Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory & Practice
2015-2017 (Whole Number 22), pp. 82-107

Politically Engaged Scholars: An Analytic of Positions and Norms

Patrick Colm Hogan

The following essay considers various possible roles of intellectuals in social change and some ways of evaluating these alternatives. It is important to recognize the alternatives as they complicate what we might initially envision as the nature and tasks of a scholar activist. The first section of the essay distinguishes some possible relations between expertise and politics, including not only integration, but also dissociation of the two. I conclude this first section by arguing that all these practices are potentially valuable. Thus, our assessment should not be focused on selecting among individual alternatives, but on fostering an effective distribution of activities in practice. Put simply, we should not all be the same.

The second section takes up the forms of scholarship that can be considered politically engaged and considers the nature of the associated scholarly expertise. There are two broad approaches to this issue. First, some scholar activists support the use of general research methods only. In contrast, others wish to draw on discipline-specific theories. In the latter group, we may make a further distinction between those who wish to stress "middle level" principles, close to empirical observations, and those who wish to follow more encompassing schemes, such as Marxism or Deconstruction, the global approaches often referred to as (capital "T") "Theory," but perhaps more aptly characterized as worldviews.

The third section turns to evaluative considerations. We may organize evaluation in these cases into legal, epistemic/pragmatic, meta-political, and ethical concerns. Legal topics include, for instance, the degree to which certain categories of speech or action by academics enjoy constitutional protection. The epistemic considerations address the validity of the methodological or theoretical expertise. The related, pragmatic concern bears on the degree to which the theory in question is likely to achieve desired political goals. Meta-political evaluation addresses the politics of the activism itself—for example, the degree to which a particular invocation of expertise is likely to limit democratic participation in deleterious ways. Ethical issues include, among other matters, the consistency with which the theories are applied.

The final section concerns the scope of the application of expertise. The first broad division here is activism within the educational system versus activism in the society at large. Within the educational system, we may make further distinctions between the classroom and scholarly outlets, on the one hand, and other institutional and extra-institutional forums (e.g., professions or unions), on the other. All these areas merit consideration. However, in order to keep this essay from turning into a small book, I confine detailed discussion to the area of teaching. In certain respects, this is the fundamental area of engaged scholarship. If my political commitments are connected to my scholarly expertise, then the first—and sometimes only—

place they are likely to be evident is in my teaching and research (e.g., in classes on colonialism and literature or writings on literature and empathy). At the same time, the classroom is probably the area where political engagement is the most controversial, the most likely to be denounced as indoctrination. Thus it seems to be an appropriate case to illustrate and further examine the considerations put forth in the preceding sections.

Academic Expertise and Varieties of Political Engagement

"Scholar activists" are, to say the least, not all the same. They differ most obviously in their political orientations. There are right-wing and left-wing activists. Even on the left, there are differences—for example, by discipline. Even within a single discipline, scholar activism is not uniform, as the cases of Noam Chomsky and George Lakoff illustrate. Nonetheless, we all probably have something like a prototypical scholar activist in mind when we refer to the group. Prototypes are valuable. But they also simplify. One risk of such simplification is that writers celebrating politically engaged scholarship may fail to recognize diversity that is not a matter of political orientations as such and that may have value precisely as diversity. In other words, prototypes may foster a tendency to see non-prototypical cases of a category as deviant and thus wrong.

We may begin by a simple, logical analysis. We have two parameters: political engagement and scholarly expertise. By "political engagement," I mean (roughly) having the goal of improving society or social wellbeing, an active commitment to advancing not only personal but also social good. Simplifying somewhat, we may say that one either is or is not politically engaged. Since the discussion is confined to academics or scholars, I will assume that all relevant persons have scholarly expertise. Thus the issue is only whether or not they apply scholarly expertise to their political engagement. These parameters yield three possibilities.

One possibility is that there is no political engagement. Without political engagement, there can be no issue of whether or not expertise is applied to political engagement. This is the class of scholars commonly derided for living in an "ivory tower," out of touch with the real world. For obvious reasons, I will not be concentrating on this group. However, I should briefly note that the derision aimed at them is unfair and even contrary to progressive goals. First, there is something to be said for the "anti-political" view that "politics brought out the worst in people . . . and also brought to the surface the worst types in society," as the narrator of J. M. Coetzee's *Summertime* put it (228). Political indifference allows many atrocities. But political commitment often initiates atrocities. The idea, even if overstated, may serve as a salutary corrective to the enthusiasms of many engaged scholars.

Second, it seems clear that scholars' research programs may be guided by numerous factors. These include the generation of intrinsically interesting questions raised by the topic of inquiry and the status of the relevant descriptive and explanatory principles available at a given time. In other words, disciplines and theories may follow research programs guided by work in the discipline or theory itself. Alternatively, researchers may derive problems or questions from external forms of activity, directing them to a discipline or theory. Thus there are both internally—and externally—defined research trajectories. Caution with respect to externally defined agendas is obviously salutary in an age of corporate—and military—sponsored research. As Schrecker notes, researchers "all too often skew their research" to the interests of funding

sources (165; see also 166, and 168). On the other hand, in speaking of engaged scholars, we are not concerned with corporate or military sponsorship. It would be ludicrous to say that research should be insensitive to pressing human needs (e.g., food scarcity) simply because they are external; but it would be no less ludicrous to say that research should be insensitive to the issues raised by its own internal development. Even if one's goals are wholly pragmatic, one can never predict beforehand what practical benefits might result from the pursuit of knowledge in its own relative autonomy. As, for example, Robert Post points out, one can never know just what knowledge will bear on democracy. The point holds *a fortiori* for knowledge that bears on such a broad category as social wellbeing. This speaks in favor of keeping a place for "disengaged" or politically neutral scholars.

On the other hand, it is important that the nature of political engagement not be understood too narrowly. Social forces consistent with dominant ideologies are likely to orient us in our scholarly pursuits. It is not always obvious whether questions arise primarily from the internal dynamics of a research program or externally from social norms. The point need not even be a matter of dominant ideology. For example, there is nothing more intrinsically interesting about the Israel-Palestine conflict than the Kashmir crisis. Indeed, in some ways, the non-standard nature of the latter makes it more theoretically interesting. But it seems clear that the former has received far more attention, even from scholars with minimal political engagement. Similar points may be made about research into different types of cancer or different national literatures.

A second type of scholar is politically engaged, but without particular appeal to his or her expertise. This is an engaged citizen who happens also to be a scholar. Again, I will not be focusing on this case. However, it too should not be dismissed or diminished in value. It is, of course, valuable to draw on one's expertise in analyzing political situations and strategies. However, disciplinary doctrine is always changing, in part because our approximation to the truth

is never fully successful. After his talk at the 17th World Congress of Philosophy in Montreal in 1988, Hilary Putnam remarked (if I recall correctly) that the one thing we know about any current scientific theory is that it is wrong. Of course, scientific theories commonly improve on our intuitions, but at the same time they may, to some extent, simplify those intuitions. In certain ways, our common sense is the result of ideological bias, but in other ways it is the result of evolution, which has attuned us to nuances of interpersonal and other matters. The point is perhaps particularly obvious in the case of literary understanding. Our theoretical generation of "readings" is often based on linguistic principles (e.g., those of Saussurean linguistics in Deconstruction) that are incapable of explaining even the simplest semantic processes of ordinary conversation (see my *Politics* 52-56). One would hardly want everyone relying on common sense alone. But it does not follow that there is no value in having a group of citizens whose political engagement exhibits a fundamental reliance on common sense rather than disciplinary expertise.

Such a cohort is likely to be particularly valuable when it is self-critical, recognizing that common sense is often challenged by systematic research and theory construction. We might then reasonably expect scholars to be *critically* engaged citizens, even when they are not drawing on their own expertise. We may consider such critically engaged citizens to be the minimal case of politically engaged scholars.

The final possibility, however, gives us a more robust and prototypical form of scholar activist. This is the scholar who is politically engaged and who applies his or her expertise to the target of political engagement—the biologist who draws on biology in addressing environmental degradation, the linguist who draws on linguistics to analyze political rhetoric, the queer theorist who draws on queer theory to understand and respond to homophobia.

Here too, however, there are kinds. In connection with this, we may draw a distinction between different degrees of political engagement. Many academics are committed to political change and they do seek to contribute to such change through their academic analyses. However, they do little beyond analysis in terms of actively pursuing political goals. They are often dismissed as "armchair theorists." Being primarily an armchair theorist myself, I am keenly sensitive to the limitations of my own position. However, as with other cases, it is important that this group not be dismissed out of hand. Here, again, it seems that diversity is a good thing. Physicians may be more important to social wellbeing than almost any other profession. But we would not have an ideal society if everyone were a physician, with no one trained in anything else. The same point holds for varieties of political engagement.

Before considering the benefits of having some armchair theorists—or, as I will call them, "scholar observers"—we need to consider the alternative group of engaged scholars. Here we come to scholar activists proper. These are scholars who are involved with political movements in such a way as to draw systematically on their scholarly expertise for participation in the movement. At the risk of manifesting a Sanskritic mania for fine distinctions, I will draw a broad contrast within this group as well. There are obviously many degrees of possible involvement with political movements. Indeed, there are many degrees of political engagement of any sort. However, there does seem to be an important difference between activists who are participants in a movement, even participants who are prominent (e.g., as speakers at events), and activists who are enmeshed in institutional or other formal administrative structures. Put simply, there is a difference between someone who gives a talk at an anti-war rally and someone who has to worry about arranging for government permits for the rally, or someone who is involved in actually crafting the language of proposed legislation regarding the war. These two sorts of activist are in different social positions and operate in different social contexts; those differences affect the precise nature of their engagement, just what scholarship they deploy, and how they deploy it.

Consider, again, two well-known scholar activists—Noam Chomsky and George Lakoff. Chomsky was for a long time perhaps the left's paradigmatic scholar activist. However, despite prominent participation in various broad movements, his formal role in political institutions (e.g., parties) has been limited. In contrast, Lakoff has been associated with the Democratic Party in different ways. He has also been a leading figure in the Rockridge Institute, guiding its program of enhancing progressive politics, largely through cognitive linguistic analysis. Other activists have taken up, or pursued, still more embedded institutional roles, as when Slavoj Žižek ran for President of Slovenia as candidate of the Liberal Democratic Party. For years, I half jokingly urged Chomsky to enter formal politics so that he could make a more concrete difference, and give at least some voters an option that they could choose without offending their principles. Chomsky, not jokingly at all, recoiled from the suggestion. When I think about it, I realize that my suggestion was in many ways ludicrous. What made Chomsky paradigmatic as a scholar activist was in part contingent on his independence from institutions.

This leads us again to the benefits of diversity. Some "pragmatists" might deride the inconsequential lucubrations of scholar activists who refuse to engage with institutions that have real power. Conversely, some "purists" may object to soiling one's hands with participation in the Democratic Party. Both positions seem partially correct, but partially misguided. The benefits of actual involvement with powerful institutions are fairly obvious. These benefits bear not only on practical consequences, but also on the formulation of theoretical principles themselves. As to the latter, the more concrete and practical one's political engagement, the more one is likely to ask pragmatic questions and to draw on research in ways that bear on specific, human issues. For example, this appears to have occurred with Judith Butler through her involvement with the practical formulation of human rights policies. As Butler wrote in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, "I have been compelled to revise some of my positions in *Gender Trouble* by virtue of my own political engagements," including "board chair of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission" (xvii). I had the pleasure to work with Butler on the Modern Language Association's Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities. Despite her reputation for being highly abstract and, indeed, opaque, Butler was a model of precision, clarity, and practicality on that committee. Moreover, one could see her criticisms of identity categories implicitly informing her comments and contributions.

In keeping with this general tendency toward increased practicality and precision, institutional engagement often gives activists a greater sense of the detailed problems involved in specific areas of activism. Consider a very simple case. Part of the charge of the MLA committee just mentioned involves considering and responding to letters of complaint regarding academic freedom issues sent by MLA members to the organization. Sometimes the complaints have merit; sometimes they do not. In each case, however, the consideration of particulars leads one from a reliance on general ideas to an attempt to deal with concrete particulars. The process often reveals the limitations of the general ideas.

On the other hand, it is also clear that institutional involvement is itself limiting in many ways. We may put our three forms of engaged scholarship on sort of multi-dimensional gradient. The dimensions include, among others, the following: 1) limitation in alternative positions; 2) nuance in the development of positions; 3) opportunity to confine oneself to areas where one has adequate expertise; and 4) differences in temporal perspective regarding implementation and outcomes. In each case, the actual situation of an activist tends to impose different sorts of constraint, with a broad tendency for the constraints to increase from engaged observer to movement-based activist to institutionally-embedded activist.

As to the first dimension, the greater one's integration into an institution, the greater the extent to which one's alternatives are limited by the policies and procedures of the institution itself. For example, it should be easier for Chomsky to address radical alternatives to U.S. economic structure than for Lakoff to do so. This is not simply because institutional involvement restricts the options one may reasonably propose. Institutional involvement tends to reorient one's thoughts about issues. There are many cognitive reasons for this. For example, even temporary groups, such as committees, produce what are called "anchoring effects." Anchoring effects are constraints in the degree of deviation from previously articulated options. To take a very simple case, even an explicitly arbitrary number will affect test subjects' estimate of how many countries there are in the United Nations (Tversky and Kahneman 335-336). Note that such

effects are strongest with respect to institutionally embedded activists, but they are not absent from activists who are simply participants in movements. These effects would appear to be weakest with respect to scholar observers.

The second dimension (nuance in the development of positions) is somewhat more equivocal. On the one hand, concrete, practical problems faced by institutionally embedded activists may challenge absolutes, thus developing certain sorts of nuance in theoretical formulation. However, requirements of action and the contingencies of appealing to broader and more diverse audiences may foster a degree of simplification. It is sometimes difficult to act on complex, highly qualified theories. It is often almost impossible to explain such theories to non-experts in compelling ways that encourage political action rather than irritable drowsiness. For example, there has been some research recently on possible links between certain cognitive and personality traits, on the one hand, and certain political attitudes, on the other. The research shows only statistical correlations or a degree of co-variation—for example, between political conservatism and "negativity bias" ("Compared with liberals, conservatives tend to register greater physiological responses to such stimuli and also to devote more psychological resources" to "features of the environment that are negative" [Hibbing, Smith, and Alford 297]). This sort of research is often greatly simplified when invoked in activist contexts. For example, I recently came across an article by Susan Douglas, Catherine Neafie Kellogg Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan and an astute and informative writer for left-liberal political magazines. Douglas basically identifies certain personality traits as characterizing conservatives. To be fair, she does say that conservatives "tend toward certain psychological characteristics." Nonetheless, this seems to suggest more than the fact that research commonly shows only a greater statistical likelihood for conservatives to have these tendencies than for liberals to have them, or that the numerical averages for traits are higher for one group than the other. For example, consider negativity bias (not cited specifically by Douglas, but a relevant recent argument in important outlets). One study found that, on average, conservatives' response times to a certain negative stimulus were around 530 thousandths of a second, while the average for liberals was about 485 thousandths of a second (Carraro, Castelli, and Macchiella). Thus conservatives take a wee bit more than a half second, liberals a wee bit less. This is suggestive, but not the sort of data one is likely to imagine when hearing that conservatives tend to have negativity bias. It is unsurprising that the results of such research would be simplified in contexts where one is faced with the more direct experience of conflict and thus the enhancing of inter-group antagonisms. Indeed, we have strong cognitive and emotional biases toward such polarization (see Pronin, Puccio, and Ross). To make matters worse, it is far from clear that conservative/liberal or Republican/Democrat or any other standard political division actually captures the explanatory principle at stake anyway. Put differently, the research itself seems to involve concealed variables (on the negativity bias research, see my "Negativity").

Further, related problems arise from the third and fourth dimensions mentioned above. As to the third (opportunity to confine oneself to areas in which one has adequate expertise), activists are likely to find themselves in situations where they have to address complex, real-world problems. Those problems may bear on many disciplines. Activists often do not have the luxury of limiting themselves to their own area of expertise, simply setting aside specialized work with obvious bearing on these problems. Even when they fully comprehend relevant research outside their areas of expertise, it is rarely the case that they are in a position to respond to it critically. The situation of the scholar observer is different. He or she is generally better situated to select just

what research he or she will consider and how critically he or she will examine it. Again, the neuroscientific research is a case in point. Douglas and others in her situation have the option of ignoring the research, thus potentially impoverishing their concrete analyses. But they are generally not well situated to respond to the work critically.

Part of the reason for this difference in positioning has to do with the sorts of temporal scale that operate in different forms of political engagement (the final dimension from our list). First, there is simply the time at one's disposal for considering various topics and acquiring relevant expertise. To take a crude example, Douglas faced a publication deadline for her column. As Katha Pollitt recently wrote, with respect to reporting on the *Charlie Hebdo* murders, "how is it possible, in a few days, to learn enough and understand enough and see and hear enough to write anything that is not simply a combination of random anecdotes and interviews shaped, inevitably, by what one already thinks" (6). The same general point holds for formulations of policy statements on particular political events and even for longer-term programs such as political platforms. Perhaps more significantly, the practical nature of activist engagement almost invariably forces one to respond to events or even enduring conditions with an eye on short-term consequences. The point is most obvious with elected officials, who face re-election challenges, but it is true for any group that seeks to sustain its organizational structure. For example, political publications need to consider not only how their advocacy might ultimately contribute to restructuring the economy, but also how they might sell enough books or advertising in order to sustain their enterprise.

In short, there are many ways in which scholars may be politically engaged. Some may be more valuable than others, but each has its own advantages and drawbacks. In consequence, it seems clear that not everyone should be the same. The best situation is some combination of these various options.

Or, rather, the best situation is some combination of these or other options. The preceding analytic is not intended to categorize all people univocally or enduringly. First of all, many of us are sometimes ivory tower or disengaged intellectuals, sometimes scholar observers, sometimes engaged citizens. Moreover, some forms of engagement are intermediate between observation and activism. The point here is not to pigeonhole individuals. It is, rather, to set out a grid that will give us a sense of the possible forms of political engagement for scholars, as well as what some of their benefits and drawbacks might be. Moreover, this grid is tentative. Different contexts will require different distinctions and different analyses.

Before going on to issues of evaluation, it is worth considering one further aspect of our usual conception of a scholar activist. The prototypical scholar activist is probably widely seen as, in some way, oppositional. This oppositional character is most often a matter of "content" or program, a matter of what sorts of society one might advocate and seek to implement. This is to a certain extent straightforward. There hardly seems to be much of a point in engaging in social activism if one's goal is not to change things.

On the other hand, there are different ways in which one may imagine that change. In his recent book on academic freedom, Stanley Fish has presented a typology of positions on the purposes of academic work. Fish's own position is that the purposes do not go beyond the function of the discipline itself (e.g., teaching and scholarship on literature). However, he isolates

other options. I have argued elsewhere that there are problems with Fish's typology (see "Academic"). However, in a slightly modified form, it suggests some important differences that may be useful. Specifically, Fish distinguishes those who see scholarship and teaching as advancing the common good, as engaging in critique, or as promoting revolution. Since his topic is academic freedom, he treats these goals in relation to academic freedom, exemplifying the first position by the AAUP, the second by Judith Butler, and the third by Henry Giroux. Roughly, the difference here may be systematized in the following terms. The first position is that the society may be improved by changing the implementation of currently predominant norms; the second involves critiquing those norms, challenging the framework in which current thought and social action unfold; the third involves substituting new norms. All three may inform the different varieties of engaged scholarship, though the second is perhaps more difficult to implement in an institutional context, which tends to require positive alternatives. Note that all three positions are oppositional in some manner, though the second and third are more obviously or intensively oppositional, thus probably closer to our prototype of a scholar activist. I will not tire the reader with another disquisition on the value of all three (but cf. Abbott and Schwartz on the value of both reformist and radical strategies in democratic socialism). The nature of such an argument should be clear without me spelling it out.

I will, however, point to one form of opposition that is perhaps undervalued by engaged scholars. That is opposition to dominant views within engaged scholarship. I am not referring here to David Horowitz's plea that more "conservatives" be incorporated into academia. The point is not that oppositional movements should allow room for views that are dominant elsewhere—in other words, the very views against which they stand in opposition. There are some contexts in which this may be the case. Moreover, there will always be some diversity of opinion among academics on any given issue, and that should not be stifled or ignored. However, in general, the socially dominant position (e.g., in support of a national war) is so widely represented in society at large that it hardly needs to be given a special place within the usually tiny opposition of engaged scholarship. Rather, I am referring to alternative kinds of oppositional thought and practice. Not to dredge up the past, but for most of my graduate study and early career, one was automatically dismissed as a reactionary "phallogocentrist" if one did not believe in the linguistic presuppositions and assertions of Jacques Derrida. It should not have taken revelations about de Man's past Nazi connections to open up some room for dissent from the idea that "differance" was an adequate account of meaning, for example.

Finally, in addition to its substantive claims, there is another way in which engaged scholarship may be understood as oppositional, or at least alternative. It is in the careful, detailed, and elaborated reflection it enables. As Ellen Schrecker has written, "In a world of sound bites and bullet points, the nation's campuses are among the last few places where it is still possible to deal with complicated ideas or entertain unorthodox opinions" (4). "Unorthodox opinions" points toward the oppositional content of engaged scholarship. "Complicated ideas" is more general, but it bears on engaged scholarship as well. Specifically, it speaks to the general tendency for standard ideas in a society, including standard political ideas, to simplify social or other phenomena and to resist questioning or challenge. This type of opposition is not a matter of policy content. But it is also not merely formal. It is, rather, a matter of methodology and intellectual processes that are relatively independent of one's policy conclusions. If policy opposition most obviously valorizes participatory activism that seeks concrete social change, such methodological opposition most obviously valorizes engaged scholar observation.

The Nature of Expertise: Theories and Worldviews

The preceding section set out an analytic of scholars' political engagement, focusing on the nature of that engagement. A no less important parameter concerns the sort of expertise invoked by scholars. In this case, however, the analysis is simpler and can be treated more briefly.

Consider, again, the contrasting pair of scholar activists from linguistics—Noam Chomsky and George Lakoff. Lakoff's political analyses are based largely on his own theoretical work on conceptual metaphor and related phenomena. When he analyzes a policy, he focuses on the way in which the formulation and defense of the policy rely on the recruitment of broad metaphorical structures that serve to guide our thought, organizing our ideas and orienting our responses. Chomsky, in contrast, has tended to maintain that his own linguistic theories are irrelevant to political analysis and activism. For Chomsky, there is a special role for engaged scholars or intellectuals. But the relevant expertise of scholars is a matter of largely trans-disciplinary skills, primarily methodological training, and access to information. As Chomsky puts it in his influential essay, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals," intellectuals have "the leisure, the facilities, and the training to seek the truth lying behind the veil of distortion and misrepresentation" (*Chomsky* 60). The general skills prominently include an ability to conduct scholarly research, finding and evaluating varied sources of information, sifting through data, formulating explanatory hypotheses consistent with the data and with general theoretical desiderata such as simplicity, recognizing violations of methodological principles, and so forth. The access to information is largely a matter of having privileges at libraries, and in some cases having the training required to understand the information (e.g., fluency in Hebrew, which allows one to read the Hebrew press, an important resource on Israel-Palestine issues).

Here, one might wonder what could possibly motivate Chomsky to set aside his own theories and to take up only broad methodological principles in his political engagements. Chomsky has both epistemic and political reasons for this preference. The epistemic reasons concern the tentative and changeable quality of any linguistic or other theory. As we have already noted, scientific theories change continually. The validity of a political analysis should not be contingent on the validity of a theory that is almost certain to be revised quite soon—thus that is almost certain to be viewed as at least partially invalid in the near future. Chomsky also has a rather low opinion of the scientific status of most theories that may be intrinsically relevant to political or social activism. The political reason is that Chomsky believes political analysis should be readily accessible to ordinary people and should in principle be the sort of work that could be undertaken by them. Accessibility of information is simply a contingent feature of the researcher's background and social location. Broad methodological principles are, in effect, systematic versions of skills held by all neurotypical humans. Thus there is nothing special about the sort of scholarly engagement undertaken by Chomsky and there is no reason that ordinary people could not understand it entirely or undertake it on their own, perhaps with some limited training to strengthen their own empirical and logical processes—I am guessing that Chomsky would say that the main training required would be a basic introduction to library research or relevant electronic databases. Indeed, Chomsky is scathing about the appeal to expertise, going so far as to say that "the cult of the expert is both self-serving, for those who propound it, and fraudulent." He explains that "To anyone who has any familiarity with the social and behavioral sciences (or the 'policy sciences'), the claim that there are certain considerations and principles too deep for the outsider to comprehend is simply an absurdity, unworthy of comment" (*Chomsky* 72).

These points lead us to the issue of evaluating expert knowledge in its application through political engagement. However, before continuing with that, we need to complete our analysis of types of expertise. We have a basic division between common methodological and research practices, on the one hand, and specific disciplinary or inter-disciplinary theories on the other; however, the second category may seem overly broad.

For example, the contrast suggested by Chomsky's preferences here does not appear terribly stark when one reads Lakoff's work. The same point holds for such social psychological approaches as that of Zimbardo. Though technical in certain ways, conceptual metaphor analysis is quite accessible, even if it turns out to be harder for people to do than might at first seem to be the case. The same point holds for understanding in-group/out-group definitions, or processes of empathy enhancement. However, the problems of both comprehension and democratic participation become more acute when one thinks of Judith Butler's deconstructive reflections or Slavoj Žižek's Marxist-Lacanianism.

In part, this difference is a matter of vocabulary and idiom. In part, it is a matter of the trajectory of thought. In part it is a matter of the extent to which a given analysis relies on background knowledge. But that is not all there is to it. Part of the difference between Lakoff's work and that of Derridaean or Lacanian critics is that Lakoff is relying on the sort of theory that David Bordwell might refer to as a "middle level" account, what might also be called a "local" or "limited domain" theory. This is an integrated complex of well-articulated principles, closely and clearly related to a set of data in a limited domain (e.g., verbal metaphor), which the principles serve to describe, organize, and explain. In contrast, Derridaean Deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis are high level or global theories. They do not so much explain independently ascertainable data. Rather they serve to interpret their subjects in such a way that they in effect produce the data. (Of course, all theories re-construe data; the issue is the degree to which a given discourse fosters a rethinking of the world that insulates the theory-suffused [e.g., Deconstructive or psychoanalytic] account from understandings of the data shared across contending theories.) Moreover, their subjects are not simply local. They are wide-ranging, even universal in the accounts of some adherents. Deconstruction, for example, does not so much explain why "binaries" are "unstable" and "phallogocentrism" is "always already self-deconstructing." It produces a way of considering the world that leads one to think of the world in terms of unstable binaries, phallogocentrism, and so forth. Indeed, in this way, these are perhaps not so aptly considered theories as worldviews. Much the same points could be made about many discourses or philosophies that have underwritten engaged scholarship—for example, Existentialism. Of course, many worldviews incorporate valuable, extensively developed middle-level theories, but such theories remain encased in what are ultimately non-judicable worldviews. The often dogmatic quality of such worldviews is marked not only by their imperviousness to challenge, but also by some common idioms that pervade the associated discourses. Examples would include the invocation of some doctrine with the phrase, "as Q has taught us" (e.g., "as Derrida has taught us"), a phrase not coincidentally reminiscent of religious precedents, such as "As the Bible teaches us."

It is perhaps unsurprising that scholar activism is often associated not with methodological expertise nor with middle-level theory expertise, but with worldviews. Indeed, it is important to note here that a given discourse may have been produced initially as a theory, but then transmuted into a worldview by zealous adherents. One might argue, for example, that this is

the case with Marx and historical materialism. Even more striking cases come from evolutionary theory, particularly evolutionary psychology, and even current neuroscience. These both appear increasingly to be viewed as theories of everything or of everything that matters. Any apparent social difference can be taken up and given an "explanation" in terms of adaptations among hunter-gatherers; a tentative and debatable interpretation of an ambiguous brain scan may be touted as a new absolute about the way our "mind-brain" operates—often in conformity with dominant ideology (e.g., gender ideology; for a powerful critique of such "neurosexism," see Fine). These qualms about worldviews or the misuses of theories as worldviews return us to the issue of evaluation.

Evaluating Expertise in Engaged Scholarship: Categories of Norms

Here, then, we need to have a better sense of the ways that we might evaluate these forms of expertise. The undertaking is complicated by the fact that there are numerous, sometimes mutually exclusive values in almost any political project. We may isolate a few types of norms that are likely to be particularly important for the evaluation of the application of expertise in engaged scholarship. These are legal, epistemic and pragmatic, "meta-political" (as we might call the politics of the means, rather than the politics of the goal), and ethical. We might briefly consider each sort of evaluation in turn, noting its relevance to engaged scholarship.

Legal evaluation generally takes two forms. The first is simply the appraisal of whether some academic speech or action violates the law (e.g., in constituting defamation of character or incitement to violence). The second, complementary to this, concerns the extent to which the state or some institution (e.g., a university) may legally restrict speech or action. For the most part, I will leave aside legal norms as they require separate, extensive treatment; moreover, their precise articulation and assessment demand a form of expertise that I lack. (I have the luxury of setting legal concerns aside as this essay itself is an instance of observer scholarship.) However, it is important to remark on one general principle that bears on restrictions affecting engaged scholarship, as the stifling of academic speech and action appear to be commonly aimed at dissident activists. The main legal question in such cases is generally whether or not it is permissible for an institution to restrict speech or action (e.g., for a university to terminate the employment of a faculty member based on his or her political assertions). Engaged scholars often wish to argue that, in relevant cases, such restriction is not legally permissible. I am, of course, sympathetic with this wish, though it is sometimes difficult to evaluate. Nonetheless, it is important not to base everything on legal permissibility of restriction versus impermissibility. If permissible, restriction may still be highly undesirable. Indeed, this holds even when we agree that the restricted speech itself is misguided, problematic, or offensive. Belching in public is distasteful. It might be legally permissible to outlaw belching in public, with a fine—hefty enough to produce a deterrent effect—imposed on anyone caught belching by an officer of the law, but it hardly follows from the undesirability of the act and the permissibility of the law that we *should* institute such a law. The point holds *a fortiori* for politically dissident speech.

In some ways, the most basic issue with evaluating engaged scholarship is legal, since legal status is what permits the dissemination of the relevant scholarship to begin with. Intellectually, however, the fundamental concerns are epistemic and pragmatic. The epistemic evaluation of theories is largely straightforward. It involves the usual issues of the consistency of the descriptive and explanatory claims with the data, the strength of statistical correlations, the

possibility of generating simpler explanatory hypotheses, and so on. On the other hand, there are some complications here. Perhaps most significantly, following such philosophers of science as Imre Lakatos, we are well advised to evaluate not merely isolated theories, but the trajectory of research programs. All theories are likely to prove mistaken or overly complex in some respect. What is important is that such theories continue to be evaluated and improved. This is easy to judge with mainstream or dominant theories, since they are usually under constant examination and revision. However, it is more difficult to evaluate with respect to non-dominant approaches, which are often under-funded and under-researched. Politically engaged scholars may draw on theories that challenge not only dominant political structures, but also dominant theoretical paradigms (to use the Kuhnian term). As such, they may be engaged in fledgling research programs. It is therefore important to give leeway or greater benefit of the doubt to such programs, so that they have the opportunity to develop in ways that make more rigorous evaluation reasonable. Returning to a previous point, I might stress here that this applies to research programs that are non-dominant within the community of engaged scholars at any given time.

I class the pragmatic and the epistemic together as the effectiveness of a scholarly activity (its pragmatic value) is largely a function of its epistemic validity. If a theory indicates that there are particular sources of racism or particular motivations for a state pursuing war, and if that theory implies strategies for opposing racism or war, then the effectiveness of the strategies is presumably contingent on the validity of the theory. Thus pragmatic evaluation is also fairly straightforward. Consider, for example, the academic boycott of Israel (as opposed to an economic boycott aimed at Israeli businesses). I am opposed to it for a number of reasons; these include my belief that a specifically academic boycott is unlikely to have beneficial effects on Israeli policies toward Palestinians (as well as my belief that it will have deleterious consequences on people who are not particularly guilty of crimes committed by the state of Israel). Take one small aspect of the boycott, at least in conversations with people supporting it, I hear that producing shame over Israeli policies is a likely outcome of the boycott and that such shame is likely to produce ameliorative action. Perhaps the organizers of the boycott do not have this sort of mechanism in mind. However, it would not be surprising if they do, since it is a common way of thinking. Moreover, it is difficult to see what other motivational effects they might imagine for the academic boycott. (Opponents of the boycott, I should note, are often explicit about their own use of shaming, as one can see by Googling "BDS" and "shame"). The problem is that the pragmatic presumptions here appear to be mistaken. Shame seems to involve a sense that other people observe one with physical or moral disgust (on the relation of these forms of disgust, see Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley). There are two common responses to such a sense; the first is withdrawal (see Scheff 455). This hiding behavior is unlikely to produce active opposition to Israeli policy. The second common response is rage. Far for inspiring conciliation, "humiliation and shame are the core trigger and vulnerability for violence" (Walker and Knauer 725). That rage, directed against those who find one disgusting, is likely to foster nationalistic xenophobia among Israelis, not empathic identification with Palestinians—just as Israeli humiliation of Palestinians has often encouraged rebellion. Indeed, shame may inspire further racism (see Ray, Smith, and Wastell). This is particularly true given the fact that Israeli Jews have more than ample historical reason to distrust moral disgust from non-Jews (on anti-Semitism and disgust, see Nussbaum 347-349).

The specifics of pragmatic evaluation in any given case may be difficult. But, again, the general principles are straightforward. Here, however, I might make two general observations. First, I have long suspected that a particular risk for engaged scholars, at least those on the left, is that they will mistake good intentions for good results. Specifically, liberals appear often to be motivated more strongly by empathic concerns (see Hirsch, DeYoung, Xu, and Peterson). Empathic distress can be relieved by two strategies. The first is changing the situation itself, thus the pain suffered by the target (e.g., the hunger of the poor). The second is through "mood repair," the ameliorative alteration of one's emotional response (on mood repair, see Forgas 258). While the latter encompasses many techniques, one technique of mood repair for empathic distress is almost certainly the thought that one has taken appropriate action. If I see a car accident and feel distress, I am likely to reduce that distress if I have found someone with a cellphone and, so to speak, offloaded responsibility for calling for help. In cases of this sort, the efficacy of my action is fairly straightforward. In the case of broad social problems, however, things are often much less clear. It is often difficult to say just what effects a given action might have on, say, racism. This difficulty may lead to renewed efforts to ascertain what sorts of action enhance inter-group empathy or other social and psychological processes that are likely to reduce racism. But it is also possible that the opacity of results will, in effect, disinhibit wishful thinking, and thus allow us to construe uncertainty of outcomes as positive results. This brings me to the second and closely related general observation. Such wishful thinking is often manifest in and reinforced by some recurring practices in current scholarly discourse. For instance, it appears common now to characterize scholarly engagement not merely in terms of illocutionary acts of challenging, but in terms of perlocutionary success (to use Austin's terms). For purposes of illustration, consider a course description that I came across while outlining the present essay, a description that was not idiosyncratic, but characteristic of a widespread pattern in current academic discourse. The description said that the course would examine how queer speech "destabilizes normative sexuality." I do not mean to pick on the instructor of this course. Again, the phrasing is standard in the profession. Decades ago, we might have said that queer theory challenges beliefs about sexual norms. That leaves the question of success unresolved. Moreover, it leaves it unresolved in two ways. First, it does not tell us whether or not the challenge has successfully changed people's beliefs. Second, it does not tell us whether or not any change in beliefs has changed social behavior—a serious issue, given the relatively limited readership of academic queer theory. The course description's (fairly standard) rhetoric, in contrast, absolutized the political accomplishment of queer theory. Such theory does not merely challenge, but effectively "destabilizes." Moreover, it does not succeed merely with some people's beliefs; it undermines the norms themselves. Indeed, in saying "normative sexuality," the suggestion may propel the success of the undertaking further still. It may indicate that not only social norms, but also human sexuality itself has been reconfigured.

Again, by "meta-political," I am referring not to the political goal of scholarly engagement (e.g., the reduction of racism), but to the political implications of the means used to achieve that goal, thus the activity of political engagement itself. Here, I would point to two general risks in engaged scholarship. The first is the risk indicated by Chomsky—that expertise will create an elite or vanguard that undermines the democratic participation of non-experts in the formulation and pursuit of policies. Chomsky discusses this problem in "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship," where he maintains that "elitist bias" is "at the root of the phenomenon of counterrevolutionary subordination" in Bolshevism and Western liberalism (Chomsky 85). This is a risk highlighted by the anarchist tradition. However, there is an opposite risk as well. In the

Marxist tradition, it is often referred to as "voluntarism" (see, for example, Lukács 4, 124, 134, 191, 318, and 322). Voluntarism, narrowly conceived, is the view that mere revolutionary or progressive decision and commitment are adequate to transform society, even when the objective conditions are not amenable to such transformation. Ironically, some of the most striking cases of voluntarism come from the Marxist tradition (e.g., in some practices undertaken in China during the Great Leap Forward). This is in part a matter of *lack* of expertise. In other words, the problems that result from voluntarism derive to some extent from setting aside disciplinary knowledge for some sort of ideal, often one defined by a guiding worldview (illustrative cases may be found in incompetent construction or irrigation work from the Great Leap Forward [see Roberts 270-271]). Thus one might say that both the anarchist and Marxist traditions have a meta-political point. On the one hand, engaged intellectuals need to recognize the danger of vanguardism or elite anti-democratic tendencies. But at the same time, they need to recognize that expert knowledge is often crucial and anti-intellectualism is no less a threat than elitism.

Finally, we have ethical evaluation. Obviously, the precise nature of one's ethical evaluations will rest in part on one's system of ethical beliefs. It would go beyond the scope of the present essay to undertake the defense of one or another ethical system. However, in general, ethical systems operate to oppose egocentric bias. In other words, the purpose of ethical reflection is to move away from one's ordinary, selfish motives and to inspire some sort of interest that is not egocentric. Thus two common ethical principles are universality of application (as opposed to application biased in egocentric ways) and respect for the autonomy of others (as opposed to recognizing only one's own autonomy).

The universality of application criterion means not only that we should treat other individuals equally with ourselves. It suggests also that we should apply principles evenhandedly to in-groups and out-groups, to those with whom we agree and those with whom we disagree. For example, I believe that Steven Salaita's rights of free speech were violated egregiously. However, critics of his treatment by the University of Illinois often indicate that his job offer was withdrawn simply because he criticized Israel. Even the article in *The Nation* may easily leave this impression, since, its author tells us the first "important" issue raised by the case is that "universities are increasingly being asked to shut down criticism of Israel" (Palumbo-Liu 10). Censoring critiques of Israeli policies and practices is clearly a serious problem, with grave human consequences. It was undoubtedly a central factor in this case. However, it is misleading to indicate that Salaita simply made a criticism of Israel, as if for instance he merely set out the human rights violated by Israel in treating Palestinians. His dismissal was at least facilitated (and perhaps in part motivated) by the precise nature of his "criticism." Specifically, he made some appalling comments about Israelis—for example, that "I wish all the fucking West Bank settlers would go missing" (quoted in Alexander). I suspect that Salaita did not think through the implication of his comment, but it implies that he wishes a number of Israeli infants would be captured and presumably executed extra-judicially. Many on the left seem to have considered this a mere triviality. Following the ethical principle of universality of application, it would seem that they should consider it also trivial if, for example, some professor, responding to the destructiveness of the crowds in Ferguson, Missouri, tweeted that he wished "all the [expletive] people on the streets of Ferguson would get the Michael Brown treatment." Of course, there is an important difference here in that Blacks are the oppressed group while (adult) Israeli settlers are the oppressor group. But the universality criterion is not satisfied simply by noting some difference.

After all, there is always some difference in the individuals involved in such cases. Rather, there must be a difference that sufficiently defines an ethical principle. But what would the principle be here? Extrajudicial execution of an entire group, including children and other innocents, is ethically permissible—indeed, something to be wished for—if that group encompasses political oppressors, but not otherwise?

Respect for the autonomy of others is perhaps less clear in its implications. I would say that it involves seeking to convince others of the value of one's position so that they are free to make a rational choice in the matter. This entails presenting the facts of the case clearly and with adequate acknowledgment of complexities and of any clear, contravening evidence. Two brief examples should illustrate the point. Some years ago, I saw a tape of George Lakoff discussing political strategy with a group of activists. Lakoff was stressing the importance of "framing" the issues in a way that is advantageous to the progressive legislation. One example they considered was abortion. "Pro-life" advocates commonly frame the debate in terms of killing babies. One of the participants in the discussion proposed that they could frame the abortion debate in terms of a story. I do not fully remember the details, but as I recall it involved inviting one's interlocutor to imagine that his or her daughter or sister had been raped, that she would have to forego opportunities and suffer shame if she were not allowed to have an abortion, and so on. On the one hand, it is perfectly reasonable for "pro-choice" advocates to point out that there are cases of this sort. However, there is a problem with this as a way of treating abortion as an ethical issue—or, rather, two problems. First, none of the participants in Lakoff's group would have accepted the universalization of such judgments. For example, they would (rightly, of course) denounce a defense of lynching that claimed we should not "frame" the issue as "killing Blacks." Rather, we should frame it by reference to a story—imagine that your (white) daughter has been raped (by a black man), and so on. Second, and more relevantly for the autonomy criterion, this reframing strongly appeals to personal attachment bonds (parent/child or sibling relations). As such, it is in effect an attempt to compromise the autonomy of the interlocutor's judgment.

A second example is closely related, but more general. We are often told that the best political speakers—like the best preachers and, supposedly, the best teachers—are the ones who can really "fire up" their listeners (to use the phrasing of a university vice provost speaking about her concept of the ideal teacher). But firing up one's addressees is a way of inhibiting their autonomy, producing a state of proneness to action and commitment that they may think better of when not fired up. Here, I could not put the point better than Chomsky has done, "I'm always put off by people who are called good speakers, by those who can rouse an audience," he explains. "That's just what you do not want. If you have the capacity to do it, you should suppress it" (*Science* 115).

In both cases—framing and firing up—the point is a simple one. Engaged scholars are perhaps in a position where they particularly risk slipping from scholarship to propaganda. Everyone has ethical obligations to avoid propaganda. Those obligations do not cease to apply when it comes to scholars.

The Scope of Application for Engaged Scholarship: Teaching

All engaged scholarship seeks to change society. However, scholars differ in the range of forums through which they express their scholarly engagements and the range of targets toward which they address those engagements. Perhaps the most fundamental difference along this axis is that between academic and extra-academic forums. The paradigmatic scholar activist works outside the university structure, directly addressing law, politics, economy, or civil society in public spaces, sometimes from governmental or non-governmental institutions or movements. A more limited case of scholar activism may be found when scholars put their expertise to use in seeking to improve society by changing or developing aspects of the university, profession, or union. For example, drafting statements on academic freedom for the Modern Language Association of America is a form of engaged scholarship. Though limited in its extent, it is potentially consequential.

Finally, in perhaps the majority of cases, the most basic form of scholarly engagement comes with the primary duties of an academic—teaching and research. When the scholar's specific disciplinary expertise bears directly on his or her political concerns (e.g., if he of she works on gender studies, colonialism, nationalism, or any of the other countless topics that are important to both higher education and political life), then the scope of his or her scholarly engagement almost invariably includes both teaching and research. In the minimal case, political engagement may not go beyond such professional outlets.

This is not to say that engaged scholars "preach" politics to or "indoctrinate" their students. Engaged scholars—no differently from ivory tower scholars—may, should, and (in all likelihood) usually do apply their scholarly expertise to the legitimate subject matter of the course in reasonable ways; they simply do so in ways that manifest political goals, even if those goals remain only implicit, as is presumably the case almost all the time. Of course, a given instructor may pursue a political agenda that distorts or bypasses the subject matter of the course. That is wrong. But it is wrong because it distorts or bypasses the subject matter of the course, not because it is political. It would be no less wrong if the motivations were religious or the result of personal humor or mere lassitude. Thus, cases of this sort—though widely discussed as central to issues of politically engaged scholarship—are in fact irrelevant to it. Someone may behave unprofessionally for political reasons, just as someone may drive recklessly to get to a political rally. The problem in each case is the behavior, not the incidental motive for the behavior. More precisely, "preaching" implies explicit and sustained advocacy, which would most often distract from the purposes of learning in the classroom and thus is objectionable on that score. "Indoctrination" implies both deceit and coercion of belief. It is not clear to me that university level teachers have the means available to coerce belief (though they have the means to coerce test responses—a different matter). In the case of indoctrination, then, the issue is deceit. In short, both objections come down to a failure to fulfill the educational objectives of the course. Again, the motives for such a failure are not—or should not be—the issue.

In this section, I will consider one very limited example of political engagement in the classroom, drawn from my own teaching. It is one of the few times when I move very slightly beyond the scholar observer role to take a less sedentary part in political activity. However, the manner in which I do this is so highly non-prototypical that it is hardly recognizable as activism. I believe it is a particularly apt example precisely for this reason. Here as elsewhere the point is not that this is the way everyone should be an engaged scholar. Indeed, it is rather the opposite: that

there are many ways of being an engaged scholar. They have different potential values, even if they are all subject to the same broad evaluative criteria.

I regularly teach a course called "Literature and Culture of India." In this course, I present a range of philosophical, literary, and artistic trends in the history of Indian thought, often pairing an ancient work with some modern parallel. The course does not focus on colonialism or anti-colonialism and rarely involves any Anglophone writings. It treats Indian tradition as a multifarious, developing complex of ideas and practices that involves many influences, of which European thought and custom are a relatively late and limited instance. Put differently, I adopt an "Indocentric" approach to Indian literature and culture. Rather than viewing India primarily in relation to the West, I view one part of Indian culture primarily in relation to other parts of Indian culture. In keeping with this, I stress the great diversity of concepts and customs in Indian cultural history. These are both already politically engaged decisions. I have a choice between encouraging my students to see Indian culture in relation to Western culture or to see it on its own terms; I have a choice between encouraging them to think of Indian culture as uniform or as diverse. For example, on the topic of caste, I discuss how there has been anticaste thought and activism since ancient times and that, indeed, Vedāntism (the revered system of metaphysics developed in the Upaniṣads) is logically incompatible with caste hierarchies—as some of the Upaniṣads themselves indicate (see Olivelle 29 and 306 for an example from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*).

I should also note that this approach is underwritten by universalism, which is to say the broad presumption that the psychological processes and group dynamics of different cultures follow universal principles. Taking the West as a norm and contrasting India with that norm fosters a sense of difference, which is almost invariably conducive to out-grouping—or "Othering" as literary critics are fond of saying. We do not "Other" people we think of as the same, but people we think of as different. The sense of common humanity, with its facilitating effects on empathy and identification, are enabled by treating India on its own terms, rather than by contrast with the West, and by emphasizing the variability of Indian culture on such issues as caste or individual choice in marriage.

Thus there is a broad political orientation in my teaching of Indian literature and culture. This necessarily works its way out in the specific books I choose to examine in the course. For example, I recently taught Bhaṭṭa Jayánta's *Āgamaḍambara*, a play that treats conflicts among philosophical schools and practical traditions (e.g., regarding sexuality). I also make a point of teaching Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*, with its stress on ahiṁsā, non-violence or non-harming. These works fit the political purposes of the course nicely. For example, Jayánta's work makes the diversity of Indian traditions unmistakable. The *YogaSūtra* stresses the imprudence of violent behavior for the one committing the violence, a perspective that is often unexpected for my students, who tend to view violence solely in moral terms (whether the violence is judged immoral or morally necessary). Later works range from the gently humanist stories of Rabindranath Tagore to films or novels connected with the All-India Progressive Writers' Association.

However, I cannot simply choose works that are politically expedient. There are important works that are militaristic and casteist as well, including some of the most influential, such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhagavad Gītā*. I usually teach one or the other, most often the latter. When I

teach the *Rāmāyaṇa*, I commonly pair it with explicit or implicit revisions to show the degree to which some ideological premises of the work have been challenged repeatedly in the course of Indian history. Examples include *Bhavabhūti's Uttararāmacaritam* and, more subtly but more subversively, Kālidāsa's renowned *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, as well as modern films such as *Pinjar* and *Raavan*.

The situation with the *Gītā* is more complex. In that work, *Kṛṣṇa* gives an argument in favor of a relatively unreflective commitment to the prosecution of war as duty. This is a potentially consequential argument for the attitudes and actions of my students. Indeed, initial responses, written down immediately after reading the work, suggest to me that students often find Kṛṣṇa's arguments compelling. In relation to this, I first locate the *Gītā* in its larger narrative context, the *Mahābhārata*. I explain that the standard view is that the *Pāṇḍavas* are the "good guys" and the Kauravas are the "bad guys." Granting that the text favors the former group over the latter, I argue that, despite this, the origins and outcomes of the conflict are not as unequivocal as is often made out. For example, the origin involves a dispute over the kingship that is not straightforward, but very convoluted and uncertain. More importantly, we consider the details of Kṛṣṇa's argument, noting its rhetoric and its logical problems. For example, Kṛṣṇa appeals to ideas from Sāṅkhya philosophy to argue that one inflicts no harm in killing the body, since the body is necessarily fleeting and distinct from the unchanging self. Such killing therefore poses no problems for Arjuna's dharma or ethical duty; however, Kṛṣṇa does not apply this principle consistently. If killing the Kaurava enemies causes them (i.e., their souls) no harm, then surely the lesser crimes of the Kauravas (depriving the Pāṇḍavas of the kingdom) affect only the fleeting, material world and are thus not harmful either. But if those crimes are inconsequential in the same way as killing, then they should raise no dharmic issues themselves. In other words, it is difficult to understand why one is ethically required to respond to Kaurava crimes if dharma is tied to genuine (rather than merely apparent) harm—and how killing is a response anyway, since it is putatively not harmful. (Note that such inconsistencies do not arise because Indians somehow reject "Western" logic, as is sometimes claimed. The consistency of "Western" and "Eastern" logic is clear not only from the general adherence of "Eastern" texts to principles of inference, and from "Western" deviations from those principles, but also from the treatments of logic by, for example, Nyāya philosophers.)

My implicit political purpose in going through these various points is two-fold. First, it is to disarm the effects of Kṛṣṇa's arguments on my students. Second, it is to suggest some of the problems with arguments for war generally. I do not make explicit connections with, say, specific U.S. wars or militarism (though I do not believe there would be anything wrong with doing so). However, I do often note that Kṛṣṇa's tactics are not unique, but common. For example, I might remark that wars often begin with sovereignty disputes that each side presents as unequivocal, but that are commonly complicated and contradictory. One side might have a superior claim, but it is rarely a matter of one side being the good guys and the other side being the bad guys. Even when there is a "right" side in a conflict, it is often a matter of fairly bad guys versus really bad guys. Moreover, the outcome of the *Mahābhārata* war suggests that, even if there is greater right on one side, war is rarely if ever a prudent or ethical option.

I hope it is clear that my teaching choices in this case reflect political engagements, even if they are far less salient than more prototypical forms of engaged scholarship. Again, that non-

prototypicality is one reason for considering a case of this sort. In any event, here the usual evaluative issues arise. I should consider them briefly in turn.

I hope it is clear that my teaching choices in this case reflect political engagements, even if they are far less salient than more prototypical forms of engaged scholarship. Again, that non-prototypicality is one reason for considering a case of this sort. In any event, here the usual evaluative issues arise. I should consider them briefly in turn.

Issues of legal evaluation would seem to arise primarily in the area of academic freedom. For many years, I had almost entirely non-Indian students in the class. The Indian students I did have tended to be secular Hindus or liberal Muslims interested in non-Muslim traditions. (For reasons of time, I often do not teach the Muslim part of Indian tradition in this course. It figures prominently in another course on "Literature and Culture of the Muslim World," which has some of the same implicit political goals and some different ones also.) Recently, however, I have begun to get heritage students who enter the class believing that that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gītā* are infallible revelations. Thus far, my relations with these students have been perfectly fine. Indeed, they are often knowledgeable about aspects of tradition as practiced that are unfamiliar to me (my connections with lived Hindu tradition, through my wife, are necessarily in part specific to regional and, indeed, familial traditions). Nonetheless, the presence of committed believers in the class makes it potentially risky to treat these texts as anything other than divine utterances.

Suppose, for example, that I was subjected to the sort of campaign to which the important Indologist, Wendy Doniger, has been subjected (see Doniger's essays for an account). Doniger has been vilified as anti-Hindu in part for some critical comments she made about the *Bhagavad Gītā*. However, I will make two remarks. The first is that, even if a writer such as Robert Post is correct that academic freedom resides primarily in the profession or discipline, it should involve at least some application to individual faculty members. At the very least, it would seem that it should entail a presumption that a professionally established faculty member is in the best position to determine the precise content and trajectory of his or her teaching, given university requirements as to topic and general features of content. As Ronald Dworkin put it, "academic freedom insulates scholars from the administrators of their universities: university officials . . . cannot dictate how those who have been appointed will teach" (183; see also Schrecker on "Lehrfreiheit or 'freedom to teach'" [11] and more generally on faculty "autonomy" [e.g., 12-13]). Even other faculty members in the same field do not have the day-to-day experience of the class and the organizational sense of the course's goals and means; these are the province of the instructor.

The second thing to remark in this context is even simpler. Suppose it is the case that academic freedom as established in case law does not protect an instructor from censure for particular sorts of teaching (e.g., teaching that offends the religious sensibilities of some students in the class). It does not follow that the university is obligated to censure those sorts of teaching. In other words, the default case is not censure, with the burden of proof on anyone who opposes censure. The burden of proof should always be on those who wish to suppress speech, whether such suppression is or is not legally permissible. This is, so to speak, the cultural (rather than merely legal) implication of academic freedom or of freedom of speech more generally.

Here, however, ethical issues arise. The preceding comments suggest that it should in general be difficult to censure teaching the *Bhagavad Gītā* as a work of political argumentation rather than divine revelation. But it does not follow that it is ethical of me to do so. Here the universality and autonomy criteria arise. Do I apply the relevant principles consistently? In fact, there are complications here. It should in principle be possible for someone to treat one text as revelation but not another, depending on his or her own beliefs. Consistency here would rather involve granting others the reciprocal right to treat one's own favored texts as historical rather than revealed. For example, to be ethically consistent, a Christian would not need to treat the Bible as historical. However, he or she would have to accept others doing so. It happens that this is not an issue for me, since I do not believe that any work derives from divine revelation. Moreover, part of my argument about the *Bhagavad Gītā* is that it appears to have incorporated different sources with different aims (e.g., a "dharma" source concerning ethical duty and a "bhakti" source concerning devotion). I often explicitly link this with Biblical studies that isolate different strands of Bible authorship, precisely in order to stress that the "secularizing" approach to a sacred text should not be confined to the Hindu tradition.

As to the autonomy issue, I can without hesitation assure my readers that I never "fire up" students in any way. Indeed, anyone who has heard me lecture will know from experience that my listeners are far more likely to nod their heads in a struggle against somnolence than in enthusiastic agreement. I also believe that I am not "framing" the discussion in a misleading way or a way that I would not readily generalize to other texts. By urging students to consider the logic of the argument carefully, I try to prepare them for analyzing texts on their own. Moreover, when I differ from standard opinion, I note the difference.

Autonomy issues might arise in connection with my treatment of student responses in class and on exams. For example, do I allow students to disagree with my view of the *Bhagavad Gītā*? This is in part a political question, a matter of the balance between democracy and expertise. But it is also a question of respecting my students' ability to formulate their own views on the topic. The answer to both the political and the ethical issue is the same. I expect my students to recognize that one may challenge Kṛṣṇa's argument on grounds of consistency. They are perfectly free to defend Kṛṣṇa's position. However, they should not simply assume its consistency. This seems to me the ordinary, scholarly position. Academics—both teachers and students—do not articulate their views in a vacuum. We relate our views to those of other people. In keeping with this, one should accept the autonomy of one's students in the same way one modulates democracy by expertise. A classroom is not a ballot box. People in the class do not simply vote for their preference. The responsibility of both the teacher and the students lies primarily with making a case for their positions, a case that bears on the textual evidence, the cultural background, and the discursive context of other arguments in the field at the time—necessarily including the instructor's own prior arguments.

Of course, some people would claim that any intrusion of political views into the classroom is wrong. Since my arguments about the *Bhagavad Gītā* involved such views, however backgrounded, the arguments are themselves illegitimate or at least suspect. In a lecture at the University of Connecticut a couple of years ago, Stanley Fish was faced with a question about an instructor presenting his or her political views as explicitly personal, thus not as some sort of doctrine to which students were required to subscribe. (The question did not come from me). Fish responded that it was still wholly illegitimate to present one's own opinions in the classroom.

Coming from the teacher, Fish went on, this was akin to the student's mother presenting her opinions. Evidently, Fish's experience of adolescents and young adults is quite different from mine. While one tends to simply believe one's parents in early childhood, there seems often to be a tendency to dismiss one's parents' views as one passes through adolescence. The analogy between teachers and parents is perhaps apt, but, if so, it is one reason why we probably do not need to worry greatly about exerting excessive influence on our students. I have little doubt that my students are at least as skeptical about my views as they are about those of their parents.

In addition, Fish's account assumes that there is a politically neutral option, that we can either be political or not. In some cases, that is true, but not always. What would be the politically neutral position in the case of the *Bhagavad Gītā*? Surely it is not politically neutral to treat the argument as revelation or as logically compelling, which is presumably what one does in effect when one merely explicates the text without considering its internal contradictions or its contextual complications. The point is particularly clear in the case of my classroom teaching, since I tend to approach a range of arguments (e.g., those in *Āgamaḍambara*) skeptically. If I refrained from doing so in the case of the *Bhagavad Gītā* that would particularly make it seem as if Kṛṣṇa's argument is valid.

More generally, far from fostering political neutrality, at least some course subject matter is intrinsically political, thus itself non-neutral. As such, it would seem to require the incorporation of ethical or political response. For example, there would, I believe, be something deeply wrong with a course on Nazi Germany that conveyed no sense that anti-Semitism was a terrible force that produced unspeakable crimes; there would be something amiss with a course on American slavery that failed to communicate the dehumanization and suffering of slaves.

A number of years ago, I published an essay on "Why We Should Not Set Out to Politicize the Classroom." One implication of that essay was that we should not import extraneous political concerns into teaching, for both academic and political reasons. The point here is that some political concerns are part of what we are teaching.

We should not set out to politicize the classroom. But we should also not simply ignore the politics that arise from the topic itself. Indeed, attempting to ignore such politics will almost invariably be a matter of conforming to mainstream ideology. It will be a pseudo-non-politics.

As this suggests, the usual ways in which "politicized pedagogy" is debated appear to be misdirected. The key issue is not a matter of insulating the classroom from one's political goals. Nor is it a matter telling "both sides"—"balance," as it is sometimes called—particularly because there are rarely just two alternative positions, and what alternatives there are usually do not have equal intellectual value. As Akeel Bilgrami put it, "if 'balance' has any role to play" in teaching, it is "entirely nested within" the "primary aim of universities … to pursue the truth." Thus, "the only thing that 'balance' could mean is that one must look at all the evidence." It "cannot possibly mean … the equal presentation in the classroom of two contradictory views" (339-340). Pedagogy always involves choices among alternatives. These choices may quite reasonably be guided in part by political goals—if those choices remain consistent with the intellectual requirements of the course and associated scholarly standards, which brings us to the epistemic issue.

Any possible justification of politically engaged pedagogy rests on the epistemic reasonableness of the information and analyses conveyed by the instructor. This bears first of all on what is directly presented in the classroom. In my case, then, it concerns the reasonableness of my account of the *Māhābhārata*, the various elements of dharma, and the logic and precise claims of Kṛṣṇa's argument. In addition to what is directly presented, there is also the issue of whether or not the presentation is likely to mislead students—hence my explicit references to standard views on the nature of heroism and villainy in the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, I usually use a translation of the poem that includes an introduction at odds with my own account. This contradiction not only helps to prevent the students' from being misled, it helps to foster their own intellectual autonomy. Indeed, in my view, it is an epistemic as well as ethical benefit if one's pedagogy presents plausible alternatives to dominant approaches, as long as students realize that they are receiving such alternative views. This would seem to be the case even when there is no political benefit to the alternatives.

Finally, there is the pragmatic issue. Referring to Stanley Fish's teacher/mother analogy, I suggested that most students are unlikely to simply accept an instructor's views on political matters. But this does not mean that we cannot present students with convincing reasons to think through political issues—such as arguments supporting war—in ways that they might not have done otherwise. Here, as elsewhere, it is unlikely that isolated pedagogical practices will have much of an impact on their own. My last set of classes on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, on their own, had no discernible impact on the life of the nation. However, in conjunction with many other experiences had by many students across a range of schools and teachers, they may have contributed to "network effects," the emergent properties of systems that arise from but go well beyond small, localized interactions (for a concise introduction to network theory, see Caldarelli and Catanzaro). The actual effects here are, of course, an empirical issue. However, the near hysteria of the political right over supposed left-wing indoctrination of students suggests that, at least in the view of our political contraries, higher education is having a liberalizing effect on many students. In this respect, for many of us—who do not have the skill, the knowledge, the fortitude, or the social platform of Chomsky, Lakoff, Butler, or other prominent scholar activists—the classroom may be our most effective forum for engaged scholarship (given the qualification that our teaching should satisfy the legal, ethical, and above all epistemic criteria noted above).

But, once again, the point here is not to support one type of political engagement over others. It is, rather, to note that there are many ways in which scholars may be politically engaged and many criteria by which such engagement may be evaluated. The aim of such an analysis is to give us a more encompassing and a more finely articulated sense of the possibilities for scholar activism and thus, one hopes, to foster greater and more productive political engagement by scholars in the future. In other words, my hope in offering this analytic of possible forms of engagement has been to broaden not only our conception of scholar activism, but to broaden that activism itself. A concept too narrowly tied to a prototype is self-limiting. Now, as usual, the left is in no need of self-limitation.

Works Cited

Abbott, Jared and Joseph Schwartz. "A Socialist Strategy for the 21st Century." *Democratic Left* 42.3 (Winter 2014): 3-4.

Alexander, Neta. "'I am no anti-Semite' says Steven Salaita, lecturercum celeb who was fired for tweeting." *Haaretz* (5 December 2014). Available online at mium-1.630098 (accessed 31 December 2014).

Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things With Words*. Ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Bilgrami, Akeel. "Truth, Balance, and Freedom." *Chomsky Notebook*. Ed. Julie Franck and Jean Bricmont. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Available online at http://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2011/04/truth-balance-and-freedom.html

Bordwell, David. "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory." In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, 3-36.

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Caldarelli, Guido and Michele Catanzaro. *Networks: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Carraro, L., L. Castelli, and C. Macchiella C. "The Automatic Conservative: Ideology-Based Attentional Asymmetries in the Processing of Valenced Information." *Public Library of Science* 6.11 (2011).

Chomsky, Noam. *The Chomsky Reader*. Ed. James Peck. New York: Pantheon, 1987.

—. The Science of Language: Interviews with James McGilvray. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Coetzee, J. M. *Summertime*. New York: Viking, 2009.

Doniger, Wendy. "The Fight for the History of Hinduism in the Academy." In *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*. Ed. Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

—. "India: Censorship by the Batra Brigade." *New York Review of Books* (8 May 2014). Available online at censorship-batra-brigade/ (accessed 1 January 2015).

Douglas, Susan. "We Can't All Just Get Along." *In These Times* (January 2015): 15.

Dworkin, Ronald. "We Need a New Interpretation of Academic Freedom." In Menand, 181-198.

Fine, Cordelia. Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences. London: Icon Books, 2012.

Fish, Stanley. *Versions of Academic Freedom: From Professionalism to Revolution*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Forgas, Joseph. "Affect and Information Processing Strategies: An Interactive Relationship." In *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 253-280.

Hirsh, J., C. DeYoung, X. Xu, and J. Peterson. "Compassionate liberals and polite conservatives: Associations of agreeableness with political ideology and moral values." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36.5 (2010): 655–64.

Hogan, Patrick Colm. "Academic Freedom and the Purposes of Universities (Reflections on a Talk by Stanley Fish)." *Philosophers for Change* (11 October 2012). Available at https://philosophersforchange.org/2012/10/11/academic-freedom-and-the-purposes-of-universities/

—. "Negativity Bias, Emotion Targets, and Emotion Systems." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 37.3 (2014): 314-315.

—. The Politics of Interpretation: Ideology, Professionalism, and the Study of Literature. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

—. "Why We Should Not Set Out to Politicize the Classroom: An Anarchist Response to the Debate over Pleasure and Critique." *College Literature* 21.3 (1994): 56-61.

Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Lakatos, Imre. "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 91-196.

Lakoff, George. Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate, The Essential Guide for Progressives. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.

Lukács, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.

Menand, Louis, ed. *The Future of Academic Freedom*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Olivelle, Patrick, trans. *Upani ads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Palumbo-Liu, David. "'Unhiring' Steven Salaita." *The Nation* (22 September 2014): 10.

Pollitt, Katha. "Letter from France." *The Nation* (9 February 2015): 6, 8, 10-11.

Post, Robert. Democracy, Expertise, and Academic Freedom: A First Amendment Jurisprudence for the Modern State. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012.

Pronin, Emily, Carolyn Puccio, and Lee Ross. "Understanding Misunderstanding: Social Psychological Perspectives." In *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment*. Ed. Thomas Gilovich, Dale, Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 636-665.

Ray, Larry, David Smith, and Liz Wastell. "Shame, Rage and Racist Violence." *British Journal of Criminology* 44 (2004): 350-368.

Roberts, J. A. G. *A Concise History of China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Rozin, Paul, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark McCauley. "Disgust." In *Handbook of Emotions*. Ed. Michael Lewis, Jeannette HavilandJones, and Lisa Feldman Barrett. 3rd ed. New York, Guilford Press, 2008, 757-776.

Scheff, Thomas. "Social-Emotional Origins of Violence: A Theory of Multiple Killing." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 16 (2011): 453-460.

Schrecker, Ellen. The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University. New York: The New Press, 2010.

Tversky, Amos and Daniel Kahneman. "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. In *Thinking: Readings in Cognitive Science*. Ed. P. N. Johnson-Laird and P. C. Wason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 326-337.

Walker, Julian and Victoria Knauer. "Humiliation, Self-Esteem, and Violence." *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 22 (2011): 724–741.

Zimbardo, Philip. The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil. New York: Random House, 2008.

Cultural logic
marxist theory & practice

Since 1997
ISSN 1097-3087
http://clogic.eserver.org/

Editors

Rich Gibson
San Diego State University

Martha Gimenez
University of Colorado (retired)

Gregory Meyerson
North Carolina A & T University

James Neilson
North Carolina A & T University

Joseph G. Ramsey
University of Massachusetts - Boston

E. Wayne Ross
University of British Columbia

David Siar
Winston-Salem State University

Advisory Group

Robert Albritton, *York University, Canada*
Theodore W. Allen, *Brooklyn Public Library (1919-2005)*
Crystal Bartolovich, *Syracuse University*
Rosalyn Baxandall, *State University of New York, Old Westbury*
Vladimir Bilenkin, *North Carolina State University*
Jamie Owen Daniel, *Director of Organizing and Development, UPI Local 4100, IFT/AFT/AFL-CIO*
Anthony Dawahare, *California State University, Northridge*
Greg Dawes, *North Carolina State University*
Teresa L. Ebert, *State University of New York, Albany*
Barbara Foley, *Rutgers University*
Marcial González, *University of California, Berkeley*
Rosemary Hennessy, *State University of New York, Albany*
Mike Hill, State *University of New York, Albany*
Peter Hitchcock, *Graduate Center-City University of New York*
Amitava Kumar, *Vassar College*
Neil Larsen, *University of California, Davis*
John McClendon, *Michigan State University*
Sophia A. McClennen, *Pennsylvania State University*
Andrew Milner, Monash *University, Melbourne*
Warren Montag, *Occidental College*
Bill V. Mullen, *University of Texas, San Antonio*
Richard Ohmann, *Wesleyan University*
Bertell Ollman, *New York University*
Vijay Prashad, *Trinity College*
Russell Reissing, *University of Toledo*
Modhumita Roy, *Tufts University*
E. San Juan, Jr., *Philippines Cultural Study Center*
Sean Sayers, *University of Kent*
Helena Sheehan, *Dublin City University*
David Slavin, *Westfield State College and Emory University*
Paul Smith, *George Mason University*
Alan Spector, *Purdue University Calumet*
Michael Sprinker, *State University of New York, Stony Brook (1950-1999)*
Carol A. Stabile, *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*
Richard Stahler-Sholk, *Eastern Michigan University*
Kenneth Surin, *Duke University*
Jeffrey Williams, *Carnegie Mellon University*
Richard Wolff, *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*
Michael Yates, *University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown (retired)*