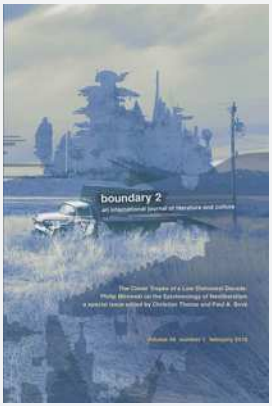

Conspiracy? What Conspiracy? A Conversation with Philip Mirowski

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b2: *You write that "whatever their political stripe, most of that Left adheres to the Enlightenment conception of epistemology and cannot imagine themselves stranded in a world so barren of graspable truth" (Mirowski 2019: 11). I suppose I'd take issue with that description of the contemporary Left, at least in the United States. The college-educated Left has absorbed big doses of critical theory—of social constructivism, antifoundationalism, anti-essentialism, and Enlightenment critique. This language is very well established in activist circles off-campus and is common on the Twitter and Tumblr Left. It can seem that when college students radicalize, they do so mostly via anti-Enlightenment positions (though I would grant that the revived environmental/climate movement is the big exception to this, and I suspect that their role will only grow). Anyway, the idea that the Left, and especially Marxists, need to get over their outmoded attachment to a discredited Enlightenment paradigm seems to misjudge the current moment; it can itself sound like a sentimental leftover from the early '90s. The complication, it seems to me, is this: when you run into skeptics and antifoundationalists on the left, in science and technology studies, for instance, you often*

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warn them that their skepticism brings them close to neoliberalism. Indeed, you sometimes seem to be suggesting that it is impossible for a philosophical skeptic to reject neoliberalism, for the simple reason that many leading neoliberals were themselves skeptics. A question, then: Is philosophical skepticism (epistemological humility + the attack on experts + doubts about the knowability of complex systems) only ever neoliberal? Yes, Friedrich Hayek predates Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. But what about the skeptical traditions that predate Hayek? How can I tell a neoliberal skepticism from any other kind?

PM: This raises a very important issue. Sure, most undergrads have had some exposure to Thomas Kuhn or Foucault or Derrida or . . . A few may be aware of Adorno tracing back all the failures of the twentieth century to the Enlightenment. And they may nurture some personal sense of the pitfalls of Enlightenment epistemology. But I was talking about political movements in the essay. Upon reflection, I have my doubts about how many contemporary left movements have been explicitly predicated upon something like social constructivism or antiessentialism.

Let me put it this way: equipped with a little history, we can see that there has never been a unique marriage of epistemology and political program. Positions on skepticism of the epistemic capacities of the polity date back to Plato, if not before. Without getting embroiled in the deep history here, one might gesture toward the numerous fights over political epistemology over the last century. I always recommend as a starting point Edward Purcell's classic *Crisis of Democratic Theory* (1973), which reveals how social scientists in the United States undermined faith in the epistemic capacities of the citizenry back in the 1920s, leading to the well-known Lippmann-Dewey debates (and, of course, the Lippmann Colloquium, the precursor to the Mont Pèlerin Society). There were at least two reactions to this, from midcentury onward. I think of the first of them as interposing academic "experts" between the citizenry and politicians—for instance, this was the primary position in orthodox neoclassical economics, decision theory, and in political science. The fascination then became to plumb the ways to distinguish this situation in the United States from the totalitarian Nazis and Soviets. The other was to attempt a marriage of relativism and "liberal" democratic theory, primarily launched from within anthropology back then, from Franz Boas to Ruth Benedict to Margaret Mead to Jerome Bruner. Whether this ever took hold in a widespread manner is an open question. In any event, what is notable about both is that they did not actu-

ally set out to question "truth" as such, and thus they maintained a more or less unexamined Enlightenment foundation.

The nature of "truth" was eventually challenged by Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend in the history of science, and by what used to be called "postmodernists" in literary theory from the 1960s onward, but my impression is that this skepticism's relationship to actual politics was pretty tenuous until it was made an issue in the 1980s by explicit neoliberal and neocon figures like Allan Bloom, Lynne Cheney, and Dinesh D'Souza. So, at that juncture there was an attempt to paint leftish ideas as dangerously relativistic, but that charge came largely from the Right, in the form of an attack on the very structure of universities themselves. (The same thing happened in the so-called Science Wars of the 1990s, attacking science studies.) You seem to suggest that this characterization of political movements was sort of correct for the post-1990s Left. While it may have had some relevance when applied to some of those engaged in identity politics, I think even there one finds much hand-wringing concerning the political consequences of epistemology: think of Terry Eagleton, or Nancy Fraser, for instance. Just as the Left gave up on the proletariat as a political force at the turn of the millennium, it seems they engaged in a sloppy equation of political virtue with epistemic egalitarianism of the lowest common denominator—think of the Occupy movement, or the praise of "citizen science" in science studies, or the fascination with the "wisdom of crowds" actualized by social media. But that was not the same as some principled antifoundationalism; rather, by that time it was watered-down neoliberalism, translated by people who misunderstood politics and cared little for epistemology.

The long and short of it is that I think that dependence on Enlightenment epistemology on the left has been much more prevalent in political motivations than the critical theory narrative seems to promote; why, otherwise, did Tom Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004) become a bestseller? Yet I also concede that a convincing history of political epistemology (even in one country) remains to be written.

Now on to the second part. Am I correct to now suspect much of your concern over the counter-Enlightenment has something to do with a worry over just how deep the rot may go? You cite antiessentialism and generalized distrust in expertise (and I agree these are common concerns), but when you lump it all together as "skepticism," I tend to get worried about getting lost in the Land of Untethered Categories. Also, hearkening back to G. W. F. Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach seems just an excess dram of historical continuity for most of my audience, I expect—and remember, I

consider myself an intellectual historian. In the circles I travel in, one finds not so much some situation of generalized skepticism nurtured by German philosophy but rather something a bit more targeted, usually at either (a) scientists or (b) people expressing particular political enthusiasms. I am inclined to regard both as being informed by an everyday neoliberalism—not so much by direct allegiance to a political doctrine they frequently misunderstand or an epistemology they have not thought through.

You seem to have an impression of a broad Left who proudly flaunts verities wherever it goes. Maybe that is so; but my impression is rather that the Left has been reeling from pillar to post for a few decades now and is currently not at all certain about what it believes anymore. The Fall of the Wall has something to do with this, and then there is the collapse of many self-identified socialist parties (Venezuela, France, Portugal, etc.); but what I was getting at was a tendency to treat some variant of Marxism as a necessary default position from which to begin any sort of soul-searching. This latter conviction has almost paralyzed the Left, especially when one examines the doctrines of modern Marxists like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, or the Accelerationists, or even David Harvey. Rather than confront the debacle in a serious way, they spin off into ineffectual posturing and thinly veiled neoliberalism. So you are perceptive to suggest that I do believe that the Left has lost its former ability to self-organize (and I hesitate to bring up recent reactions to the marches in Charlottesville that seem to be about banishing *statues*) and needs some soul-searching about why it cannot match the Neoliberal Thought Collective (NTC) in organizational prowess. Just as Hayek and the early neoliberals renounced classical liberalism, I think the time has come for a segment of the vanguard Left to renounce Marxism.

b2: *I'm especially interested in the Marxist and Marx-friendly writers who agree with you—the ones who lean on your work and cite you appreciatively. You talk about the reluctance of many Marxists to acknowledge that neoliberalism has been a program or a movement. But then what about Melinda Cooper's* Family Values *(2017)? Or Srnicek and Williams's* Inventing the Future *(2015)? I'm interested in whether you could imagine a Mirowskian Marxism, because my sense is that other people can even if you can't.*

PM: Just as the nascent NTC was comprised of people with classical liberal backgrounds, it is equally likely that a forceful countermovement may eventually be comprised of people with Marxian backgrounds of one sort

or another. Take, for instance, Nick Srnicek. His latest book, *Platform Capitalism* (2017), is one of the most insightful pieces of analysis on the rise of a new format of corporate business model I have read for a very long time, and he is very sober in the projection of its potential political consequences. I don't detect a whiff of Accelerationalism in it, but I may be mistaken. (In personal conversation with Srnicek, he suggested he had purposely omitted the Marxism from the book to address a wider audience.) Or take Melinda Cooper. I have been repeatedly gobsmacked about the deft ways she can tie together finance, feminist concerns, and science studies—this sort of analysis is the wave of the future. And remember—she started out with a comp lit degree from Paris. What is needed is a concurrent admission that historical materialism, the labor theory of value, and a monolithic "capitalism" as mode of production are all dispensable as concepts, so that analysis can start over with something that can ruthlessly hollow out neoliberalism from within, similar to the way that the NTC gutted Marxism. So yes—a new movement will have to give up *more* of their Marxism in the process of learning from their opponents.

b2: *I've heard at least four friends and colleagues wonder aloud whether your work on the Mont Pèlerin Society isn't conspiracy theory. What are they missing? And what is it in your account of neoliberalism that invites this misreading?*

PM: I start my response with a quote I ran across in Buzzfeed the other day: "Conservatives deny that the Federalist Society is a shadowy cabal pulling the strings—its events aimed at fostering a community for conservative and libertarian lawyers are public, and its donors are listed in annual reports and tax records. Gorsuch himself cracked in his remarks last week that if the group was in fact a secret organization, it shouldn't host an event in the main hall of Union Station" (Tillman 2017). There it is, right there, out in the open: there just happens to be a band of lawyers who just happen to believe in the same or similar political doctrines, united in a club that just happens to have enjoyed extensive subsidies from known neoliberal billionaires, with recruitment from feeder neoliberal agencies like the Liberty Fund and Intercollegiate Studies Institute that just happen to vet prospective comrades for ideological conformity from early in their careers, and thus that happen subsequently jointly to convene to plot how they would take over the courts if (and when) they ever get the chance. (This is extensively documented in books like Amanda Hollis-Brusky's *Ideas with Conse-*

quences: The Federalist Society and the Conservative Counterrevolution [2015]. Love that title, by the way. Note, too, how Buzzfeed cannot bring itself to use the N-word but instead mischaracterizes the membership as "conservatives" and "libertarians," which badly muddies the waters.) Then along comes a president like Trump, who, due to attention deficit disorder, happens to not be bothered to assert his own personal choices for the bench, so he (or Mike Pence) delegates it to some Heritage Action underling, who immediately just happens to compile a list of candidates from—guess where?—the Federalist Society (Wheeler 2017). And we end up with a packed Federal judiciary in the United States for years to come.

When someone confronts the neoliberals with these facts, often they respond: "Conspiracy? What Conspiracy?" I think the fact that members of the NTC would themselves deny they were party to a conspiracy is relatively straightforward: their core doctrine prevents them from admitting that their intentional coordinated activities were needed to bring about their own political triumphs—it had to be "spontaneous order," or the outcome of beneficial evolution, or some other such fairy tale. The real problem is to understand why so many on the left are impervious to evidence for a well-organized and coordinated political program being responsible for their defeats (e.g., Goldfarb 2017 or Farrell 2017). It may have something to do with the imputation of intentionality to groups of intellectuals and operatives in pursuit of political objectives; hence the rejection of the very idea of a neoliberal thought collective. (See Cahill and Konings 2017: "Certainly conspiracies exist and we may readily grant that the Mont Pelerin Society is as close to one as we may ever hope to find evidence of; but the mere discovery of a conspiracy should not lead us to assume that it must have succeeded in realising its goals in the way it intended, or that it has been the organisational force behind its own realisation.") Or it may have something to do with an inability to confront the brute fact of their own defeats. It seems that, either way, the Left is loath to admit that ideas have consequences.

This is exemplified in the genres used to approach the history of ideas nowadays. Look around at intellectual history today and one will find one of two options: either close-grained biographies of the thought processes of some revered individual thinker, or else grand cosmic syntheses of intellectual trends, where contingency and chance reign, and the pinball of genealogy careens off a sequence of unrelated boundary bumpers, with the resulting history looking like one damn thing after another. (Angus Burgin's *Great Persuasion* [2012] in its second half ends up like the former;

Daniel Rodgers's *Age of Fracture* [2011] looks like the latter.) Although once in a while someone bravely attempts to craft a prosopography—that is, a third option that is more than a motley collection of biographical sketches—their efforts are mostly given short shrift. The notion that ideas, and particularly political ideas, are the product of the concerted efforts of some thought collective stretching over generations, engaging in critique and reconstruction, fine-tuning and elaboration of doctrine, and that their social interactions serve to ride herd on excessive originality and fruitless detours on the part of epigones, while keeping focused on problems of implementation and feasibility, is something that many modern historians automatically dismiss derisively as conspiracy theorizing. This is where we have arrived after generations of work on the history and sociology of knowledge: an understanding of human knowledge as the product of willful communal activity is derided as the province of the hoodwinked, the unsound, and the delusional.

I might even venture further into courting unpopularity to suggest that the very epithet *conspiracy theory* is itself unsound. The commonplace notions of how evidence feeds into belief has no unique relationship to "conspiracy," especially if one concedes all knowledge has a social aspect. The key issues are, rather, how evidence and testimony are incorporated, the quality of inferences made, and the extent to which this process is intentional, and not whether the inferences are predicated in support of a "conspiracy" or not (Dentith 2017). And there, I find that most people willing to launch the accusation of "conspiracy theory" concerning my work often don't have the first glimmer about the history of Mont Pèlerin, or the Heritage Foundation, or the Cato Institute, or the Atlas Foundation, or the Mercatus Center, nor indeed what it is neoliberals actually believe. Some neoliberals intermittently went so far as to indicate some sources of the lessons they were learning from the Left—for example, Cato's Murray Rothbard wrote in his 1961 memo entitled (hint, hint) "What Is to Be Done?": "I think we can learn a great deal from Lenin and the Leninists" (Rothbard 2009: 2).

How many people on the left realize that critics internal to the thought collective sometimes complain about the "Kochtopus" (their neologism)? They don't need me to concoct "conspiracy theories."

b2: *What we call science is obviously a complex bundle of claims, practices, and institutions, but the general drift of much of your early work was to promote a suspicion toward science and especially toward an economics profession that often claims the authority of science. As late as 2013, you*

were writing that "Science is part of the problem, not obviously the solution" (2013b: 173). Yet in Science-Mart *you step forward as a defender of science—or indeed, as the ally of working scientists, as the economist who will explain to the biologists and chemists how the economics professions betrayed them. Does that mark a shift in your thinking?*

PM: I feel compelled to begin by saying I have been consistently fascinated by all the myriad roles that "science" plays in our cultural discourse. If I am allowed to slightly revise your question, my earlier work was highly attuned to seeking out the functions of "scientism" in social theory and, in particular, in the history of economics. *Scientism* is a term I appropriated and has usually signified the misleading and overambitious application of the supposed methods and idioms of science to areas where they may not be suitable or even compatible. Of course, I soon realized that this "compatibility" was itself a thorny and contentious philosophical question, which set me off down all sorts of further paths of inquiry.

In this phase, I attempted to parse the problems of the applicability of "scientism" into some more manageable subcomponents: crudely, (1) Did its proponents even possess a plausible conception of how science worked in their historical epoch? and (2) How well did those who sought to import the bits of science into what they considered impoverished pursuits even understand the scientific theories they propounded? The answer to the former methodological question was that usually they didn't, while the answer to the latter conceptual transfer was that their sophistication concerning the scientific theories in question was usually low. From my courses in the history of physics in grad school, I realized a couple things: one was that scientism was more frequently driven by reified and inaccurate images of some "scientific method" which never had actually held sway among professional scientists; another was that the proponents of scientism were more often far more mesmerized by some emotional metaphorical aspect of their proposed transfer than the full logical implications of their transplant.

This research could rapidly get tangled in the weeds of the philosophy of science and technical details of scientific theories, but I thought I could access a few choice examples to get the message through to economists, at least back then. One exercise was the demonstration of the fact that the innovators of marginalist theory fell in love with the constrained optimization they discovered in energetics, but they seemed discombobulated by the attendant need for conservation principles, which they never

really understood. In some material rooted in the twentieth century, I sought to use the example of Benoit Mandelbrot to illustrate the economists' fascination with chaos theory but equally to reveal their inability to appreciate Mandelbrot's insistence upon non-Gaussian processes as the necessary hallmark of any such dynamics. I produced papers along these lines for a couple decades, but then finally had to admit to myself that economists were impervious to this line of argument. But I was more disturbed to find that this also seemed true for outsiders in the general public as well.

Some economists, such as Paul Samuelson, were happy to deny any whiff of gross scientism, while all along freely practicing it (Mirowski 2013a). Historians who read my work could not understand what exactly was so unsavory about physics envy (Schabas 1993). All the while, a number of exiles from physics programs unselfconsciously began to declare the advent of a new discipline of "econophysics," while selling their protophysics models to banks. I came to understand that the widespread cognitive aphasia was not a logical issue at all but rather something far deeper, ingrained in the culture. This is what I meant when I wrote, "Science is part of the problem."

However, nothing dictates that the sins of scientism should necessarily be lain at the doorstep of the natural scientists or that they should necessarily be held culpable for its consequences. Sure, in the past, some scientists did attempt to lord their status over the social sciences and humanities, but the headline from the last two decades was just how awfully the whole thing backfired. The grand irony is that the economists, who so desperately had wanted to usurp the status of physics, went on to play a major role in the destruction of the science base, at least in the United States and Europe. By insisting that the university must be reengineered to run like a business, and that the market is the ultimate validator of all knowledge, the most advanced science infrastructure in the world has been corrupted and debased, possibly irreversibly. That was the message of *Science-Mart* (2011).

A message, I might add, that still seems elusive to many of its readers.

b2: *You have painted a compelling—and devastating—portrait of the subversion of basic scientific (and even discursive) norms by multinational corporations, in* Science-Mart *(and by the NTC, in* Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*). Is it possible that repairing the first breach (within science itself) would require a political program as Schmittian as that adopted by*

political allies of the NTC? In other words, are rationalist critics of neoliberalism bringing the rhetorical equivalent of a knife to a gun fight?

PM: A decade ago, when I was attempting to suggest that science was under severe *epistemic* threat from neoliberals who wanted to subordinate it to their version of the ideal market, no one would take me seriously. I particularly recall one interviewer in Boston who challenged me by asking: What's wrong with all that well-heeled development over in Kendall Square? Won't MIT-style "innovation" be our salvation? Over the last year or so, I find that finally, some people are more open to the idea that the cultural authority of science has already been badly diminished by its commercialization, and that something has gone seriously wrong with regard to truth claims, especially with regard to the quality of scientific knowledge. (Consider the sad state of pharmacology, for instance.) Lately, the very idea that it is incumbent upon the average Joe to somehow inoculate himself against the cacophony of falsehoods and noise has begun to resemble the taking of a knife to a gun fight, as you so aptly put it.

You will never defeat neoliberalism by seeking to simply engage it in rational argument because, deep down, most members of the NTC don't believe that is how people come to adopt their political positions. In a way, that is one of the main points of my article in this issue. Accepting that the market is always smarter than you is an injunction to "Stop Making Sense" (*pace* David Byrne). Accepting neoliberal precepts means that access to advanced education will be denied to an ever-larger proportion of the population, who will be relegated to regimes of so-called home schooling or voucher mills or crappy online surrogates that nevertheless mire them in a lifetime of indentured debt peonage. The Koch Brothers will essentially own most of the economics departments in the few universities that remain. And scholarly journals will go the way of buggy whips, displaced by so-called open science. The neoliberal project is tantamount to a grand dumbing down of the populace, who will never miss a deliberative democracy that they have never experienced. Pretty soon, adequate preparation to engage in structured argumentation will be nothing more than the object of a vague nostalgia. (It is already the subject of harsh satire. See, for instance, chapter 4 of Nathan Hill's *The Nix* [2016].)

I suppose your mention of Carl Schmitt implies that the Left has so far been unwilling to see the attack on epistemology as the disaster it has been, and that they might need to take the "friend/enemy" distinction closer to heart. I do not come bearing panaceas, but it does seem to me that a different regimen of research and educational institutions will be a

necessary prerequisite for an effective resistance. And by that, I do not mean that it would be desirable or even possible to return to the Cold War University and Cold War Science. The new model vocation of the scientist will need to be closely integrated with a new model of advanced education and pedagogy, and both predicated on a doctrine that a life in science is, with apologies to Max Weber, a political vocation first and foremost, one opposed to corporate regimentation and bureaucratic control by its very essence. Michael Polanyi (an MPS member!) tended to conceptualize it as monastic, but I think we need a better template than some medieval citadel.

b2: *I'm interested in some of the spatial dimensions of the neoliberal project, particularly in regard to building challenges to that project. Your work shows neoliberalism's powerful and protean adaptive mechanisms. Its implicit and explicit universalism has sought, through institutional and other mechanisms, to extend its reach across national and regional boundaries, albeit with a willingness to adapt to local circumstances. Are there, in your view, any limits to neoliberalism's spatial scalability? How would you evaluate the strategies implicit in oppositional spatial practice—the resolve to build spaces that are not neoliberal—and how could oppositional practices inoculate themselves against their inner neoliberal?*

PM: It is unnerving for me to have you so accurately identify the aporias and silences in my writings. I would cop to the accusation that I have neglected the spatial and global aspects of neoliberalism in much of my work. This is doubly inexcusable since some of the best work on this history of neoliberalism has come out of geography departments, by people like Jamie Peck and the *Antipode* crowd. I have a few excuses, although I doubt they will cut much ice for my audience.

When the group gelled that eventually produced *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, I was happy to accept a division of labor, where Rob van Horn and I would deal with the situation in Chicago and leave much else to others who were equipped with the language skills and appropriate backgrounds to deal with the geographical spread of neoliberalism. I would especially single out the work of Karin Fischer on Chile and Dieter Plehwe on the developing world as producing exceptional insights in that regard. Nevertheless, I must admit that the preponderance of effort tended to be lavished on the usual suspects, like Milton Friedman, Ronald Coase, and Hayek and, to a lesser extent, the ordoliberals. In my case, even though I knew that the thought collective was intently cosmopolitan from the start, and often claimed to transcend its national outposts, I just felt that I was not

well equipped to plow through the masses of historical detail that would be required to pan out and provide a global account of the capacity of neoliberals to scale their politics and befuddle their various opponents.

Luckily, at the second conference of our group of historians of neoliberalism at Berlin in March 2017, I met Quinn Slobodian, a scholar who set himself the task which I had avoided and was finishing up a book to rectify the situation. As he writes in his new book *Globalists* (2018):

> Historians have focused, in particular, on the Mont Pèlerin Society. . . . Apart from monetary policy and development economics, though, the question of international and global governance has been surprisingly neglected in these histories. . . . Globalizing the ordoliberal principle of "thinking in orders," their project of thinking in world orders offered a set of proposals designed to defend the world economy from a democracy that became global only in the twentieth century. . . . The clearest-eyed academic observers of the neoliberal philosophy of global ordering have not been historians but social scientists. (4)

Slobodian's book has helped me appreciate the extent to which an "authoritarian neoliberalism" tended to be fashioned at a global level from its beginnings, in order to outmaneuver democratic stirrings that threatened neoliberal political hegemony in various national contexts. An obvious culprit is the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but Slobodian explains how the constitution of organizations like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/World Trade Organization (WTO) and the European Union were heavily influenced by what he calls the "Geneva School" of neoliberals. What I find especially fascinating is the sheer amount of political work that had to be exerted to construct institutions that permit the scaling of neoliberal policies across diverse borders. I have had some experience of this in researching the Uruguay round of the WTO with regard to spreading intellectual property standards, but I suspect we are still in the early days in the understanding of just how pervasive were such interventions with regard to all manner of pursuits, from controlling the internet to proliferating the number of tax havens, to better undermine national sovereignty where it really mattered.

b2: *What's the deal with Hayek? As I read him, at least, Hayek is such a misfit! He's a misfit methodologically because he seems like a philosopher, not a wanna-be mathematician (unlike most of the other microecon guys).*

But even more than that, he's so skeptical, even cynical, about the capacity of human-made models in general, about the ability of science to transcend general human idiocy, about any fantasy of empiricism or objective knowledge, that his thought seems not just different from, but actually antagonistic to, the pretense to methodological scientificity that shapes the discipline after the marginalists. And he's also (I think?) a misfit ideologically—such a misanthrope that he can scarcely mount a positive defense of individualism, or even of market-liberalism. (I often imagine the Adam Smith of Moral Sentiments *rolling over in his grave at Hayek's claim that "it is impossible to recognize, let alone to speak of, a mind different from our own.") The result, for me, is that it's nearly impossible to understand how Hayek could ever have been a coconspirator of someone like Friedman, who is both a staunch proponent of the math side of the discipline* and *someone whose defense of individualism and market freedom is, relatively speaking, sunny and confidently unworried! How do you reconcile the difference between Hayek and those around him? Does it make Hayek more complex (even in some way more appealing, even if as an intellectual antagonist), or is it just a fantasy to imagine him as a distinct voice in the "Thought Collective"?*

PM: I am a bit hesitant at taking a stab at this, since my personal credo involves *not* getting too involved with the biographies of my historical protagonists, as broached above in my answer to the question about conspiracy theory. Nevertheless, Hayek was a much more intriguing intellectual—certainly he warrants more sustained attention than Friedman, whom I regard as a distinctly superficial thinker and more a street brawler. So the question of how such diametrically opposite souls could cooperate in a political project based so fundamentally on epistemic commitments does demand explanation.

First, a few clarifications. It is not at all odd that Hayek was skeptical of mathematical economics and, indeed, neoclassical economics. I have long argued that his predecessors in the Austrian School (with the exception of Friedrich von Wieser) were not card-carrying neoclassicals from Carl Menger onward; it was commonplace for them to disparage the scientism of other schools of economics, so they were collectively immune to the scientistic tendencies and mathematical infatuations of other schools of economics. Furthermore, after Hayek's ignominious defeat at the hands of the Keynesians in Britain, his ejection from the Anglo brotherhood of the orthodox economists would have tended to hasten him into the arms of alternative disciplinary identities; since psychology wouldn't have him, philosophy

seemed the most likely option. If we think most people are shaped to a greater or lesser extent by their intellectual environment, then Hayek's doctrinal configuration circa 1950 was relatively unremarkable *for him*. In the American context, however, it rendered him mostly odd man out. Absent the unexpected success of *The Road to Serfdom* just at that juncture, and the consequent founding of the MPS, it is hard to imagine we would be pouring over his intellectual output the way we now do.

I do take your point that he does seem incongruous from an ideological standpoint, at least at first blush. The problem was, where was someone like Hayek to go, once he had so thoroughly renounced old-fashioned laissez-faire? (Here is the beginning of divergence from Friedman, who never really admitted the break with the past. Like so many Americans, he just thought he could have it both ways.) His recasting of the market as *primarily* a superinformation processor began to have all sorts of consequences for his other commitments, in particular, his eventual renunciation of individualism as a political doctrine. Much American social science had come to the conclusion by the 1930s that the vast mass of the citizenry harbored profound cognitive deficiencies (and Army intelligence testing in the 1940s reinforced it), so a space was opened for a different set of justifications for the American way of life. From the 1950s onward, Hayek's defense of the market was not grounded in the cognitive and political self-sufficiency of the individual: quite the contrary. Once he also decided to coquet with something he called "evolution," the integrity of the individual was displaced by the "spontaneous order" of the market-mobilized mass, and thus the neoliberal takeover of the state no longer seemed such a transgression of liberal norms. It was this package that was novel: market as information processor, sanctioned political intervention to circumvent democracy, lack of consequentialist argument for economic outcomes, and the effective disappearance of the individual, all tied up into a tidy system.

And yet, Hayek then attempted to square the circle by claiming that it wasn't really new but could all be found in the Scottish Enlightenment, in particular, in Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith. Jessica Whyte (2017) has done us the valuable service of revealing just how groundless this fake genealogy really was.

> [For Hayek], the proper response to the inequality and compulsion of the capitalist economy is a form of submission modelled on religious faith. . . . Hayekian liberalism is not simply a critique of governmental reason. Its intent is not merely to disqualify the "great

> state decision-maker," as Foucault has suggested, but to depoliticize social life and cordon off market relations and inherited inequalities from political challenge. . . . [I]n Hayek's account of spontaneous order public power is restrained while private domination is naturalized and sanctified. (21)

Now to Friedman. One mustn't overstate his commitment to mathematics—Chicago was known primarily for its low-tech approach to microeconomics; he despised the real thing in the guise of Walrasian General Equilibrium happening at the Cowles Commission. Friedman seemed to think he could coax neoliberal policies from a dumbed-down version of neoclassical microeconomics. He wanted to end up at the same place as Hayek—public power is restrained while private domination is naturalized and sanctified—but he never really derived much of anything in any serious sense. His sloppy Marshallianism could serve to underwrite anything whatsoever happening, with its portmanteau utility functions and absence of any serious dynamics. It was tennis with the net down, and many of his orthodox opponents said so. The one place he departed decisively from Hayek (and many other MPS members, like George Stigler) was his rejection of the notion that the people were so cognitively challenged that they didn't matter politically. You gloss this as a "sunny disposition."

I am not sure that is the best way to understand it. Much of Friedman's self-conception was bound up with his reputation as a sharp debater; he was proud that, with sufficient effort, he could twist anyone's convictions around in a neoliberal direction. That meant he really did act like he should make arguments and convince people; his political task was to engage his opponents in dialogue. The fact that this was inconsistent with the fundamental belief in the market as the ultimate validator of truth was pointed out by many of his supposed allies, like Stigler. But, in my view, Friedman never thought deeply about politics, and never felt hemmed in by contradictions and inconsistencies. He resembled nothing more than the plain vanilla Sophist, and winning the rhetorical battle in the short term was the only real objective. Of course, this rendered him wildly popular in the twentieth-century American context, the ideal font of sound bites on TV and in popular magazines.

While it is certainly true that most people first learned of neoliberal politics from Friedman, it is also the case that most of his insubstantial doctrines have already faded away, revealing their slipshod character. Monetarism, the permanent income hypothesis, the negative income tax,

the abolition of the Fed and the National Science Foundation, predictions as more important than assumptions—none of these are serious intellectual propositions nowadays. I think that the real indicator of the difference between Hayek and Friedman is that it is Hayek's texts that are still treated as the words of the prophet by the NTC; *Free to Choose* abides as low-level propaganda for the unwashed masses on YouTube.

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