### 2NC – Overview

#### Turns the case -- devalues grassroots union action.

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Subverting Praxis and Mystifying Social Change

The evidence suggests that EA comprehends reality only in its outermost form—in the realm of appearances or immediacy (i.e., not in its fundamental character). As such, it is unable to envision a society meaningfully different than the one we now have, and so ends up affirming a conservative politics that takes existing social arrangements for granted. (As Robert Wiblin [2015] says, “We don’t want to burn the existing system to the ground,” only “to make enduring improvements to national and international systems to ensure [that] the future is better than the past.”) Such “operational rationality,” as Marcuse termed it, seeks to improve the mechanisms of repression and control, without, however, questioning their “timeless” character. Since the “reified world appears . . . as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world vouchsafed to us humans” (Lukács 1971, 110), reality shrinks to mere “facticity,” assuming the appearance of a fixed social order with “the patina of an eternal law of nature or a cultural value enduring for all time” (157). Forms of collective action and dissent that cannot be quantified are meanwhile viewed either as irrelevant or as a threat to rational planning.

The inability of Effective Altruists to picture a meaningfully different world helps explain their contempt for grass-roots activism, radicalism, and small-scale nonprofits. If existing institutions and norms are basically the right ones, and societal problems are a matter simply of reallocating resources, then attempts to disrupt or unsettle the status quo are rightly to be viewed skeptically. However, few of EA’s own descriptions of moral life, human behavior, or history correspond to the observable features of reality. This is especially true of the doctrine’s representation of the history and phenomenology of collective action, which it falsifies. EA’s claim that change occurs as the aggregate result of the rational, “evidence-based” choices of dispassionate individuals fails to comport with the history of social change, which is effected not so much through incremental adjustments as by impassioned social struggles with the force to shatter an existing status quo. Consider the following cases:

•To win voting rights, British women march in the streets, go on hunger strikes, and firebomb the homes of government officials.

•When a police squad stages a routine raid on a gay nightclub in lower Manhattan, the club’s patrons respond by violently rioting (to the surprise of themselves as much as to the officers).

•To strike a blow against racial segregation, a coalition of Black Christian churches organizes a boycott of buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

•Women hold consciousness-raising groups in their homes, to share their common experiences of oppression by men.

•A Tunisian man sets himself on fire to protest the lack of democracy in his country, sparking a pro-democracy movement of millions that sweeps across the Middle East.

•An autistic teenage girl in Sweden stops attending high school so that she can hold a sign on the steps of the parliament—to demand government action on climate change.

Effective Altruists cannot easily account for these or other signal events in the history of social movements because their mechanistic, fragmented conception of the world leaves them without a proper account of human agency and will. They are unable to offer a meaningful description of the affective experiences of human beings involved in struggles to overcome structures and institutions of power and injustice. EA’s notion that human agency should be purged of passionate feelings, including empathy—a recurring theme in utilitarian thought—furthermore mirrors a wider masculinist culture that eschews compassion and valorizes domination.8 As phenomenologists and feminist care ethicists have shown, however, empathy plays an indispensable role in constituting our moral objects (Donovan 2011, 77–94), and is even a “precondition” for moral performance (Vetlesen 2014). Arguably, it is our very capacity to “feel” our way into the experiences of others that makes moral life possible. Edith Stein went so far as to claim that empathy is the ground of intersubjectivity itself (Hamington 2018).

That Effective Altruists nevertheless persist in denying these basic facts of moral and social cognition is itself a symptom of their reified worldview. They assume the dissociated stance of the “experimenter” or “pure observer” (Lukács 1971, 131), the knower who stands over or apart from “the known.” As both Hegel and Marx noted, however, objective structures are realized or brought into being subjectively (i.e., though the passion, will, emotion, determination, etc., of flesh and blood human beings). Such a dialectical conception is foreign to EA, which conceives of society as a fixed system of “facts.” Under the mantle of a supposed pragmatism, the Effective Altruist looks at the way things “really are,” then adjusts his or her expectations and goals to suit the existing reality. The trouble is, when we set out believing and acting as though the world already is what it is—rather than something that can become other than it is—we foreclose on historical possibilities that might otherwise reveal themselves to us. “Only the man who wills something strongly,” Antonio Gramsci observed, “can identify the elements which are necessary to the realization of his will,” because “strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and make intuition more penetrating” (1971, 171). Reality assumes determinate form only when we exercise our emotions, passions, intellect, and will as an organic unity, in concert with other perceiving, thinking, feeling beings.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to help minimize the suffering of others, nor with wanting to use one’s limited time and resources wisely. These are sensible and admirable sentiments. (If nothing else, the success of Effective Altruism challenges us to confront more honestly the dearth of strategic thinking on the left, and the need for movements to develop more carefully worked through, long-term plans for social struggle.) However, while consequentialist theory is of use in moral philosophy, it is inadequate and even harmful as a guide to social and political emancipation. The consequentialism of both Bentham and J. S. Mill hewed closely to the common sense of the bourgeois class of the early manufacturing period—a “free market” in thought as in international trade; the isolated, monadic individual as the basis of social life; the reduction of moral life (in Bentham’s version of the “hedonic calculus”) to quantitative measures; the supremacy of formal over substantive conceptions of freedom. Today we find these same asocial assumptions embedded in EA discourse as well. MacAskill’s morally repugnant call for an increase in the number of sweatshops in the Third World (2016, 128–132) is merely the artifact of a utilitarian ideology incapable of recognizing exploitation as a moral or social problem.9

**Accelerated tech causes extinction.**

Michael J. **Albert 20**, doctoral candidate in Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, “The Dangers of Decoupling: Earth System Crisis and the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution,’” Global Policy, vol. 11, no. 2, 2020, pp. 245–254

Infinite growth on a finite planet: the decoupling challenge

As both its critics and defenders agree, global capitalism as a system relies on continuous compound growth (about 3 per cent per year) for its stability and survival (Lynas, 2011; Smith, 2016). Without growth (and by extension the expectation of future profit), investment dwindles, interest on debt cannot be repaid, unemployment rises, and consumer spending falls, thereby catalyzing a reinforcing spiral of economic contraction. The problem for global capitalism in a context of earth system crisis, then, is how to make this compound growth compatible with climate stabilization and ecological regeneration. This has clearly been a challenge thus far. As Roger Pielke explains: ‘If there is an iron law of climate policy, it is that when policies focused on economic growth confront policies focused on emission reductions, it is economic growth that will win out every time’; therefore, any successful policy ‘must be designed so that economic growth and environmental progress go hand in hand’ (quoted in Lynas, 2011, p. 68). The philosophy known as ‘ecomodernism’, which can be considered the dominant approach to climate policy in the World Bank, OECD, and UNEP, believes these goals can be simultaneously attained by ‘decoupling’ economic growth from resource use and environmental impact. In the words of the Ecomodernist Manifesto:

Intensifying many human activities – particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry, and settlement – so that they use less land and interfere less with the natural world is the key to decoupling human development from environmental impacts … Together they allow people to mitigate climate change, to spare nature, and to alleviate global poverty (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015, p. 7).

The ecomodernists distinguish between relative and absolute decoupling: relative decoupling means that ‘human environmental impacts rise at a slower rate than overall economic growth’, whereas absolute decoupling would occur when ‘total environmental impacts … peak and begin to decline, even as the economy continues to grow’ (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015, p. 11). Modern technology and urbanization are considered the keys to achieving decoupling, which they claim enable humanity to ‘[use] natural ecosystem flows and services more efficiently’ (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015, p. 17). In this way, the ecomodernists not only believe that it is possible to decouple economic growth from CO2 emissions, but that all environmental impacts – including deforestation, biodiversity, soil depletion, air and water pollution, etc. – can decline even as the global economy continues to grow.

There are a number of indicators that ecomodernists and other proponents of decoupling draw upon as evidence for their theoretical claims. First, the ‘domestic material consumption’ indicator, which measures the total material and energy consumption in a given nation-state, shows that GDP has grown faster than total material consumption in rich countries like the United States, with some European countries going further towards absolute decoupling (Pearce, 2012). In particular, ecomodernists highlight trends in wealthier countries toward reforestation, reduced air pollution, plateauing meat consumption, and saturating demand for material-energy intensive goods (e.g. cars) (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015). This shift is often attributed to the transition from manufacturing to service-based economies in these countries, which are thought to promote ‘dematerialization’ by relying on less material and energy intensive services to create economic value (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015). Ecomodernists also point to steady improvements in the carbon intensity of the global economy (roughly 1.4 per cent per year, though the rate of improvement has slowed in the past 2 years), which has enabled global growth to relatively decouple from CO2 emissions (IEA, 2016). Ecomodernists therefore conclude: ‘taken together, these trends mean that the total human impact on the environment, including land-use change, overexploitation, and pollution, can peak and decline this century’ (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015, p. 15).

Unfortunately for the ecomodernists, degrowth scholars and ecological economists have begun to poke holes in their optimistic assessments. Their response can be summarized according to three key counter-arguments: (1) the evidence that ecomodernists provide for relative decoupling is flawed and limited at best; (2) their evidence for the possibility of absolute decoupling is even weaker; and (3) even if absolute decoupling was possible in principle, there is even weaker evidence that this could occur with the necessary speed to stabilize the earth system before reaching irreversible tipping points.

First, claims that rich countries have seen relative or even absolute decoupling of economic growth from domestic material consumption have been shown to focus solely on correlations between national GDP and material throughput while ignoring the material-energetic costs embodied in imported consumer goods. For example, Thomas Wiedmann and colleagues show that while the EU, the US, and Japan have grown economically while stabilizing or even reducing domestic material consumption, a broader analysis of their material footprint embedded in their imports shows that it has kept pace with GDP growth. They conclude that ‘no decoupling has taken place over the past two decades for this group of developed countries’ (Wiedmann et al., 2015, p. 6273). Focusing on the global economy as a whole, Krausmann et al. show that its resource intensity improved over the course of the 20th century, though the early 21st century has seen a faster rate of growing resource consumption than global economic growth (cited in Hickel and Kallis, 2019). Thus, as Kallis and Hickel (Kallis and Hickel, 2019, p. 4; italics added) explain: ‘Global historical trends show relative decoupling but no evidence of absolute decoupling, and twenty-first century trends show not greater efficiency but rather worse efficiency, with re-coupling occurring’.

Second, given the limited evidence for even relative decoupling, it is little surprise that the evidential basis on which claims for the possibility of absolute decoupling rest is even flimsier. In the most comprehensive summary of the modeling evidence to date, Hickel and Kallis (2019) show that even the most optimistic scenarios fail to prove the possibility of absolute decoupling. For example, a modeling study by Schandl et al. (2016) shows that in a ‘high efficiency’ scenario, one that combines a high and rising carbon price plus a doubling in the rate of material efficiency improvement, global resource use grows more slowly (about a quarter the rate of GDP growth) but steadily to reach 95 billion tons in 2050, while global energy use grows from 14,253 million tons of oil equivalent in 2010 to 26, 932 million in 2050. The authors therefore conclude: ‘While some relative decoupling can be achieved in some scenarios, none would lead to an absolute reduction in … materials footprint’ (Schandl et al., 2016, p. 8). A high efficiency scenario modeled by the UNEP comes to even less optimistic conclusions (with global resource use rising to 132 billion tons in 2050), since it incorporates the ‘rebound effect’ in which efficiency improvements lead to increased consumption due to resulting price reductions (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). In short, as they conclude, these ‘models suggest that absolute decoupling is not feasible on a global scale in the context of continued economic growth’ (Hickel and Kallis, 2019, p. 6).

Third, the critics show that even if absolute decoupling (from both emissions and total environmental impact) were possible in principle, this would need to occur fast enough to prevent transgression of ecological tipping points. Just focusing on the climate problem, the 2018 IPCC report claims that emissions must be reduced 7 per cent annually to reach net zero by 2050 in order to achieve the 1.5 C target, whereas they must reduce 4 per cent annually to reach net zero by 2075 for a shot at the 2 degree target (IPCC, 2018, p. 15). However, even under optimistic assumptions (e.g. a near-term implementation of a high and rising carbon price, alongside heroic carbon intensity improvements), studies suggest that annual declines of 3–4 per cent might be the fastest rate possible assuming continued economic growth (Hickel, 2019). Thus, it would most likely be impossible to meet the 1.5 C target in a context of continuous compound growth. While the 2 degree target might be feasible in this context (assuming implementation of a globally coordinated program starting in 2020), many argue that the IPCC’s estimates downplay the existence of positive feedbacks in the earth system (e.g. Steffen et al., 2018), and thus more rapid emissions cuts might be needed even for 2 degrees. On top of this, economic growth must also be decoupled from impacts on other ‘planetary boundaries’ that may have already been overshot, especially land-use change and biodiversity loss (Raworth, 2017). A number of ecologists believe that to bring humanity back into a ‘safe operating space’, total resource consumption should be reduced from roughly 70 to 50 gigatons per year (Hoekstra and Wiedmann, 2014), while a ‘half earth strategy’ should be implemented that protects 50 per cent of the planet’s surface from direct human interference (up from roughly 18 per cent today) (Wilson, 2017), possibly by 2050 to prevent tipping points in biodiversity loss and land-use change (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). Even if these claims are exaggerated, the magnitude of the overall decoupling challenge remains clear. It would mean that total resource consumption and land use needs to shrink, remain stable, or only increase moderately (depending on our assumptions regarding the further stress (if any) that planetary boundaries can handle) even as the total output of the global economy triples by 2060. It is thus not hyperbole to say, as Boris Frankel puts it, that this goal of absolute decoupling is ‘overwhelmingly staggering in its ambition and historical novelty’ (Frankel, 2018, p. 127).

Given the magnitude of the decoupling challenge and limited evidence for even relative decoupling so far, what arguments could believers in the possibility of absolute decoupling in the future possibly turn to? Some would claim that we simply need to ramp up government regulations and planning to accelerate efficiency improvements. However, the Schandl et al. (2016) study cited above shows that even under highly optimistic scenarios in which such policies are globally implemented, absolute decoupling still fails to occur. Others point to the potential of the ‘circular economy’ in which wastes are converted into inputs for other industrial processes across the global economy (e.g. Rockstrom and Klum, 2015). However, only a fraction of total throughput (roughly 29 per cent) can be converted to a circular economy, since agricultural and energy inputs (44 per cent of the total) are irreversibly degraded, while buildings and infrastructure (27 per cent) involve net additions that cannot be recycled until the end of their lifespan (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). Even for the 29 per cent of the economy that is convertible to the circular economy, the reality of entropy means that total recycling is likely to be physically impossible, while additional constraints on re-using other materials (particularly the rare earth minerals in electronic goods) may lower this potential even further (Frankel, 2018).

The best hope for advocates of absolute decoupling, therefore, appears to be a technological revolution that would render projections of potential material-energy efficiency improvement rates obsolete. Indeed, the Schandl et al. (2016, p. 4) study makes ‘very conservative assumptions regarding the development of new technologies’, and thus significantly faster rates of efficiency improvement are possible (at least in principle) via technological breakthroughs. And as Kallis and Hickel acknowledge, ‘we cannot rule out substitutions or technological breakthroughs that will push such limits [to efficiency improvements] so far into the future as to render them irrelevant’ (Hickel and Kallis, 2019, p. 13). The belief that future innovations will in fact enable such breakthroughs is likely responsible for the fact that ecomodernists and other advocates of decoupling remain undeterred by limited evidence to date. Is there any basis for their optimism?

The fourth industrial revolution

While it remains to some extent speculative, there is a wildcard in the pocket of ecomodernists that lends at least a degree of plausibility to their confidence in future decoupling. This is the Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR): the convergence of technological developments in the fields of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, AI, and 3D printing among others. As noted earlier, it is the convergent and reinforcing nature of these technological trends that lead many to believe that they will deliver exponential breakthroughs in all fields of science and engineering, even catalyzing a transformation that will be ‘unlike anything humankind has experienced before’ (Schwab, 2017, p. 1). Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, effectively captures the hope that many place in these converging technologies:

We have yet to grasp fully the speed and breadth of this new revolution … think about the staggering confluence of emerging technology breakthroughs, covering wide-ranging fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, the Internet of things (IoT), autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing. Many of these innovations are in their infancy, but they are already reaching an inflection point in their development as they build on and amplify each other in a fusion of technologies across the physical, digital, and biological worlds (Schwab, 2017, p. 1).

Given the immensity of the decoupling challenge, it seems likely that to sustain economic growth in the coming decades while stabilizing the earth system would require such a technological revolution. And indeed, this is what many ecomodernists anticipate. Stewart Brand (2012, p. 19), for example, affirms the need for environmentalists to embrace these ‘self-accelerating’ technologies, which he claims can be ‘deployed against the self-accelerating problems of world industrialization and against the positive feedbacks in climate itself’. In particular, both Brand (2012) and Lynas (2011) envision an important role for biotechnology and synthetic biology, which they claim will enable the production of more resilient crops with higher yields, clean and renewable biofuels, and microbes engineered to cleanse polluted environments and sequester carbon. Recent breakthroughs in gene editing and DNA synthesis have enabled new techniques for restoring damaged ecosystems, conserving endangered species, improving biological fixation of carbon, developing bio-based materials, and boosting crop yields by enhancing the efficiency of photosynthesis (Maxmen, 2015; Wintle et al., 2017), thereby raising hopes among environmentalists and governments that the emerging ‘bioeconomy’ can help solve sustainability challenges (Synthetic Biology Leadership Council, 2016).

Others focus on the promise of emerging developments in information technology, particularly AI, big data, and IOT – the global network of online devices, sensors, and databases forming a ‘world-spanning information fabric’ (Goodman, 2016, p. 284). For example, a recent report commissioned for the 2018 Global Climate Action Summit highlights the importance of these ‘exponential technologies’ for accelerating the transition to a low-carbon economy. It places particular emphasis on the power of the IOT and machine learning to ‘enable next generation mobility and electric vehicle breakthroughs, improvements in energy and space efficiency for buildings, and electricity generation and storage’, while making cities orders of magnitude more efficient through traffic, energy, and infrastructural optimization (Falk et al., 2018, p. 80). It also highlights the potential of 3D printing to ‘democratize production’ by enabling local communities to print their material and infrastructural needs, thereby making them ‘far less dependent on global supply chains’ (Falk et al., 2018, p. 33). Overall, the authors believe these technologies can fuel a rapid decarbonization and dematerialization of the economy, with IOT and AI-driven efficiency gains alone enabling 15 per cent emissions reductions by 2030, without sacrificing economic growth or rising material standards of living (Falk et al., 2018).

While its technological flowering may not occur for at least another decade or two, nanotechnology may further revolutionize the above fields. For example, inventor and futurist Eric Drexler claims that nanotech:

will increase energy efficiency across a wide range of applications and sometimes by large factors…In ground and air transportation, the accessible improvements include ten-fold reductions in vehicle mass and a doubling of typical engine efficiencies…reductions in the costs of physical capital will lower the cost of new installations of all kinds, facilitating replacement of capital stock at rates that could surpass any in historical experience. (Drexler, 2013, p. 229)

Combined with 3D printing, nanotechnologists claim that ‘personal nanofactories’ will enable any product to be assembled locally, atom by atom, which would bypass energy-intensive supply chains, reduce energy consumption by an ‘order of magnitude’ (Ramsden, 2016, p. 288), ‘essentially eliminate waste’ and overcome scarcity by disassembling and reassembling any atomic assemblage into novel material compounds (Ramsden, 2016, p. 296), and may even enable the rapid creation of a carbon sequestration and storage infrastructure that would ‘return the Earth’s atmosphere to its pre-industrial composition in a decade, and at an affordable cost’ (Drexler, 2013, p. 234).

Whatever the actual potential of these technologies, it is clear that a powerful technological imaginary exists among policy makers, technologists, and economists that contributes to an unshakeable faith in innovation and human ingenuity to solve the decoupling challenge. Degrowth proponents have so far mainly challenged this optimism by emphasizing the limited potential of renewable energy due to its intermittency and high land and raw material demands (e.g. Kallis, 2018). However, this may downplay the (at least theoretical) potential for convergent breakthroughs in nanotechnology, synthetic biology, and AI to vastly improve renewable energy efficiency and storage systems while designing new materials to substitute for depleting minerals (Diamandis and Kotler, 2014). More broadly, while degrowthers have to some extent considered individual FIR technologies (particularly AI and biotechnology) (e.g. Kallis, 2018; Kerschner et al., 2018), they have yet to address their convergent and mutually amplifying character, which leaves them vulnerable to the arguments of techno-optimists.

Of course, the revolutionary promise of these technologies may fail to materialize, and, given the magnitude of the decoupling challenge, degrowth advocates are right to be skeptical. However, due to irreducible uncertainty combined with the ‘exponential’ and ‘revolutionary’ potential of the FIR (Schwab, 2017), even more rigorous critical assessments would always be insufficient in the eyes of the techno-optimists. Therefore, an alternative line of response should also be pursued: what if the FIR does succeed in decoupling economic growth from total environmental impact? What unintended consequences then might this give rise to?3

Dual-use technologies and the democratization of violence

First, we must consider that all these are ‘dual-use technologies’, or technologies with potential both for economic productivity and violence. As Blum and Wittes (2015, p. 2) explain, these technologies are driving a trend referred to as the ‘democratization of violence’ in which the ‘destructive power once reserved to states is now the potential province of individuals’. Rather than simply a matter of creating new individual weapons, Blum and Wittes (2015, pp. 39, 7–8) emphasize that convergent FIR technologies are generating ‘whole technological fields – a series of breakthroughs in basic science and engineering’ that ‘generate creativity in their users to build and invent new things, new weapons, and new modes of attack’. And to compound the problem, while FIR technologies empower individuals to kill and provoke systemic chaos unlike any other time in history, they also empower states to monitor the minute details of private and public life and potentially constrict individual and collective freedoms, while the unprecedented threats enabled by these same technologies will likely reinforce governmental efforts to intensify securitization as deeply as is technologically feasible. Blum and Wittes summarize the emerging predicament as follows:

How should we think about the relationship between liberty and security when we both rely on governments to protect us from radically empowered fellow citizens around the globe and also fear the power those same technologies give to governments? (Blum and Wittes, 2015, p. 13)

Blum and Wittes do not consider how the earth system crisis will intersect with these threats, either as a positive or negative feedback. But it should be clear that, in a world of FIR-driven sustainability solutions, they would inevitably intensify, and it is thus necessary to consider what new problems and governmental responses they would engender.4

Without claiming to exhaustively describe the security risks created by the FIR, I will focus on three emerging areas of concern: biosecurity, cybersecurity, and state securitization, and will then discuss how they may collectively generate a spiral of insecurity and securitization.

Biotechnology and the emerging terrain of biosecurity

To begin with biosecurity, both the promise and peril of biotechnology – particularly the still nascent field of synthetic biology – is its immense creative potential. As a recent report from the National Academies of Sciences (NAS) describes:

synthetic biology is expected to (1) expand the range of what could be produced, including making bacteria and viruses more harmful; (2) decrease the amount of time required to engineer such organisms; and (3) expand the range of actors who could undertake such efforts. (NAS, 2018, p. 4)

For example, manipulating DNA structures in microorganisms can make certain agents more virulent, improve their resistance to antibiotics and vaccines, make them less detectable by already limited surveillance systems, transform harmless microorganisms into deadly ones, and make pathogens more resilient to diverse atmospheric conditions, thus increasing their lifespan (Charlet, 2018; NAS, 2018). At present these capabilities remain limited and dependent on highly advanced techniques and laboratory equipment, which is why most experts believe there have to date been no mass casualty bioterror attacks (NAS, 2018). However, the NAS notes that improvements in synthesis technology have followed a ‘Moore’s Law–like’ curve for both reductions in costs and increases in the length of constructs that are attainable’, and that ‘these trends are likely to continue’ (NAS, 2018, pp. 18–19). Moreover, automated DNA synthesis techniques remove much of the time-consuming and technically difficult aspects of manipulating DNA, further reducing barriers to access (Wintle et al., 2017). And in the future, experts warn that ‘convergent capabilities’ between synthetic biology, information technology, nanotechnology, and 3D printing may enable ‘sudden’ breakthroughs in bio-weaponization (e.g. by improving bio-agent stability and delivery, providing advances aerosolization capability, and accelerating the ‘Design-and-Build’ cycle) (NAS, 2018, p. 87).

The possibilities of bio-weaponization will expand as these techniques diffuse, which are already enabling the formation of a ‘DIYbio’ movement in which amateur scientists, inventors, and others are increasingly ‘capable of doing at home what just a few years ago was only possible in the most advanced university, government or industry laboratories’ (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 1109). The new CRIPSR/Cas9 gene editing technique further expands the range of genomic tinkering available to individuals, which has been widely embraced by the DIYbio community as a powerful tool that ‘makes it easy, cheap, and fast to move genes around – any genes, in any living thing’ (Maxmen, 2015). The capacities of DIY biohackers remain limited in important ways, though the trends described above suggests they will continue to increase as barriers to advanced bio-weaponization fall (NAS, 2018). And while the risks are evident, the democratization of these techniques may also facilitate the diffusion and customization of local solutions to environmental and health challenges while enhancing popular participation in the direction of biotechnological evolution away from transnational corporate dominance (Bennett et al., 2009).

We can therefore say that these emerging technologies pose a unique kind of ‘security dilemma’: while their development and diffusion may strengthen local and global capacities to solve environmental challenges, they may also imperil global security by unleashing uniquely powerful and complex violence capabilities. Synthetic biology is only in its early stages, and governments from the UK to China aim to ‘accelerate [its] industrialization and commercialization’ in order ‘to drive economic growth’ and ‘develop solutions to key challenges across the bioeconomy, spanning health, chemicals, advanced materials, energy, food, security and environmental protection’ (Synthetic Biology Leadership Council, 2016, pp. 13, 4). If calls for emergency action to exponentially expand the green economy indeed accelerate these trends (Falk et al., 2018), then by 2030 (and more so by 2040) we will live in a world where genetically engineered biofuels dramatically increase, genetic tinkering with crop varieties is normalized to enhance agricultural resilience, and gene drives are deployed to control old and new disease vectors intensified by climate change (among other potential applications), which would exponentially expand the number of individuals with biotech expertise and access to the needed equipment. Therefore, while we have yet to experience a catastrophic bioterror attack, rapid advances in synthetic biology are nonetheless creating a ‘black swan waiting to happen’ (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 1110), and the risk is that such black swans could become increasingly ‘normal’ if this technology becomes a key engine of economic growth and green technological innovation.

Cybersecurity in an age of ‘smart everything’

The second key problem with the FIR is that ‘exponential technologies’ deployed to decouple growth from environmental impact will also intensify ongoing cybersecurity threats. Cybercrime has increased to the point of costing the global economy an estimated $500–600 billion per year, while new vulnerabilities in civilian infrastructures continue to be discovered and exploited more quickly than they can be secured (Goodman, 2016). We are thus dealing with an already significant problem, though it remains important to consider how it will deepen in a world reliant on FIR-dependent solutions to the earth system crisis, especially once we take into account the cyber vulnerabilities posed by next generation information systems (Goodman, 2016).

In particular, we must consider the risks associated with the incipient IOT, which is a key component of the solution-set offered by techno-optimists for decoupling economic growth by dramatically improving efficiencies in energy, transportation, and agriculture (Falk et al., 2018; World Economic Forum, 2018). One of the prerequisites of a future renewable energy system capable of providing at least 80 per cent of growing electricity demand would be the creation of national or regional ‘smart grids’ in which energy surpluses in areas with lots of wind and sun at a given time can be transmitted to areas with energy deficits. While this system would itself increase cyber vulnerabilities relative to more modular systems, the efforts of Cisco and others to enhance the efficiency of smart grids via the IOT would intensify these vulnerabilities even more. In this vision, the smart grid would form ‘an intelligent network of power lines, switches, and sensors able to monitor and control energy down to the level of a single lightbulb’, which would be enabled by IOT connected sensors that ‘monitor energy use and manage demand, time shifting noncritical applications like delaying the start of your dishwasher to the middle of the night, when energy is cheaper’ (Diamandis and Kotler, 2014, pp. 169–171). In this way, every connected device – from iPhones and laptops to dishwashers and microwaves – would become a possible point of entry for hackers to the overall network (Goodman, 2016). The IOT is also envisioned as a possible solution to traffic congestion and fuel efficiency for the future fleet of self-driving electric vehicles that are set to (potentially) transform the market over the next decade. While advocates of ‘smart’ cars and ‘smart’ cities are enthusiastic regarding the possibilities for improved energetic and economic efficiency, it would also leave vehicles vulnerable to remote hijacking, as researchers Chris Valasek and Charlie Miller demonstrated in 2014 by taking control of a 2014 Jeep Cherokee (Markey, 2015). Adding further to the IOT-hype, a recent World Economic Forum report proposes deploying it to create ‘precision agriculture’ systems, which could link farms with global positioning systems and weather data collection to monitor water and soil conditions while enabling farms to automatically optimize inputs (World Economic Forum, 2018).

If these IOT powered energy, urban, and agricultural systems come into being, this would constitute an exponential expansion of attack vectors for would-be hackers, whether they come from states, criminal organizations, or non-state terrorist networks. Cybersecurity analyst Mark Goodman effectively captures the scale the problem:

The IoT will be a global network of unintended consequences and black swan events … we cannot even adequately protect the standard desktops and laptops we presently have online, let alone the hundreds of millions of mobile phones and tablets we are adding annually. In what vision of the future, then, is it conceivable that we will have any clue how to protect the next fifty billion things to go online? (Goodman, 2016, pp. 301–302).

In short, while the expansion of cyber vulnerabilities is already stressing if not overwhelming the defense capacities of governments, corporations, and public utilities, it is also practically assured that these vulnerabilities will expand significantly if the global economy relies on smart energy grids and the IOT to maximize energy efficiency and decouple growth from growing resource use.

State securitization and totalitarian dangers

The third key risk domain involves the securitization powers of states. FIR technologies may not qualitatively transform state power individually, though their convergent character could offer immense power to states that are able to systematically harness these capabilities for surveillance and militarization purposes. Unsurprisingly, such capacities are being intensively pursued by leading states. In particular, the US and China appear to be engaged in an AI arms race, with China aiming to create a $150 billion AI industry by 2030 and the Pentagon seeking to triple its AI warfare budget to match China’s ambition (Ashizuka, 2019). Military robotics is also a key field of competition, with worldwide spending tripling between 2000 and 2015 from $2.4 to $7.5 billion, and which some estimate will double again by 2025 (Allen and Chan, 2017). The US has also spent $29 billion on nanotechnology research since 2001, with about 20 per cent of its investments involving military applications (National Nanotechnology Initiative, 2019). A short list of potential military applications includes powerful and lightweight body armor, microscopic and networked nano-bots with capacities for ‘swarm intelligence’, and more compact and powerful chemical and nuclear weapons (Drexler, 2013; National Nanotechnology Initiative, 2019).

The full extent of the capabilities these technologies may unleash cannot be known in advance, though it seems possible that they could become an ‘axial’ capability of states. As Deudney (2007) describes, an axial capability is one that can dominate an entire system due to its unique character. While FIR technologies may not offer axial capabilities individually, their convergent character is such that they could collectively offer an axial advantage to states able to systematically harness their potential. This could take the form of a globally networked and nano-IOT-AI powered system harnessing vast capacities for force mobilization and information gathering and processing. By integrating nanotechnology, the IOT, big data, and robotics while harnessing the processing power and flexibility of advanced AI, states may in this way be in the midst of unleashing technological capabilities that will enable them to informationalize and monitor human populations while mobilizing destructive power with an unprecedented degree of precision and sophistication.

Of course, without speculating on the future, we can already see how states are taking advantage of the global information infrastructure to enhance control over the security environment. In particular, the metastasizing US security state is already in process of forging an incipient Techno-Leviathan – a ‘global-surveillance-state-in-the-making’ – whose drive for informational omniscience is pushing it beyond territorial boundaries in an effort to control the global infosphere and erode all pretense of legality and democratic oversight (Engelhardt, 2014, p. 107). And we are seeing comparable developments in China, where advances in AI, the IOT, and big data are being used to construct a ‘citizen score’ system that incentivizes ‘good’ (i.e. regime-friendly) behavior and punishes citizens for critical thinking (Mitchell and Diamond, 2018). Thus, while securitization trends in the US and China should already give us pause, they will only become more extensive and intensive by integrating increasingly advanced FIR technologies over time, which would likely be the case if the latter are relied upon to achieve decoupling.

The spiral of insecurity and securitization

Overall, due to the combination of democratized violence capacities and totalitarian state powers that it would create, the FIR would likely generate a reinforcing spiral of insecurity and securitization that produces a qualitatively new kind of techno-authoritarianism on a global scale. To understand how this may come about, it is first important to recognize that even if the FIR enables the global economy to grow while stabilizing the climate at 1.5 or 2 degrees C (a highly optimistic assumption), this would still (according to one study) leave 16 to 29 per cent of the world’s population (mostly in the Global South) vulnerable to lethal climate impacts (Byers et al., 2018). Technological advance could certainly improve adaptation capacities even amidst such environmental changes, but poverty and deprivation will remain difficult to reverse, and deep grievances felt towards the Global North – due to its primary responsibility in creating the problem whose consequences are primarily suffered in the Global South – will make militant and/or terrorist violence a likely response. Second, we can see that the increasing dependence of the global economy on FIR technologies would create an exponential expansion of possible bio and cyber attack vectors. In conjunction with steady advances in technologies of securitization and rising fear among policy makers and populations, it may only require a relatively ‘minimal’ attack (e.g. something comparable to 9/11, rather than the kind of million or even billion casualty attack feared by some bioterror experts) to catalyze a further threshold of intensified global securitization.

What might this threshold entail? Abstractly, it could be understood as a shift from a predominant ‘liberal’ security apparatus to an ‘authoritarian’ mode that establishes a permanent ‘state of emergency’ on a global scale (Opitz, 2011). While we can only speculate on what this might look like in practice, especially as technologies of securitization advance, it would likely involve a conjoined transformation in and integration of both technological-surveillance and institutional-legal assemblages, with the former being intensified and extended while the latter sheds all pretext of democratic oversight to become an increasingly absolutist form of sovereign authority on a global scale. Surveillance would reach from the planetary to the molecular scale through a network of satellites, distributed environmental sensors, and AI-facilitated data collection and processing techniques; military force mobilization capacities of nearly absolute speed and global reach could be created through a combination of space-based and networked AI-robotic weapons systems; and the right of the planetary sovereign to detain individuals, mobilize force without legal pretext, and constrict the mobility of people and goods to more tightly regulated territories, would be enshrined. While such an apparatus may seem far-fetched, philosopher and futurist Nick Bostrom envisions a similarly totalitarian global surveillance system as the necessary prerequisite of global security in an age of democratized weapons of mass destruction (Bostrom, 2018). And he notes that ‘thanks to the falling price of cameras, data transmission, storage, and computing, and the rapid advances in AI-enabled content analysis, [it] may soon become both technologically feasible and affordable’ (Bostrom, 2018, p. 25).

In sum, while techno-authoritarian trends are already evident in the US and China, FIR technologies would further enhance their capabilities while ‘democratizing’ WMD capacities among non-state actors (Blum and Wittes, 2015). This would incentivize states to extend and deepen surveillance as far as possible while making democratic populations more willing to accept intensified securitization, therefore making it difficult to avoid an authoritarian global security apparatus.

Conclusions

To return to the question that opened this essay: can global capitalism solve the earth system crisis? I have shown that the answer is an ambiguous maybe: the FIR may enable economic growth to decouple sufficiently rapidly from CO2 emissions and broader environmental impacts to stabilize the earth system, though these technological solutions would then intensify risks in the domains of biosecurity, cybersecurity, and state surveillance, thereby unleashing a spiral of insecurity and securitization that will push global capitalism towards a new kind of techno-authoritarianism. It is thus worth showing, in a way that differs from, yet complements the arguments of degrowth advocates, that even if global capitalism can succeed in stabilizing the earth system in a context of endless growth, then it would likely create security threats and totalitarian dangers that would undermine the desirability of such a system.

This conclusion reinforces the need for a set of global policies that break decisively from the growth-oriented status quo. On one hand, to dampen these technological trends and improve the prospects of earth system stabilization, the pursuit of GDP growth should be replaced by alternative goals based on new metrics (e.g. the Genuine Progress Indicator or Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare) that more accurately represent social welfare (Kallis, 2018). The European Commission’s Beyond GDP project shows that steps are being taken in this direction, though they should go further by explicitly ending reliance on growth by placing hard caps on material-energy throughput while restructuring economies so that livelihoods are not dependent on increasing GDP (Hickel, 2019; O’Neill et al., 2018). On the other hand, many FIR technologies (especially open source synthetic biology) offer great promise for improving human welfare through advances in sustainable energy, agriculture, and medicine. Thus, transitioning beyond growth should not necessarily entail abandoning these technologies, and strong global regimes for regulating and monitoring their use would therefore be necessary. However, rather than simply strengthening existing regimes like the Biological Weapons Convention (Charlet, 2018) or relying on private sector-led initiatives to regulate emerging risks ‘without impeding the capacity of research to deliver innovation and economic growth’ (Schwab, 2017, p. 90), more far-reaching changes are needed to enhance democratic control over the pace and direction of technological innovation, thereby counter-balancing the influence of multinational firms and militaries. In particular, ‘citizens assemblies’ should be empowered to debate the relative benefits and risks posed by FIR technologies (from synthetic biology to IoT, nanotechnology, and AI) and set mandates regarding investment levels and priorities, the direction of research, and the pace of deployment, while also having the right to ‘relinquish’ certain technological trajectories if their risks are perceived to outweigh the benefits.5

Overall, a ‘post-growth’ economy based on more democratized ownership of common wealth, reduced overall material-energetic throughput, decelerated and democratically controlled technological innovation, and prioritization of production for meeting essential human needs rather than profit (Hickel, 2019; Kallis, 2018; Raworth, 2017), has the potential to create a global political-economy that meets all human needs within planetary boundaries without shifting problems into the realms of biosecurity, cybersecurity, and state securitization. While the obstacles it confronts are of course formidable, the alternatives may be ecological collapse and civilizational breakdown (if the FIR fails to decouple economic growth from environmental impacts) or global techno-authoritarianism (if it succeeds).

### 2NC – Alt

### AT: Plan Focus

#### The use of longtermist justifications shapes the field of public engagement. Severing their advantage from the plan promotes moral corruption by protecting the unequal economic institutions their plan implies we should eliminate.

Alice CRARY Walter A Eberstadt Professor in Philosophy and University Distinguished Professor @ New School ’23 in *The Good It Promises, the Harm It Does: Critical Essays on Effective Altruism* eds. Carol J. Adams et al. p. Oxford Academic

Effective Altruism (EA) is a program for rationalizing charitable giving, positioning individuals to do the “most good” per expenditure of money or time. It was first formulated—by two Oxford philosophers just over a decade ago—as an application of the moral theory of consequentialism, and from the outset one of its distinctions within the philanthropic world was expansion of the class of charity recipients to include nonhuman animals. EA has been the target of a fair bit of grumbling, and even some mockery, from activists and critics on the left, who associate consequentialism with depoliticizing tendencies of welfarism. But EA has mostly gotten a pass, with many detractors concluding that, however misguided, its efforts to get bankers, tech entrepreneurs, and the like to give away their money cost-effectively does no serious harm.

This stance is no longer tenable. The growth of EA has been explosive, with some affiliated organizations, such as Open Philanthropy, now recommending grants amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Partly building on congenial trends in development economics, and in tandem with movements like “impact investing,” EA has become a force capable of leaving its imprint on whole fields of public engagement. This is in evidence in the domain of animal advocacy, to which EA has brought substantial new attention and funding. One result of the windfall is that EA-guided ratings groups serve as kingmakers, raising up pro-animal organizations deemed “effective” by EA and denigrating and partly defunding many organizations deemed “ineffective,” while pressuring others to artificially shift their missions in order to conform to operative metrics of “effectiveness” and secure funding. This has led to objections from animal advocates (often muted due to fear of alienating EA-admiring funders). Yet champions of EA, whether or not they are concerned with the cause of animals, for the most part adopt the attitude that they have no serious critics and that skeptics ought to be content with their ongoing attempts to fine-tune their practice.

Yet there are formidable critical resources both inside and outside the philosophical tradition in which EA originates. In light of the undisputed impact of EA, and its success in attracting idealistic young people, it is important to forcefully make the case that it owes its success primarily not to the (questionable) value of its moral theory but to its compatibility with political and economic institutions responsible for some of the very harms it addresses. The sincere dedication of many individual adherents notwithstanding, EA is a straightforward example of moral corruption.

Consequentialist ideas inform the way EA is implemented by many EA-affiliated groups focusing largely on human outreach, such as Development Media International, GiveWell, and Giving What We Can. Such ideas also inform EA’s implementation by groups focusing largely on animals, such as Animal Charity Evaluators and Faunalytics, and by groups like Open Philanthropy that address both humans and nonhuman animals. Consequentialism is a rather big tent, accommodating a variety of EAs. Some advocates argue that it is not necessary for Effective Altruists to be consequentialists (Vinding 2018). Others go further, claiming that EA is “independent of any theoretical commitments” (McMahan 2016, 93). This last claim is false, reflecting ignorance of competing ethical traditions from which criticism of EA arises. But it is fair to set aside the question of whether one can be an Effective Altruist without being a consequentialist. The consequentialist stances that have figured in the articulation and institutional actualization of EA presuppose a distinctive philosophical worldview, and it is possible to move from criticism of this worldview to a thoroughgoing attack on EA’s most destructive aspects. The resulting nonconsequentialist outlook makes it possible to expose EA-style talk of doing the “most good” as confused, delegitimizing evaluations of charitable organizations that presuppose such talk’s coherence, and thus rendering moot the question of whether such evaluations are invariably consequentialist.

#### Our framework improves topic education. Debates over labor law reform should consider the core ideas used to justify the rights provided to workers. Legal institutionalization cannot be evaluated independently of political and rhetorical context.

Diana REDDY Law @ UC Berkeley ’23 After the Law of Apolitical Economy: Reclaiming the Normative Stakes of Labor Unions, 132 YALE L. J. 1391 p. 1403-1405

For the past several decades, labor-law scholars have worked to theorize the role of law in this decline. For the most part, they have argued that labor law has failed to keep pace with structural economic change and that the legal rules that facilitate union organization and collective bargaining are no longer adequate to effectuate employee free choice in a postindustrial economy. In what became a leading metaphor, Cynthia L. Estlund argued in 2002 that labor law had been "ossified."33 Estlund showed that, for various reasons, labor law had been insulated from "democratic renewal" and rendered incompatible with a changed economy, a form of what political scientists call "policy drift."34 Labor-law scholars writing in this vein have rightly noted that the specifics of the statute presume midcentury economic organization and patterns of employment; due to changes in the structure of work since the late 1970s, the assumptions no longer fit eco- nomic realities.35 Summing up this perspective, Joel Rogers emphasized problems of legal technologies:

The core ideas of [the New Deal] system- that workers should enjoy associational rights within and without the firm and that collective worker organizations can contribute to the vitality of the American economy- remain perfectly sound today. The problem is that the particular ways in which these ideas were institutionalized in the New Deal system are increasingly inapposite to present circumstances. 36

Technical problems merit technical solutions. Contemporary legal scholars have accordingly proposed a host of potential improvements, such as more flexible representation procedures, reversal of the doctrine on permanent replacements, and harsher penalties for employer unfair labor practices.3 7 Others have more hopefully emphasized the "hydraulic" effect of labor law's demise, the ways in which workers, unions, and workers' centers can and do leverage other laws for building power, redistributing wealth, and exercising a voice in the workplace. 38 Kate Andrias has documented unions' turn to public policy-"the new labor law"-to improve working conditions through the political process when representation at the bargaining table has proven impossible.3 9 Most recently, a cadre of leading legal scholars formulated a vision for "clean slate" reform, a comprehensive, multidomain plan for rebuilding labor law.40 Noting that the technical specifics of the NLRA never fully effectuated the purposes set forth in its preamble, these scholars propose a substantial reworking.4 1 The upshot of this academic consensus has been summarized by one scholar as "save the preamble 42 but not the rest."

This scholarship is essential. There is no question that labor law is outdated and in drastic need of reform to make unionization meaningfully accessible to workers. And yet, drawing from a law-and-political-economy framework, I suggest that focusing on economic change independent of its political and social context provides an incomplete, and potentially misleading, picture.43 As such, this Feature focuses on the ideas that have facilitated and followed from the eco- nomic changes noted above." I will argue that the problem for American organized labor has never been just the "particular ways" in which labor law is institutionalized. The problem has equally been the insufficiency of its "core ideas" to justify what the statute asks of workers, employers, and the public. But other possibilities have always existed.

This revisiting of ideas could not be more timely. The past ten years have been a critical moment in the contest of ideas. Public opinion about labor unions has skyrocketed over the past decade, from a historical nadir to the highest level of support in sixty years.45 But notwithstanding a recent surge in organizing successes, public support has not yet translated into a statistically meaningful increase in union membership rates. Nor has it effectuated labor-law reform. Meanwhile, recent debates about police unions' role in enabling and protecting violent and racist officers and teachers' unions role in resisting the opening of schools during the COVID-1 9 pandemic have highlighted the potential limits of current ideas.46 As Benjamin Levin recently noted, "Worker power is often referred to romantically or idealistically as an unqualified good, but when worker power has been wielded, it hasn't necessarily been met with resounding support, particularly from liberals or progressives."4 7

#### Turn - Our framework generates better debates over consequences of action. You should evaluate vocabularies we use for anticipating consequences as ideological scripts about the type of future we want for labor policy.

Richard HYMAN Professor Emeritus at the London School of Economics and a fellow of the British Academy ’16 “The very idea of democracy at work” Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research 22(1) p. 20-21

The key issues here involve ideas, language and mobilization. The decline of union organization across Europe in recent years is in part ideological in causation: European unions were able to thrive when the prevailing policy discourse made collective regulation, employment protection and state welfare provision the commonsense of the times. The ideological counter-revolution of the past three decades – which has proceeded further and faster in some countries than in others – has placed trade unions very much on the defensive. They are often seen as representing a vested interest: those who are already relatively secure in the labour market, and have relatively good wages and working conditions; those who are in most cases winners or at least not major losers in the process of economic restructuring. But unions have to convince themselves and others that they are a ‘sword of justice’ (Flanders 1970), representing the losers as well as the winners and seeking to convert the losers into winners. This requires a battle of ideas.

The battle of ideas is also a battle of words. Human actors ‘discern situations with particular vocabularies, and it is in terms of the same delimited vocabulary that they anticipate consequences of conduct. Stable vocabularies of motive link anticipated consequences and specific actions’ (Mills, 1940: 906). Yet the vocabularies of motive that legitimated traditional trade union action have an archaic ring today. Trade unions require effective linguistic means of ‘framing’ workers’ perceptions of the circumstances that afflict them, of attributing blame for their problems and of proposing credible remedies. If for example workers accept that deteriorating conditions of work, or threats of workplace closure, are the inevitable outcome of uncontrollable economic forces, collective resistance is futile. If they blame employers or governments for their predicament but have no conception of alternative policies, they may protest but are unlikely to prevail. If they conceive an alternative that they cannot communicate, it will be ineffectual.

Tilly (2006) has made an analogous point, that socio-political movements draw on ‘repertoires of contention’: forms of action that have been developed in the past and provide ‘scripts’ for the future, but which nevertheless are subject to constant innovation. Such repertoires, he suggests, contain three key elements: ‘identity’, the assertion that those involved are a group with distinctive interests and the capacity to pursue these vigorously; ‘standing’, the insistence that their claims and interests deserve to be taken as seriously as those of other more powerful socio-economic groups; and ‘programme’, an integrated set of demands. All three in his view are mutually supporting. Indeed this is a useful prism through which to regard European trade unions: in their period of greatest strength they could credibly claim to represent a constituency with a strong collective identity, to possess the standing of a recognized actor in societal policy-making, and to articulate a programme which reflected the general interest. In more recent times, in most countries, all three claims have been weakened, and the elements in this weakening have been mutually reinforcing. New vocabularies which give meaning to the identity, standing and programme of trade unionism are part of the key to union survival and renewal and the fight for democracy at work.

#### [X] Our framework creates better policy analysis. The knowledge used to construct policy stories to define a problem area shape implementation. Different justifications create competing policy regimes.

Ole SENDINGResearch Fellow @ Norweigan Inst. of Int’l Affairs ‘4 in *Global Institutions & Development* eds. Morten Boas and Desmond McNeil p. 58-59

Granted that the objectification and definition of a given phenomenon is open to a variety of normative and political considerations, it becomes interesting to explore how scientific knowledge constitutes a symbolic resource used by politically motivated actors. In order to justify and legitimize certain courses of action, and to render these possible and effective, scientific knowledge forms an important component both for efforts of persuading and mobilizing different groups, and for formulating and establishing policy practices. This can he grasped through the concept of policy stories. A policy story can be defined as follows: A set of factual, causal claims, normative principles and a desired objective, all of which are constructed as a more or less coherent argument a story which points to a problem to be addressed and the desirability and adequacy of adopting a specific policy approach to resolve it.

This conceptualization incorporates how politically motivated actors integrate scientifically produced knowledge in the form of facts, concepts or theories in order to i) convince others that a certain phenomenon is a problem, (ii) demonstrate that this problem is best understood in a certain way as shown by the facts presented, and (iii) link these factual claims to normative principles giving moral force to the argument that it should be resolved. This perspective thus subjects the factual dimensions of political processes to the interests and normative commitments of actors, in the sense that knowledge is used to justify and legitimize calls for adopting certain policies to resolve what is seen to be a problem that 'ought' to be resolved. The formulation is partly inspired by Rein and Schuss (1991. 265), who refer to problem-setting stories that 'link causal accounts of policy problems to particular proposals for action and facilitate the normative leap from "is" to 'ought"'. We depart from Rein and Schon's conception somewhat by emphasizing more strongly the factual claims (the characteristics of a phenomenon and normative principles (the morally' grounded principles used to legitimize the policy formulation invoked by actors as they define a problem and argue for a specific policy approach. The concept of policy stories seeks to capture how actors integrate knowledge claims into their politically charged arguments so as to 'frame' the issue under discussion. Because of the interlocking of the factual and normative dimension of policy making, a policy story, can be seen to create space for political agency. That is: a policy story serves by creating an argument grounded in a body of scientifically produced knowledge, to persuade and mobilize different groups as it represents a complete package: an authoritative problem-definition and a concomitant policy solution that is legitimized in both factual and normative terms. A policy story- that wins acceptance at the discursive level can be seen to define the terms of the debate for the establishment of policy and to de-legitimize competing conceptualizations and policy approaches. Through the political agency performed through a policy story it may come to dominate the policy field as it forms the central cognitive-normative organising device for specific formulation and establishment of policy within different organizations. In this way, the policy story' may over time attain a 'taken for granted' character as it comes to structure, and reflect, policy practice. This process of stabilization is best described as a process of institutionalization. Following Scott, we can define institutionalization as a 'process by which a given set of units and a pattern of activities come so be normatively' and cognitively held in place, and practically taken for granted as lawful' Scott at al. 1994: 10). This latter feature is critical to the argument presented here. In the change from an argument for a specific policy approach to the establishment of that policy in practice, the policy story comes to define the cognitive-normative outlook of a policy regime. This can he defined as an interlock between the knowledge which underwrites the policy story, and the establishment in practice of the policy advocated in a policy story: That is: the knowledge that once formed part of an argument for a policy is now an integral part of the very rationality and identity' of the organization involved with managing this policy in practice. As such it becomes pact of the bundle of routines, rules, priorities and rationality of the organizations in the policy field see Douglas 1986; March and Olsen 1989: Scott and Meyer. 1994).

### AT: Perm – Include Other Perspectives/Justifications (Plan + Alt)

#### The core premise of longtermism excludes situated political and moral perspectives. Including additional justifications can’t resolve the conflict with the fatally flawed core.

Alice CRARY Walter A Eberstadt Professor in Philosophy and University Distinguished Professor @ New School ’23 in *The Good It Promises, the Harm It Does: Critical Essays on Effective Altruism* eds. Carol J. Adams et al. p. Oxford Academic

EA has not been wholly unresponsive to criticism. In addition to responding—unsatisfactorily—to the institutional critique, Effective Altruists have attempted to respond to the charge that EA has “been a rather homogeneous movement of middle-class white men” (Srinivasan 2015), by placing new stress on inclusiveness. Two prominent Effective Altruists have urged effective animal altruists to “consider how the history and demographics of the animal rights and Effective Altruist movements might be limiting their perspective” (Sebo and Singer 2018), and a number of EA-associated groups have made diversity a central institutional ideal. Animal Charity Evaluators, for instance, now includes diversity among the issues it considers both in its own staffing and in that of animal organizations it assesses, and Oxford EA has made a big push for diversity. These moves toward inclusiveness are typically presented as intended not just to bring in participants with different social identities, but to make room for their perspectives and ideas as well. As initially attractive as such gestures are, there is every reason to be skeptical about their significance. They come unaccompanied by any acknowledgment of how the framework of EA constrains available moral and political outlooks. That framing excludes views of social thought as engaged and irretrievably perspectival—views associated with central strands of feminist theory, critical disability studies, critical race theory, and decolonial theory. Despite its signaling toward diversity of ideas, EA as it stands cannot make room for individuals who discover in these traditions the things they believe most need to be said. For EA to accommodate their voices, it would have to allow that their moral and political beliefs are in conflict with its guiding principles, and that these principles themselves need to be given up. To allow for this would be to reject EA in its current form as fatally flawed—finally a step toward doing a bit of good.24

#### Ther perm is a Trojan horse for billionaire political control. Wrapping longtermist justifications in a package about concern for inequality is the key ideological move of the movement.

Mollie GLEIBERMAN PhD Student @ University of Amsterdam ’23 “Effective Altruism Doing transhumanism better” WORKING PAPER / 2023.03 https://repository.uantwerpen.be/docman/irua/d8a015motoM7a p. 1-2

Abstract: Effective Altruism (EA) is a Trojan horse for transhumanism, through which EA movement leaders and funders aim to naturalize transhumanism as the logical extension of the existing global aid and development sector. This paper traces transhumanism’s mainstreaming, first via its rebranding as a humanitarian effort to save lives, protect vulnerable populations, and ensure global flourishing (what I term ‘transhumanitarianism’), and later by embedding transhumanitarianism in EA (now under the rubric of ‘longtermism’). A key component of this strategy was inverting transhumanism’s techno-optimism to instead focus on safety and preventing existential risks (‘x-risk’) from emerging technologies like AI and biotechnology, while simultaneously advocating for the creation of these same technologies. The paper focuses on some components of this strategy: the use of inoculation, speculative ethics, anticipatory governance, and the mobilization of apocalyptic discourse as means for producing material outcomes in the form of policy and research agendas.

1. Introduction

Despite being commonly defined as an evidence-based approach to philanthropic giving that focuses on addressing global poverty, Effective Altruism (EA) is, in practice, an ideological and interest-driven project whose main aim is steering research and policymaking related to emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and biotechnology. This agenda, which the movement now calls ‘longtermism’, reflects the ideological aims of EA’s founders (members of an initially online subculture that coalesced in the mid-2000s around transhumanist thinkers Eliezer Yudkowsky, Nick Bostrom, David Pearce, Robin Hanson, and Aubrey de Grey) and the financial interests of the movement’s major funders and supporters (Silicon Valley tech billionaires invested in AI/machine learning, biotechnology, cryptocurrency, and prediction markets). ‘Longtermism’ is the EA idea that since the future holds so many more people than the present, efforts to maximize wellbeing and reduce suffering (to ‘do the most good’) ought to prioritize the welfare of the entire aggregate future of humanity, and ensuring the well- being of the long-term future should be a —if not the— key moral priority of our time (EA Forum, 2021; MacAskill, 2019; Todd, 2018, 2019). Crucially, in terms of practical components, EA’s ‘longtermist’ agenda is not merely similar to transhumanism, but precisely what Bostrom, Yudkowsky and their fellow transhumanists (later folded into a movement known as the ‘rationalists’) began advocating in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The outer justification has changed, jettisoning the unbridled techno-optimism that characterized the earlier Extropian transhumanism in favor of sober calls for safety and global well-being, but the core agenda—from the futuristic goals of space colonization, superintelligent artificial intelligence (also known as artificial general intelligence, AGI), genetic and cognitive enhancement, paradise engineering, and digital minds to the more down-to-earth goals of building ‘civilizational refuges’, popularizing prediction and forecasting markets, promoting ‘rationality’, cryptocurrencies and charter cities—remains strikingly the same 2.

While the specific content of this agenda is interesting and worthy of extended analysis in its own right, my aim here is more modest: I seek to trace the arc of transhumanism’s mainstreaming via its positioning as the logical extension of the global aid and development sector — first as a humanitarian effort to save lives, protect vulnerable populations, and ensure global flourishing and well-being (what I term ‘transhumanitarianism’), and later through EA (under the rubric of ‘longtermism’). A key component of this strategy was inverting transhumanism’s techno-optimism to instead focus on safety and preventing existential risks (‘x-risk’) to the future of humanity from emerging technologies, while advocating for the creation of these same technologies. This process of inoculation—pre-emptively admitting the flaws of whatever ideology, project, or worldview one is promoting in order to protect and strengthen it from attack (Mosco, 2005)—combined with prognostications of catastrophe has enabled the advancement of the transhumanist sociotechnical imaginary to ascend global policy and research agendas. The paper focuses on the tactical components of this mainstreaming: the use of inoculation, speculative ethics, anticipatory governance, and the mobilization of apocalyptic discourse as means for producing material outcomes in the form of policy and research agendas.

### 2NC Th – PIKs Good

### AT: Longtermism good

#### Longtermist impact framework is incoherent. Using utility and expected value makes no sense when comparing unprecedented events. Statistical framework is smoke and mirrors with no reliable estimates of probability.

Joshua SCHUSTER English @ Western University AND Derek WOODS English @ University of British Columbia ’21 *Calamity Theory: Three Critiques of Existential Risk* p. 46-54

The theoretical models used by existential risk analysts vacillate among deep time speculations, unknown risk horizons, and policy making in the present. What kind of scientific reasoning best fits these timescales and the “unprecedented” nature of the events in question? The philosophers of existential risk deploy a model of probability far more than actual calculation. But they promise that their account of “possible” extinctions and the actions that will help humans avoid them can and will have a quantitative foundation. Their claim is that low probability plus extinction-level significance means we should care more about existential risks than anything else—and that this level of analysis is truly the ultimate priority of “effective altruism.” In the case of avoiding remotely probable existential risks, the benefits and rewards are postponed for a future distant enough that it will be hard for most to care deeply about it, with the added complication that many of these extinction scenarios might not be possible in the first place. It would not be fair to say that existential risk is fundamentally incoherent when assessing risk probability and leave it at that. But this caricature gets at something that we will take up with more rigor in this chapter.

The field of existential risk combines utilitarianism and probabilistic risk analysis toward a fortuitous “ok” outcome (Bostrom’s “maxipok”). On the one hand, existential risk analysts aim at the utilitarian goal of establishing the greatest good for the greatest number. On the other hand, they seek to use mathematical probability models to estimate the chance that a given cause will lead to the extinction of humanity, or even of life in general.2 The crux of existential risk analysis is the synthesis of these two modes of calculative reasoning. But this crux is also a failure: as we show in this section, existential risk analysis is constituted by a radical mismatch between method and object of study. This mismatch leads to a comic effect: the wonderfully strange spectacle of serious philosophers (Bostrom), scientists (Sir Martin Rees), and entrepreneurs (Elon Musk) discussing how to mitigate the risk of deep future extinction events as though they were calculating the probability that one will die in a car accident based on ample statistics about the frequency of such events in the past. The effect is similar to that of Michael Madsen’s documentary Into Eternity, when we watch engineers become speculative philosophers as they ponder the one hundred thousand-year time frame of their deep geological repository for storing nuclear waste, especially when Madsen asks them what human societies might be like in such a distant future.3 What Mark McGurl calls “posthuman comedy” is here the effect of rational solutions applied to cover over the unthinkable, unimaginable, and uncontrollable otherness of any future that stretches beyond a few human generations.4

Existential risk veers from “comic” analyses of extremely remote scenarios, such as the “aestivation hypothesis” (aliens are sleeping so as to wait billions of years for the universe to cool down enough to run cosmic-size computers), to “tragic” assessments of the high near-term likelihood of some massive extinction-inducing event that would be predictable but not avoidable.5 If we were to start calculating the probability that a climate tipping point or AI will bring an end to our evolutionary line, then not only would we be unable to arrive at a reliable estimate that bears any analogy with, for example, finance or insurance risk analysis, we wouldn’t even know if the event is possible in the first place. We would be trying to estimate the probability of something that can only happen once, without any evidence to go on. Not only that, we would be trying to use this knowledge to act in a way that will prevent it from happening. Or at least, because existential risk analysis operates within a fundamentally probabilistic universe, the aim is to lower the fatal event’s probability: the closer to zero, the more immune humanity’s potential will have been.

For some, this might already be enough to dismiss the idea of rational study of remote existential risk scenarios. As one AI re- searcher reports, “I don’t worry about [AI induced extinction] for the same reason I don’t worry about overpopulation on Mars.”6 There is a common-sense idea that we should not spend too much time or too many resources to prevent something when we don’t know if it’s possible (though Bostrom and others would remind us that common sense is what prevents us from seeing the implications of probability theory clearly enough to act). As our characterization of existential risk’s model of probability and utilitarianism suggests, we lean toward skepticism about the field’s claim to rationality and scientific rigor. For readers steeped in critical theory, such a quantitative approach to politics, ethics, and extinction may look to be another chapter of the dialectic of Enlightenment, bound to end badly. But the epistemological assumptions of existential risk should attract greater attention and critique—not dismissal as another overreach of rationalism, but analysis and historicization.

The Rhetoric of Probability

Writing for Vox, journalist Dylan Matthews covered the Effective Altruism Global Conference at the Google campus in Mountain View, California, in the summer of 2015. The title of his article—“I Spent a Weekend at Google Talking to Nerds about Charity. I Came Away . . . Worried”—divulges his take on the ideas and affects that circulated at the meeting.7 “Effective altruism” is the philanthropic practice of attempting to do the greatest good through means that are efficient and data-driven rather than sentimental. Many in the existential risk community also subscribe to the effective altruism movement, such as philosopher Toby Ord, founder of the society Giving What We Can (a group admirably committed to donating at least 10 percent of income). In Oxford, Bostrom’s Future of Humanity Institute shares office space with the Centre for Effective Altruism. Effective altruists see themselves embracing “the cold, hard data necessary to prove what actually does good.”8 This makes the movement a candidate for study from the perspective of science and technology studies, as an ethical philosophy that claims for itself scientific imprimatur. Matthews says that he identifies as an effective altruist; he also admits that “EA is very white, very male, and dominated by tech industry workers.”9 The topic of existential risk occupied center stage at the conference in 2015, and it gave him pause even as someone who embraces quantitative ethics.

Matthews’s skeptical account of this “X-risk” takeover is a good example of how existential risk combines fantastical, deep-time probability calculations with utilitarian ethics. In the example he cites, a panel featuring Bostrom and Musk, the starting point for determining the greatest good for the greatest number of persons was to calculate the greatest number of lives. The presenters did so not with respect to a narrow time frame, as in the greatest number alive on Earth today or during a 100-year period. Instead, they reasoned that if humanity lasts “another 50 million years,” then “the total number of humans who will ever live is . . . 3 quadrillion.”10 But they went on to decide that this number fails to take into account future extraterrestrial inhabitants of the solar system, “the potential value of our posthuman future,” or what Phil Torres calls the “astronomical value thesis.”11 Given the same arbitrary time scale of 50 million years, they concluded that the number of people we need to take into account is more like 1052 lives of 100 years each—a vastly greater number than 3 quadrillion, so much greater that the mathematical notation for exponents seems more accessible than obscure words like sexdecillion.

Bostrom then shifts from such uncountable numbers to discussing the ethical implications for us today: “Even if we give this 1054 estimate ‘a mere 1% chance of being correct,’ . . . we find that the expected value of reducing existential risk by a mere one billionth of one billionth of one percentage point is worth a hundred billion times as much as a billion human lives.”12 As Matthews continues to paraphrase, the number of future humans who will never exist if humans go extinct is so great that reducing the risk of extinction by 0.00000000000000001 percent can be expected to save 100 billion more lives than, say, preventing the genocide of 1 billion people. That argues, in the judgment of Bostrom and others, for prioritizing efforts to prevent human extinction above other endeavors. This is what X-risk obsessives mean when they claim ending world poverty would be a “rounding error.”13

Since we read this article, we have mentioned Matthews’s rather satirical report to a number of friends and colleagues. Their reaction is always amusement at the comical absurdity of this scenario. They are right, in a sense, but in this case the reductio ad absurdum of deep-time utilitarianism is strange because it is also perfectly rational, if “rational” means consistent with the concepts thinkers like Bostrom have applied. Notwithstanding their highly speculative assumptions about the time scale of fifty million years and interplanetary travel, the numbers reported by Matthews are faithfully deduced by combining probability theory with the first principle of the mathematical ethics of utilitarianism, even if the greatest “good” is reduced to mere existence for the greatest number. This is the “effective” side of effective altruism, now stretched to an unimaginable future.

In another example, Bostrom offers a box essay in Superintelligence about the human lives and happiness that are really at stake when it comes to the risk of malevolent AI. Different from Matthews’s example, he adds a quantification of happiness that goes beyond the negative value of avoiding the foreclosure of countless future lives:

Assuming that the observable universe is void of extraterrestrial civilizations, then what hangs in the balance is at least 10,000,000,00 0,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 ,000 human lives. . . . If we represent all the happiness experienced during one entire such life with a single teardrop of joy, then the happiness of these souls could fill and refill the Earth’s oceans every second, and keep doing so for a hundred billion billion millennia. It is really important that we make sure these truly are tears of joy.14

This implied utilitarian calculus stretches the limits, to put it mildly, of any known means of deciding how we should act, what is right and wrong, and how to calculate the odds of a given extinction. Yet they remain calculations. They have a certain rationality despite the absurd ambition. They also provide the foundations for a normative prescription for action, even if it reads slightly tongue-in-cheek given the image of an ocean filled with tears of joy. The aspiration here is to make an ethics of extinction avoidance rational by grounding it in the relation between probability of a given risk and the idea that doing the right thing means dividing the total amount of total happiness, now and in the future, by the total number of humans. Working with such vast numbers is what gives the idea that even slightly lowering the probability of an extinction event is worth “astronomically” more than any justice achieved in the present.

Another example of Bostrom’s use of probability appears in the first chapter of Superintelligence, where he posits that AI will reach human-level intelligence during our century. In this case, the evidence with which to calculate such probabilities comes secondhand from surveys of AI experts recalibrated by Bostrom. Rather than probabilities calculated on the basis of known conditions such as the two sides of a coin or all the data about car accidents used by insurance companies, we have researchers guessing at probabilities, other researchers averaging them out, and Bostrom reporting the results. So he is right to admit that small sample sizes, selection biases, and—above all—the inherent unreliability of the subjective opinions elicited mean that one should not read too much into these expert surveys and interviews. They do not let us draw any strong conclusion. But they do hint at a weak conclusion. They suggest that (at least in lieu of better data or analysis) it may be reasonable to believe that human-level machine intelligence has a fairly sizeable chance of being developed by mid-century, and that it has a non-trivial chance of being developed considerably sooner or much later; that it might perhaps fairly soon thereafter result in superintelligence; and that a wide range of outcomes may have a significant chance of occurring, including extremely good outcomes and outcomes that are as bad as human extinction. At the very least, they suggest that the topic is worth a closer look.15

Bostrom rhetorically hedges several layers of uncertainty, writing not just that we should take the numbers with a grain of salt, but that a “weak conclusion” “suggests” that it “may be reasonable” to believe in a “fairly sizeable” chance of the development of human- level AI, “which might perhaps fairly soon” become superintelligent, which could then mean a “significant chance” of human extinction alongside the more neutral and optimistic possibilities. This rhetoric of probability does not amount to anything very different from an unguided estimate. More generously, we can say that the changing opinions of experts allow for guesses that are easier to trust secondhand, and that these guesses can be updated as new evidence arrives. Yet they remain guesses about several things that we do not know to be possible in the first place.

There would seem to be a qualitative difference between such “probabilities” (if this is still the right term) that involve educated guesses and secondhand surveys, and the kind of probabilistic risk analysis that, though its conclusions remain uncertain, is able to use data about real past events to calculate a probability. Surveying the expert community can tell us the probability that a given ex- pert will believe in human extinction by AI, not the probability of the event itself. Given Bostrom’s hedging, we are not just dealing with uncertainty but, what is more abstract, rhetorical play with uncertainty about uncertainty. We would have to be very generous readers to grant that there is some truth to these forecasts when the author is explicitly telling us not to read much into them. Given the fundamentally speculative nature of extinction scenarios, such guesswork is understandable. The problem is when it is also treated as “scientific” and “rational” grounds for political policy—even as the only grounds worth mentioning.

#### 2. Appealing to growth as the key to millions of future generations ideologically excuses the initial source of that growth in violent labor appropriation, genocide, and slavery.

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Irrationality and Crisis

Under reification, “quantity alone determines everything,” and time itself “sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature, [and] . . . freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’ ” (Lukács 1971, 89–90). This formulation, amounting to what Walter Benjamin (2019) termed “empty, homogeneous time,” corresponds more or less exactly to the temporality depicted in MacAskill’s TED talk—his collapse of human species history into a timeline of per capita GDP. Not content to homogenize the past, however, MacAskill in the same talk projects “empty, homogeneous time” onto the future, too. EA’s proponents are in fact never more eloquent or ecstatic than when speaking of humans who do not yet exist, whose lives and interests they nonetheless imbue with greater moral importance than the merely existing humans and nonhuman animals of the present. By colonizing other planets, MacAskill thus maintains, Homo sapiens might live for “billions” more years, while EA advocate Toby Ord, in his bestselling book The Precipice, similarly invites the reader to imagine the “millions of generations” of future humans yet to come—provided only that we first dispatch the “existential threats” facing our species. Given the imminent collapse of the earth’s ecosystem, such views—which characterize existence only in terms of quantities of experience—are not so much optimistic as dissociative.

This homogeneous rendering of time finds its complement in the occlusion of historical fact—as when MacAskill credits the growth of GDP to “the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions,” rather than to the birth of capitalism. That MacAskill fails even to mention capitalism—the chief structuring principle of human economic and social life for the last five hundred years—is hardly an accident: only by mystifying the social origins of economic growth can he sell his cheerful vision of transhistorical progress. For to admit where all this miraculous wealth came from—viz., the violent appropriation of the resources, lives, and labor of countless millions of humans and nonhumans—would otherwise require him to confront such horrors as the Atlantic slave trade, the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, the destruction of the great forests of Europe, and the extermination of billions of land and sea animals to satisfy Europe’s insatiable markets for fur, fish, meat, and whale oil.

It is ironic, in this connection, that EA should pride itself on being “evidence-based” when its naive rejection of historicism and critical theory renders it anti-empirical in orientation. Ostensibly, the “principle of rationalization” enables the knower to “to predict with ever greater precision all the results to be achieved” (Lukács 1971, 88). In reality, however, a chasm opens up between the form and content of knowledge—i.e., between the conceptual apparatus of the “knower” and the actual content of social life. Trapped within a reified system with which it “[harmonizes] its own structure” of thought (95), the reified mind is only able to “grasp what it itself has created” (121–122). It “surrenders to the immediate facts,” and in so doing “repels recognition of the factors behind the facts, and thus repels recognition of the facts, and of their historical content” (Marcuse 2002, 101). Effective Altruism’s empirical inadequacy is for this reason incurable, since the “facts” that it posits are shorn of their wider sociohistorical context and significance. Because reification leads “to the destruction of every image of the whole” (Lukács 1971, 103)—occlusion of the totality of social relations—the Effective Altruist is chronically “unable to grasp the meaning of the overall process as it really is,” the “ ‘organic’ unity of phenomena” (182, 188). This renders EA incapable of perceiving the patterned forces in society that lead to harm.

#### 3. Only alterthe antive solves root cause of exploitation. Their own inequality arguments prove that existing distribution of power increases the chance of system collapse.

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The reason Effective Altruists are unable to “connect the dots” between the capitalist system and its manifest consequences is that their “philosophic critique finds itself blocked by the reality from which it dissociates itself” (Marcuse 2002, 139). Doomed to mistake its own “rational and formalistic mode of cognition” for “the only possible way of apprehending reality” (Lukács 1971, 104–105, 121), EA remains helpless before the complex mediations of culture, society, and economy, unaware “that the world lying beyond its confines, and in particular . . . its own underlying reality lies, methodologically and in principle, beyond its grasp” (104). If society really did consist merely of quantifiable facts, then EA’s faith in dispassionate reason and calculation might be justified. Alas, society does not resemble the rational scheme that effective altruists attribute to it, leaving the latter blind to the “irrationality of the total process” (Lukács 1971, 102). Within EA’s cramped intellectual rooms, there is no space for Marx or Freud, or for feminism, critical race theory, or any other historicist framework that would enable it to comprehend the social origins of, say, authoritarian populism, male violence against women, or the destruction of animals and nature. Such phenomena simply “do not compute” within EA’s own mathematicized schema, leaving the “reified mind . . . unable to perceive a pattern in this ‘chaos’ ” (Lukács 1971, 105). As a consequence, the movement can take aim only at the secondary effects of the primary phenomena. In his TED talk, MacAskill thus misidentifies the biggest problems today as global health, factory farming, and existential threats (chiefly, nuclear war, meteor strikes, and AI “singularities”). However, the global poor suffer from adverse health outcomes because of capitalist social relations (i.e., from a coercive division of labor rooted in exploitation and domination); the suffering of animals stems not from “factory farming,” but from long-standing patterns of human, patriarchal domination, on the one hand, and capitalist accumulation, on the other; and though we may have good reason to worry about accidental nuclear war and stray asteroids, we face more urgent concerns today—including, and above all, the mass extinction crisis. (The latter, though by far the worst catastrophe to befall terrestrial life in 66 million years, goes strangely unmentioned by MacAskill, both in his TED talk and in Doing Good Better, his bestselling book.)

An inability to comprehend “the phenomenon of crisis” (Lukács 1971, 105) is thus itself one of the symptoms of the reified mind. If Effective Altruists have failed to recognize the true scale of the catastrophe, or to grasp its origins, it is because today’s global crisis—the destruction of the ecological order and the breakdown of the economic, social, and political structures that have long organized human life—is rooted in fundamentally irrational social structures, institutions, and norms of which Effective Altruists can form no definite idea. As a consequence, Effective Altruists will no doubt continue to see hopeful signs of incremental, quantitative progress in specific areas of policy—e.g., in extreme poverty or malaria reduction—right up to the moment when the entire system collapses, leaving billions to starve to death and all animal life obliterated.