts with  
the nature of people who succumb to a  
totalitarian movement. She distinguishes a  
totalitarian movement from a totalitarian state;  
the latter is a nation in which the totalitarian  
movement has taken over a nation and is  
functioning as the state. The leaders of  
totalitarian movements have enormous popular  
support in large part because they are  
charismatic people.

Totalitarian movements recruit support among the  
masses, a concept I take up in Part 3 of this  
series. The masses are superfluous people. They  
come from all classes, from the lowest to the

highest. They have one thing in common: they stand outside the society, because they are not needed for any productive purpose, and do not participate in government or any other social institution. They have no identifiable common interests, in particular, no common economic interests.

Arendt says that democracies stand on two assumptions. First, people are involved with policy issues and participate in government. If they do not participate, it's because they believe that there is an organized party or an institution that represents their views in the decision-making process. Second, the people who do not participate for some other reason are an irrelevant minority. Organized parties do not reach out to the non-participants, or try to recruit them. In the 1920s the number of non-participants grew rapidly, partly because a number of people were not needed for production and lost their sense of belonging, which is a precondition to participation; and partly because many ended their participation when they realized that their views were not in fact represented by the existing parties.

Totalitarian movements recruit among non-participants. Because they are not organized by economic or other interests, it isn't necessary to use reasoned arguments to recruit them. A leader can emerge who expresses their fleeting passions and any prejudices or foolish ideas they share, or state some new idea with such fervor that it becomes a firm belief, without regard to reality. Suddenly that leader emerges at the head of a very large, very loud and often violent group, suddenly organized seemingly from nowhere.

Though they came from all classes, the masses shared the belief that

... the most respected, articulate and representative members of the community were fools and that all the powers that be were not so much evil as they were equally stupid and fraudulent. P. 315.

The number of non-participants in Germany and Austria increased enormously in the wake of the defeat in WWI and the hyperinflation of Weimar, and the breakdowns in production that gave rise to high unemployment. The fact that this displacement from their role in society happened to many people at the same time did not stop individuals from judging themselves harshly, from blaming themselves. Arendt says that gradually these people lost interest in their own well-being, their sense of self-preservation. They put a bunch of abstract ideas ahead of their own well-being, their own interests.

Himmler, who knew so well the mentality of those whom he organized, described not only his SS-men, but the large strata from which he recruited them, when he said they were not interested in "everyday problems" but only "in ideological questions of importance for decades and centuries, so that the man ... knows he is working for a great task which occurs but once in 2,000 years." The gigantic massing of individuals produced a mentality which, like Cecil Rhodes some forty years before, thought in continents and felt in centuries. Page 316, fn omitted.

The key to understanding the role of the individual in a totalitarian movements is this:

Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member. This demand is made by the leaders of totalitarian movements even before they seize power. It usually precedes the total organization of the country under their actual rule and it follows from the

claim of their ideologies that their organization will encompass, in due course, the entire human race.

The totalitarian movement demands absolute loyalty, and cannot bear any ties other than to the movement. It cannot abide any other claims on the loyalty or the feelings of people under its control, whether to institutions or to other people, even families.

The characteristics of people caught up in a totalitarian movement fit the needs of the movement.

1. They are separated from their society and have no close social relations outside their families.
2. They are not members of any organized party, and frequently have never participated actively in any political action.
3. They are alienated from the political structures of their society, and specifically, they believe that the politicians and other authority figures in power are frauds and incompetents, and that these leaders are the cause of their situation.
4. They respond to the charisma of the leader of the totalitarian movement.
5. They have lost their sense of self-preservation, and their sense of their own interests, substituting abstract issues and intense loyalty to the charismatic leader.

The usual explanation of the rise of Trump and Cruz given by the center-left is that a large number of US citizens have strong authoritarian streaks, that they like the idea of a strong man willing to take on the burden of governance and lead the US back to greatness, whatever that means to them. I think a lot of people leap from this idea to the idea that authoritarianism is a short step from fascism, and then they conclude that Trump represents a sort of proto-fascist smovement. Arendt gives us a broader way of



thinking about our right wing problems.