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Complexities of Political Discourse

Class, Power and the Linguistic Turn¹

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The linguistic turn began as an epistemological revolution against metaphysics. During the initial onslaught of this rebellion, political thought was a victim of collateral damage – a subject about which philosophy could not speak, so it must remain silent.² After the dust settled, however, the linguistic turn proved surprisingly useful for politics. It has furnished core insights for a wide array of perspectives in political theory, revealing exciting vistas that would have been unimaginable 50 years ago.

With these advances also come problems, however. As language has become more and more the lens through which politics is viewed, we are forced to deal much more incisively with the complex social and political character of linguistic practices. The proliferation of political theories based on language requires a critical counterpart of equal weight, especially when normative – which is to say, prescriptive – conclusions hang in the balance. If we are to organize

¹ I'm grateful to Rainer Forst for several rounds of stimulating dialogue, including his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I've also benefitted greatly from conversations with Amy Allen, Maeve Cooke and Keith Topper on these themes. This research was supported by the Critical Theory Institute at the University of California, Irvine.

² L. Wittgenstein, 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C. K. Ogden. London: Routledge, 1922, §7. Cf. A. J. Ayers, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 2nd edition. New York: Dover, 1952, ch. 6.

our society around something like the public use of language, we must have a finely honed analysis of the dangers and pitfalls that we might encounter along the way.

As a contribution to this critique, I will enter into conversation here with Rainer Forst's innovative version of the linguistic turn. Forst bases his political theory on the idea of a right to justification. It establishes a view of politics centred on the reciprocal trading of reasons for proposed norms and laws. This view inscribes a linguistic turn in politics by connecting justification with ideas of recognition, generality and reciprocity. Because justification is so basic to politics, especially when we think of it as discursive in character, this provides a normative fulcrum for critical perspectives on a wide array of issues, from multiculturalism to toleration, deliberative democracy, social justice and transnational justice.

In this essay I will focus on an issue lying at the heart of Forst's work: the argument he makes for the right to justification itself. I am particularly interested in his account of the claims we can make for such a right. I believe that Forst's answer to that question has a great deal to say about the normative bases of a discursive politics, while also exemplifying the linguistic turn's entwinement with some of the very social issues it aims to criticize. Chief among these, I will claim, are issues of power and class in political discourse. When taken together, these concerns call into question the universality of something like a right to justification. Rather than forming the core of any discursive politics, reason-giving may well be a class-specific political practice that favours elite groups over others. The connection of such practices with class power and domination gives us cause to rethink the way we inscribe a linguistic turn in political theory.

These are not claims that I take lightly, nor do I mean to impugn Rainer Forst's admirable insights and conceptual subtlety. I single out his work here because it theorizes political discourse in a robust, clear and compelling manner, making it possible to see the underlying problems in a uniquely perspicuous way as well. My claims apply equally to many other political theories based on discourse and language.

Jürgen Habermas's work springs to mind, as do other attempts to make a linguistic turn in political theory, including, I hasten to add, some of my own. In a spirit of friendly engagement and self-criticism, then, I join with Rainer Forst to see what can be made of a linguistic turn in politics when we take issues of class and power into account.

Rights to justification

Forst's political theory is based on moral premises, particularly on a conception of the autonomy of morality. He understands morality 'as a system of categorically obligating norms – and corresponding duties and rights – that count as reciprocal and general for humans *as humans* in their character as moral persons, and do not presuppose any thicker context of interpersonal relations like particular communities (family, friends, political community, etc.)' (75–6).³ The bases of morality are independent of cultural or ethical contexts, then, such as particular notions of the good, or culturally embedded ideas of right and wrong. Instead, morality rests on the character of human beings as moral agents.

The humanity from which morality arises is not our own, however. We do not act morally out of respect for ourselves, but out of respect for others (89–90, 94). As a moral insight, this has a double character, with both cognitive and recognitive components (89). We understand others as human, in the sense of free, rational beings subject to suffering. Similarly, we recognize others as human, seeing them as vulnerable to suffering and thus deserving of respect. This, Forst claims, is tantamount to recognizing them as moral beings to whom we have particular obligations (67). Invoking Levinas, he writes: 'It is the face of

³ Emphasis in the original. Parenthetical references in the text refer to R. Forst, *Das Recht auf Rechtfertigung: Elemente einer konstruktivistischen Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007a. I have translated all quotations of this work from the original German.

the other that makes it clear to me where the ground of being moral lies: in the fact that we are humans' (95). People are given to us – recognized by us – as moral others. Understanding and recognition come to the same conclusion, then: we see others as moral agents to whom we have categorical moral obligations.

Because moral norms are based on the cognition of shared humanity and the recognition of others as moral agents, they have an inherently intersubjective character. They raise validity claims that must be discursively negotiated within a 'shared space of justifying reasons' (65, 106). The discursive character of moral norms implies the second-order practical insight that we have of duties of justification towards those others (66–9, 124). Insofar as people are affected by a given norm or action, we have a duty to justify it to them, to provide reasons that show our respect for them as persons affected. Symmetrically, this duty implies that each person has a right to justification. The right to justification provides each person with what Forst calls a 'moral veto', being able to object when particular norms or actions seem not to be justifiable (173, 198).

In Forst's view, the right to justification can be fulfilled only by discourses of a particular form. Those discourses are characterized above all by reciprocity and generality. Reciprocity ensures symmetry between the interests and points of view considered in discourse. No one can determine unilaterally what counts as a good reason, and any reason I apply to my own case must apply equally well to others. Generality guarantees that no affected person's participation can be excluded from the discourses that create an agreement. Agreement is general only when the discourses forming it are open to all those who may be affected by the issue under consideration (34–6, 81–2, 106–7).

Although Forst's conception of a right to justification is philosophically elaborated, he does not intend it as an abstract view from nowhere. Rather, he says that the right to justification is 'disclosed from a first-person perspective' (126). It is 'the unconditional claim of the other' (124). This right is based on an 'evaluative perception' of others: we

recognize them as human beings and moral agents (96). As such, the right to justification is immanent in concrete contexts and actual practices. It is something we understand and perceive for ourselves, based on the attitudes we take towards others as human.

These insights about morality, intersubjectivity, discourse and justification have far-reaching political significance. The moral insights we derive from our experience of others imply particular forms of politics. Norms, laws and actions must be justifiable in a reciprocal and general sense. The duty to justify in turn requires political procedures and institutions that can facilitate justification. At the same time, it puts limits on the kinds of interests and perspectives that count in public discourse. The right to justification has broad implications for politics, then, from face-to-face discursive interactions in the political arena, to justice and toleration, to human rights and international politics.

Complexities of the normative world

Forst's view makes an elegant linguistic turn in politics. It starts from a particular notion of humanity, describes it as a characteristic of our experience of others, shows that this experience has a distinctively moral character, and finally, elucidates a duty of justification towards others on that basis. The view moves from basic ideas about human existence to a form of discursive proceduralism. Here Forst's view acquires its greatest normative weight as a critical theory of contemporary society. The duty of justification is not simply a moral prescription, but a way to evaluate actually existing systems of law and politics. It provides a basis for criticizing institutions and human relations in which justification is insincere, incomplete, impeded or non-existent.

I take this kind of argument very seriously. It describes a carefully specified mode of politics without making any pre-determinations about the issues that actual participants would discuss. Its conclusions are drawn from concrete forms of experience and public practices of reasoning, rather than moral absolutes or metaphysical notions of

a person. Yet I wonder to what extent it depends upon assumptions about practice and culture that we may have a hard time redeeming. In particular, I wonder whether the theory can do justice to what Forst himself refers to as ‘the complexity of the normative world’ (111).

As I have accounted for it, Forst’s view rests on particular assumptions about our cognition and recognition of others as human beings. It is based on a specific and morally charged conception of what it means to be human. This view gives humans a dignity by virtue of their humanity, and describes moral orientations we should take towards them in recognition of this humanity. In Forst’s case, the moral and political results of the theory rest on our experience: they are ‘disclosed from a first-person perspective’; they are impressed upon us by the recognition of human finitude and by our confrontation with ‘the face of the other’. Here Forst evokes the spirit of Kant’s investigation of the conditions of experience. Like Kant, he draws broader conclusions from the fact of our experiences. Kant details the preconditions necessary for us to have coherent experience as such. Forst, following a slightly different path, traces the consequences of experiencing others as humans and moral agents. Forst’s view starts from a more particular point than does Kant’s: not experience as such, but the experience of others as particular kinds of human beings. The view rests on an empirical claim about the way we actually experience others, rather than an analysis of the necessary presuppositions of experience in general. The normative force that we can draw from seeing others as humans depends on the *de facto* practice of those forms of cognition and recognition. We must actually experience others as humans to whom we owe reciprocal and general justification for the theory to have normative traction.

This kind of humanism is part of a distinguished intellectual tradition that reaches back at least to Suarez and Bellarmine in the sixteenth century and the English Levellers in the seventeenth. It has a long history of levelling hierarchies and providing the bases for egalitarianism and (quasi-)universal suffrage. Variants of this view are still highly favoured by philosophers and other thinkers today. Given Forst’s emphasis on the actual experiences of people in general, however, we must ask how

well this outlook characterizes the practices of contemporary societies. Do all – or at least a significant number – of our fellow citizens really recognize one another as human beings with moral standing in a way that implies a right to justification? Do all individuals, or all individuals in modernized, rationalized societies – or at least a significant number of them – share the kind of humanist outlook described here? Does this form of recognition actually characterize the norms and attitudes of the real people around us?

I believe that this conception of recognition is only partly on target. There are many different ways of recognizing others, and not all of them take the form Forst describes. Indeed, the social sciences provide persuasive evidence that our practices of recognition are much more varied. Those practices oscillate between broad-ish (sometimes close to universal) recognition of others as something like human, and differentiated forms focusing on distinctions in group difference.

At times, people recognize others as sharing certain common traits. If comprehensive and robust enough, this kind of recognition can be interpreted as an experience of basic human commonality. It is, however, a rather thin and abstract form of recognition. This experience is typical of contexts in which we know very little about the other person or her culture: in the cases of ‘first contact’ that we find described in early anthropology or science fiction, for instance, in which the language and culture of the others is so foreign that we are reduced to the most abstract commonalities in trying to understand them. It can also be characteristic of situations of duress: emergencies in which the blood and pain of another forcibly negates any more subtle, socially differentiated conclusions one might draw about them. Here the impulse to focus on differences is set aside in favour of a more general, less differentiated response.

More often, however, things run in the opposite direction. We see others in identitarian ways rather than egalitarian, universalist, humanist ones. These socially differentiated identities are generated through categories of social perception and classification. Pierre Bourdieu has catalogued these mechanisms in careful detail, showing

how individuals are classed into groups by various markers of group identity. Subtle cues of speech, dress, taste and bodily posture are taken as signs of group belonging. They provide criteria for determining who functions as a 'natural' (i.e. thoroughly enculturated) member of a given group. The ubiquitous use of these criteria in turn forms a system of social distinction. There is nothing necessary about this logic of group formation, but it seems to be a durable pattern of human behaviour that has been observed in a wide variety of societies across several continents.⁴

The process of group distinction is largely unconscious and intuitive. We classify people without thinking about it, and attach various valuations, orientations, biases and stereotypes accordingly. We do this in many ways, but language is one important mechanism. Differences in the way people use language, their skill at using it and their fluency in the idioms of argumentation and speech are an important mechanism for determining a person's group identity.⁵ Differences in accent, grammar, vocabulary, word choice, rhetorical ability, style and self-confidence within a given language constitute an important way to tell 'who a person really is'.⁶ In this sense, language use operates in the same way as many other markers of distinction that we draw on constantly to assess and value other people.

It is important to realize that these habits of social differentiation are not simply perceptual or phenomenal. They are not simply a matter of recognition, but equally a matter of cognition. They are part of the sense, as Bourdieu characterizes it, in which 'ordinary experience of the social world is a cognition, . . . [and] primary cognition is misrecognition,

⁴ For example, concerning France, North Africa, Japan and East Germany, respectively: P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by R. Nice. Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press, 1984; P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Space: Introduction to a Japanese Reading of Distinction', *Poetics Today* 12(4), (1991a), 627–38; P. Bourdieu, 'Distinction Revisited: Introduction to an East German Reading', *Poetics Today* 12(4), (1991b), 639–41.

⁵ P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991c.

⁶ C. R. Hayward, 'Doxa and Deliberation', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 7(1), (2004), 1–24.

recognition of an order which is also established in the mind.⁷ Our practices of social differentiation are both cognitive and recognitive, then. We recognize others as different, and we understand the social world to be structured through such differences in a way that seems both natural and intuitive to us, because it is part of the very fabric of our experience of society.

The empirical realities of social differentiation seem to undermine the humanist orientation described by Forst. In his terms, our cognition of the shared humanity of others must live in tension with our cognition of them as different. Similarly, our recognition of others as moral agents competes with our recognition of them as falling into certain types based on (quasi-)intuitive categories of classification. In this case, universalism has no distinctive normative privilege over distinction. Rather, the principle we seem to endorse in our actions is one of polyvalence: universalism sometimes, distinction other times. At times we treat others as equals, like us, deserving of respect because of their similarity to us. At other times, however, we treat them as members of different and perhaps competing social groups, different from us, and valued (positively or negatively) for their embodied characteristics as members of those groups.

Consider, for example, the biblical story of the Good Samaritan. We are told that Samaritans and Jews were largely hostile to one another in this era. Each group recognized the other as different and disliked it. Against this background, the 'Good' Samaritan strikingly rejects such differentiating tendencies and recognizes the basic humanity of an injured Jewish traveller. This recognition causes him to care for the traveller, even at some expense to himself. Tensions between universalism and difference give this parable its heuristic force. The parable is able to valorize the Good Samaritan's behaviour precisely because we see it as such an atypical response. His recognition of a more-universal humanity stands as a reproach to our own differentiating tendencies to see others as alien, of less value and not worthy of our aid.

⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 172.

This example, one among a great many, shows that we do not simply recognize others as universally human, nor do we recognize them as thoroughly different. Rather, there are many different ways to recognize others, and within that, there are many different ways to recognize them 'as human.' As a result, principles like reciprocity and generality sometimes characterize our practices and sometimes do not. This examination tells us that we cannot derive any determinate conclusions about the moral status of others from practices of recognition as such. Those practices are polyvalent and often contradict one another. By extension, it is not clear that others have a right to justification based on our recognition of them. The multiplicity of practices through which we assign value to others throw this conclusion into doubt.

The ruling ideas of the ruling class

Now that we have examined some of the complexities of the normative world, it is important to clarify that I am not referring to what is often called 'the fact of pluralism.' That expression refers more narrowly to discussions about whether 'the right' can accommodate different conceptions of 'the good' (cf. 101–2). Here I am identifying something much less connected with abstractions of moral theory and much more connected to the complex texture of our practices themselves: the fact that we recognize others in a great variety of ways; that we combine practices that have distinctively moral or ethical content with those that have an altogether different character; that our practices are so complex that it is difficult to say how one can gain normative leverage on them.

Unfortunately, failing this normative challenge may cause us to remain blind to some of the power and class dynamics that can occur within democratic politics. In particular, it is important to be aware of the implicit class character that ideas of discourse and justification can have. The primary constituency of such views is the class-fraction that Pierre Bourdieu refers to as high in cultural capital and occupying

professions that emphasize words and speech.⁸ That is to say, it is the domain of knowledge experts: writers, consultants, politicians and, of course, academics. The members of these professions specialize in the self-confident articulation of opinions through language, complex, persuasive forms of discourse, thematization of problems, criticism of opposing positions, taking of stances, peer review of written results, building a career based on the uptake received by one's opinions, controversy as a source of interest, intellectual life as a privileged mode of practice. Giving reasons is one of their primary aptitudes and most sharply honed skills. Correspondingly, the public use of reasons is most closely associated with the shared orientations and habits of these knowledge experts.

We must acknowledge, then, that the value intellectuals place on discourse is to some extent subcultural and group specific. Giving reasons seems natural to this group because of the deep centrality of language to its own practices. It is not surprising that such people would see others as deserving of justification. Nor is it surprising that they would see practices of justification and public reasoning as an essential aspect of being human. The naturalness of these ideals is very much an aspect of their group identity, one not necessarily shared by other groups. In fact, some groups specialize in skills that have very little to do with the public use of reasons. For them the public use of reasons is a much less intuitive practice, and perhaps worse, one at which they perceive themselves as less competent.⁹ From this perspective, justification is not a basic human right, but a mode of practice that is the expert domain of others. It does not recognize one's basic humanity, but implicitly universalizes a vision of humanity whose signature characteristics are most comfortably practiced by the members of elite groups.

This line of criticism suggests that a conception of recognition based on humanist criteria, implying moral obligations to justification, may

⁸ P. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, ch. 1, esp. tables 2 and 3.

⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, ch. 8.

not be as universally practiced or as naturally human as the members of that group suppose. The subject-position of intellectuals as a group, with our specific identities, orientations and taken-for-granted knowledges and practices, may lead us to suppose that certain things about ourselves are also true of people as a whole. And this mistaken assumption may lead us falsely to universalize those skills and activities.¹⁰ This would be a kind of social myopia, taking all of society in one's own image. It would be a product of what Bourdieu calls the 'unconscious universalization of the particular case'.¹¹ And this universalization has an implicit class character. As Marx and Engels noted, each dominant class tends to 'represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones'.¹² In this manner, we academics might see reasoning as a fundamental aspect of being human, when it is actually a group-specific behaviour that defines the borders and criteria of entry to certain privileged groups.

If we fail to see the group-specific character of this set of linguistic practices, we risk misrecognizing the exclusions and biases they covertly bring along with them. At core, these are problems of class position and power, and the joint effects of the two when they coincide. They raise the prospect of a cultural imperialism *within* developed societies: not the imposition of Western ideals on the rest of the world, but the imposition of the ideals of the thinking and talking classes on the rest of society. Here seemingly open and fair conceptions of political practice can have a dark side as well. Rather than bracketing or challenging power relations, such theories risk reproducing them.¹³

¹⁰ K. Olson, 'Legitimate Speech and Hegemonic Idiom: The Limits of Deliberative Democracy in the Diversity of its Voices', *Political Studies* 59(3), (2011), 527–46.

¹¹ P. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Oxford: Polity, 1998, p. 136; P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 65.

¹² K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1970, pp. 65–6.

¹³ K. Topper, 'Not So Trifling Nuances: Pierre Bourdieu, Symbolic Violence, and the Perversions of Democracy', *Constellations* 8(1), (2001), 30–56; K. Topper, 'Arendt and Bourdieu between Word and Deed', *Political Theory* 39(2011), 358–61; Hayward, 'Doxa and Deliberation'.

They universalize as 'human' activities those that are practiced at differential levels of expertise throughout the population and are differentially valued by members of different groups. Thus well-intentioned ideas such as recognizing the humanity of others through the public use of language can rationalize a political system that privileges some while framing others as less competent. Rather than recognizing the universal humanity of others, such a conception might establish a seemingly neutral domain of politics that is differentiated along pre-existing lines of group privilege.¹⁴ Wittingly or not, such a political theory could become another case in which 'the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships; the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas'.¹⁵ That is to say, it could become a mechanism for reproducing relations of class and power, rather than challenging them.

Critique, idealization, practice

One might call the line of criticism I have been outlining a 'critique of socially differentiated epistemology' or a 'critique of socially differentiated practice'. It ultimately raises two questions. First, it forces us to ask how we can justify political theories based on a linguistic turn – like a right to justification – without appealing to universalist notions of humanity. Second, it poses the problem of how we can combine those theories with a critical understanding of power, class and social differentiation. In sum, we must determine under what circumstances language can serve as a medium for justifying norms and actions, and under what circumstances it is co-opted by pre-existing relations of class and power.

These questions have a special urgency for neo-Kantians. Their approach has great normative power, but often has difficulty bridging the

¹⁴ I have developed this line of thought more fully in Olson, 'Legitimate Speech and Hegemonic Idiom'.

¹⁵ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 64.

gap between theoretical idealizations and actual people and practices. One's response to these challenges depends on how exactly one wants to tap Kantian insights. Rainer Forst draws on many varieties of neo-Kantian political thought in rich and subtle ways. Overall, though, I take his view to fall closer to the constructivist side of contemporary neo-Kantianism than the reconstructivist side. The difference is something like this: A constructivist theory builds an idealized model of political or moral practice, then brings it into reflective equilibrium with current cultural norms. The model has internal consistency because of the care with which it is constructed, then it tries to acquire binding force by being adapted to actual contexts. A reconstructive view, in contrast, is interpretative from the start, working within actual practices to discern their implicit norms and presuppositions. It must interpretatively characterize people's practices in a rich enough way to show those people the implicit, hidden logic of their own action. This logic typically takes the form of unrecognized presuppositions that provide the interpreter with leverage to criticize the practices in question.

Each paradigm has advantages and disadvantages. Constructive views develop a strong idealized consistency from the start, but then must bridge the gap to the messy world. They are more theoretically pure, but correspondingly more distant from the normative complexities of real life. Reconstructive views acquire a strong normativity from their starting point within the lived world, but then have corresponding difficulties developing critical distance and philosophical consistency from that basis.

Forst advertises his view as a constructivist one, and I think he does fall closest to that side of contemporary neo-Kantianism. For instance, he characterizes his insights about the reciprocal and general character of norms as 'a practical, not metaphysical constructivism', emphasizing that 'for us' there is no other path to moral norms than this kind of practical constructivist insight (83–4). He unequivocally rejects metaphysical notions of moral personhood, putting in their place a non-metaphysical though still idealized view of a moral human being. When the idealized humans in question are thought in relation

to one another, we arrive at the idea of an idealized moral community. It would be a community of people who recognize one another as moral persons and feel a responsibility to justify actions and norms to one another as a result. The idea of a right to justification, then, is implied by the postulated features of this construct, particularly its conception of moral personhood.

This argumentative strategy has the hallmark advantages of a constructivist theory. It draws clear lines from moral personhood to rights to justification, framing a robust notion of discursive politics on that basis. The concerns I have outlined do not challenge the internal consistency of that vision so much as its relation to our actual practices of recognizing and thinking about one another. They are concerns, in other words, about a gap between the theory's idealized claims and their basis in lived experience. To fully elaborate the potential of this vision, we would need to think carefully about bringing its idealized claims together with lived experience to ensure that the theory retains its critical force.

My own suggestion would be to embrace a more thoroughly reconstructive approach. This would require us to interpret and reconstruct practices that people actually engage in, as opposed to practices they ideally would or hypothetically should engage in. By reconstructing the ways that people actually recognize one another, we may be able to identify practices that would serve as a basis for reciprocal, general commitments towards one another. In this revised view, it is possible that reason-giving would not emerge as a privileged mode of human action. Justification may not be something we owe to one another *as humans*. Indeed, there may be no 'humanity as such' in such an account. It may wind up relying on multiple modes of politics to avoid the potential problems that could be associated with a view based solely on a linguistic turn. However, such a strategy would come closer to fulfilling the desiderata I laid out above. It would stay closer to actual social and political contexts, giving it stronger critical purchase against problems of class and power. It would also make possible a more differentiated view of subtle group differences in knowledge and practice.

Conclusion

The problems I have outlined are troubling ones. They threaten what has seemed for a long time like a robust source of normativity for political theory. The linguistic turn promised that political theorists could get out of the business of substantive critique and focus on procedure. We would tame language as a neutralized medium of communication, allowing normative content to rise out of the fissures of daily life and harden into already-binding, already-contextualized norms and obligations.

Whatever variety of the linguistic turn one subscribes to, that strategy is now thrown into doubt. Before such a project can succeed, we must find critical strategies that take the social differentiation of discursive practices into account. What I have called a 'critique of socially differentiated epistemology' must be a necessary component of such an understanding. It requires us to take account of the social and political complexities of language, particularly their tendency to reproduce class and power relations. Such a theory must conduct a finely textured critique of the faultlines of real life, even if they complicate philosophical conclusions or render theorists unable to make normative pronouncements on their own. Answering these questions will help us to make a linguistic turn that can comment incisively on the actual politics of our time, without becoming entangled in the very issues it aims to criticize.