REVIEWS

Realism About Migrants

David Stoll

No issue polarizes the immigration debate like the increasing number of undocumented migrants under the age of 18. Legally these are children, so shouldn't we welcome them with open arms? If they show up at the U.S. border without a parent, aren't they running away from danger? Or given the fact that a large majority are teenagers, eager to find work, are they just another category of foreign job-seeker?

Underage migrants arrive from all over the world, but currently the majority are Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Hondurans. To explain why, advocates point to Central America's homicide rates, among the world's highest, surpassing the annual toll once taken by the region's civil wars. Escaping from Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and other street gangs has become a refrain in the stories told by Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan border-crossers. Yet the majority seek to join relatives who are already in the United States, some come from localities without a gang presence, and there is no mistaking their keen interest in U.S. jobs.

This is no surprise because, in economies undercut by globalization, nothing attracts like the dollar. Like so many others around the world, Central American youth are glued to their Facebook accounts and iPhones, so they live in a media-scape defined by U.S. consumption standards. Yet jobs in manufacturing and other value-added endeavors, which could boost their purchasing power, have been underbid by the cheap-labor industries of East Asia. Facing $5- or $10-a-day futures as security guards or vendors, they dream of new lives in Los Angeles, Houston, or New York.

In those same dream destinations, meanwhile, international wage competition is turning more occupations into jobs that only immigrants are willing to do. The "giant sucking sound" that billionaire populist and presidential candidate Ross Perot denounced in 1992, of U.S. jobs going south to Mexico, is now sucking young Central Americans north. They are encouraged by employers who want cheap labor, relatives who are hungry for remittances, and immigrant-rights advocates who, while highly critical of U.S. capitalism, still wish to believe that the United States is a haven for the downtrodden.

As for the majority of Americans, we shrug. Doesn't the first generation of immigrants always suffer? Doesn't the second generation always do better? And so millions of border-crossers and visa-overstayers, without legal status, have been allowed to settle into lower-class American life. Here they are barred from social benefits such as food stamps, but they can access emergency rooms for medical crises, any newborns are U.S. citizens, and through citizen children they can stake shaky claims to benefits and legal status.

Should these underground migration streams, improvising their own admission into American society, be legalized or uprooted? The answer from the U.S. political system is successive mood swings of leniency and punishment, which have turned the U.S. government's immigration bureaucracy into a legal gauntlet. Woe to anyone who runs afoul of an opaque exclusion or deadline. Some unauthorized border-crossers and visa-overstayers are waved forward to legal residency; others are deported.

Three recent books delve into the tough issues posed by underage migrants. One is Tanya Maria Golash-Boza's highly readable *Forced Out and Fenced In*. In short, dramatic chapters, more than 20 sociologists and anthropologists sketch portraits of a wide range of people facing deportation. Like so many current migration scholars, Golash-Boza and her contributors obey Nicholas De Genova's injunction to focus on the "legal production of illegality." If

this strikes you as tautological, given that nothing is illegal unless there is a law against it, De Genova is arguing that, unlike laws against burglary that protect the boundaries of your home and laws against sexual harassment that protect the boundaries of your person, laws that protect the boundaries of your country have only injurious effects and therefore serve no defensible end.

Whatever you make of that, Golash-Boza and her contributors provide plenty of detail about their subjects, so you can make up your own mind about whether each of them deserves a break. Some are victims of ethnic profiling; others are involved with illegal drugs; still others blame vendettas by relatives for their predicament. Consider Paloma, one of tens of thousands of Mexican citizens whom the U.S. government has deported to the Mexican city of Mexicali. Growing up on both sides of the border, Paloma produces three U.S.-citizen children with an undocumented husband, who then makes a unilateral decision to legalize himself by marrying someone else—a neighbor who has U.S. citizenship.

Standing in the way of this strategy is not so much Paloma and her children but the husband's record of domestic violence against her. To get around this, the husband accuses Paloma of being abusive and addicted and gets the children sent to foster care. When Paloma goes to court to reclaim her children, the *Migra*—Spanish slang for immigration officers—have been summoned by her husband and she is grabbed. As of 2009, both Paloma and her husband have been deported, leaving their U.S.-born children on the U.S side of the border in foster care.

Couldn't all this enforcement, trauma and expense have been avoided by granting Paloma and her husband legal status? That's the very sensible conclusion of the sociologist who tells her story, Heidy Sarabia. Wouldn't it be great not to spend $20 billion a year on border enforcement?

Like Golash-Boza's other contributors, Sarabia conveys the family situations that bring migrants to the United States and send them into the nets of the legal system. This is a background that tends to be heavily edited once migrants tell their stories to advocates advising them how to meet requirements for legal status. Illustrating this important point is anthropologist Lauren Heidbrink's research on unaccompanied minors in foster care in her book *Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State.*

Heidbrink shows that migrating youth are actors in their own right, not just pawns in family migration strategies. They are eager to join the labor force, not least to pay back the money their families have borrowed to send them to the United States. But they are prevented from working by the fact that, having been caught crossing the border under the age of 18, they are wards of the U.S. government. Heidbrink gains access to such youths, detained against their will, inside foster-care shelters. We learn a lot about how they interact with officialdom, but only occasionally about their relationships with their families, who were tough to locate and therefore tend to fade into the background. Toward the end, Heidbrink concludes:

> . . . unaccompanied children and youth are intensely embedded in kinship and social networks, which facilitate migration and shape their everyday actions. While there are certainly migrant children who are alone, fleeing abuse, violence or poverty and seeking employment, education and opportunity, more commonly children and their families leverage social and financial capital to facilitate their transnational migration and settlement (even if temporarily) in the United States.

In short, parents are using their children to speculate on the potential high returns of U.S. jobs and legal status. Don't such parents deserve some of the skepticism that Heidbrink reserves exclusively for the U.S. government?

Thus when the parents of 11-year-old Goz tell him to withhold information from U.S. authorities, Heidbrink concludes that "state policies and practices" are separating Goz from his family. What about the role played by his parents? With parents conveniently crouching out of sight, Heidbrink verticalizes the responsibility for their children to the U.S. government. It sounds as if she would prefer a more *laissez-faire* approach, in which family networks are allowed to send junior members into the U.S. labor market. Given her subjects' age, should they, their families and their employers be allowed to violate U.S. laws against child labor? If the answer is yes, the next question is, should they be considered children at all? The U.S. legal system prolongs childhood in ways that Central Americans do not. But if such migrants shouldn't be considered children, why should they get special treatment?

Forced Out and Fenced In:
Immigration Tales from the Field
by Tanya Maria Golash-Boza
Oxford University Press, 2017, 272 pp., $24.95

Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State: Care and Contested Interests
by Lauren Heidbrink
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, 208 pp., $24.95

The Far Away Brothers: Two Young Migrants and the Making of an American Life
by Lauren Markham
Broadway Books, 2017, 320 pp., $16

Lauren Markham's *The Far Away Brothers* raises an even more uncomfortable issue about underage migration from Central America. In 2014 Markham was a counsellor at Oakland International High School, across the bay from San Francisco. One fourth of its students entered the United States as unaccompanied minors. Among them were a pair of identical twins from El Salvador, whose ordeals brought them to Markham's attention. Ambitious to write her first book, Markham not only befriended Ernesto and Raul but went to El Salvador to interview their family. This enables her to reconstruct the decision-making that sent them north from a small town where MS-13 had begun collecting *renta* or extortion payments.

Family networks in this milieu are vast, but they foster feuds as well as cooperation. Competition for income is intense and physical violence is often a possibility. The town's first MS-13 members are invited by a local *patrón* who happens to be the twins' own Uncle Agustín. Two of MS-13's first victims are another uncle, who is a drunk, and a cousin, who is a thief. Then Uncle Agustín fails to pay the twins fairly for picking coffee. He also turns out to be a moneylender and coyote who smuggles migrants to the United States.

The human smuggling is why Uncle Agustín hires MS-13 as bodyguards and why local youth start to hang out with these new role models. By the end of the book, Cousin Juan is leading the local MS-13 chapter and Brother Ricardo is a wannabe gangster. And so Markham documents how paranoia over gangs ("they are everywhere") pervades not just Salvadoran society, but the kin network of her two subjects.

Ironically, Ernesto and Raul don't realize that running away from gangs is their motivation for going north until they reach the United States. Only there do the twins grasp that this is the theme that immigration advocates are invoking to help them obtain legal status.

As for the household decision-making that sent them to the United States, at least as expressed to Markham, this consists of frustration over Salvadoran income levels in an economy that, since 2001, has been dollarized. The twins' father Wilber is an enterprising small farmer with enough land to support nine children, but not enough to support their future upward mobility. When the twins' older brother Wilber, Jr. passes a university entrance exam, Wilber, Sr. has a better idea—why not go north and send us remittances? Wilber, Jr. reaches his destination, pays off the $6,000 his father borrowed to pay for the journey, then stops sending remittances and falls out of contact.

Seven years later, 17-year-old Ernesto volunteers to go north. But the plan is complicated by family tensions with Uncle Agustín, as well as with another angry relative who is said to be affiliated with MS-13. After Ernesto naively announces his imminent departure on Facebook, he must flee from his own relatives, whose animosity could also endanger his identical twin brother Raul—so now Raul has to go north too. Paying for all this is $14,000 that dad has borrowed from another local moneylender, at 20 percent interest and guaranteed by the titles to the family's precious agricultural land.

The twins get as far as the thorny scrub of South Texas before being caught by the U.S. Border Patrol. Still shy of 18, they are classified as juveniles, which means that, pending

a future court date, they can be released to a family member. This turns out to be their older brother Wilber, Jr., whose own lack of legal status is no obstacle to his serving as their guardian. All he has to do is pay their airfare from Texas to California and stick them in school, not the labor market—to the chagrin of the twins, who are increasingly anxious about their father's migra-loan.

Fortunately for the twins, they now meet their author/mentor Markham, who connects them with a low-cost lawyer, who knows that family conflicts with an uncle will not qualify them for political asylum. Conceivably they could qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), but this is for kids who have been abused by their parents. Moreover, if they win status as abused minors, their now legally certified abusive parents will never be able to join them in the United States. Neither issue prevents an obliging immigration judge from clearing Raul and Ernesto for SIJS status.

The other big hurdle is that the twins are too independent to settle down to tenth grade in an Oakland high school. They are distracted by iPhones, girls, cigarettes and booze; only their never-say-die teachers and counselors prevent them from flunking out. There is occasional talk of suicide, and occasional threats against others that never cause physical injury. The obvious bright spot is their dedication to the low-level service jobs which many American teenagers now shun and for which American employers now prefer immigrants. Where Ernesto and Raul shine is as a bus-boy and a dishwasher.

Compared to the travails of many unaccompanied minors, this is a success story, thanks to an older brother who provides a temporary home and an immigration judge who sets them on the road to legal residency. Yet the twins debate whether the United States is a better deal than El Salvador. Their first interpretation of an Oakland neighborhood is that it is poorer than their hometown. As for the violence they allegedly fled, it is in Oakland that they get mugged, not in El Salvador. On the migrant trail is where they suffer their worst experiences—in Guatemala Raul is beset by fake policemen who rob him and rape his female coyote, while in Mexico Ernesto witnesses his own coyotes murder a fellow migrant.

Only at the level of consumption—and of prestige in the eyes of Salvadorans who wish to follow their example—is California clearly a big improvement over El Salvador. Every photo the twins post on Facebook excites envy, including financial requests from the gangster relatives who allegedly chased them north. Given the boys' excellent luck with the Oakland public schools and the immigration bureaucracy, their biggest worries lie elsewhere.

Unlike many immigrant-rights advocates, Markham does not ignore the theme that preoccupies so many Central Americans in the United States—the debt and interest threatening their family's patrimony back home. Even after the twins drop out of high school to earn money as fast as they can, a succession of necessities and temptations prevents them from assembling the monthly $1,000 needed to save the family farm—until Ernesto's impregnation of his 15-year-old Oakland girlfriend, followed by an expensive baby shower, ends this pretense once and for all. Up against the wall, Wilber, Sr., sells one parcel of land in the hope that the cash will save the other parcel.

In short, the family is liquidating a viable farm in order to send what Salvadorans call a chain of migrants into the lowest level of the U.S. proletariat. But even after three sons have been sent north, the vision of receiving remittances fails to materialize. As guilt gnaws at the twins, back home their relatives are tempted by the latest migration scams to come north themselves. These include 1) paying a U.S. citizen for a phony marriage, or 2) showing up with a small child, which is said to guarantee release with the right to work. But each will require borrowing more money to pay smugglers. The book ends with the twins' older sister receiving a $500 extortion threat over the phone—possibly from an MS-13 cousin who presumes they are rolling in remittances.

What does Markham conclude from this tangled saga? For her, the most important problem is how to overcome the limits of existing laws, as well as the prejudices of her fellow Americans, in order to ease the path of Ernesto, Raul, and others like them. Only by reaching the United States, she presumes, will they be able to escape poverty and violence. That the United States is no haven from poverty and violence, and that the underground migration industry might be stimulating poverty and violence in Central America by producing MS-13 gangsters who seek to extort remittances . . . none of this seems to have occurred to her.

Yet *The Far Away Brothers* is an honest book, with Markham reporting circumstances that do not support her message. One telling detail is that, even in the supposed safety of Oakland, the twins are unsure of the loyalties of the people around them. Even in the Bay Area, they are afraid someone will come after them Salvadoran-style. Are they just being paranoid? Not if enough Salvadorans join them. In another telling detail, even Markham seems unsure whether one of the twins briefly belonged to a gang or not. If it is this hard to tell, after several years' acquaintance, how are U.S. government officials supposed to identify who deserves to be protected from whom?

MS-13 murders on Long Island corroborate the problem. Since 2014, Long Island has received at least 8,600 unaccompanied minors processed by U.S. migration enforcement, then released to guardians who are usually relatives. Over a span of 17 months, Suffolk County police attributed 17 murders to MS-13, with federally placed unaccompanied minors turning up among the accused. For example, of the 13 MS-13 members arrested for murdering two girls with machetes and baseball bats, seven had Federal unaccompanied minor status. Of five MS-13 members who were arrested while attempting to abduct another victim, three arrived on Long Island with federal unaccompanied minor status. Of the latter five detainees, all but one attended Brentwood High School, five of whose students have been murdered by MS-13 members. The mother of one of the victims is suing Brentwood High for failing to protect her daughter from the gang. The school is also being accused of unfairly profiling students as possible gang members by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Seventeen murders, including five in a single high school, raise the question: Exactly who is capable of picking out gang members from a mass migration? Who is capable of doing so without error and without triggering lawsuits by civil libertarians? Which matters more, civil liberties or physical safety? If Salvadorans are fleeing not the Salvadoran state but their fellow Salvadorans, won't a generous policy of admitting Salvadorans reproduce the dangers they face on U.S. soil?

Adding to the underage furor are thousands of Central American parents, usually mothers, who are showing up at the U.S. border towing small children. According to the Department of Homeland Security, the number of "family units" apprehended at the Mexican border has increased 600 percent between spring 2017 and spring 2018. The women say they are running away from gangs or domestic violence. They also have the idea that arriving with child in hand will give them a *permiso* or quick release into U.S. society. The *permiso* is a folk interpretation of how unaccompanied minors and women with small children were handled by the Obama Administration. Underage migrants qualified for a legal hearing, as did migrants who expressed a "credible fear" of persecution in their own country. Under this policy, tens of thousands have been released with temporary legal status, pending a date in immigration court that, thanks to a backlog of 700,000 cases, will take years to arrive.

Now the Trump Administration is striking back with zero-tolerance policies. In May Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that border-crossers with children will be separated from those children. There was such an outcry that the policy has been reversed—supposedly. In June Sessions made a second announcement with far wider implications: Fear of domestic abuse or criminal gangs will no longer be accepted as grounds for an asylum hearing.

The idea that the United States is a haven for the poor of low-income countries is an enduring feature of American national mythology. In actuality, American capitalism takes quite a toll on immigrants, especially when immigration levels are high, as they are at present. Fortunate outcomes can never be presumed. The consequences of high immigration flows for sending societies are, if anything, even more troubling. Immigration advocates have yet to realize that the migration industry and its remittances are a mighty contributor to the extortions and homicides wracking Central America. As a lucky

remittance-receiver in a poor neighborhood wends her way down a rutted lane, chatting on her iPhone, she presents quite an opportunity for enrichment.

David Stoll *is the author of* El Norte or Bust! How Migration Fever and Microcredit Produced a Financial Crash in a Latin American town. *He teaches anthropology at Middlebury College.*

Plucking Out the Heart

Bradford Tuckfield

> The outstanding thing about China's 600 million people is that they are "poor and blank" . . . . On a blank sheet of paper free from any mark, the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written; the freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted.
>
> *- Mao Zedong*

Some people love science for its own sake, but most of us value it because it enables good engineering. Few there be who enjoy reading circuit diagrams or materials science treatises, but everyone wants a powerful smartphone. Almost no one wants to wade through the equations of hydraulic physics, but people spend more than half a million dollars every day to cross the Lincoln Tunnel.

For social science, this relationship between science and engineering is nearly reversed. Nonscientists are more likely to share academic social science research findings with their friends than they are to share any other type of scientific research, indicating that many laypeople find social science interesting for its own sake. And on the other side, "social engineering" is an ugly term that scientists disown and that makes most people uncomfortable. Alone among the sciences, social science is prized more for its interesting ideas (science) than for its downstream technologies (engineering).

Princeton University Press's ongoing Analytical Sociology book series provides reasons to be both excited about social science ideas and uneasy about their application, as most of us are. Damon Centola, of the University of Pennsylvania, has written *How Behavior Spreads* as the third book in the series. The book opens with a puzzle: Why is it that HIV has spread rapidly around the world but relatively easy behaviors that could prevent HIV infection have not? It is posed as a social scientific question, but it is easy to think of a social engineering analogue, something like: How can powerful institutions manipulate people's behavior (to minimize the spread of HIV)?

The later chapters of Centola's book are written to answer just these types of engineering questions, and the book is clear and innovative enough to serve as a primer on the implementation of social control by the powerful. But like all good social science, the ideas are more exciting than the implementation. While traditional behavioral research has either focused on individual psychology or population-level trends, this research occupies a fascinating place in between, examining the implications of the network structures that people form when they interact and connect.

The image above shows the types of networks that the research focuses on.[1] In these graphs, each dot represents a person, and the lines between the people represent social connections. In the "regular" graph, each person knows his neighbor and his neighbors know each other, but no one knows anyone who is spatially distant. This is a simplistic version of what we might imagine the world looked like before the transportation and communication technologies of the last few centuries, when most people never traveled more than 50 miles from where they were born. It is a "large world" because if one person has a virus or letter or idea, it takes a maximally high number of steps to transmit it, neighbor to neighbor, to a distant person.

How Behavior Spreads:
The Science of Complex Contagions
by Damon Centola
Princeton University Press, 2018, 312 pp., $35

The "small world" graph in the middle is quite similar to the "regular" graph: nearly everyone knows his neighbor and nearly no one knows anyone who is spatially distant. However, there have been a small number of "rewirings," each maybe representing a person who has neglected his friendship with his neighbor in favor of a pen pal in Russia or an ex-girlfriend in Tahiti. Now that there are a few connections that cross wide spatial divides, the number of "hops" it takes to transmit a virus between any two randomly selected people is greatly reduced. In the "Random" graph, connections show no spatial pattern whatsoever, and the number of steps needed to transmit something anywhere is minimized—it's the "smallest world."

These network structures were popularized among academics by Duncan J. Watts and Steven Strogatz in a 1998 *Nature* paper. Their key insight was that even though the "small world" graph is extremely similar to the "regular" graph, its two or three rewirings were enough to make transmission across the world almost as efficient as the "random" graph. In other words, even if only a tiny percentage of the population is connected to someone far away from them, anyone can get a virus or an idea from anyone else extremely quickly.

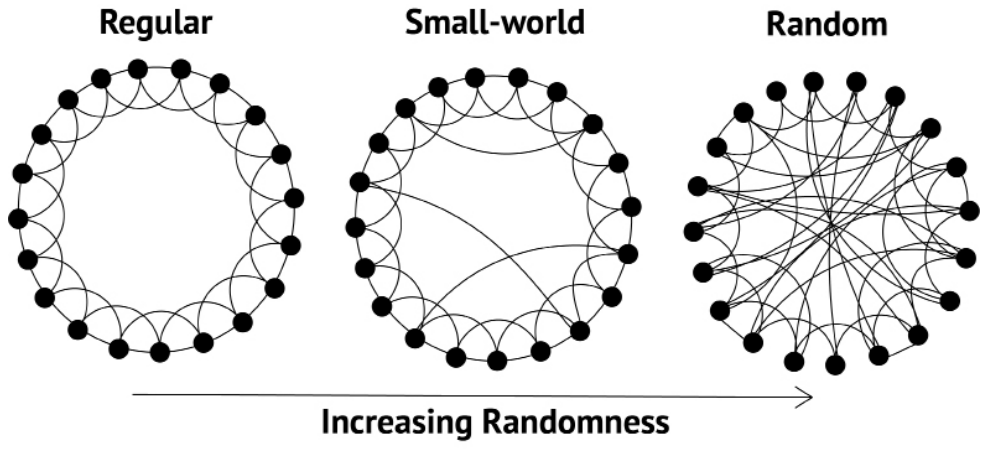
The small-world notion is intuitively appealing. It is thrilling to think that even without a cosmopolitan personal network, one is only a few handshakes away from a Congolese peasant or the Sultan of Brunei or Kevin Bacon. On social media platforms like Twitter, it is easy to connect with strangers half a world away, and the social rewiring this creates has been used to explain everything from the success of new products to the Arab Spring. As more people travel or interact with distant strangers online, the world gets "smaller" and in theory it is easier for ideas and behaviors to "go viral" and spread quickly.

Except when it's not. Centola documents a huge variety of cases in which ideas and behaviors have not spread via a small-world model of jumping across space and social divides. Rather, Centola shows that quite often large-world, old-fashioned, neighbor-to-neighbor transmission without immediate hops across space is both faster and more successful. This violates both intuition and the theory of contagion that used to be accepted.

To explain this anomaly, Centola introduces a distinction between simple and complex contagions. Measles and rumors are textbook examples of simple contagions: A single exposure is sufficient for transmission. They can travel quickly by airplane and spread the fastest in smaller worlds. A complex contagion requires multiple sources of reinforcement in order to be transmitted. Membership in social movements, behaviors related to health, and large investments are complex since one wouldn't be likely to do them until one had been influenced by several connections rather than just one.

---

[1]This particular illustration of the Watts-Strogatz networks structures comes from Ali Sydney, "Characteritics of robust complex networks," 2009.



If three neighbors start a new political party, according to this theory, the party's spread through a large world (like the one on the left of the graphic on the previous page) is straightforward and efficient. A person convinces his neighbor, with the help of another neighbor who is a mutual friend. In a large world, networks are clustered and one's friends know each other. This clustering and the ubiquity of mutual friends make possible the multiple contacts that are necessary for the transmission of complex contagions. In the smallest possible world (like the one on the right of the graphic), a political party will never expand beyond its founding members, because they have no mutual friends and so cannot "team up" to provide multiple sources of reinforcement to attract new recruits. Hence Centola's central insight: While viruses and simple contagions spread the best in small worlds, new movements and other complex behaviors will spread best in large ones.

This result is especially important since the life-altering behaviors that we care the most about tend to be complex contagions. Centola identifies large-world-style behavioral contagion in contexts as diverse as birth-control practices in Korean villages, trade unionization in Northern Europe, participation in 1964's "Freedom Summer," and innovative house construction methods in Kenya.

The results of the book provide a strong reason to be leery of the rise of online social technologies. Every year fewer Americans know their neighbors well, and in general the internet makes our world smaller. This makes it harder for complex contagions to spread through our increasingly weak ties with each other. Centola describes the likely result of this change as

> a form of social amnesia. . . . The everyday memory of how people interact and the kinds of gestures or civic-minded behaviors they are expected to display may be transformed. . . . While simple contagions may be conspicuously better spreaders, they typically are not very effective for. . . transmitting new ideas that will improve the common welfare.

In other words, the metaphor we have of "going viral" is apt: things that spread like viruses are simple, lowest-common-denominator, and require little investment or discipline, and most important they tend to be harmful like viruses. The trend of the world's social network structure is towards enabling those types of contagions to spread more easily, and to make complex, socially beneficial contagions rarer and more often stopped in their tracks.

Centola's careful analysis of network structures and the way that behavioral contagions spread may also provide a way to understand more intangible cultural trends. For example, a variety of commentators have asserted that our culture hasn't generated distinctive innovations since about 1990, in fashion, art, popular music, and culture overall. Complex cultural practices are precisely the types of contagions that Centola claims are more difficult to spread in our increasingly small world. Could it be that the rise of the internet has caused us to live in a permanent cultural stasis or devolution in which every year is a slightly worse version of 1992? The question is too big to answer definitively, but Centola's ideas would provide a strikingly apt explanation for this if it were true.

Part III of the book is about "social design," a term more palatable but roughly synonymous with "social engineering." Centola has been a pioneer in experimental sociology, and has found ways to connect members of online communities to each other to push the overall networks towards resembling either large or small worlds. In these artificially constructed networks, a few random nudges to some carefully chosen "seed" individuals can create cascades of behavior change, for example new diet or exercise practices that spread through the whole network.

The success of these experiments to spread complex behaviors invisibly among crowds of strangers is both impressive and discomfiting. With each advance in social science, some new ingenious method to control other people's behavior becomes possible. If the science of behavior control experiences enough serious breakthroughs like Centola's, we can imagine a future in which human liberty is curtailed by powerful groups who "weaponize" social science to bend crowds to their whims.

The desire to use social science for the sake of behavior control is not new. As Theodore Dalrymple has ably pointed out, it is even a plot line in *Hamlet*. King Claudius summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and points out "Hamlet's transformation" of his "inward man." He hopes that they "may glean, whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus, That, open'd, lies within our remedy." He wants to understand Hamlet's psychology and behavior for the sake of using a "remedy" to control it—it is science for the sake of engineering again.

Hamlet obviously resists both the attempts to understand and to control him. He asks Guildenstern to play on a pipe, and after Guildenstern refuses because he lacks the skill, rebukes him:

> Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass: and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

Hamlet has rightly identified the intention of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—the social scientists of the Danish court—to control him by understanding him. As social scientists in the centuries since have learned more of the "stops" of the human mind, they have gotten closer to a future in which they can play people like instruments. They are, as earnest scientists, trying to pluck out the heart of the mystery of human behavior, but as they try they are also getting closer to being able to control us.

Nor is this only a hypothetical concern for playwrights and paranoiacs. The World Bank and other powerful institutions continue to support the creation and development of governmental "nudge units" that seek to take advantage of the quirks of human psychology to control subject populations. Numerous private consulting companies charge huge fees to help them.

An understanding of social network structures casts new light on recent controversies. Eminent domain takings like the infamous *Kelo v. City of New London* of 2005 provide a case in point. These seizures push our social world to be smaller by destroying dense networks and large-world communities. The reasoning of judges who have allowed such takings is frequently some version of a public benefit vs. private harm argument: that the public (for example, economic) benefit is great enough to justify the private harm caused by displacing citizens from their private property. With Centola's research, we can identify a serious public harm—the destruction of socially beneficial large-world networks—in addition to the alleged public benefits and private harms.

Outside of the United States, there are numerous recent examples of policies that have had (mostly pernicious) effects on citizens' social network structures. In Singapore, a housing law was passed that directly prevents large-world clustered networks from forming by instituting racial quotas in apartment buildings. In China, land seizures have been conducted on a scale that dwarfs *New London* and other U.S. cases. As in the U.S. context, the victims of such takings abroad tend to be members of politically weak classes.

Advocates of busybody government intervention should remember that the unintended social network consequences of these policies could not have been fully understood when they were implemented. The unintended consequences of the laws we pass this year or next may similarly be unappreciated for decades to come.

Those who love science for its own sake tend to have confidence that it can continue to progress forever without limit. This is an exciting thought if we consider inventing food that can feed all of the hungry and interstellar travel that can carry us to distant galaxies. But for social science, unlimited progress in understanding human behavior would mean the possibility of unlimited control of some by others. It would mean that we could arrive at Mao's fantasy, in which a central state could write on its citizens like blank paper by influencing and controlling their most important decisions. With recent advances in facial recognition technology, data storage infrastructure, and predictive modeling, Mao's successors are already beginning to make that fantasy a reality.

Robert Cialdini, the famed scholar of psychology and marketing, once told me that he believed it vitally important for individuals to properly educate themselves about methods of social influence so as to more effectively resist them. For readers seeking to take up the challenge, Centola's book is a superb place to start.

Bradford Tuckfield *is a data scientist living in Phoenix.*

The Useful Errors of Terry Eagleton

Molly Brigid McGrath

Radical Sacrifice (2018) is the newest of Terry Eagleton's scores of books. He has published close to one a year for about 50 years. This doesn't rank Eagleton as a presence on Wikipedia's page of the most prolific writers, but the fact that L. Ron Hubbard holds the Guinness World Record, at 1,084 publications, reminds us that, in this mass-market age, quantity comes cheap. Hubbard's success as science fiction author-turned-religious guru also shows that many people today, though awash in words, long desperately for meaning. Eagleton's core thesis is thus apropos: Our culture lacks a sense of sacrifice as transformative and salvific, as a source of meaning.

Eagleton is adept at explaining meanings. His 1991 book *Ideology*, for instance, acquaints the reader with 20 different definitions of the book's titular term but fails to endorse any of them as true. Cultured, charming, and well read, Eagleton wrote the textbook on *Literary Theory* (1983) as well as an attack on it, *After Theory* (2003). He slings frequent potshots at capitalism and quotes chic French philosophers while using literature to suggest vaguely Marxist interpretations of culture. He occasionally pens sentences like, "Only the fertile dissolution of non-being can reclaim powers oblivious of their own finitude." In other words, he is the very model of the modern, or postmodern, English professor.

Yet—and this is what allows *Radical Sacrifice* to be interesting—Eagleton casts himself as a radical contrarian, dissenting from both modernity and postmodernity. Exploring sacrifice through chapters on the crucifixion, martyrdom and death, gift-giving, and scapegoating, the book identifies an important idea and, in Oscar Wilde's phrase, "plays gracefully" with it. But his posture—kind-of Marxist, kind-of Christian—is mostly a pose, veiling a deeper postmodernism. And postmodernists, by definition, will never be able to articulate a view of the human person as something worth sacrificing for. Eagleton has thus underlined the central problem of postmodernity: meanings, meanings everywhere, but not a drop to drink.

"The practice of sacrifice nurtures a wisdom beyond the rationality of the modern," Eagleton asserts. In the name of the autonomous self who exercises an exchange-based rationality, the liberalism of the moderns rejects sacrifice and thus overlooks its redemptive and transfigurative powers. "For conventional liberal wisdom," Eagleton writes, "self-fulfillment and self-dispossession are essentially at odds. This is not the case for a more radical outlook. One must take a remarkably indulgent view of humankind, as many liberals do, to assume that the self can come into its own without that fundamental breaking and refashioning of which sacrifice has been one traditional sign."

Here Eagleton argues, rightly, that sacrifice escapes the logic of calculated self-interest. An American baseball analogy might summarize the Irishman's point: A "sacrifice fly" is not a sacrifice, but a strategy. Its mode of thinking cannot transform a life, sustain a culture, or give either of them meaning.

Eagleton also critiques the "callow postmodern cult of options" that too facilely celebrates inclusion and mocks as naive and oppressive

Radical Sacrifice
by Terry Eagleton
Yale University Press, 2018, 216 pp., $25

the idea of Truth or Reality or Human Nature. Postmodernists, despite their radical posture, are ultra-capitalists, he claims, because they dissolve all real meaning and substantial difference into a supermarket of shallow diversity and ever multiplying micro-meanings.

Eagleton is on solid ground here, again. Words are said to be signifiers breeding without substance, images reflecting images in a hall of mirrors with no original object anywhere in sight. Postmodernists sometimes critique, sometimes commend, this loss of value, depending on whether it serves their political purposes of the moment—but they offer no alternative. By debunking meaning as a mask of raw power, they are left with no meaning with which to combat injustice and so are left with nothing to sacrifice for. If we wish for significant lives and a decent society, postmodernism is a bad investment. Sell while you can.

Eagleton's angle can be explained pretty quickly, simply by explaining his title. As sacrificed, a thing is "sacred," both holy and cursed (from the Latin). Eagleton could have appealed also to the etymology of "blessing:" to be blessed is to be bloodied, wounded. Though it is religious people who most easily recognize how these apparent opposites are actually complementary, the link between blessedness and suffering is a universal feature of human experience. True sacrifice, self-sacrifice, is always radical and transformative.

The point is worth developing a bit more. Sacrifice entails some degree of suffering. While not all suffering is salvific, it is our most profound teacher. And people who see the other side of deep suffering often understand their wounds as blessings, as the experiences by which they have become more fully human. In hindsight, an adult can wish *that awful thing* (insert your own tragedy here) didn't happen, while also being grateful for having learned its lessons, having been sculpted inwardly, engraved—however brutally—with deeper meaning.

Suffering and sacrifice, however, are not equivalents. Suffering is something that happens to us, while sacrifice is something we choose to do. We can turn suffering into sacrifice by consenting to our hardships, but it's still not the same as an act of choice. In sacrifice, we show an openness to this unavoidable human process that can move us from lower to higher, from superficial to deeper, from brutish to more elevated. Of course, a noble readiness to suffer can be exploited; Eagleton should have emphasized the fact more clearly (it is perhaps too modern a point for him to explore). Still, in the true sacrificial attitude we do not seek suffering but expose ourselves to life for the sake of something worthy, consenting to become something new, something we can neither will ourselves into nor even foresee.

Eagleton rightly emphasizes that, for sacrifice to work its magic, one cannot approach it transactionally. Pagan burnt offerings were often understood as deals, exchanges with the gods for goodies or bribes to obviate evil. The great monotheistic religions reject this *quid pro quo* attitude, even if some followers still fall into it. It is an impious form of piety, as Socrates points out in the *Euthyphro*.

Eagleton suggests that, in order to unleash the transfigurative powers of sacrificial suffering, we must approach it as an ultimate act—worth doing even if we were in no way recompensed. Unless it is unconditional, the sacrifice is nullified, reduced to a self-serving strategy. Eagleton here endorses the ethics of the crucifixion while rejecting, or remaining agnostic, about its promise of an afterlife: "Only if the cross is lived in tragic resignation as final and absolute may it cease to be either. Only by living one's death to the full, rather than treating it as springboard to eternity, might it prove possible to transcend it."

By reading the resurrection metaphorically, as a hoped-for transformation in time rather than as guaranteed reward in heaven, Eagleton manages to reject the crucial doctrine of Christianity while still taking it seriously. In other words, he expertly uses Christian scriptures but rejects the religion for which they are central, leaving the reader to wonder where any meaning occurs worthy of making a sacrifice.

So: a sacrifice *for what?* Eagleton doesn't seem to believe in souls, so his aim, and his object of analysis, is clearly not spiritual. In the end, it all comes down to what we knew it would from most of the previous 49 books: political transformation, sketched in Marxist fashion, if only rather vaguely.

In Eagleton's concluding chapter, he applies the idea of the sacred scapegoat to victims of

political and economic dehumanization, suggesting—as he does also in *Why Marx Was Right* (2011)—that the proletariat is the true image of Christ's sacrifice. "The transition from Christianity to Marxism is among other things one from a vision of the poor as prefiguring the future to a faith in them as the prime means of its attainment." Eagleton's blending of Christianity with Marxism reminds us of an older style leftism, and also a Latin American style, before the obsession with race and gender displaced concern about the proletariat. What we are left with, pardon the pun, is a leftism plain-faced about attaining a collective unity with what amounts to religious meaning by way of economic prophecy and political activism.

Instead of hoping for an afterlife, or for lives of personal and interpersonal significance, we are to hope for a political afterlife: a world after capitalism. And this will be achieved through capitalism's metaphorical crucifixion of the proletariat, the image of which should move the rest of us to repentance and conversion. About the "impending upheaval which Marx calls communism and the Christian Gospel calls the kingdom of God," Eagleton concludes the book with the exciting, deep-sounding, but obscure sentence, "revolution is a modern version of what the ancient world knew as sacrifice." And why not? In postmodernist fantasyland, anything can mean anything, so long as it is sounds the right political note.

Attempts to find the font of meaning in political life are not the monopoly of the Left, whether positivist, para-modern or postmodern. The Right has been at it too, albeit with less alacrity over the years. Note Michael Walsh's best-selling books *The Devil's Pleasure Palace* (2015) and *Fiery Angel* (2018), which frame contemporary culture wars within an "Ur-Narrative" of hero versus villain, in which the Right's enemy is no less than the Devil and his minions among "the Satanic Left." Only in this narrative context, Walsh claims, can we individually and culturally recover the meaning we need to survive. Other recent (and more serious) conservative books—like Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018) and Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option* (2017)—also critique our modern liberal order as insufficiently meaningful, urging us toward a post-liberal order where our lives together might be infused by a thicker, collective significance.

The problem isn't that modern liberalism has failed, but that it has succeeded rather well at its goal of providing, however imperfectly, a balance of prosperity, security, and liberty on a massive scale. It does not attempt to make our lives meaningful, but it never promised to do so. Its very success has proven Aristotle right: The key question is, what should one do with leisure? And as Aristotle also notes, when aware of their own ignorance about the point of life, people are vulnerable to various forms of baloney telling them that it is something grand and high above them. It is in this context that we should understand Scientology, Marxism, and other ideologies.

People long for meaning. It's just one of the things we do. To borrow a phrase from Michael Oakeshott, one can recognize "the politics of faith" as a permanent and necessary feature of public life while also recognizing that it wants to find more meaning in the collective than a decent liberal politics can bear. To be modern about it, a decent politics largely leaves people to their own private devices to satisfy their longing for meaning, even if this means some people will make a mess of it.

But we mustn't be too thoroughly modern about it: Of course politics is ultimately going to be meaningful for many if not most people, and in a big way. Even this liberal order, which tries to privatize the search for meaning, is neither neutral nor self-supporting; it requires people willing to make sacrifices for it without turning to it as the wellspring of meaning. That is a fine needle to thread, for we ask people—soldiers, for example—to make ultimate sacrifices for the sake of a procedural order. It requires a self-effacing, rather unsatisfying faith, one pushing us to focus on something smaller-seeming than it should: the responsibility that, in daily life, we take for ourselves and our civic companions.

People long for meaning. It's just one of the things we do.

Thus I would rewrite Eagleton's concluding sentence as "personal responsibility is a modern version of what the ancient world knew as sacrifice"—if only "responsibility" sounded as exciting as "revolution."

Eagleton's recourse in the end to a political and economic resurrection implies that he has lost sight of the concrete human being, for whom the activities of personal responsibility are the primary site of meaning and sacrifice. Neither his postmodern nor his Marxist self can allow him to accept such a bourgeois view of human identity.

In the postmodernist view, our identities disintegrate into various images, each one a socially constructed narrative. This debunks both the premodern concept of the soul, the set of capacities and drives that comprise each person's essence, as well as the modern self, the rational, self-interested ego. In contrast, the postmodernists tell us that a self is a hodgepodge of images and stories given to it and absorbed in false consciousness. *You only think you exist* as a unitary self, we are told.

The physicalistic reductionists say much the same thing. Perhaps you think you exist because your brain is doing something or other, or because the Disney movies you saw as a kid convinced you that you did. In either case, the trendy position in the academy for a few decades now, in the sciences as well as in the humanities, wants to convince you that you don't really exist. "You" are actually a biochemical or a cultural epiphenomenon of one sort or another, and the same goes for others.

In his fine 2007 book *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*, Eagleton successfully avoids the moderns' selfish self, the postmodernists' non-self, and the materialists' brain pretending to be a self by endorsing an Aristotelianism supplemented by a Christian sense of *caritas*. In that view of the person—despite the obvious, superficial tensions between the parts—true self-love is not cast as an enemy of love of others. Sacrifice can be affirmed while avoiding the naive readiness to sacrifice that can be so easily exploited.

But in *Radical Sacrifice*, Eagleton adopts a different view. Here, he wants too much "self-dispossession," urging a "selfless" ethics, based on a postmodern non-self mixed with a revolutionary Marxist materialistic reduction of the person. It is *homo sapiens* stripped of all meaning that shows us the ground of solidarity: "Our common susceptibility to political murder constitutes a potent egalitarian bond." But that sense of self—as potential victim in solidarity with other victims who probably don't exist as free agents in the first place—is hardly enough to make someone want to live through life's inevitable moments of terrible suffering.

The abstract humanitarian *caritas* he hopes will transform the world is not aimed at the good of the specific people we encounter, but is anonymous—"an impersonal (which is to say, political or institutional) love." Worse, throughout the book Eagleton emphasizes the "nothingness" and "lack" that, for him in this book at least, constitute the core of humanity:

> 'In love,' writes Slavoj Žižek, 'I am nothing, but as it were a Nothing aware of itself, a Nothing paradoxically made rich through the very awareness of its lack.' He might have added that to acknowledge the self as nothing is to transcend the self-serving illusions of the ego in order to be open to the reality of other selves.

Notice the contradictions: You are nothing, but capable of being aware of yourself and of serving either yourself or others, and "the Other" is presumably also nothing, but somehow also a reality worthy of your attention, love, and suffering. We will create our meaning out of nothing, it seems, when political institutions, loving humanity anonymously and impersonally, end capitalist dehumanization. But mustn't persons be something significant already for there to be something wrong with dehumanization and right with love?

Lucky for us, human lives—enjoyed and suffered by intrinsically relational individuals in contact with other concrete individuals—have inherent meaning. The contemporary German philosopher Robert Spaemann critiques the

revolutionary fanatic who "thinks that it is only through his actions that any sense can come into the world at all." This is where we should place Eagleton in his Marxist moods. "Every moral point of view by contrast," Spaemann writes, "starts with the position that there is already sense in the world, and that this sense results from the existence of each individual person." Let's hope that liberalism can sustain a faith in that.

Eagleton is able to play gracefully with ideas. This proves yet again, for anyone who still needs proof, that it is often better to be usefully wrong than to be trivially right. For all this we should be grateful, even if we, personally and politically, must look for the meaning we long for elsewhere—namely, wherever each of us happens to be.

Molly Brigid McGrath *is an associate professor of philosophy and director of the College Honors Program at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts.*

Fromm 1941 to Now

David Goodhart

Erich Fromm's classic work, *Escape from Freedom*, about the group psychology and personality traits that made Nazism possible, was almost certainly on my undergraduate bookshelf. I cannot recall actually reading the book, but that strand of Marx-cum-Freud represented by Fromm, Wilhelm Reich, and others appealed to my impressionable young leftist mind. Opposing the repression of the workers by capitalism and the repression of our libidos by pleasure-hating authoritarians was neatly melded together into a single, simple song of liberation.

Forty years on I am far less impressed. *Escape from Freedom* is a useful reminder that, notwithstanding the contemporary failings of Western academia, many things in our intellectual life have vastly improved. For *Escape from Freedom* is in many ways a poor book. Repetitive and clunkily written, it is full of mechanistic quasi-Marxist "dialectical" thinking about social processes and group behavior but provides almost zero evidence and very few references to other academic work to back up its sweeping claims. If one regards it as a work of social science or social psychology it compares very badly to recent works like Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* or Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind*, which at least make some effort to provide evidence for their claims about social trends and evolving values.

But if one takes a more charitable view and regards *Escape from Freedom* instead as a work of Frankfurt School social philosophy, it is not without interest. And it was, after all, written in 1941 in the German-born Fromm's second language, English.

It may also be the case that its ideas, above all the focus on the anomic individual in a mass society, have been so influential that what now seems almost banal was highly original at the time. Another example might be Eric Voegelin's argument that totalitarian ideologies resemble religious movements in non-trivial ways, which was shockingly novel when he introduced it in 1938; now the challenge is to remind some people that there are non-trivial *differences* between them.

Fromm believed that the striving for freedom was a natural human impulse but that many people fear the freedoms of modernity to the point that they long to return to the certainties and order of the premodern world. "What characterizes medieval in contrast to modern society is its lack of individual freedom. . . . But although a person was not free in the modern sense neither was he alone and isolated."

Indeed, Fromm seems rather fond of the womb-like medieval world. And, in his favor, he generally sticks up for maternal love and family ties unlike his two masters, Marx and Freud, and most of his fellow Frankfurt schoolers, who tended to see the family as a crucible of repression.

Lutheranism and Calvinism both, Fromm believed, were systems of thought that celebrated the emergence of the autonomous individual from the mass conformity of medieval life and the Catholic Church only to demand a new, and extreme, form of direct submission to God himself. This submission came to be expressed

---

Escape from Freedom
by Erich Fromm
Farrar & Rinehart, 1941

---

within a generation or two of its theological origin in a ferocious work ethic. Weber famously explained the process whereby "salvation anxiety" shape-shifted into a set of attitudes that aligned with the impulses of early capitalism. Fromm makes a similar argument but is more concerned with feelings of loss and disorientation: "Protestantism was the answer to the human needs of the frightened, uprooted, and isolated individual who had to orient and to relate himself to a new world."

The most striking part of the book is Fromm's discussion of the Adam and Eve story. Fromm's parents were Orthodox Jews, one of his grandfathers was a rabbi, and he took Jewish theology seriously, studying under a Hasidic scholar while completing his doctorate in sociology at the University of Heidelberg. But unlike the conventional view of that story, Fromm regarded the breaking of God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil as an act of liberation. "Acting against God's orders means man freeing himself from coercion, emerging from the unconscious existence of pre-human life to the level of man. Acting against the command of authority, committing a sin, is in its positive human aspect the first act of freedom, that is, the first *human* act."

Fromm's interpretation certainly stood athwart of the Christian "original sin" view of the story, and that is what gave his interpretation its shock value. But it actually was not far from some rabbinic views that saw the foundational stories in Genesis as "set-up" narratives—in the case of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to problematize the reality of human disobedience to authority. That is, after all, in large part what the rest of the Bible is about.

The latter part of the book, certainly the most cited and best remembered, is dedicated to a discussion of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's neurotic authoritarian character, and how Germans, especially of the lower-middle class, longed for submission in a movement appealing to their collective spirit of sado-masochism. Written before the United States entered the war, aspects of the analysis seemed remarkably prescient to many at the time. Together with Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*, completed also in 1941, Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* constituted half of the interpretive couplet that English-speakers relied on during the war to try to make sense of Nazism and Nazi Germany.

Fromm's analysis here seems plausible, if not exactly true or provable. And yet it is so general as to be of little use in understanding the world—a bit like saying that most of us in different ways are trying to find a balance between freedom and security in our lives.

Moreover, almost by definition people are drawn to extremist political movements by fear of one sort or another. But why focus on fear of freedom rather than fear of economic loss or fear of the "other" or fear of the loss of dignity, as a modern-day Fromm might stress?

Fromm would probably argue that the fear of freedom was the master fear of which the other forms were mere subsidiaries, but the case is never made, merely asserted. And why does fear of freedom become a group phenomenon and not just a feature of individual psychology that is always there among a certain proportion of the population? When he describes his ideal of the healthy person, who is able to embrace freedom through emotional spontaneity, he talks just about individuals, not groups. (His ideal of emotional health comes close to the destructive bohemian notion of freedom as lack of constraint.)

The lower-middle class are selected as the main freedom-fearing group because of Marxist assumptions slipped into the argument: They are stuck in the middle between resentment of those above them and fear of those below, while their hard-won respectability and savings are constantly threatened by the vagaries of monopoly capitalism. Today there would at least be some attempt to provide survey evidence

suggesting that people from certain social strata are more attracted to particular values and attitudes. Fromm provides none; in fact, I don't think there is a single number in the whole book.

The success of Nazism and other extremist movements required, by definition, a critical mass of individuals with personalities attracted to, or at least ready to tolerate, the movements. But this is merely a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for success—otherwise how do we explain the fact that Nazism did not happen in all modern societies?—and it means that personality as such lacks any real explanatory value at the political level.

So anybody looking to Fromm's 1941 analysis of the last great crisis of liberalism for clues as to how to respond to today's political anxieties about populism are going to be disappointed. Even if fear of freedom and the authoritarian personalities it allegedly produces were still stalking Europe, it is such a different place from the Europe of the 1930s that it is impossible to imagine a repeat of that disaster.

Europe today is very much richer than in the 1930s with few people suffering the real, material hardship that was common in the prewar decades, with much lower standards of living, much more threadbare welfare states, mass unemployment, and, in Germany, the great savings-destroying monster of inflation. The rich liberal democracies also have liberal political norms far more deeply embedded than in the still-young democracies of the 1930s, when deferential, authoritarian, and bigoted attitudes were still widespread in all social classes.

Above all, today's Europeans are on average very much older than in the 1930s. Extremism is a young man's game. Germany in the 1920s and 1930s was full of purposeless, angry young men, many of them brutalized by service in the Great War, who were happily recruited into the violent Freikorps street gangs. Were these people escaping freedom? Or were they feeling angry and discarded and therefore vulnerable to the appeal of demagogues of extreme Left and Right?

Compare those street gangs with what has been happening in Greece in recent years: Despite a fall in living standards of more than 25 percent, comparable to the Great Depression, and an easily stoked sense of grievance against Brussels and Berlin, people have by and large stayed at home and grumbled.

This does not mean that Fromm was wrong to seek an explanation for political events in forces outside economics, in human psychology and group dynamics. The most plausible explanations for today's pushback against mainstream liberalism represented by Brexit, Trump, and European populism are to be found in culture and identity, as politics has tilted from socio-economic to socio-cultural themes in the face of rapid social change and much more fluid and open societies.

But this is less about the extreme pathologies of authoritarianism that Fromm identified and more about the humdrum yearning for esteem, meaning, and respect: the quest to heal the wounds of a democratic-egalitarian age in which the promise of political equality clashes with the reality of economic and status inequality. Nietzsche's "*ressentiments*" are more relevant today than the suppressed fury of Fromm's deferential lower-middle class.

Just as the move from an agrarian to an industrial society produced various traumas and social pathologies, so the move from an industrial to a post-industrial one is producing different traumas today—less challenging materially, perhaps, but at least as challenging psychologically.

For it is worth recalling that industrial society did not destroy traditional religious belief; indeed, the new urban centers created new forms of mass Christianity such as Methodism. Nor did it destroy the family; levels of illegitimacy in England *fell* during the course of the 19th century. Moreover, it also created new collective class identities and forms of recognition associated with the dignity of labor.

Indeed, it may be that industrial society, for all its misanthropies, was better at distributing status than our emerging post-industrial society. The latter, with its characteristic individualism and secularism—at least in the West—appears to be in the process of diminishing many traditional roles, group attachments, sources of unconditional recognition (via family, religion, nation) and geographic and ethnic rootedness. Add to that the relentless stress on meritocracy and the failure to protect the status (and incomes) of the less able, and it is hardly surprising that a political counter-reaction has emerged.

But people today do not so much fear freedom as the humiliations of relative failure and neglect in more open societies, humiliations made ever more transparent by modern media. With the quite recent emergence of education and cognitive ability as the gold standard of human esteem, how is the half of humanity that is always going to be in the bottom half of the cognitive ability spectrum supposed to feel respect and purpose?

Now, this a question that is a proper subject for social psychology—a discipline that Fromm enthusiastically identified with and assumed, in the introduction to *Escape from Freedom*, would become the master discipline of the social sciences. Yet after 1945 it was economics, with its individualistic and rational-actor paradigm, that became the dominant discipline in social science while social psychology struggled to establish itself in public consciousness.

There are, no doubt, many departments of social psychology and probably hundreds if not thousands of professors of social psychology in the English-speaking world alone. Yet I can name just one of them in Britain—Miles Hewstone, who works in the tradition of Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis about racial prejudice—and just Jonathan Haidt in the United States.

Social psychology with its inherent interdisciplinarity and ambitious scope is perhaps not best suited to a world of intense academic specialization. And it may be that after emerging from the Fromm-like Marxist-Freudian fog it swung too far the other way, becoming a branch of marketing, advising companies about how best to sell things to people via their emotions. (The Left was also suspicious of its interest in groups and group attachment, at least for ethnic majorities.)

Sound social psychology did not disappear altogether, of course. There was the work in the 1960s of Robert Nisbet about the weakening of "intermediate" institutions such as the family that left people vulnerable to powerful group attachments, that might be said to act as a kind of link between Fromm and Robert Putnam in the 1990s with his bridging and bonding social capital. Many other bridges can be identified by experts and initiates in the field, no doubt, but the policy reach and impact of social psychology never extended as far as Fromm and others anticipated.

There does now, at last, seem to be an appetite for more relevant mainstream social psychology. I wrote a book last year called *The Road to Somewhere* about the value divides in modern liberal democracies that have contributed to the new instability in our politics. It was a work of amateur social psychology based on what the British Social Attitudes surveys tell us about how attitudes have shifted and polarized over the past couple of generations. The book did better than expected, suggesting that there is a powerful interest in this kind of thinking. The popularity of behavioral economics might also be a function of social psychology's low profile.

Fromm, like all of us, was a man of his time, not least in his very traditional view of gender relations. But strip out the mechanistic Marxism and here was a thinker at least looking in the right places about how the private realm of the individual's emotions connects with the public realm of politics. And here was a thinker with the hope that human freedom would prove the strongest force of all:

> But man is not only made by history—history is made by man. The solution of this seeming contradiction constitutes the field of social psychology. Its task is to show not only how passions, desires, anxieties change and develop as a result of the social process, but also how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become *productive forces, molding the social process*.

It is a typical dialectical mouthful, but nevertheless breaks decisively with the deterministic and nihilist tradition in German thought and identifies a humane and ambitious intellectual framework for our new age of anxiety.

David Goodhart *works at the Policy Exchange think tank in London and is author of* The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics *(Penguin).*