

Plurality Plurality Plurality Plurality REC

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Published: 2025-01-18

Dear friends,

Let's come to terms with some terms. Sorry, I'm not trying to be cute (that's just effortless). I think it's important we, as I constantly raise, share a literacy for engagement with big ideas. Sadly, much of the time those big ideas are also terrible ideas —things that dominate our lives, change our ways of being, and interrupt what we might (at least individually) deem antithetical to our being. Ideas, however, are critical and require serious and robust examination as we continually sit in a world dominated by bad ones, and bad faith actors whose entire existence is designed to peddle those ideas. But we also need a binding approach, something that brings us together with hope and possibility —not just doom and gloom about the state of things (which is, admittedly, pretty shit). A few things have pushed this desire to write this morning, some good, some bad. Let's jump into them.

I went for a walk with Harriet Taylor Mill this morning, and we saw several propagandist headlines “anti-semitism crisis in Australia will end in murder,” (Australian) [1] “anti-semites deny auschwitz” (NYT) and myriad others. I went to a cafe, as one does in bourgeois life, and naturally we see more of this propaganda, even propaganda about the paper itself: “Facts” they purport “are embodied in The Advertiser” and, immediately below, “News Corp” who assure us only they can bring you said facts. In a singular, individualist, solitary, only, ‘just one’ reality that mega corporations, like News Corp, we can be assured that their version of reality, their interpretation of truth, and their deliberate denial of empirical factual events —i.e., the genocide being conducted by Zionists, that their own personal canon of events (which serve their personal investments exclusively), is unquestionably “factual” . Only, we know it isn't.

The postmodern/post-structural amongst us believe that we are “post fact” . Indeed, post “truth” . To an extent, without terms, we might even agree with this *ipso facto*. But, if we accept *ipso facto* post truth then what use are terms? What use is refuting misinformation, or being literate in, at the very least, the lingua franca of populist propaganda? There's no truth so I can decide what I want to be true, and no one else may change my mind, for that is *my truth*. This verges dangerously close to identity politics. The kind of identity politics that results in people being “cancelled” , because if I reject “your truth” I am, by the very nature of my existence, threatening yours through words. To be clear, I'm not here to challenge your truth, but rather hold space for plural thought. But this is an important epistemic distinction and we need to spend the time to create shared language to understand it, and when we create shared language, we accept a truth. This is not “my truth” but suddenly our truth —yours and mine, together.

Humans are social animals, and we use communication strategies to mediate our worlds. It is important to note we are not the only species to do this, and communication takes myriad forms, verbal communication is one small facet of the way we interact both with each other, and the natural world. As yet, the natural world is not dominated utterly by neoliberalism, ergo we still need communication strategies. So, I'm going to hurry to the point for our shared vocabulary and stop beating around the bush. I am, today, arguing that we need to understand three key things:

- Epistemology
- Ontology
- Pluralism

We, contra my point, do not need to agree on definitions for each of these. But rather,

we need to share some notion of relation to each. So, as best I can, let me share my view on these in a hopefully interpretable way. Beginning with epistemology, at its most basic, referring to how we know. Or, more aptly particularly in Indigenist circles, ‘ways of knowing’. Note there, even in our most essentialised form, we move from the dominant view: how we know; to the subversive way: ways of knowing. What’s the movement? Pluralism. This, right here, is why we do not need to fight. But rather create movements with ideas that hold diverse space, but reach shared ends. Okay, let’s keep moving, this is “the whirlwind tour” after all.

Next we have ontology, which is decidedly more complex, but it is about the nature of being. In academic terms, it is a branch of philosophy concerned with reality. We might ask, to grasp ontology’s scope, do physical things exist? Then, do concepts exist? If yes, are these categorically the same? What is the, and is there a, relationship between properties and the things that ‘have them’? We might say an orange is orange, but who decided that? And in a thought experiment where there were two separate planets, with two separate children born to each, would they both grow to explain oranges as orange? Beyond linguistics, these are questions of fundamental being. Things about the nature of reality. You’ve heard me talk about ‘capitalist ontology’: within capitalist realism [2], alternatives to capitalist social relations are treated as practically impossible or unreal. This creates an ontological boundary—certain possibilities are treated as being outside the realm of what can “really” exist.

And finally we have plurality. This one has been particularly affective in my life. Seeing people trapped in capitalist social relations, in particular, and showing divergence as a good, creative, productive, fun and silly thing, rather than “breaking the rules” (which, often, it does not). Pluralists, intersecting across the epistemology/ontology space, might advance that multiple forms of value exist. Rather than reducing all value to ‘market value’ or ‘economic metrics’, pluralists recognise diverse, incommensurable forms of value i.e., cultural, spiritual, ecological, relational, etc. These different value forms aren’t variations of economic value, but fundamentally different kinds of worth that can’t be reduced to a single metric. We also acknowledge coexisting realities. We see that different ways of being can coexist without needing to be unified into a single system, and that this plurality and divergence offers creativity and possibility at the boundaries. For instance, Indigenous ways of investigation and truth telling may coexist with western ‘scientific’ modes, each valid and in dialogue about phenomena we all share.

However, and I need to be very clear here, pluralism isn’t infinite tolerance or relativism. Let’s take an example, understanding that pluralism is fundamentally about enabling human flourishing and dignity in multiple forms, where, for instance, ideologies like nazism are explicitly aimed at destroying plurality and human dignity. This isn’t a contradiction in pluralistic thinking, but rather core to its coherence. Pluralism rejects totalising ideologies—nazism, neoliberalism, and capitalist realism because they seek to eliminate plurality itself. This makes them incompatible with a pluralistic framework not as a matter of opinion but as a matter of logical consistency. But pluralism is also not about co-opting. A pluralist stands firm in their understanding of onto-epistemic relations, seeking to advance human liberation as a collective form, understanding the intersectional violence that hegemonic systems have born. This means we hold ourselves fast—knowing who we are, and what we recognise, not going with the flow.

Pluralism offers powerful ways to break through the paralysis of capitalist realism and create genuine hope, primarily by highlighting actually existing alternatives that already function alongside capitalism [3]. These include Indigenous economic systems, successful cooperative enterprises, commons-based resource management, and mutual aid networks—demonstrating this isn’t utopian thinking but recognition of existing plurality often rendered invisible by capitalist realism’s narrative [4]. Pluralism accomplishes this through

temporal complexity, recognising different *temporalities* can coexist and change doesn't require totality or immediacy, necessarily. We might re-frame agency by showing people can begin creating and living alternatives in the present without waiting for system collapse or perfect consensus –and this doesn't require bourgeois status, just attitudinal change. Through practical experimentation, pluralism encourages small-scale experiments in alternative ways of living, learning from different existing systems, and creating spaces where different values can guide action [5]. Perhaps most importantly, pluralism challenges the naturalisation of current systems by demonstrating that current arrangements are historically specific rather than natural laws, that different societies have solved problems in different ways, and that social systems are human creations that can be recreated. This makes change tangible and immediate rather than purely theoretical or impossibly distant.

It's about optimism, yeah? But to get there we need to be clear on our terms, we need to be clear on ourselves, and we need to engage in reflection and transformative praxis. From a Marxist or even socialist perspective, ontology (the study of what exists and how things relate) and epistemology (how we know what we know) intersect critically with pluralism in understanding our current conditions (as products of history) and the myriad possibilities for change. Ontologically, our approach recognises that multiple forms of social and economic relations exist simultaneously, not just as historical stages as classical Marxism might suggest, but as concurrent realities. Some are better, some are worse, and some cannot be compared because context is everything. This means acknowledging that while capitalism is dominant, it is not and will never be *total*; other forms of relation and production persist and emerge even within capitalist frameworks (and even when they are squashed or subsumed, they exist, they existed, and they can return). Epistemologically, our perspective values multiple ways of knowing while maintaining critical analysis of power relations, understanding that knowledge is always situated within material conditions but isn't reducible to them. Our pluralism, here, doesn't mean "relativism" or uncritical acceptance of all positions, but rather recognition that transformation can emerge through multiple paths and forms.

This framework helps us understand that while capitalism shapes reality it never completely determines it. The task becomes recognition of and nurturing (existing) alternatives while developing new ones, understanding that resistance and creation of alternatives happens through multiple valid forms. From traditional Marxist class struggle to Indigenous resistance to cooperative economics to new forms of commons, new and better forms emerge constantly. But it is on us *all* to help these forms find their way to reality. Our approach maintains socialist critique of exploitation and domination while avoiding the pitfalls of economic reductionism or historical determinism (and certainly collapse of structure into agency, or agency into structure). Our approach offers that transformation may come, not through waiting for a single revolutionary moment, but through nurturing multiple forms of resistance and alternative ways of being, all while maintaining critical analysis of power relations and systemic constraints –and being *angry* when plurality is denied.

Understanding terms and being reflexive in transformative praxis connects deeply to how we understand and create change. When we grasp concepts like ontology, epistemology, and pluralism, we gain tools to recognise and resist how capitalist realism narrows our imagination and actions. Being reflexive helps us notice when we're unconsciously reproducing capitalist frames like reducing everything to economic terms or seeing all solutions as individual rather than collective. Activist practice through a pluralist lens opens up multiple forms of resistance and creation, from teaching that opens possibilities rather than closing them [6], to creating spaces for collective care that resist market logic [7], to maintaining traditional practices that embody different relationships to land or community [8]. The power of this approach is that it doesn't require everyone to engage in the same way or wait for total system change. Instead, it recognises that transformation happens through multiple, interconnected actions at different scales, where small changes in how we think

and relate (or react) can create openings for larger systemic changes. This isn't about individual lifestyle choices, though they most definitely help, but rather about creating and maintaining spaces where different values and relations can exist and grow. And stasis, conservatism, and aggression like other cancerous positions, are denied the light for growth in such a system because they are fundamentally antithetical to our humanist and ecologically engaged position (more on this soon).

That's where my heads at today, anyhow. Have a cracker weekend friends,
Aidan.

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1. seriously, don't bother, I literally had to unblock a wide range of known adware and malware sites even to access their home page: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/sir-frank-lowy-enough-is-enough-plea-to-politicians-to-speak-up-against-antisemitism/news-story/5e0caff33f6ecef80aa2189de2d70b0b>
 2. c.f. Fisher's Capitalist Realism
 3. <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/pluriverse/9788193732984>
 4. <https://www.dukeupress.edu/pluralism> (ignore the eggs on the cover, weird choice, it's not about eggs -in case you were confused like me)
 5. Wright's Envisioning Real Utopias is a phenomenal piece on this, as are the edited collections of real exemplars of this work in praxis.
 6. On my reading list <https://www.akpress.org/emergentstrategy.html>
 7. Revolutionaries, feminists, and pluralists: <https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-revolution-will-not-be-funded>
 8. c.f. <https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/1664-we-do-this-til-we-free-us>