

The Responsibility of Intellectuals in a Climate-Changed, Crisis-Ridden World: The Real Problem with Erik Wright's *Envisioning Real Utopias*

Bill Barnes

Draft of March 6, 2012

Erik Wright's *Envisioning Real Utopias* is a big, rich, demanding jumble of a book, with something for every lefty into socio-political theory (except Russell Jacoby) to both like and dislike.¹ Nicely framed introductory arguments. A goldmine of middle-range theorizing with explicated real-world illustrations. Chunks of well-presented, dense, insightful higher level theorization. But overall coherence is a problem. Even in the instances of sustained theorizing, overall coherence is limited to chapters eight through ten. I expected chapter eleven to be a grand culmination of that sustained argument, but found it disappointing, up until the last, highly compressed, five pages (361-65). The whole chapter should have been about unpacking what's in those last five pages. Then the following eight page conclusion would have been adequate. As it is, the book feels like it's ending abruptly, without the heuristic promise of chapters 8-10 being fulfilled, and without the various streams of argument contained in the book as a whole ever coming fully together. At least, that's how many readers will experience it.

Taken with full seriousness, the book is a graduate school course all by itself. Is it a course worth taking? Probably only if your intellectual and political interests are pretty closely aligned, or at least substantially overlap, with those that animate the book.

Books like this pose a basic question: Is it worth it for me to do the considerable work necessary to digest the book as a whole – or should I treat it as a kind of catalogue or encyclopedia that I dip into here and there, now and again, where its subsections address particular subjects that come to be of interest to me? – but without ever attempting to grasp the whole argument (assuming there really is one) more than superficially? I think that *Envisioning Real Utopias* had the potential to deserve chewing through and digesting the whole thing, but that as it stands, most busy people won't see it that way. I've dipped into it repeatedly over the last three years, but not been motivated to try consuming the whole until the

¹One thing I agree with Jacoby about is the over-use of schematics; their constant interpolation in some chapters often makes the argument harder to follow, not easier – most if not all should be relegated to appendices.

last few months of preparing for this symposium. I do think it's turned out to be worth it, but it hasn't been easy.

To my mind, a considerably greater use of Gramsci would have been a very good fit, as would some engagement with the most stimulating contemporary critiques of Left utopianism – Jim Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* and Christopher Lasch's *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. And there ought to be at least a long footnote on the inadequacy of Rawls' "ideal theory" and "realistic utopia" (*The Law of Peoples*, 5-7, 11-13).

But instead of pursuing anything I've mentioned so far, I'm going to talk about Wright's complete failure to say anything about the herd of elephants in the room that completely blocks our way toward any of the desirable futures that the book envisions – climate change, environmental degradation, resource depletion, and their epidemiological, social, economic and political consequences.² At this particular historical moment, we simply don't have time to indulge my, or anyone else's, intellectual pet projects. That Wright did not recognize this in the course of his five years of work on, and world-wide presentation and discussion of, the book's arguments, mid 2004 to mid 2009 (pp. xi-xv– "I felt that I was part of a global conversation on the dilemmas of our time," xv) – that in all those presentations and discussions no one ever raised the climate change/environmental degradation issues with sufficient force as to leave a footprint in the 2010 text – despite the scientific evidence and argument that was accumulating during those same years – that is very telling – a sign of our historic failure in meeting our responsibilities as intellectuals – one mark of the current world-historical failure of the social and policy sciences in general, of intellectuals at large, and of the modern state (more on social/policy science unrealism and state failure below).

² A crude parallel might be drawn between my critique of Wright here and Charles Mills' critique of Rawls on account of the latter's "ideal theory" allegedly complete eliding of major relevant realities. "Realizing (Through Racializing) Pogge," in Alison Jaggar, ed., *Thomas Pogge and His Critics*, Polity, 2010. I don't mean to endorse Mills' account of Rawls. I don't know Rawls well enough to judge. Pogge, a student of Rawls, seems to give it some credit. See pp. 231-38. As indicated below, I find Pogge's own work inspiring.

Had Wright seriously engaged the climate change issue, much of the book would have been strongly affected, forced to become more focused and better grounded, because he would have had a partial answer to one of the big questions that – because he is, insistently, a social *scientist*, not a moral philosopher – keeps stopping him and limiting him. And dealing with that partial answer would have required a less abstract continuation of his theoretical argument.

Wright is very conscious of writing in the wake of the definitive refutation of Marx's deterministic "future history of capitalism" culminating in implosion and transcendence. Given that lesson, given the staying power exhibited by capitalism, what openings might remain, or might be newly emerging, for "emancipatory change"? Where are the cracks, the weaknesses, the vulnerabilities in capitalist self-reproduction and how might agents of emancipatory change take advantage of them and cumulate partial breaks with the system? How might unintended social change play into this? What should be our theoretical approach to assessing such matters? How can we rebuild a strong sense of future possibility of realizing "egalitarian emancipatory values" on a substantial scale?

Wright repeatedly emphasizes that classical Marxism, in projecting the future possibility of utopian transformation, relied on "a systematic theory of the dynamic trajectory of *unintended* social change" (27) [Wright's emphasis]. Wright continues:

Were this theory [Marx's historical materialism] adequate, it would be of enormous help in formulating long-term strategies for emancipatory transformation since it would give actors a sense of how the obstacles and opportunities for struggles were likely to evolve over time. [¶] [The classical theory has failed], but neither do I believe that any compelling alternative has yet been developed. ... The absence of a compelling theory of the dynamic trajectory of social change is thus a significant gap in emancipatory social science. It means that the formulation of robust projects of emancipatory social transformation necessarily must be formulated with relatively thin knowledge of the conditions likely to be faced in the future. ... our capacity to generate scientifically credible knowledge about social conditions beyond the near future is very limited. (28)

And in a typical end-of-chapter statement, he writes:

It is ... possible that capitalism will enter into a long-term process of intensifying crisis and permanent decline that lowers the standard of living of most people, but in the absence of a compelling theory of the mechanisms that generate such intensification, this is a purely speculative argument.
(320)

In an important respect, Wright's statements here are out of date. In fact, we now have a body of very compelling theory, backed by strong evidence, of the mechanisms that have begun to generate such a long-term intensifying crisis. But this does not mean that "Capitalism's" intensifying crisis opens the way to "emancipatory social transformation." Quite the contrary. We have recently developed a good deal of relatively thick "knowledge of the conditions likely to be faced in the future," and those conditions take "robust projects of emancipatory social transformation" entirely off the table in most respects for a long time. Instead we have to play defense against the unintended consequences of industrialization and high modernism, "capitalist" and every other kind. For the reality of our current situation and emerging trends, Christian Parenti's *Tropic of Chaos* is excellent. For a reasonable conservative forecast of the likely path of medium-term development (but not politics) see Jorgen Randers, *2052: A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years*.³

But let me try to go at this a little more systematically, starting where Wright begins. The essential question to be asked of any proposed "*real* utopia" is not the definitional, "is it reasonably possible that human beings, as we have known them in this world, could someday put such social arrangements into sustained practice in a way that is generally true to the ideals invoked, and that does not in practice betray other values of acknowledged importance?" Realistically, the essential

³ Another area of physical science research-findings and theory that has exploded over the last 30 years or so, the incorporation of which ought to revolutionize social science, is neuroscience and its findings as to the impact of the pregnant and nursing mother's environment, life-circumstances and experiences on fetal brain development, and on the child's eventual cognitive and "executive" functioning. This dovetails powerfully with developments in the environmental sciences.

question is, *can you get there from here*, given where we are now, given the history that's already happened and its material consequences? By this, I do not mean to raise merely issues of "pragmatism" or "political realism," or "path dependency." But rather the question of whether any such line of possibility (which in the past may have qualified as a real utopia) may have been definitively cut off for all of imaginable human history, because in real time we have blindly destroyed indispensable, unreconstructable, irreplaceable bridges, opportunities, way-stations, building materials? In other words, the question of the "realness" of a proposed "real utopia" must be historicized – and not just in the sense of the usual theories of "path dependency."

For us humans of the early 21st century, the question has teeth, big teeth. At this point in our history, there is only one really real Utopia left to us: the creation of forms of political economy, and a world order, that can cope with and stabilize, in an at least minimally just and humanitarian way (de facto Social Darwinist solutions don't qualify), the climate-changed, environmentally-degraded, resource-depleted world that is bearing down upon us. Holding open the possible realization of grander utopian visions, in some distant future, rests on achieving substantial success on this front over the course of this century. And such success is very much in question – in fact, as things stand in early 2013, a long shot. At this point, we simply can't afford the distraction of indulging in wishful theorizing about unreal utopias (which include the survival of anything like the status quo – actually-existing capitalist high modernism – as Wright says, following Marx, "in the long run capitalism will become an impossible social order, so some alternative will of necessity have to occur (89) – but that should not be understood to mean that all "capitalist" forms will disappear – see Wright's theory of "hybrids" (123-27, 144-49 – which really should be central to the book and referenced up front). This imperative is not dictated by any sectarianism, identity politics, theology, or school of political economy or historical sociology, but rather by what 200 years of industrialization has done to the planet, by 40-50 years of cumulative findings in the physical sciences as to the geo-physical and bio-chemical ramifications, and by the forceful implications of those findings for the social and policy sciences.

It is worthwhile to do some close analysis of the first two chapters of Wright's book, where he sets up what he means by "real utopias":

The idea of “real utopias” is grounded in the belief that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions. ... Nurturing clear-sighted understandings of what it would take to create social institutions free of oppression is part of creating a political will for radical social changes to reduce oppression. ... “real utopias”...are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, *utopian destinations that have accessible waystations...*[emphasis added]

... The conservative critique of radical projects is not mainly that the emancipatory goals of radicals are morally indefensible ... but that the uncontrollable, and usually negative, unintended consequences of these efforts at massive social change inevitably swamp the intended consequences.

... radical intellectuals have insisted that wholesale redesign of social institutions is within the grasp of human beings. This does not mean, as Marx emphasized, that detailed institutional “blueprints” can be devised in advance of the opportunity to create an alternative. What can be worked out are the core organizing principles of alternatives to existing institutions, the principles that would guide the pragmatic trial-and-error task of institution building. ... unintended consequences need not pose a fatal threat to the emancipatory projects themselves. (6-8)

The problem here is that there are some respects in which “what is pragmatically possible” *is* “fixed independently of our imaginations,” and Wright fails to take into account that while “unintended consequences *need not [always or necessarily]* pose a fatal threat to the emancipatory projects,” exactly such may, in some historical instances, prove to be the case – perhaps even in some definitive sense. A-historical generalization simply doesn’t work here. [And of course it’s not just the unintended consequences of Left emancipatory projects that are at issue, but the unintended consequences of all ambitious exercises of power, in particular, 250 years of capitalist “creative destruction”– some strains of “conservatism” have been correct about the recklessness of “liberalism.” I’m tempted to say that 150 years of intensive burning of hydrocarbons is the equivalent of Eve picking the apple, biting into it, chewing it, savoring it, being temporarily nourished by it.]

Wright makes some acknowledgment of the need to historicize. He explains that real-utopian proposals must be evaluated at three levels, desirability, viability, and achievability. The viability issue is key:

The study of *viable* alternatives asks of proposals for transforming existing social structures and institutions whether, if implemented, they would actually generate – in a sustainable, robust manner– the emancipatory consequences that motivated the proposal. (21)

“The *viability* of a specific institutional design for realizing emancipatory goals *may, of course, depend heavily on historical context* and various kinds of side conditions. For example, a generous unconditional basic income may be viable in a country in which there is a strong culturally rooted work ethic and sense of collective obligation ...but may not be viable in a highly atomistic, selfish consumerist society. (22, emphasis added)

Each such country would of course be the product of a particular history; and that’s true of any and every country, and always will be. Wright’s reference to the importance of the existing state of “systematic scientific knowledge about how the world works” to evaluation of the realness of a utopia (10) also implicitly acknowledges the significance of our particular historical starting point. And he quotes Marx’s famous historicizing admonition “[people] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (25, fn 13). And the sustained theorizing of chapters 8-10 incorporates lots of historicization. But in the set-up chapters in the beginning of the book, the manner in which Wright elaborates on the viability issue and the achievability issue undercuts the force of his nod toward historicization:

The exploration of viable alternatives brackets the question of their practical achievability under existing social conditions. Some people might argue: what’s the point of talking about some theoretically viable alternative if it is not strategically achievable? The response to the skeptic is this: there are so many uncertainties and contingencies about the future that we cannot

possibly know now what the limits of achievable future alternatives really are. the further we look into the future, the less certain we can be about the limits on what is achievable.

Given this uncertainty about the future, there are two reasons why it is important to have as clear-headed an understanding as possible of the range of viable alternatives to the world in which we live, alternatives which, if implemented, would stand a good chance of being sustainable. First, developing such understanding now makes it more likely that, if in the future historical conditions expand the limits of achievable possibility, the social forces presently committed to emancipatory social change will be in a position to formulate practical strategies to implement an alternative. Viable alternatives are more likely to eventually become achievable alternatives if they are well thought out and understood. Second, the actual limits of what is achievable depend in part on the beliefs people hold about what sorts of alternatives are viable. This is a crucial point and fundamental to sociological understandings of the very idea of there being “limits of possibility” for social change: social limits of possibility are not independent of beliefs about those limits. When a physicist argues that there is a limit to the maximum speed at which things can travel, this is meant as an objective constraint operating independently of our beliefs about speed. Similarly, when a biologist argues that in the absence of certain conditions, life is impossible, this is a claim about objective constraints. Of course both the physicist and the biologist could be wrong, but the claims themselves are about real, untransgressable limits of possibility. Claims about social limits of possibility are different from these claims about physical and biological limits, for in the social case the beliefs people hold about limits systematically affect what is possible. Developing systematic, compelling accounts of viable alternatives to existing social structures and institutions of power and privilege, therefore, is one component of the social process through which the social limits on achievable alternatives can themselves be changed. (22-23)

The problem with the foregoing, of course, is that the limits we face now are limits set not only by our current (but changeable) beliefs about humans, social life, and the physical world, but also set, in part, independently, by unchangeable facts and laws of physics, chemistry and biology, and by the unchangeable facts of the

historical record to date. Future humans may eventually be able to hedge or work around the second law of thermodynamics to some degree, but there's no reason to believe they'll ever be able to repeal it. And no matter what we believe, we can't erase from our history the 200 years of massive deforestation of the planet, or the 150 years of intensive carbon-loading of the atmosphere, or the population explosion of the 20th century, or what 20th century industrial agriculture and the chemical industry have done to the planet's fresh water supply, or the massive species-die-off of current times, or the place to which such historical realities, in interaction with the laws of science, have brought us as of 2013. (Unless, of course, we are economists of a certain ilk, in which case we can simply say, "assume a time machine.") [Insert Toles cartoon.] Please note, I am not insisting that various imagined techno-miracles, in some sense "reversing" and remediating some consequences of our past history, are pure pipedream, forever. But even if someday it becomes possible to scrub the atmosphere of carbon⁴ and the aquifers and oceans of toxins, etc, the history between now and then will have been hell, taken a horrendous (in many ways fatal) toll, and will leave massive scar tissue.⁵ Personally, I find it hard to take comfort in the idea that, with luck, millennia from now it will all be water under the bridge.

Accordingly, in some very important ways, it simply is not true that "we cannot possibly know now what the limits of achievable future alternatives really are." Nor is it true that "the further we look into the future, the less certain we can be

⁴ Inefficient and energy-intensive carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) is possible now and there are pilot projects in operation - but questions remain as to the effectiveness of sequestration, and there is no prospect of going to scale in the foreseeable future with versions that couple wood-fired CCS-equipped power plants with massive plantations of fast-growing, repeatedly-harvested trees, each generation of which sucks much more CO₂ out of the atmosphere than the power plants emit.

⁵ While things might be different had the world taken a different course beginning 100 or 200 or 300 years ago (so as to conserve and spread around essential resources and avoid particularly damaging deficits and pathologies), given the world that has been made by the history that actually happened, with its profound inequalities, traumas, resource depletions and accumulated environmental insults (and consequent mounting health hazards and natural disasters), you just can't get to Fukuyama's end of history from here (not to mention to Marx's), or from any future world that is within the horizon of realistic imagination. At this point, there is simply no reason to believe that we will ever escape this limit.

about the limits on what is achievable” (unless our time-frame is multiple millennia). We can say confidently that if we remain on our current course, our options will progressively narrow in certain major respects, and, within a century or somewhat more, “civilization” will become impossible over most, if not all, of the planet. Wright’s throw-away hypothetical is in fact what is actually happening today: “when a biologist argues that in the absence of certain conditions, [higher forms of] life [are] impossible, this is a claim about objective constraints. Of course both the physicist and the biologist could be wrong, but the claims themselves are about real, untransgressable limits of possibility.”

One bottom line: The viable maturation and authentic living-up-to-avowed-ideals of “middle-class democratic capitalism,” and/or the radical transcendence of “capitalism” and realization of a viable and authentic “democratic socialism,” might each have been hundred-year “real utopias” (at least for half the planet) circa 1945-1965. But neither is any longer – given what humanity did, and failed to do, over the second half of the 20th century (coming on top of the unappreciated reality of what we’d done over the preceding 150 years). If those projects are ever to regain the status of real utopias, it will be only after, and thanks to, the realization of the only utopia that is really “real” for us at this point in our history.

It is possible to sketch out approximations of the general grounds and elements for the realization of this one-and-only real utopia over the second half of this century – what we must be putting firmly in place by mid-century if we are to fend off the full, irreversible maturation of the thousand-year perfect storm that has been brewing for some time, now beginning to surge, soon to be in rampaging adolescence across the planet. The big questions: (1) what must be accomplished during the second quarter of this century in order to make it possible to begin effective large-scale building toward launching this real utopia as of the third quarter? and (2) what must be accomplished in the near term in order to have a realistic shot at turning the corner in the right direction and decisively enough by the 2030s so as to set the stage for achieving what needs to be achieved during the middle decades of the century? Big environmental and economic shocks, and big political battles, will come on strong and increasingly accumulate circa 2020-2040. Will those lead to turning the corner decisively to the Green Left, to the Neo-Fascist Right, or to plunging straight off the cliff?

To realize the scale and seriousness of our problem, you have to appreciate how bad the present reality already is for the world's most vulnerable populations, how locked-in the worsening trends are, and how great are the obstacles to effective counteraction. Realism means acknowledging that we now face, in much of the world, a future of increasingly catastrophic environmental and public health disasters, increasing criminal, predatory, and socially destructive behavior, amidst unrelenting poverty. Much of the world is dramatically short in coping capacity, and there is no prospect of the weak and nearly-failing states of the poor world remedying that shortfall on their own. Some stronger but predatory states will not only be of no help, but react in ways that make things worse for their neighbors. If the rich societies and their powerful, quasi-democratic states do not devote themselves to heading off the full realization of the approaching catastrophes, by helping to grow coping capacity all over the less developed world, things are going to get very nasty. The immediate problem is that, by these standards, the recent policies of the richest of these societies and the strongest of these states have been, on balance, highly dysfunctional. This deserves to be counted as a form of state failure – perhaps the most important form.

A central challenge will be massive population movements out of coastal areas of flooding, hurricanes and typhoons, on one hand, and out of inland areas of drought and food-and-water-shortage on the other hand, into ever-more-massive refugee camps and urban slums. What we have seen over recent decades in major cities throughout the Third World will be multiplied many times over at an accelerating rate throughout much of the Global South. If the “surplus populations” of the burgeoning refugee camps and slum metropolises of that world are *ever* to be productively and humanely (not to mention “democratically”) integrated into their societies, those societies will have to be radically reorganized so as to make such integration possible, consistent with environmental exigencies and limits, and resource endowments. Such will require radically different modes of modernization and globalization, requiring in turn the institutionalization of very different priorities in the advanced world in order to create permissive conditions and real assistance. The idea that something much less radical will do, that some version of neo-liberal capitalist “democracy,” a creature of the actually-existing world system but capable of coping with the on-coming cascade of crises, might *ever* be built in the more densely populated and resource-poor countries, is pure pipedream.

The most forthright and unvarnished statement of current reality that I have seen is focused on world poverty in general, but it is fully applicable to our current subject. This is from philosopher Thomas Pogge's introduction to his 2010 book *Politics as Usual*. He starts out describing his own profound shock, as a German born in the early 1950s, at first learning the reality of the Germany of the two prior decades. His discovery that "every adult I knew had played a part in these events," led him to "the experience that I had misunderstood the world – completely." He then compares his learning curve to that of people growing up in the affluent societies today as they first encounter the existential reality of the wider world:

Children growing up in the affluent countries today may have a similar experience when they discover world poverty or one of its manifestations. They may learn about children elsewhere going hungry, chained to a loom, forced to be soldiers, sold into prostitution, dying of treatable diseases. And they may be stunned to find that the adults around them don't care.

I imagine few children in today's affluent countries have their emerging view of the world shattered by such discoveries. Being on the winning side makes a difference. With reassurance from all sides, it is easy to set aside nascent doubts and to join one of the reigning narratives on how these problems are intractable or disappearing, and on how our noble and advanced countries are doing all they can (or, at worst, a tiny bit less).

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This book is not only about our politicians, about their corruption, and their crimes against humanity. It is also about citizens who are disregarding, trivializing, and condoning these crimes... In this we get plenty of help from academia and the media, from people who know better but have more to gain by flattering us and serving our political elites than by seeking and speaking the truth. And the book is then also about the lies and deceptions, the hypocrisy, the carefully made-up statistics that keep us comfortably ignorant of what we are doing.

As to attention to and comprehension of our current reality: Damage, impoverishment, disease, and social breakdown caused by "natural" disasters have been on the rise for some time (particularly in territories "governed" by weak and

failing states), as has evidence linking increasing frequency and extremity of such disasters to climate destabilization. This is often noted in passing, at least as an apparent or possible reality, but not persistently focused on by non-specialists, except in the immediate aftermath of hurricanes, typhoons, floods, extreme heat-waves and firestorms, dramatic infestations or die-offs, etc.

The foregoing “unrealism” will soon become unsustainable. It cannot be stressed too strongly how much worse the latest science shows our situation to be than was indicated as recently as seven or eight years ago. Stuff that was thought to be still largely avoidable is clearly fully baked-in and unavoidable, even if GHG emissions start plunging dramatically tomorrow - which we all know is not going to happen. Over the next 10 to 20 years, the scale and severity of climate destabilization, its ineluctable “progress,” and the ever-increasing catastrophic consequences will become undeniable to anyone capable of rational thought. Full-scale, drawn-out catastrophe (exacerbated by the interaction of the foregoing with resource depletions and maldistributions, particularly of safe water⁶) will hit first and hardest in areas with very large concentrations of very poor people within the territories of weak and failing states. The result will be numerous instances of mass starvation, epidemic disease, civil conflict, and large on-going refugee flows toward better-off regions. Disaster relief efforts, long-since stretched to the breaking point, will be overwhelmed and collapse. The governments of the better off regions in the path of the refugee flows (and of epidemics of deadly diseases) will turn increasingly to military response. These developments will get people’s sustained attention. (Christian Parenti’s *Tropic of Chaos* is very good on this. For updates on the science, see Andrew Guzman, *The Human Cost of Climate Change*; P. & A Ehrlich, “Can a Collapse of Global Civilization Be Avoided?” *Proceedings of the Royal Society, Biological Sciences*, March 2013, V. 280, No. 1754. For a reasonable conservative forecast of the likely path of development (but not politics) see Jorgen Randers, *2052: A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years*.)

It is now too late to avert a substantial dose of such events; they are baked-in by what we have already done to the environment, which we continue to exacerbate every day, with no realistic prospect of near-term course correction. But it is not

⁶ That is, water free of dangerous microbes, chemical toxins, and concentrations of minerals deleterious to human, animal, plant metabolisms.

too late to make a difference, to avert the worst, to bring some positive accomplishments and legacies into the mix. But we need to put this issue on the front burner almost everywhere, almost all the time, and for the duration. Most of us (including me) are not yet doing that, and we only have a few more years to get started.

Once one absorbs the foregoing truths, the everyday public discourse among educated professionals, journalists, policy wonks, public intellectuals, corporate and institutional officers, politicians, government officials becomes dissonant, unreal in the extreme, and intolerable. How is it possible for such informed and intelligent and responsible and public-regarding adults to talk about the future - any future - near term, medium term, or distant - in isolation from and disregard of the issue of the consequences of climate change? Not only the larger, general public sphere, but the specialized public spheres within professions, disciplines, institutional complexes, are pervaded by blindness, delusion – suicidal delusion – and criminal negligence. Such that the same judgments that Tom Pogge makes above re the ignoring of poverty-on-our-doorstep are fully applicable.

Another bottom line: Some time in the not too distant future, most likely between 20 and 40 years from now, middle class Americans – and other privileged populations over the world, but particularly Americans – will find themselves facing a “which side are you on” moment the like of which humans have never seen before. It will be as if every “Good German,” long uncomfortable with the rise of Naziism but remaining apolitical, had been dramatically confronted with the reality of the Holocaust from its very inception. Right now, we still have a chance to avert this fate, by dedicating ourselves over the next two decades to assembling the building blocks necessary to forestall or defeat the evolution of the United States toward a fascistic Fortress America. If we fail, the result of the realization of that threat will be defacto genocide over much of the planet, in defense of Fortress America and an allied archipelago of regional and local fortresses of privilege in other parts of the world. The human population would likely go down to perhaps one billion or less over the course of the subsequent 100 years or so, and virtually all wildlife above the level of insects, small reptiles and some aquatic life, would disappear from the planet.

In our immediate future, over the next 15 or 20 years, the human capital of the

master institutions of modernity, educated professionals everywhere, and particularly in the United States, must be brought to the point of saying to themselves: “not only must I admit that I’ve been living as a Good German, I also must now recognize and acknowledge that in so far as I continue to serve as a loyal cog in the machinery of the dominant political economy, a rationalizer of mainstream high modernism, I will be an Eichmann.” I mean this quite literally.

The foregoing reality puts a particularly strong responsibility on intellectuals and professionals who are educators, writers, leaders, public intellectuals in the social and policy sciences. And such people are our most likely effective point of leverage, given the simultaneous decline in the role of industrial labor in advanced capitalism and rise in the magnitude and importance of the educated professions (broadly construed). In the mid-20th century, most educated professionals were “progressives” (in the old sense) and New Deal liberals. From the late ‘40s to the late ‘60s, many became “normal scientists” of the Cold War national-security apparatus and military-industrial complex. But, at the same time, from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s, many budding educated professionals were New Left radicals or sympathizers. And some elders, and some parts of some disciplines, were somewhat radicalized. Then, over the last quarter of the 20th century, most such (and their children and grand children) were substantially coopted by business and technocratic elites and the culture and institutions of mainstream high modernism (particularly where such adopted meritocratic nondiscrimination as SOP) - once again, more or less normal scientists of the hegemonic order. But in many cases, such cooptation has always remained incomplete and, potentially, unstable (this is in fact essential to the proper understanding of Gramsci’s hegemony) – particularly in the face of the recent flagrant corruption of many of the most privileged elite professionals. (See the beautiful takedowns of elite economists in Charles Ferguson’s film *Inside Job*, and also chapter 8 of his book, *Predator Nation*.) It should not be assumed that, when the crises begin to hit hard and unrelentingly, and the full implications come forcefully into view, most educated professionals will more or less automatically choose narrow self-interest and ideological orthodoxy over broader values and thinking – particularly if some intellectuals/professionals have done the work to make it impossible for the professions at large to deny the reality before them and the consequences of their choice.

Let me hasten to add that this is not a call for a politics of revolutionary rupture or of attempting to bring about the overthrow of “capitalism” in any of the referenced time-frames. It is, rather, a call for a broad Green popular front against the coming neo-fascism and/or social darwinism. On the other hand, it is also a call for recognition and acceptance of the urgent necessity of a fundamental transformation of the existing political economy and world order, in some ways more radical than the classical Marxist vision of the overthrow of capitalism – but likely to retain important “capitalist” characteristics (from the producerist republicanism of the proto and early industrial age and from the small and medium scale capitalist forms that have thrived under social democracy over the last 75 years) for as far into the future as the eye can see.

Had I more time/space, I’d go into Wright’s theory of “hybrids” –which really should be central to the book and referenced up front. My own view: Of course, Marx and liberal modernization theorists were both right in insisting that Jeffersonian small-producer capitalism of the 19th century – proto/early-industrial petty bourgeois radicalism and utopian socialism – were bound to be defeated in their time by capitalist accumulation and industrial concentration. But that doesn’t mean that that outcome is forever fully irreversible. Something like that outcome was inherent in the capitalism of that time as a historically-situated mode of production/world system - but that doesn’t mean that there is any such thing as “Capitalism” as a trans-historical political economy that must continue to exist in that form – embodying those “laws of motion”– or not at all.

People to whom I made the foregoing arguments at the 2012 American Sociological Association meeting in Denver didn’t intuitively grasp what I was driving at - they took me to be asking for the impossible – an immediate major organizing drive aimed at bringing together every kind of even minimally “progressive” organization, movement, demographic to focus on climate change as their top priority. But the immediate goal I’m talking about is not orchestrating this kind of rapid coalescence of a larger social movement, but rather the mobilization of progressive professionals for this kind of political work within their own professions and institutions, in the educating, training, advising of students and younger colleagues, and the policy intellectuals who consult with them, so that over the next 15-20 years, as many as possible will come to be on the same page re refusing to follow, work for or with, vote for, accept as colleagues,

the advocates of the Fortress America response to climate-disasters-reaching-crisis-proportions – insisting that an alternative response be constructed. We, our students, colleagues, and the following generation, must refuse to play the role of loyal staff in any institution whose leaders refuse to acknowledge and focus on climate change as the challenge of our time or which are under the control of forces opting for the Fortress America response. We and they must instead become the organic intellectuals and normal scientists of a new Green Social Democracy. Increasingly, we must refuse to shut up, refuse to devote ourselves to business as usual, and, at points, we must “lay our bodies on the gears...”

Another bottom line: The education of human capital must prioritize these issues over everything else, everything else must be secondary. This kind of perspective was no where in sight at the 2011 APSA in Seattle, or last March’s LASA in SF, or at the ASA in Denver – or, I’m sure, in any other discipline’s meetings. At the ASA, as far as I saw, the only panels that came close were those expressly focused on environmental sociology or the issue of sustainability (plus Joel Rogers’ panel presentation). Erik Wright deserves great credit for using his presidency of the ASA to produce a conference program with sustainability as one of three core themes. But in practice, this simply meant one main plenary session devoted to the topic (excellent presentation by Paul Ehrlich) plus more than the usual number of panels for environmental sociology. Wright’s presidential address made only marginal references to climate change and how it bears on “real utopias” There was good stuff in the environmental panels, but not much sense of urgency as far as I saw. Even Clive Hamilton was relatively subdued until pushed. Joel Rogers gave a very good paper (the best thing I’ve seen succinctly giving some specifics to the idea of a real utopian political economy), and his presentation was even better, but too optimistic. I agree that some of this “accentuate the positive” is necessary, and there really is some hope and it's not dependent on super-human efforts, there are things to work with, and they're growing - but too slowly and in too fragmented a fashion. We need to be brutally realistic "among ourselves" about how dire the situation is, how inadequate and late our current efforts are, and how horrible the consequences will be if we don't blah blah blah. More recently, I went to hear Theda Skocpol give a talk on her TEA Party research (her new co-authored book is very good). Afterward, I approached her and made a bit of my usual pitch. Her reaction was first to talk about some technical policy issues re cap-and-trade vrs tax-and-distribute-the-proceeds-universally, and second to say

strongly and repeatedly that one absolutely must not talk apocalyptically. I said I agreed in terms of general public political discourse at this point, but tried to explain my argument about what we need to be doing "within the social sciences." She couldn't hear it. I had the same kind of experience in Denver at the Burawoy, Panitch, Therborn panel critiquing Wright's work of recent years as not Marxist enough. The panel was all about the importance of not losing sight of Class, Class Conflict, and Capitalism, and their transcendence, as THE fundamental issues. Not one word about climate change or sustainability. I made my pitch, and kept arguing with Panitch for a while after the panel. His response was, "well if you're right about the time-frame, there's no hope, because there's no possibility of building a mass socialist movement in the next 15-20 years, and only such a movement can defeat Capitalism." Period; there's nothing more to say. Don't get me wrong, for those interested in Marxist theory, this was a high quality, worthwhile panel. But that's beside the point. This kind of thing has to be reduced to the status of a hobby we pursue when we need a vacation from life-and-death work.

The more aware I become of the huge and ever-proliferating array of thinkers, groups, organizations, community-development programs, etc, all over the world that are devoting themselves to working, discussing, publishing, blogging, etc, in the general area we're talking about, the more impressed I am by their continuing fragmentation and lack of mutual engagement and reinforcement, lack of scaling-up, and by their failure to achieve a sustained, dramatic presence in the mainstream public sphere and in the upper echelons of the most powerful public and private organizations and institutions. This is ultimately a fundamental *political* failure. Many people devoting their lives to this and doing good work, are politically unrealistic – in a wide variety of ways - from the advocates of Green Capitalism (even the best of them, like Paul Gilding) to the advocates of Green Marxism and Green Anarchism. As to the last of those, I think the idea of purposefully confining oneself to the interstices of the dominant system, building the alternative there, thinking a new system will then be ready to exfoliate across the landscape in the wake of the dominant system's self-inflicted collapse, is very unrealistic – unless one is ready to give up on saving the human race (and higher mammals generally) from near-extinction.

I think that a key arena, or set of arenas, in these regards is the social sciences and

all of the different kinds of advanced-degreed professionals and intellectuals who lead and staff the “master institutions” of modernity. Over the last couple years, I have approached a number of prominent such people, one of whom qualifies as a major mainstream public intellectual with long-time connections to Power, and made some of my arguments. The response I got in the latter case was, “But if you’re right, then all of my knowledge and experience, and the books I’m working on, are beside the point, and I have little to offer” [implicitly “I can’t look that prospect in the face”]. I tried to convince him that that was not correct, that it was essential that people like him reconsider that posture and become part of the solution rather than remaining part of the problem – apparently to no avail, except a tiny bit around the margins (some public criticism of Republican denialism). More commonly, I’ve gotten the response: “I largely agree with you, but it’s not my area of expertise, and while I’m willing to lend support here and there, my own scholarly work and professional duties and responsibilities really don’t leave me with enough time to become substantially involved.”

I would contend that the human capital of the social sciences, the professions (private sector as well as public sector), the educational system, civil society, most often knows better than to accept the official elite gloss on the state of society and the manageability of any and all crises, and may well worry about such crises in private conversations with like-minded friends. But typically such people do little or nothing, within their professional public spheres, to challenge the official gloss. They don’t take bold, out-spoken, “radical” public positions, because they’re too busy to risk getting embroiled in, and diverted from devotion to professional advancement by, (what is perceived to be) extra-professional controversy – and for fear of jeopardizing their standing with and access to the established stars and master institutions of their profession. This is reinforced by the fact that such people are most often genuinely interested in (often in love with) their particular professional specialties (not to mention busy raising families and needing career success for that).

But in some sectors, recognition of the absolute necessity of changing the foregoing is beginning to reach critical mass. More and more, the less conformist and careerist of the professionals and the intellectuals must take the leap and cajole others to join them, so as both to provide “technical” and political support to the world of Green activism and its scaling-up, and to bring this world and its

many micro-accomplishments to public attention, so that the wider, mainstream public sphere(s) reflect and encourage widespread recognition of such – such that it becomes permanently front and center for all organizational leaders and all policy-makers – can't be escaped or avoided or downplayed in any public discussion anywhere.

We need something close to 100 years of sustained non-economistic, producerist Green Social Democracy – starting no more than 20 years from now. In Wright's terms, what I'm arguing for is a symbiotic, class-compromise strategy that seeks to expand and defend the space for interstitial tactics, while fighting for a radical break with high-modernist and neo-fascist tendencies within "capitalism." But where that gets us, if we're lucky, is not any fully egalitarian, just or emancipatory political economy, rather, it gets us through hell, and back to a world of options akin to 1945, with our basic humanity in tact and a lot of hard lessons learned.

That's a reasonably realistic utopia.