

Hey Norm,

I hope all is well.

I have finished "This Time We Went Too Far." It is probably the most scientific political science book I've ever read and one of the best ones at that. Man, it must have taken you forever to write that book. There are so many footnotes and quotes, the book weighed more, literally, because it was so dense with facts. Apart from the content, of which I learned so much, I've become a shrewder person after reading it because of the way you wrote it. You pick up tools as you read it like what serious research looks like, how to present the arguments and viewpoints of the opposing sides fairly and in context, and expose their propaganda with facts and pointing out their logical fallacies. Whoever reads that book will know the whole story and not just part of it and be truly informed.

Since finishing the book, I've been thinking about how it made me feel. I think one of the reasons I left the book moved and with a mind on fire (again, apart from the powerful content) is because your writing has ethos in every page and every argument, which is often missing from argumentation on the political left. It can feel dispiriting for any person to have to argue that killing defenseless people is wrong, but so long as it happens in real life, so long will something so crystal-clear have to be continuously brought to the forefront of our consciousness. The left being morally right is always taken as an axiom— and conversely, there's a faction of the left that feels like morals have nothing whatsoever to do with our protests and programs; you know, because politics is about prophecy or pragmatism and not about people, the planet, and peace. I wonder if the 'Moral Majority' propaganda that existed a while ago created this dynamic; there must be factions of the left that deems its point of view as morally inferior to that of the right's, so they avoid the moral aspects of their arguments altogether and focus solely on logic and emotion. (A good example of this would be abortion and the Roe v. Wade case we studied in class. We mostly heard arguments like it's not a man's decision to make when a woman is deciding whether or not to keep her baby. As we discovered while reading and discussing the case, the moral side isn't apparent. As you said while discussing eugenics the last day of class, it was the conservatives that were against the grotesque practice— not the liberals). A more significant portion of us on the left believes that our side is so obviously morally superior that whoever does not recognize this must be lacking in some basic human qualities. Hence, people are often denounced online or in-person for not falling in line. I think this is a huge mistake which could make getting people on our side harder than it needs to be. We have mastered pathos in expressing our emotions and trying our best to evoke them in others, and we have learned logos as everyone on the left believes they have the facts on their side and secretly

relish the moments where they can enlighten any unstudied opponents. But one thing we do not always express or try to have understood is the ethos. Why don't we ever decide to prove that our goals are morally correct? For example, to go back to the riots that happened for a few days during the genesis of the BLM protests, many of us on the left tried to argue in favor of riots. We said our riots in 1968 got us a legislative victory (logos), we said it was pragmatic because the other tactics supposedly do not work (logos), and we said that we should express our anger at the system (pathos), but rarely was the argument made as to whether rioting was the right thing to do. Is it right? Not just if it is a good idea, but is it good? This reluctance to engage in whether something is the right thing to do, rather than just merely being pragmatic in a technocratic way, I think hinders our attempts in getting passive people to act. We cannot always rely on videos of innocent people getting murdered to inspire action. We should not only tell people that defunding the police is the pragmatic thing to do because we can give money to education and housing etc., but we should also say that it is right because any good society should be dedicated to the welfare of its citizens, and a primary requirement for the positive promotion of the welfare of a populace is having the basics of human needs met like housing, food, healthcare, etc., therefore, spending money on anything but that is wrong. Though, of course, human beings are born with a moral compass, knowing which direction to follow takes practice, and deciding even to follow it in the first place will take more than just logic and emotion. If I had to rank ethos, pathos, and logos in order of importance, I would have to say ethos is the most important from which the rest should follow. Our society has disturbed our sense of what is right and wrong. When your human needs are unmet, (no food, no shelter, etc.) our morals can go out of the window when survival is at stake, and on the extreme opposite end of the wealth pyramid, the need to justify and maintain power forces one to construct an entirely different moral code, which is foisted onto all of us. The rest of us who are struggling, but maintaining, need to have, as you said in your book, our moral batteries recharged periodically, and people arguing what is right and wrong and not just what is expedient, and going beyond mere incitement can help. (I plan on reading Aristotle's Rhetoric very soon).

I started reading Goldstone Recants so I can understand what happened with him and his report. After that, I will continue reading your other books. I just ordered Beyond Chutzpah to complete my collection.

I, like you, and people all around the world have been doing a lot of thinking and reflecting during this pandemic. My employment ordeal changed my thought patterns. I have always prided myself on being a low-maintenance person, and now I see that I have experienced a lot of unneeded unhappiness as a result of suppressing my needs and wants. I've spent many years putting other people's needs ahead of my own, telling people everything was good with

me when they weren't, having a hard time accepting help from others, and a host of other things. I am trying to change that and ask for help more often, and like you pointed out at the end of *This Time We Went Too Far*, something that even atheists would agree with: "God helps those who help themselves". Asking for help and helping oneself are two sides of the same coin, and after many years of trying to live with only one side, I feel better being whole.

I told you that I felt humiliated because my behavior at work will now be somewhat submissive because of my ordeal. Your response was, "why do you care what people think?" You then followed that up with "you have greater things to accomplish". That, too, changed my thought patterns. Since taking your class, as I have pointed out many times, I started to feel like a smart person, and I have been motivated to learn, read, and think more. One further thing I have learned is to reject all status symbols and look upon everyone as equals. I remember how intimidated I was because of my co-workers' educational pedigrees, but that has changed. What one man can do, another man can do. I should also add that one man should not care what another man thinks of him. Now, I look at my *Jacobin* magazine which I just got in the mail, and here are some of the contributors for the summer 2020 issue:

Jacob Abbot: Ph.D. candidate Harvard

Phoebe Braithwaite: Ph.D. Student Harvard

Briahna Joy Gray: Harvard Alum

Marilyn Arwood: Georgetown

Daniel Finn: University of Chicago

Jeff Weaver: Georgetown

Anton Jager: Doctoral Student University of Cambridge

Matt Karp: Associate Professor Of African American Studies at Princeton University

Dominik A, Leusder: Graduate student London School of Economics

While I was reading that, I felt pangs of insecurity, but I quickly snapped out of it; I will be like those guys in time. The only thing that separates me from them is a lot of hard work.

Hey Norm, can I ask you for a favor? I have a goal of publishing articles in *Current Affairs Magazine*. I don't think this was ever a secret as I always mention that publication and its founder, but their pedigrees! I did not believe that I was good enough, and I may not be now, but I can get there! And I need some help. Can you please read my essays as I write them? Help me get better at them by being critical and honest (like you always are). I've taken your advice so far, and I've been reading more difficult books. I have also bought authors like George Eliot,

Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens, as you recommended. I am trying to get better, but I know that I cannot do it independently.

Other than all of that, all is well with me. Things are ok at work, and I am fine personally.

How are things going for you? Any plans for the Fall?

Let me know

P.s I've read your mom excerpt from your memoir, and it was so good! It made me feel like I was there, it made me think, and I feel like a better person. (Please, can you continue writing the memoir!? We gotta have the full version). I saw Nathan Robinson share one of the excerpts on Facebook the other day. I have included an image of this below.



**Nathan J. Robinson** shared a link.

Admin · August 5 at 10:43 PM ·



Norman Finkelstein's essay about his time as a Maoist is a really beautiful piece of writing. A lot of good stuff about how easy it becomes to rationalize atrocities and the difficulty of accepting that the things you believed in were lies. Good material for resisting the temptations of authoritarian leftism and seeing why the arguments for it can feel so persuasive. His conclusion at the end is that we have to commit ourselves to being honest and not trying to bend the truth to suit our political goals.



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