

**Gray is Beautiful:
On the Social Condition and Fractured Society in Donald Trump's
America**

by

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In this talk, I will critically explore the proposition that “gray is beautiful,” that between the stark blacks and whites of political and cultural conflicts there is a gray beauty that supports promising political engagement.

I am thinking about this, my longstanding position, as the future of “democracy in America” and many other polities around the world is far from certain.

The exploration draws from an examination of intractable tensions and dilemmas knitted into social fabric, what I call “the social condition.”

I believe there are enduring sociological grounds supporting the appreciation of the beauty of the gray. And, I think that studying these sorts of tensions, and the dilemmas they raise, should be understood as fundamental field of social and political investigation.

The exploration also responds to a unique development of contemporary society, what I think of as the continuing structural transformation of the public sphere.

I am outlining here a book I imagine that I am writing, *Gray is Beautiful: On the Social Condition in a Fractured Society*, although I am not sure I will write the book, half believing that my anticipation of writing it may be enough.

Each phrase, “gray is beautiful,” “the social condition,” and “fractured society,” is a component of my imagined book and this presentation. Today, I will give an overview, with special attention given to Trump and Trumpism, and their opponents considering first the fractured society, then gray is beautiful and then the social condition

The Fracture Society

If and when I write my book, I will address the issue of the fractured nature of public life and the threat of authoritarianism. I would want to demonstrate how this is a manifestation of what Jürgen Habermas long ago named the structural transformation of the public sphere, very much connected to the development of the media. I would outline a three part account of the continuing transformation of the mediated public life: literary, televisual, and digital public life.

In the era of print capitalism, as Benedict Anderson once put it, public life combined the media of face to face communications and of the printed word. It was a semi-intimate, semi-public affair in Habermas's idealized account. Bourgeois men met in cafes, taverns and tearooms, as they authored articles in journals of opinion about the pressing issues of the day, and they read each other's writings. They discussed them in face to face interaction, as they continued to write and read. Though they may have been of different means, they checked these differences at the door and deliberated as equals, trying to set forth reasonable solutions to political and economic problems. Their discussion then informed official political discussion and decision, supporting informed reasoned policy formation.

Granted that there may have been many publics and not a singular public, as Habermas's critics have underscored, but the power relations of the social order made it so that some publics were very much more equal than others when it came to influencing the political and economic powers.

Such is a generalized account of the bourgeois public sphere before electronic communications, supplemented in intriguing ways by criticisms of Habermas that underscore that the deliberations were not exclusively rational and verbal, that affect, emotions and performance were involved, and that there were multiple publics, some dominant or hegemonic, others marginal or subaltern, but with power.

A great irony of the age of television, from the point of view of critical theory, is that that the efficacy of free public life, of a deliberative democracy, arguably, was advanced because of television, contrary to what Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, et al suggested. Habermas later in his career recognized this in his essay "Political Communication in Media Society." Even though in American television, political candidates were marketed, as were brands of toothpaste, the wide reach of television was democratic, bringing into political life less literate and educated, the more marginalized and dominated. Radio and television also brought the wider world, beyond immediate experience, to a broader segment of the population. Multiple publics existed, but major broadcasting systems provided order for the sphere of publics, creating a common world.

The post war television age saw an explosion of publics: in the United States, for example, surrounding the civil rights, feminist, LGBTQ, environmental and anti-war movements. But as the saying went, with television, "the whole world was watching."

Television created a sphere of publics, connecting multiple publics, supporting democratic life. The study of ceremonial television by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events*, shows how this connection was made in granular detail.

The role television played in helping to relate multiple publics is especially apparent now that it no longer plays the dominant role that it once did. In the television age, the basic facts were set by the major television broadcasters, as they worked through their own reporting and the reporting of major magazines and newspapers. There could be serious concerns about the bias of this reporting, from the left and the right. But the left critics,

along with the critics on the right, worked off the mainstream script. There was a common world.

What the networks paid attention to, a broad public paid attention to, as they criticized the range of attention.

In the U.S. and beyond, we now lack a common understanding of the factual grounds of the order and disorder of things. As is commonly noted, we live in a world with opposing facts and realities. There are the facts and truths to be found in the major established media institutions, in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and, significantly *The Wall Street Journal*. And then there are the facts and truths of Fox News, *Breitbart* and *The Washington Times*.

There is a fundamental public divide that is in part an outgrowth of political polarization, but it also creates the fractures. And at issue is not simply normal partisan conflict. All sides declare that others propagate fake news, with the authoritarian side developing a view of the world that is based on purposeful denial of the findings of science and the confusion of fact with fiction. And, crucially, it systematically ignores the segment of the population, sometimes the majority, that still is moved by the findings of science and basic facts.

Without mass centralized media -radio, television, and also print - we have come to live apart, occupying the sector of the sphere of publics that most appeals to us, that speaks to us, that makes sense to us. People go to the websites, and the cable news channels that make sense to them, and they know little about people who go elsewhere. Facebook and Twitter encourage this, as do the algorithms that determine our feeds and searches.

In the absence of ceremonial media events and mundane mass media reporting and entertaining, we live in worlds apart. And its not only a problem of social structure, fractured publics; its made distinctive by a deeply problematic political culture, concerning the relationship between truth and politics. From my point of view, this culture is one of stark blacks and whites in which the complexities of the social condition are overlooked.

I see Donald Trump and Trumpism as manifestations and causes of this fragmentation. He and his enablers make no attempt to lead the country as a whole. They think that the key to his success is the enthusiastic support of his base, of red America, of the loyal viewers of Fox News and the like. All other media are the “enemies of the people,” and professionalism, especially in public institutions, in the civil service, is a conspiracy of the deep state, including those who work on the census, the Justice and State Departments, and the foreign service and the courts, including two Justices of the Supreme Court (Ginsberg and Sotomayor), the IRS, the FBI and the CIA, along with the Environmental Protection Agency, and particularly frightening right now as it applies to the threat of the coronavirus, the Center of Disease Control and Prevention.

Trump systematically over the past two years has largely dismantled government units that were designed to protect against pandemics, discontinuing initiatives started by Barack Obama, and dismissing experts that staffed these along with well established public health institutions. Trump has somehow politicized both the weather bureau in hurricane season, and the Center of Disease Control in the face of pandemic, and his loyal media and their avid publics have supported this.

This is outrageous. It must be opposed. The very integrity of the United States as a liberal democracy is at stake. There is a significant majority that agrees with these judgments of mine.

Yet, it is far from certain that we will prevail. There are decent conservatives and Republicans, sometimes labeled “never Trumpers,” center left and right Democrats, and left Democrats (now calling themselves Democratic Socialists) that share my concerns. Yet, in recent weeks it has been far from certain that they can or will act together, informed by this judgment.

In my view, this is because they don’t appropriately appreciate the political beauty of the gray and the dimensions of the social condition.

Gray is Beautiful

If I were to write my imagined book, I would start with how I came to appreciate the beauty of the gray. I was listening to a lecture, entitled “Gray is Beautiful” by Adam Michnik in New York, at The New School for Social Research in 1996. He declared:

“Radical movements — whether under black or red banners — gladly use democracy in order to obliterate it. In the meantime, democracy is neither black nor red. Democracy is gray, is established only with difficulty, and its quality and flavor can be recognized best when it comes under the pressure of advancing red or black ideas... Democracy is a continuous articulation of particular interests, a diligent search for compromise among them, a marketplace of passions, emotions, hatreds and hopes; it is eternal imperfection, a mixture of sinfulness, saintliness, and monkey business.”

I have long been a colleague, student and friend of Michnik, and I have found that he often succinctly and persuasively describes my own judgments.

For, in his understanding, I have a gray view of capitalism and socialism, and a gray view of neo-liberalism, a gray view of democracy, and a gray view of various geo-political conflicts, such as the Isareli-Palestinian conflict.

When many of my colleagues, friends, and indeed even relatives, see things in black and white, not to mention in red and green, I see ambiguity and complexity, want nuance, expect the less than ideal, but hope for, and do what I can to make possible, the better,

knowing that to do what I can requires an appreciation of the power of the powerless, the power of the politics of small things in my terms.

To be clear, I am not calling for moderation, or acceptance of the ways things are. I am, with qualifications, radically committed to democracy and pragmatically committed to non-violence. As I appreciate the beauty of gray, I also appreciate the limits of violence and non-violence, and democracy as well.

I would be quite happy to explain more fully my commitments and qualifications with you in the discussion. If I write up my book, they would be in separate chapters. For now, I should be more clear what I mean and how it relates to our present challenges by sharing with you a gray perspective on memory, hypocrisy, socialism and capitalism and so called “neoliberalism.”

On Memory

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” So wrote Milan Kundera. Years ago, I found in his bold assertion confirmation of the findings of my first major research project on the sociological dynamics of cultural freedom focused on Polish Student Theater.

Decades later, I spoke to a group of my students and colleagues about their studies of collective memory, as they created first a series of conferences on the topic and then edited books and journals coming out of the conferences. I expressed my concern about the interdisciplinary study of and broadening public focus on collective memory. I noticed how memory was being considered, more or less, in the spirit of Kundera, and pointed out a darker side, all too apparent today, as people are making America, Poland, Turkey and Hungary great *again*. Collective memory (with some contrast to the study of history) is an imaginative process focused on the past, and this imagination has a seamy side.

Further, I expressed my concern that the focus on collective memory, on an imagined shared past, tends to constrain the imagination of a better future. I, along with most of my scholarly and political friends and colleagues, never thought that history had ended after 1989, but I feared that the focus on memory then conceded too much to the lessons of experience and overlooked the possibilities of a more radical imagination. I, half jokingly, asserted that I am “against memory.”

The joke is a gray one. Fidelity to remembrance should proceed cautiously. In 1989, in this corner of the world, there was a tension between, on the one hand, fully calling into account those responsible for the wrongs of the communist regimes, and on the other, the dangers of political retribution and revolutionary (in)justice. Remembering too well and acting upon it has had real dangers, while ignoring problems from the past also has dangers, as is revealed today. It’s not a matter of black and white to be sure.

This is where my idea of remembering with caution, while acting boldly, comes in. (Amnesty without Amnesia?) There is a stark difference between the new authoritarians, on the one hand, and democrats, conservative, liberal and radical, on the other. The true belief in a singular memory script is the danger.

While today the threat mostly comes from the right, the terrors of the twentieth century came from both left and right, and even from the center (radical market fundamentalism, neo-liberalism if that term speaks to you, as it doesn't speak to me).

But a certain fuzziness in our memory (in the understanding of Eviatar Zerubavel) provides the democratic alternative. This provides the grounds for people with some significant differences to be open to dialogue with each other, and then be capable of acting together. This it is the kind of gray collective memory that provides the grounds for democracy.

On Hypocrisy

Francois de La Rochefoucauld: "Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue."

I have long been intrigued by this epigram and its political implications. I like its ironic cogency, and think that historic and contemporary hypocrites demonstrate the insight of this pithy observation, but also its limitations. I first thought of this as the ceremonies and tributes to Senator John McCain, Vietnam War hero, conservative Republican, steadfast, and stubborn opponent of the only president in my lifetime who I supported enthusiastically, were proceeding. I appreciated John McCain not despite the fact that I see him as a hypocrite, but because I do. He often was a blind partisan for policies I strongly opposed, but he draped his partisanship with the rhetoric of patriotism and honor, which were kept alive by this gesture. These days presenting a model for conservatives and Republicans who oppose Trump.

And there are even more striking American examples.

Consider these beautiful, powerful, words that transformed the world, written by the hypocritical owner of over one hundred of his fellow human beings:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among them are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Thomas Jefferson indeed was a slave owner with a bad conscience, torn between his public commitment to the enlightened ideals of equality and his very real private interests in his human property, which made his way of life possible

And also consider these racist words written by Abraham Lincoln, "the Great Emancipator":

“I will say, then, that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races -- that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this, that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together, there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I, as much as any other man, am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

Abraham Lincoln, though he found slavery abhorrent and played a major role in abolishing “the peculiar institution,” was a white man of his times, a white supremacist we would say, as revealed in this quote. (Though he did change his position later in his life)

Jefferson and Lincoln were hypocrites. Their fame is belied by beliefs and practices contrary to their great public actions. Yet, the homage their vice paid to virtue has been more important than the vice itself. The ideal and imperfect practice of human equality is very much more with us because of their hypocritical actions.

But at this point, we should recognize the limits of this gray view. I know that sometimes the way vice pays homage to virtue destroys any possibility of principled action. The pretense of commitment is so transparent that commitment itself seems to be completely arbitrary. Principle becomes lost. This I believe to be our present situation.

Donald Trump is the master hypocrite of our times. He claims to be draining the swamp, as he engages in unprecedented levels of corruption. He repeatedly declares he is the least racist person, while he has a long ongoing history of overt racism, most spectacularly with his long campaign attacking the citizenship and the legitimacy of the first African American President of the United States. He warned before his election of rigged elections and has suggested that the midterms were rigged, as the evidence mounts that he and his enablers willfully have benefited from Russian support for his election and re-election, and the Republican Party has engaged in sustained voter suppression of the poor and the non-white.

I suppose it could be argued that his outrageous hypocritical claims to virtue in the face of his profound vice does involve a kind of homage to virtue, but because his vice is so apparent and blatant, I don't think it works that way. Rather, he is destroying the possibility of virtue. I think he has lost a sense of what his commitments are, and that his supporters have come to the point that they too are losing a sense of what a real principled commitment is, apart from their devotion to their leader.

Thus, my gray conclusion: two cheers for hypocrisy!

Neoliberalism and Capitalism

There aren't any cheers for neoliberalism, although the meaning of the term is infinitely elastic. No one who uses the term thinks it describes a good thing. The term drives me crazy, specifically when used in the U.S. It explains too much with too little, concealing crucial distinctions, as it frustrates crucial coalitions against the clear and present danger of the new authoritarianism of Trump, along with Orban, and Kaczynski, et al.. Further, it's meaningless for much of the American citizenry beyond academic and leftist circles. It's "elite -- speak," confusing at best, destructive, at worst.

I, of course, know, that many of my dear friends, colleagues and students, probably most of you also, use the term. While I understand and often appreciate what you are getting at, I worry about the consequences, intended and unintended, of using the term. It combines evaluative clarity with descriptive confusion. From a gray point of view, I question the clarity, while I think that the confusion is politically disastrous, specifically in the U.S.

The center of my bewilderment is with the "liberalism" that the "neo" is intended to specify.

Is it the liberalism of the United States or liberalism as the term is used in much of the rest of the world? If it is the global definition of liberalism, "neoliberalism" refers to the radical application of market logic and practices to broader and broader previously nonmarket activities: from family life, to the arts and sciences, healthcare and education, and even to geopolitics (Trump's transactional approach to foreign policy). It further, centrally, refers to the radical commitment to let the market run wild without political interference.

But, if the referent is to the distinctively American approach to liberalism, "neoliberalism" is manifested in the political innovations in the tradition of The New Deal to work on the relationship between state and market mechanism to accomplish what the rest of the world understands as social democratic ends.

These two definitions clearly are not the same.

Without recognizing the distinction between these meanings, you cannot tell the difference between a realistic project of the left, attempting to use state and market mechanisms to achieve public goods, and a destructive utopian project of the right, reducing all forms of judgment and evaluation to market criteria. Without recognizing the distinction between the meanings, in the U.S., you cannot tell the difference between the positions of the Democratic and Republican parties, while differences among progressives are exaggerated: thus, Obama – neoliberal versus Sanders – truly progressive. This divide may very well assure the re-election of Donald Trump.

Socialism

Socialism is an appropriate topic for gray consideration in the United States, made pressing by Bernie Sanders's candidacy for the Democratic Party's nomination to be President of the United States.

The right is worried that socialism might in fact be happening in America, trying to understand how this could be, but also confident that it is much ado about relatively little, seeing in it as a label to defeat the Democrats.

Many on left are excited by the a socialist prospect, noting the possibilities and the limitations of the present moment, and also concerned about potential pitfalls, working to figure out ways to reach a broad public without compromising fundamental principles, of being true to principle and responsible.

While the right is trying to figure out what got us into this mess, who is responsible, as it seeks to defeat socialism, the left is assessing the present prospects for radical change, and debating ways of achieving it, or seeking to avoid the label, as they fear its toxicity with a broad public.

I am struck by how the observations, assessments and debates would be greatly improved with a gray sensibility, a sensibility that recognizes that socialism is not a clear black and white matter. I find myself torn between critical thoughts, concerning actually existing capitalism and previously existing socialism. I also note how difficult it has been for much of my friends and colleagues to hold such critical thoughts simultaneously, recently revealed in the controversy surrounding Sanders qualified appreciation of Communist Cuba, and for that matter left wing dictatorships in Latin America and the previously existing socialist regimes of the Soviet bloc.

On the other hand, the injustices associated with capitalism are just too apparent to ignore for both centrists and leftists: the inequalities, the persistence of deprivation, the environmental degradation, the social injustice. The logic of capitalism clearly has to be challenged. It may be the case that, as John Dewey asserted, "the answer to the ills of democracy is more democracy," but I think it is pretty clear that the notion that the answer to the ills of capitalism is more capitalism is mistaken and deceptive. As an aside, I think this is what the critiques of neoliberalism should focus on, i.e. market fundamentalism.

Unfettered market solutions to the problems of poverty, injustice, education and the environment, and much more, have been ineffective at best, and quite often little more than reactionary rationalizations for doing nothing: accepting that the poor and the uneducated will always be with us, that sexism and racism are somehow a consequence of human nature, and that climate change is not real.

Yet, I don't believe there is an attractive *systemic* alternative to capitalism, and I am confused when my friends and colleagues assert otherwise. I don't understand how an intelligent caring person wouldn't be concerned by the historical fact that every attempt to create socialism as a systemic alternative has ended in failure. Clear in this corner of

the world, but also clear in the socialist experiments, as radical and systemic alternatives to capitalism, of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Economic failure, along with political repression, have been the consistent pattern. I'll add: nostalgia for Stalin and deep admiration for Lenin and yearning for the discipline for "the party," though circulating in what is sometimes called the Brooklyn left, are, in my judgment, moral abominations.

It perpetually amazes me how people across the political spectrum can't hold the two critical thoughts together and act accordingly. All too often, they choose to focus criticism on one side, while ignoring or apologizing for profound problems on the other.

Following this flawed logic, I think that the post-communist enthusiastic embrace of capitalism, pure and simple, in this fashion, contributed to the tragic rise of right wing authoritarianism throughout the former Soviet bloc.

But I also think that the present sectarianism on the center and left in which my friends and colleagues fight over the radical potential and dangers of socialism is tragically absurd, and may undermine the resistance to the present danger of right wing post-truth authoritarianism. This sectarianism is most apparent in America in the contest for the Democratic Party's Presidential nominating process.

Moderate establishment democrats, as a matter of principle and strategy flee from the socialist label, supporting a innovative reformed tamed capitalism. They focus on the fundamental problems both in the theory and the practice of socialism. To their left, there are Democrats who embrace or at least recognize the value of socialism as a critical ideal, and see in its new found popularity, especially among young voters, an opportunity to achieve fundamental changes concerning the environmental catastrophe, healthcare, education, economic inequality, racial and gender injustices, and much more. To their left, are socialists who are skeptical about the Democrats and social democracy. Their debate ranges from those who would tactically work with the Democrats holding their noses with their eyes wide open, committed to social movement mobilization combined with party politics simultaneously, and those who are deeply skeptical about the possibility of working with the Democratic Party.

From my gray point of view, this would be amusing, if it weren't so deadly in its consequences. In my judgment, the controversies create a big fuss, about very little, given that there is no stark contrast between capitalism and socialism. If you want to call the actually existing economy "capitalism," then it is clear that it exists in multiple forms very differently shaping people's lives. There is a modern economy, more or less humane, given political and social actions.

Commitments to democratic socialism would seem to be the answer to the dilemma, where both the democratic and the socialism are pursued with an understanding that they cannot be fully achieved. Socialism, then, is a sustained project to minimize and overturn the pernicious consequences of the market and the logic of capital. In this sense all to the left of center are self limiting, gray socialists, equally opposed to those who believe that the only way to address the problems of capitalism is a more radical capitalism, and those

who imagine and would seek to enact a radical alternative to capitalism, which experience has revealed as the road to the gulag and serfdom.

Yet, my judgment is not generally shared, I know. Socialism will not stop being a red flag for a significant portion of the American population, even as it is becoming a more attractive banner of hope for many others, especially among the young. Both groups are likely uninterested in the gray perspective in the context of our fractured society with its fractured public sphere.

The Social Condition

What, then, is to be done?

I think that we have a clear goal, all democrats, small “d” have to work together against Trump and Trumpism. I agree with [Sławomir Sierakowski](#), as he reflected upon the significance of Zuzana Čaputová’s victory in Slovakia’s presidential election: while a weak opposition can empower right wing populists, a united opposition can prevail against them. Donald Trump and Trumpism can be defeated. Victory requires a democratic opposition in which differences are addressed through political contest, compromise and collaboration, not through black and white assertions and dismissive judgments.

But even if we agree on such a broad observation, oppositions everywhere seem unable to get their act together. Creativity and political talent are necessary, but seem to be in short supply. Yet, because I believe it is more complicated than this, I also think it is more promising. I see a manifestation of the social condition that can be grappled with.

I think that the debate among the Democratic candidates and their supporters is more about form than content. It’s more about basic strategy for defeating Trump and Trumpism than it is about political principles and public policies.

The conflict on policies has become absurd, best revealed in the recurrent shouting matches about “Medicare for All” in the Democratic Debates. Sanders “wrote the damn bill,” in his colorful language, that would create a single public supported healthcare system. Warren has committed to this. Others propose and support systems that would improve Obamacare, or add a public option to it, or provide “medicare for all who want it.”

They surround their proposals with lots of affect, denouncing the greed of the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, warning that people might have their insurance taken away, praising choice and freedom, and the like. All while, it is very clear that any one of these proposals will need to be passed through legislation that would necessarily require compromise, and be supported by a cross section of the Democrats. There is no real conflict. The candidates and their supporters will have to work together to assure that healthcare is a human right.

Nonetheless, there is something very important involved, concerning the appeal of the black and white, and the saliency of the gray, an example of a social condition dilemma.

Sanders appeal is that he is principled, honest, authentic and consistent. He is proposing a plan that would fundamentally and radically change American society, consistent with his call for a revolution. Medicare for all is both consistent with his democratic socialist commitments and, as demonstrated by the experience in countries around the world, the most efficient way to deliver high quality healthcare to the American public at the lowest cost. He is the white knight battling against all that is evil in America, insurance companies, the pharmaceutical industry, “the one percent”, and the like.

Serious policy wonk that Elizabeth Warren is, she agrees with Sanders on the goal, but has recognized that getting to the most efficient system would require steps, recognizing the saliency of Sanders most articulate critic, Pete Buttigieg, who proposes the hallowed American value of freedom: “Medicare for all who want it.” Warren tried to run on the gray approach, supporting the ideal, but also recognizing the practical obstacles. This probably doomed her candidacy to failure.

The clear and (overly) strong argument prevails over nuance.

The black and white proposals get attention. They appeal to specific sectors of the fractured society, in this case, a fracture in the Democratic Party. And they raise the most significant strategic question: can victory over Trump be achieved by energizing the political base of the Democrats, or does it require creating a broad coalition that opposes Trump and Trumpism, cutting across the fractures of American society?

In the primary contest, Sanders is demonstrating that the energizing of the base very well may be the best strategy. But many, including me, have their doubts that this approach will apply to the election. In the relatively distant past in the U.S., it didn't apply in the campaign of George McGovern in his contest with Richard Nixon, in 1972, and more recently it didn't lead to the election of Prime Minister Corbyn. My fear: what is the most effective strategy to win the nomination is not the best strategy in the election.

But it isn't so simple, of course. Trump was elected. May it not be the case that Sanders can energize his diverse, young, energetic base and overwhelm Trump, pitting progressive populism against reactionary populism? The Democrats do need an energized electorate to turn out and do everything it can to defeat Trump. Given the injustices of the American system, not doing that led to the Electoral College defeat of Hillary Clinton. The magnetic personality and performance of Sanders is clearly a significant asset that his opponents can't match.

I don't think there is a clear resolution to this problem, aside from an extraordinary candidate who has both broad appeal and fervent support across the fractured society that America has become. The secret to the great electoral success of Barack Obama was that he could do this, but I am not sure that this can be replicated, and not even sure he , even

with all his immense political talent, could do it now, given the present development of the transformed public sphere.

Appeals that excite the base of progressive supporters are likely to not be appealing to the broad coalition of potential anti-Trump voters (e.g. “Medicare for all,” taking away our insurance), but appeals to the broad coalition, on the other hand, are likely to dampen the enthusiasm of progressive supporters (e.g. improve Obamacare, the position of Biden). The primaries are proceeding with partisans arguing with apparent assurance the enthusiasm versus coalition tension.

With my gray perspective, recognizing that this is a manifestation of the social condition, I hope that all Democrats understand that this is indeed an irresolvable dilemma, which is best recognized as such, with those arguing for exciting the base doing all that they can to broaden their message and appeal, and with those arguing for a grand coalition, doing all they can to excite the base.

I happen to think that the best person to do this is Elizabeth Warren, but that’s my personal judgment, others have alternative judgments, of course. I do hope, though, and think it is quite possible, that all the candidates take on this challenge, using a gray sensibility, addressing an instance of the social condition, in our fractured society, as a way to solve the clear and present danger of Donald Trump and Trumpism, *Za naszą i waszą wolność*, for our freedom and yours.

Appendix: Some additional examples of the social condition:

It is obviously important for a democratic society to provide equal opportunity for all young people. The less privileged should have the advantages of a good education. This is certainly a most fundamental requirement for equal opportunity. On the other hand, it is just as certain that a good society, democratic and otherwise, should encourage and enable parents to provide the best, to present the world as they know and appreciate it, to their children: to read to them, to introduce them to the fine arts and sciences, and to take them on interesting trips, both near and far. But not all parents can do this as effectively, some have the means, some don’t. Democratic education and caring for one’s children are in tension. The social bonds of citizenship and the social bonds of family are necessarily in tension. This tension, in many variations, defines a significant dimension of the social condition.

Another dimension of the social condition was illuminated in a classic lecture, “Politics as a Vocation,” by Max Weber: the tension between what he called the “ethics of responsibility” versus the “ethics of ultimate ends.” I observed an iteration of this tension in the debate about *Lincoln*, the movie. In politics there is always a tension between getting things done, as Weber would put it, responsibly, and being true to ones principles. Ideally the tension is balanced, as it was portrayed in the film: Lincoln the realist enabled the radical Republican Thaddeus Stephens, the idealist, to realize his ends in less than

idealistic ways. A wise politician, Weber maintained, has to know how to balance, idealism with realism.

But this tension goes beyond individual judgment and political effectiveness. Establishing the social support to realize ideals is necessary, but sometimes the creation of such supports make it next to impossible for the ideals to be realized. Making sure that educational ideals are realized, for example, equal educational opportunity, requires measurement, but the act of measurement can get in the way of real education.

Making sure that funds distributed by an NGO to disaster victims get to the victims can get in the way of getting the funds to the victims. Most generally, organizing to achieve some end establishes the conditions for those who have their particular interests in the organization itself to pursue their interests. NGOs often provide for a comfortable standard of living for its employees in impoverished parts of the world, sometimes this gets in the way of realizing organizational ends. But this isn't a new development: Robert Michels described this in the early 20th century, as "the iron law of oligarchy." I suggest that we think of this as a dilemma built into the social order of things.

I think one of the most fundamental manifestations of the social condition animates the work of Erving Goffman. He explored the power of the Thomas theorem more intensively than any other social theorist. *If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.* Goffman was particularly interested in how in their expressive behavior people managed to define social reality.

The dilemma arises when people disagree about the reality, are ambivalent about it, or even want to flee from it. A prime example is the concept and apparent reality of race. It's a social construction, as every college freshman comes to know. It's a fiction, but a fiction that we cannot ignore, a fiction that we continue to treat as real. becoming a social fact. To pretend it doesn't matter, even as it does, is to flee from enduring social problems. But attending to the problems of race carefully has the unintended consequence of furthering its continued salience in social life. Recognize race and it continues to be real. Ignore race, and it is likely that you will ignore its continued negative effects. Controversies over affirmative action policies revolve around this dilemma of race.

I worry when political actors pretend that the complications of the social condition can be easily overcome, following one formula or another, with negative political consequences. This is what motivates me to explore the topic, why I feel compelled to do so. I am concerned that bad sociology also pretends that these tensions are easily resolved, often with a theoretical slight of hand. Rather I propose gray theoretical perspective.