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Doubt and the Revolutionary

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Abstract: So, you want to start a revolution. There is something significant in the world around you that is wrong: unjust, oppressive, unfair, unequal. Half measures won't suffice. Something dramatic, revolutionary, is required. You have ideas. You might have a plan. But although you are certain of the wrong around you, you are not certain of the path forward. You have some doubt about the plan, whether it will work, its moral costs, and whether there are problems you cannot yet see. You have revolutionary doubt. That is good. We need revolutions. But revolutions should not be only (or ever?) conducted by the certain. This article will help you to nourish that doubt, to see why it is almost always epistemically appropriate if also almost always difficult to maintain, to learn how to live and act with it, and to give it its due without it leading to paralysis and inaction.

Key words: revolution, doubt, certainty, polarization, confidence, revolutionaries

1.

So, you want to start a revolution.

Like all revolutionaries, you believe that right is on your side. There is something significant in the world around you that is wrong: unjust, oppressive, inhumane, unfair, horrible, unequal. Half measures won't suffice. Something dramatic, even revolutionary, is required. What should be done? You have ideas. You might even have a plan. But although you are certain of the wrong around you, you are not certain of the path forward. You have some doubt about the best plan, about whether the plan will work, about the moral costs of the plan, about whether there are problems you cannot yet see. You have revolutionary doubt.

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That is good. We need revolutions. But revolutions should not be only (or ever?) conducted by the certain. Let me help you to nourish that doubt, to see why it is almost always appropriate if also almost always difficult to maintain, to learn how to live and act with it, and to give it its due without it leading to paralysis and inaction.

2.

I may have been presumptuous. Maybe you don't want to start a revolution.

To bring more of you along with me, think not just of REVOLUTION in the grandest sense, but any significant social, legal, or political change: opening borders and eliminating immigration restrictions, banning abortion, defunding or abolishing the police, creating a single-payer national health system in the United States, disbanding NATO or the European Union, having the state cease to license marriages, requiring all companies and organizations to achieve carbon neutrality within ten years, legalizing drugs, implementing an 80 percent estate tax rate, allowing markets in human organs, decreasing the size of the United States military by 50 percent, abolishing the FDA, introducing parental licensing requirements, abolishing prisons, introducing a flat income tax, instituting a nationwide minimum wage of $15 in the US, ending exclusionary zoning, implementing a competency threshold for voting in elections, banning animal agriculture, and so on. And, of course, there are the more familiar kinds of structural, revolutionary ideas: abolishing private property, nationalizing major industries, and taking other anti-capitalist measures; breaking off from a particular nation-state and forming a new independent nation; transitioning to a democratic world government; fighting to eliminate all coercive legal and political institutions and to introduce a voluntarist anarchy; moving from a system that elects political officials to a system that selects them by lottery (Guerrero 2014); and so on. In all these cases, the change counts as revolutionary because of the significance and magnitude of the departure from the status quo. Importantly, I do not mean to imply that violence is likely to be or must be involved, contrary to some ways of talking about "revolution."

Even if you aren't inclined even to any revolutionary changes—maybe you're a milquetoast moderate through and through—you still might be interested in what is going on with those who are drawn to revolutionary action. As I will suggest in a moment, would-be revolutionaries are often both remarkable and puzzling.

Here are two claims about "revolutionary" changes (more precisely, about our appropriate attitudes toward such changes):

Doubt About Results: epistemically speaking, one should have some significant doubt about the substantial effects of any even modestly revolutionary change (even in the relatively near term after the change has been implemented).

Doubt About Moral Preferability: epistemically speaking, one should have some significant doubt about the moral preferability of this revolutionary path as compared to (a) the status quo or (b) other available paths.

These two claims, DAR and DAMP, concern one's beliefs about propositions in two domains. The first domain concerns the effects of a proposed revolutionary change. The second domain concerns the moral preferability of pursuing the proposed revolutionary path as opposed to some other path. For each, the suggestion is that it is epistemically appropriate to have some doubt about those domains.[2]

Doubt is colloquially understood as a psychological, phenomenologically distinctive state akin to (or identical to) an emotion or feeling. Alternatively, philosophers often write about doubt as a doxastic attitude toward a proposition (perhaps one believes that the negation of that proposition is possible, or one lacks the maximal degree of confidence in that proposition, or something else) or as a property of doxastic attitudes like belief, which may or may not be accompanied by a distinctive feeling or psychological state. Accordingly, claims about doubt come in at least two varieties—psychological and epistemic—just as claims about certainty do.[3] There are dif-

2. More precisely: for a subject, S, to have "some significant doubt" about a domain, D, is for S to have no substantial, central, first-order beliefs about propositions in D that are certain or close to certain. To clarify yet further, by this I mean that S has no substantial, central, first-order beliefs about propositions in D such that (1) S believes the negation of those propositions is impossible (or extremely unlikely to be the case), (2) S has credence 1.0 (or near 1.0) in those propositions, or (3) the belief is held by S with maximal psychological confidence (or near maximal psychological confidence). In this case, the relevant domains are those propositions concerning (a) the results of the revolutionary change and (b) the moral preferability of that change compared to other options.

Having some significant doubt is compatible with S having substantial, central, first-order beliefs about propositions in those two domains. S might have some doubt about whether taking a particular revolutionary action, RA, will be morally preferable to the status quo, while still believing that RA is morally preferable to the status quo. Although the verb form of "doubt" might be incompatible with belief—so that it is awkward to say that S *doubts* that RA is morally preferable to the status quo while also saying that S *believes* that RA is morally preferable to the status quo—there is no such problem with the mass noun form of "doubt." For discussion, see Moon 2018, 1830–1831. One can believe that RA is morally preferable to the status quo while also having *some doubt* about whether that is the case.

3. We can distinguish between subjective or psychological certainty, according to which one is certain of a proposition if and only if one has the highest degree of confidence in its truth; and epistemic certainty, according to which one is certain of a proposition if and

ferent views about both the causal and normative relationships between the psychological and epistemic senses of doubt. A plausible view is that our psychological state, our felt confidence, regarding our beliefs about some set of propositions ought to be sensitive to our epistemic situation regarding the propositions those beliefs are about—how justified we are in holding those beliefs, what evidence we have for the propositions, and so on.

Would-be revolutionaries should have some significant psychological and epistemic doubt regarding substantial, central propositions within these two domains. Given their epistemic position, they should believe, that for any substantial, central proposition about what will result from a proposed revolutionary change, or about the moral preferability of any proposed revolutionary change, that that proposition might be false. And they should lack maximal or even any high degree of confidence in any such claims. They should be in the epistemic state of having some significant doubt about central propositions in these domains. And they should have some psychological doubt because they should have some epistemic doubt. In both senses, then—the epistemic and the psychological—one ought to have some doubt regarding one's central beliefs in these two domains.

A few further qualifications. There is a "substantial" limitation to focus our attention on those beliefs about what might result from revolutionary change and the moral preferability of those changes that are central to why a person might want to engage in the revolutionary change.

The claims are both specified so that one ought to have some "significant" doubt. One's beliefs and psychological state regarding those domains ought to not be certain, nor close to certain. The reason for this is that we should not be *certain* about any empirical claims regarding future contingencies, about what may occur in the future. I should have some doubt that the sun will rise tomorrow or that there will be more than 10,000 living individual salmon on Earth in the year 2025. But, epistemically speaking, given my evidence, I should not have *significant* doubt about those things (or at least suggesting otherwise is to embrace a controversial, radically skeptical path). The claims here regarding the effects of revolutionary change and the moral value of the revolutionary path are intended to be stronger, and perhaps less obvious, than that: we should be *significantly* uncertain about these two domains; we should have some *significant* doubt.

Finally, the "epistemically speaking" qualification is to focus our attention on considerations that bear on the justification or evidential support

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only if one knows that proposition (or is in a position to know that proposition) on the basis of evidence that gives one the highest degree of justification for one's belief in that proposition. For discussion, see Stanley 2008.

regarding one's beliefs about these two domains. If one could believe with certainty at will, and if one were told that one should be certain about the effects of some proposed revolutionary step or all life on the planet would be immediately extinguished, then one ought to believe this with certainty, one's beliefs about these domains ought to be certain, without doubt. But these purely practical or moral, non-epistemic considerations, do not bear on one's epistemic justification for having certain beliefs about those domains.

With those clarifications about these claims, we can now ask: why should we accept them?

Doubt About Results follows simply from the complexity of the changes contemplated—how many people and institutions they affect, how those people and institutions will respond to the changes—and the epistemic difficulties of forecasting in social, legal, and political domains.

Doubt About Moral Preferability follows in substantial part from Doubt About Results, because whether a change is morally preferable or not will depend on what actually happens, and what would have happened if nothing or something else had been done. This is true whether or not one goes in for a consequentialist moral view. Even on non-consequentialist views, consequences matter (at least on any plausible non-consequentialist view). But it also may stem from uncertainty about the moral assessment, even given some fixed set of results. And even if one is reasonable in being certain that almost any alternative will be morally preferable than the status quo—say, as in the case of the revolution against racial slavery in the antebellum United States—there may still be epistemically appropriate doubt about the various paths forward and the various alternatives to the status quo.

Importantly, we are in a somewhat different epistemic position now than Thomas Jefferson, Toussaint Louverture, Maximilien Robespierre, Frederick Douglass, Vladimir Lenin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Mahatma Gandhi, among many others, were in the late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries. There has been a sustained development of the fields and methods of the so-called social sciences: anthropology, economics, history, law, linguistics, political science, psychology, sociology, etc. These fields vary in their methods and the extent to which they draw on quantitative tools from statistics and mathematics or qualitative tools involving interviews and observation and other forms of analysis. All use a mix of both, but the precise proportions vary. They might be able to aid a would-be revolutionary in thinking through what might be likely happen if certain significant changes are introduced. Many of the aforementioned figures were operating on something more like faith or hope, rather than anything informed by data, evidence, or science. In some cases, of course, things worked out well, despite flying

in the dark. In others, things did not go so well. Even now, these fields are still in their infancy, and we should be appropriately modest in our technocratic ambitions. There are potentially deep conceptual and empirical limitations in how useful they can be in predicting what will happen—in the short term and certainly in the longer term. Revolutionaries should draw on the evidence that is available—particularly historical evidence concerning similar situations and choices in the past or comparative evidence concerning similar situations in the contemporary world in other geographic locations. But this evidence, even fully incorporated (a near impossibly tall order), still leaves plenty of room for appropriate and significant doubt about how things will in fact turn out, what changes will turn out to be significant improvements, which slightly different options might have radically different results.

There are also other arguments for both DAR and DAMP based on more general considerations of epistemic humility (maybe we should always have some doubt about most things, and perhaps some significant doubt about anything relatively complicated); conciliatory responses to the fact of disagreement from epistemic peers (in most cases, would-be revolutionaries should acknowledge that there are epistemic peers who disagree with them significantly about the need for a particular revolution and the moral preferability of taking some revolutionary step); and general higher-order, doubt-making worries about bias in the selection and evaluation of evidence, both testimonial and non-testimonial, as a result of our own political and other biases and our location within various epistemic bubbles and echo chambers.

From an epistemic vantage point, both DAR and DAMP seem compelling. Indeed, some might feel that I have been doing an odd kind of pushing downhill. If one considers the matter for even a minute, one should accept both DAR and DAMP.

3.

Perhaps you accept these relatively uncontroversial claims about potential revolutionary changes. But then there is something at least initially puzzling: the apparent certainty of those who engage in and advocate for revolutionary change.

There are many historical examples of revolutionaries at least acting in ways that suggest their certainty regarding the likely results and moral preferability of their revolutionary actions. Consider Robespierre, when he says, in explanation and defense of The Terror—the mass execution and massacre of upward of 20,000 people during the French Revolution in 1793–1794—that

> the basis of popular government during a revolution is both virtue and terror. . . . Terror is nothing more than speedy, severe and inflexible justice; it is thus an emanation of virtue (Robespierre 1970)

Or consider Lenin (1992) writing "[t]he replacement of the bourgeois by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution." These words were made real through the Red Terror, a campaign of political repression and between 10,000 and 100,000 executions carried out by the Bolsheviks over a few months in mid-1918 after the beginning of the Russian Civil War. Or consider Che Guevara and Fidel Castro putting hundreds of people up against a wall and executing them by firing squad after day-long show trials in the early years of the Cuban Revolution.

In these cases, and many others, revolutionaries at least acted certain regarding their specific cause, the moral necessity of the actions they were taking, the permissibility of summary execution as a means of dealing with dissent or opposition, and, in many cases, the particular measures that ought to be implemented after they had seized power.

There is a lot one might say about these revolutions, but one would be unlikely to describe those leading them as acting as if they had some significant doubt about what they were doing or the moral preferability of the path they were forging. That doesn't mean that they didn't have some doubt. Their biographers, close friends, and private journals might attest to some doubt hidden in their hearts or confessed on dark nights, perhaps, but that is not the image they project through their words or actions. I will suggest that that is no accident.

Less "capital-R" revolutionary, think of those arguing that abortion should be banned, that prisons should be abolished, that there should be open borders and no immigration restrictions, or that the United States should move to a socialist system rather than a capitalist system. In my experience, the more revolutionary the cause, the greater the confidence and apparent certainty of those arguing for it.

Given the things I've said above about Doubt About Results and Doubt About Moral Preferability, this presents a puzzle. Why are revolutionaries so confident, certain, lacking in doubt?

3.A.

One possible explanation focuses on a transmutation from certainty regarding the moral case that change of *some kind* is needed into certainty about a *particular* change or set of changes. For some, moral outrage extinguishes other doubt. On one version of this story, those who are most certain about the need for change are the most likely to actually act, so those who act as rev-

olutionaries will be more certain about the results and moral attractiveness that will attend the revolutionary path they favor than those who do not act.

Consider someone who sees what they believe to be a moral outrage—an injustice, unfairness, inequality, harm, or mistreatment that requires not just moral condemnation but action. One might have a lot of evidence, and be correspondingly very well justified, in believing *that feature X of the status quo is morally objectionable*. It might even be reasonable to be certain of this. And it might furthermore be reasonable to move from that claim to believing, just as confidently, *that something must be done about X* or *that the status quo is unacceptable*. Many people in a society might have noticed the morally bad feature X. But it is also true that many of them will get stuck there, believing *that something must be done about X*. Most of us are not revolutionary agents. Most of us just kind of go along with things. Even if we are the ones suffering and targeted, there is still a strong temptation to keep one's head down, stay out of the way, and not make things worse for oneself or those one cares most about. That's generally true. But then add in both Doubt About Results and Doubt About Moral Preferability, so that it is significantly uncertain what *in particular* one ought to do. That makes it that much easier not to act.

But some people do act. A natural thought: those who do feel compelled to act and actually do take revolutionary actions might be so convinced of the badness to which they are responding that it transmutes into corresponding confidence and certainty regarding the course of action they think is the best way to address the badness. This is a possible psychological explanation, of course, not an epistemic justification. The moral badness of the status quo might lend weight to a moral case for acting even in the face of substantial uncertainty about whether the course of action is the right or best one, but that doesn't affect one's evidential justification for believing that the course of action is the right one or that it will have any particular set of results.

3.B.

A distinct but potentially complementary explanation suggests that those who support revolutionary change are, or become, *extremists*, and extremists are more likely—for reasons having to do with both social psychology and social epistemology—to be extreme in not just the substance of the views they hold, but also the confidence with which they hold them. Extremism is incompatible with doubt.

Human beings are drawn to being in social groups. We categorize, including categorizing other human beings, in order to understand the world, and "to derive an emotional connection and a sense of well-being from being group members" (Mason 2018, 9). That sounds nice enough.

But we are drawn to create groups that have an inclusive and exclusive dimension. There is an ingroup and an outgroup, and a significant part of our identity is connected to membership in our group, favorable bias toward our group under the right conditions, and so on. We create these ingroups and outgroups readily. These are central tenets of Henri Tajfel's highly influential "social identity theory" (Tajfel 1974). There is also neuroscientific evidence that how we learn, what we perceive, what emotions we feel, and the intensity of those emotions all are affected by these ingroup/outgroup identities. For example, Mason (2018, 12) notes that "people's brains respond similarly when people are sad and when they are observing a sad ingroup member, but when they are observing a sad outgroup member, their brains respond by activating areas of positive emotion." Almost all of this takes place sub-personally: "favoring the ingroup is not a conscious choice. Instead, people automatically and preferentially process information related to their ingroup over the outgroup" (Derks and Scheepers 2018).

When people come to have the belief that some aspect of the status quo is morally objectionable, they might come to know of each other, come to organize and meet with each other, and form a group. If what they object to is significant to them, this might come to be a significant part of their life, and this group membership and identity might come to be a significant thing in their life. These group identities may come to structure other aspects of one's life, affecting where people work, how they spend their free time, who they talk to, what media they consume, what sources they draw on, who they are friends with, and engage with on social media platforms, and so on.

This can have two distinct but reinforcing effects. First, it rigidifies an ingroup/outgroup identity centered around the commitment to the need for revolutionary action to address the shared object of moral concern. Second, over time, it creates an epistemic environment in which one lives in an epistemic bubble or an echo chamber. In combination, this leads us to dislike and distrust those in the outgroup, those who are on the other side regarding the need for revolutionary action. This leads to further segmentation and sorting. With fewer dissenting views around us, this leads us to have more extreme versions or more confidently held versions of our political views. This is often described as "polarization."

There are several distinct conceptions of "polarization." Two described by Robert Talisse are most relevant here:

> <u>partisan political polarization</u>: "partisan ideological uniformity . . . ideological purity among partisans . . . the absence of moderates within partisan groups."

> affective political polarization: "affective distance between political opponents . . . high levels within a partisan group of distrust and antipathy toward the members of opposing groups." (Talisse 2019, 98–99)

For revolutionary ingroups, we should expect both ideological purity and significant distrust and antipathy towards those who are not part of the revolutionary ingroup. Members of the ingroup demonstrate ingroup commitment and loyalty by condemning the outgroup, loudly proclaiming their robust commitment to the moral views of the ingroup, and by putting pressure on moderates within the ingroup.[4] One can prove one's revolutionary bona fides by being increasingly extreme and unwilling to compromise or entertain doubt regarding the proposed course of revolutionary action. With this increased polarization, the non-revolutionary side starts to seem even further away ideologically and morally, leading to increased vilification and attendant sorting. And the spiral toward extremism continues.

Affective political polarization and ingroup membership in general results not just in dislike for and bias against the outgroup in terms of how we will treat members of the outgroup, but also in distrust of the outgroup. This distrust affects who we will listen to and credit as testifiers, who we will see as peers in cases of disagreement, and who we will seek out as experts. But the intergroup dynamics have broader epistemic effects, too. They also influence what sources we will consult and rely on and how we will respond when we encounter claims that the outgroup accepts but which the ingroup rejects (or vice versa). We come to have a partisan, pro-revolutionary filter, constituted by partisan differences in our assumptions and background priors, the generalizations and stereotypes we use, the sources of information and testimony that we seek out and rely on, the experts we consult, the informational cues and heuristics we attend to, the concepts we use to process and explain the world, the education we have received and sought out, and even the particular technology we use to learn about the world. Much of this filter is created and shaped by our extended participation in segmented, partisan epistemic communities.

There has been much written recently about "echo chambers."[5] A common way of understanding an echo chamber is as sociological context in which peoples' views are 'echoed back' to them, giving them the impression that their beliefs are correct. Echo chambers, according to Nguyen (2020), also include beliefs that outgroup members are not to be trusted, that evi-

4. Some of this might take the form of what Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke (2020) call "moral grandstanding."

5. See, e.g., Sunstein 2009 and Nguyen 2020.

dence that supports divergent outgroup beliefs is misleading or unreliable, and other mechanisms of "discrediting" outgroup members and the means by which they have come to their differing beliefs. The social identity theory and polarization account offered so far suggests that with revolutionary ingroups, we should expect these more-difficult-to-dislodge echo chambers.

As we become more segmented and ensconced in our echo chambers, it becomes more natural not just to disagree with our opponents and to reject their views, but also to start to see our political opponents as morally bad—not just clueless but villainous. Why else would they embrace this so obviously objectionable position? This makes expressions of doubt about the ingroup's view regarding the proper course of action, or openness to other views about either the need for revolutionary action, the likely results of the proposed course of action, or the moral preferability of that course of action, also tantamount to a kind of moral viciousness.

This is particularly troubling when combined with what we learn from intergroup emotions theory—building on intergroup social identity theory—which has found that "strongly identified group members react with stronger emotions, particularly anger and enthusiasm, to group threats" (Mason 2018, 83). Revolutionary actions are typically framed as high stakes, with action to address the morally objectionable status quo framed as necessary to counter significant, even life-and-death, threats. Framing things in this way makes vilification and high levels of anger and hatred toward the outgroup seem morally important. And it makes ingroup expressions of doubt or arguments that some doubt is appropriate seem treacherous. We should not be surprised, then, when some of the most vicious attacks are reserved for those who are described as "_[name of ingroup]_ in name only."

Every revolution has its Huber Matos. Matos, like Fidel Castro, responded with horror as the despotic and corrupt Fulgencio Batista usurped power in a coup d'état in March 1952. As he put it, "Batista's coup was an insult. . . . I saw it as a situation that required a response" (Matos 2018). Matos joined with Castro and approximately 150 others in storming the Moncada Barracks in July 1953 as an effort to rouse the Cuban public to take power back from Batista and to reestablish democracy. This effort—near suicidal in terms of the numbers involved—was unsuccessful but did spark a larger movement against the Batista government. Matos fought side by side with Castro in the Sierra Maestra in later revolutionary efforts and was awarded the rank of *comandante* by Castro himself. He entered Havana in January 1959 standing next to Castro atop a tank as Castro's rebel army ousted the Batista government. He was as ingroup revolutionary as a person could be. But, as clear eyed and confident as Matos had been that Batista's coup was

a moral outrage, and as confident as he had been that democracy must be restored—using arms if necessary—he had significant doubt about going beyond that. Matos expressed reservations about other directions, in particular the internal movement toward the embrace of Marxism and communism and revolutionary steps in that direction. He could see that Fidel, Fidel's brother Raúl, and Che Guevara were intent on consolidating power around Fidel, embracing Marxism and communism, and eliminating anyone who disagreed with this direction. Matos attempted to quietly resign from his post in the new government in September and again in October of 1959. But, as a core member of the revolutionary ingroup, even this implicit expression of disagreement or dissent was intolerable to Fidel, Che, and Raúl and other ingroup members. The ingroup was not open to discussion, to having the direction of the revolution questioned, to the expression of doubt.[6] Two days after his resignation letter was submitted in private, Fidel publicly branded Matos a traitor, had Matos arrested, and five days later called for a vote at a mass demonstration on whether to have Matos executed. Later, in private, several key leaders in the new government—Manuel Ray, Faustino Pérez, and Felipe Pazos—questioned Fidel's justification for punishing Matos. All three were immediately replaced by men loyal to Fidel and willing to go along with punishing Matos. Che and Raúl were in favor of executing Matos, but Fidel didn't want to make him a martyr. After a five-day show trial, Matos was sentenced to twenty years in prison. He served every day of his sentence, spending sixteen years of that time in solitary confinement. And this was after having served at Fidel's side as an absolutely central member of the revolutionary ingroup. Thousands of Cubans, many sympathetic with the anti-Batista cause but skeptical of turning all power over to the unelected Fidel and to moving toward communism, were not even as fortunate as Matos, and were executed by firing squad in 1959 and 1960.[7]

As revolutionaries become segmented and ensconced in echo chambers, increasingly ideologically pure and ideologically extreme, and as levels of distrust and antipathy toward the outgroup increase—as revolutionaries become more extreme along a number of dimensions—it is unsurprising that it is difficult to hold on to epistemically appropriate levels of doubt, particularly while remaining a part of the revolutionary ingroup.

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6. Armando Valladares recounts Che Guevara as saying, "At the smallest of doubt we must execute" (Bunch 2009).

7. For references and discussion, see the PBS.org article "A Moderate in the Cuban Revolution," https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/castro-huber-matos-moderate-cuban-revolution/.

3.C.

The two explanations offered so far combine in powerful ways. Moral outrage results in certainty that might come to pervade more topics than it ought to, and ingroup/outgroup social psychological and social epistemic dynamics work to insulate views from challenge, questioning, and doubt, and to motivate punishing and eventually ousting ingroup members who express or reveal any doubt. These two explanations seem plausible in many cases of would-be revolutionaries and revolutionary ingroups. But there is a third kind of explanation that might also apply in those cases, or in other cases where those first two explanations seem inapt or inadequate.

This third explanation suggests that—perhaps to overcome anti-revolutionary inertia—those who would act to bring about revolution will be pressured to act as if they have no doubt, even if they have some doubt. They have to pretend to be certain. This might be sufficient to explain why many revolutionaries *seem* certain. It could be something of an act—and remain one throughout the process of revolutionary change and its aftermath. It is also possible that acting as if one is certain—and particularly taking actions that could only be justified if one were certain—eventually leads one to become certain. And whatever the initial revolutionary's situation regarding doubt, those who join her—and witness her performance of certainty—might well take on that certainty, at least in part through the social dynamics discussed above. Indeed, the initial revolutionary might come to be replaced and cast out of the inner ingroup by those without doubt if she continues to harbor and perhaps reveal even her mostly private doubt. In this way, pretense masks, and perhaps eventually erodes and eliminates, doubt.

We can imagine this as a "confidence game" along the lines of a prisoner's dilemma. Imagine two people, Connie and Dowd, each of whom believes, of a particular social problem, that it is an urgent moral problem in need of significant, even revolutionary, action in response. Suppose that there are four main actions that stand out as possible actions in response to the social problem: C, D, E, and F.

Suppose that Connie and Dowd have different views about what ought to be done.

Connie thinks that C is the best option, but has some doubt about that, as she should, given her evidence. Given her evidence, which differs from Dowd's evidence, Connie thinks that D is not a good response, but she thinks that E and F both have some promise, even if not as much as C.

Dowd thinks that D is the way to go, but has some doubt about that, as she should, given her evidence. Given her evidence, which differs from Con-

nie's evidence, Dowd thinks that C is not a good response, but she thinks that E and F both have some promise, even if not as much as D.

If they know of each other's preferred options in response to the problem, and if they are competing to get support for their vision of what ought to be done, get people to rally to their cause, to come out to their protests, and so forth, it is plausible that there will be significant pressure for them not to express their doubt about their own preferred path. So, we can end up with a situation like this:

	Dowd expresses measured view, revealing preference for, but also doubt about, D	**Dowd advocates for D with certainty, not revealing doubt about D**
Connie expresses measured view, revealing preference for, but also doubt about, C	Open sharing of evidence about merits of C and D is more likely Full consideration of C and D, as well as E and F, is more likely Might avoid 'same-side division' and bring C and D supporters to work together	People rally to Dowd and option D Limited discussion of the merits of D or the comparison with C, E, and F
Connie advocates for C with certainty, not revealing doubt about C	People rally to Connie and option C Limited discussion of the merits of C or the comparison with D, E, and F	Same-side division: people with shared views about need for change are sharply divided into ingroups and outgroups, as they stridently adopt conflicting views about what ought to be done Ineffective organizing, with neither C supporters nor D supporters having enough people to bring about successful revolutionary change

A few things to note about this kind of confidence game.

First, for Connie, the best outcome is the one on which people rally to her side and go for option C, and—also important from her current perspective—stay away from option D. And so, too, *mutatis mutandis*, for Dowd; the best outcome from her perspective is the one on which people rally to her side and option D, and leave aside option C.

It is also true that there is a broader perspective, comprehending both of their views—and, in this case, all of our interests (or at least all of those who would benefit from better decisionmaking regarding the question of what revolutionary action, if any, is needed)—from which it is better to land in the upper left box. In that situation, things are much better epistemically, with evidence being shared, reasonable doubt revealed, and better responsiveness to available evidence. Things are also better in terms of potential collective action and coordination, organization and collaboration. This makes a difference epistemically, as a broader group allows for more robust sharing of evidence, trust across disagreement, and cooperation in investigation and

evidence-gathering. And it makes a difference politically and agentially, too, as in almost all political and social contexts the numbers of people behind an idea matter. In this upper left box situation, doubt and openness about doubt helps to prevent same-side division, in which the revolutionary ingroup is sliced thinner and thinner due to sharp, cutting disagreement among people who, to almost everyone else, appear to be almost indistinguishable in their views and interests.

But, unfortunately, it is reasonable to expect that a likely outcome—at least absent some coordination between Connie and Dowd—is that Connie and Dowd will act so that we land in the bottom right box. Each will reasonably worry that if they express some doubt about their preferred option and the other does not express any doubt, this will land them in what is, from their perspective, the worst situation of all. Even though they have some doubt about what ought to be done, it will seem rational to each of them to act as if that is not the case, *particularly* if they do not see that they are in a problem with this structure and if there are no good mechanisms to approach the other—perhaps in private—and to open up about their doubts about their preferred option. In this situation, we are likely to see the sharp ingroup/outgroup division and extremism—even among those who support revolutionary action—split now into pro-C and pro-D ingroups. We see this, too, in the situation in which either Connie or Dowd win out, with the extremism and ingroup standing dividing in that case based on whether one accepts with full confidence the need to act to bring about C or D, respectively.

The conditions of Connie and Dowd in the above example are specified fairly precisely. Variation in their preferred options, their ranking of the options, their confidence in their judgments about those options, and their views about the relative badness of certain revolutionary actions and not acting at all, might all affect exactly how these confidence games play out. Despite this, I think we often see games of this sort leading to fragmentation, inaction, and internal strife that undercuts the possibility of important revolutionary action. (These games are played with ordinary political action, too.)

Notice, too, that all that is required is that a would-be revolutionary *believes* that her situation might be something like this. She won't typically know exactly where everyone is with all of their own views and preferences and doubts. And so it might seem the best course of action to act as if she has no doubt, to not make a lot of room in the revolutionary ingroup for those who do express some significant doubt, and so on—even if she only believes there is a small chance she might be in this kind of confidence game situation. Over time, given the psychological mechanisms discussed in the

previous sections, acting certain in this way might well result in her losing even her private doubt about the revolutionary course of action she favors.[8]

4.

The above factors are present and powerful even when one should, epistemically speaking, have some significant doubt about what will follow from revolutionary action and whether it will be morally preferable to alternative actions or even to the status quo. Pointing to the evidence in favor of having some doubt is a quick route to being viewed by the ingroup as inadequately confident in one's judgment that the status quo is morally objectionable, to being cast out of the ingroup, and to losing the confidence game in the face of other would-be revolutionaries stridently pounding the table while calling for the revolution.

These pressures generate one kind of worry: would-be revolutionaries will do poorly in an individual epistemic sense. They will not have enough doubt—they will be too certain—in the epistemic sense, and also likely in the psychological sense as well. They will violate both DAR and DAMP. But how well a particular revolutionary individual manages their epistemic life regarding these few claims isn't keeping anyone up at night. What should worry us is what is downstream.

The first downstream worry is how this kind of inappropriate certainty will affect the epistemic practices of the revolutionary ingroup. Rejecting revolutionary doubt will be seen as a litmus test for other potential sources of testimony and other kinds of evidence, so that the revolutionary ingroup ignores or discounts any testimony or other evidence that questions or opposes the proposed revolutionary changes. This includes, as discussed above, evidence relating to the need for revolution or the moral preferability of this

8. I'm inclined to tell a similar story in response to the suggestion that would-be revolutionaries should use sophisticated expected value calculations in order to decide which of the actions available to them they ought to perform. Although it might be useful to engage in expected value reflection, I worry that the same pressures will distort the enterprise. One worry is that it can become simply another route to becoming too certain. If, for example, Connie comes to believe that option C is the correct one because of an expected value calculation, that might, over time, also put pressure on how she updates about which state is actually emerging, how she updates her judgment of the likelihoods of these outcomes and their value based on new evidence, and how she responds to epistemically reasonable disagreement about judgments regarding the likelihoods of various states of affairs and the moral assessment of the value of those states of affairs. Also, there is something worrying about the way in which the fake mathematical precision of calculations of this sort can suggest more certainty than is appropriate regarding the choice of the EV winner, given how little evidence we have to support our judgments about what states of affairs are likely to obtain and what value those states will have. Most of the reasons in support of DAR and DAMP equally well support Doubt About Expected Value Assessments.

revolutionary change. But it also affects, crucially, the potential to obtain relevant evidence concerning the full moral costs of the revolution and, once it is underway, evidence concerning how the revolution is going, how it is affecting people's lives, what results are actually attending the revolutionary changes. There will have already been pressure to create an ingroup that will operate, effectively, as an echo chamber. Testimony or other evidence that goes contrary to the revolutionary action or that suggests that the revolution is not having the desired effects will be ignored, suppressed, and even punished. Those who would offer such testimony will be vilified and branded dangerous counter-revolutionaries, or shills for the pre-revolutionary regime, even when, as in the case of Huber Matos, those individuals might have been just as adamant and certain regarding the moral necessity of acting to change the status quo. Versions of this dark story have been told by Arthur Koestler in *Darkness at Noon*, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*, and by many others documenting the revolutions of the twentieth century. It has emerged anew as radical, would-be revolutionaries on the right and left embrace extremist views; become further ensconced in echo chambers and a media landscape that plays to their fears and worldviews; offer revisionist histories regarding communism, Marxism, fascism, racism, slavery, and genocide; and become increasingly open to seeing those who oppose them as not just wrong but evil, treacherous, and having forfeited their moral rights not to be violently forced out of the way or forced to go along with the revolution if necessary.

The second downstream worry is how this unwarranted certainty—both of individual revolutionaries and of revolutionary ingroups—will translate into action. Consider a revolutionary who holds on to some doubt about the particular course of action and who remains open to listening to dissenting voices, who continues to consider evidence that suggests things aren't going as hoped or expected, who is open to the possibility that their view of the moral preferability of this revolutionary path is incorrect or incomplete, and who understands that there may be legitimate grounds for both doubt and even belief that alternative paths would be better. Call such a person an *open* revolutionary.

Contrast an open revolutionary with a revolutionary who is certain that the revolutionary course of action they prefer is the correct one, who condemns and vilifies those who ask questions or express dissenting views (whether ingroup revolutionary comrades or not), and who ignores or dismisses as deceptive propaganda any evidence that would challenge their view of either the results of revolutionary action or the moral preferability of that action. Call such a person a *closed* revolutionary.

An empirical conjecture: closed revolutionaries and groups composed of closed revolutionaries will be considerably more likely than open revolutionaries and groups composed of open revolutionaries (a) to engage in morally bad and morally disastrous revolutionary actions, and (b) to engage in impermissible violations of individual moral rights in conducting their revolutions while laboring under the false belief that these violations are morally permissible and even morally obligatory.

One reason to think this is that, for the reasons discussed above, we should expect that closed revolutionaries will do poorly over time from an epistemic vantage point, as they fail to gather evidence appropriately and to update on the evidence they encounter. Given that moral facts about which actions are optimal and preferable are sensitive to non-moral facts, these epistemic failures are likely to translate into moral failures as closed revolutionaries act based on their warped epistemic perspectives. A second reason to expect closed revolutionaries will do poorly is that they will be prone to disregard the moral costs of revolution if those costs fall on those who they perceive to be outgroup members and opponents of their morally justified cause. A third reason is that it is plausible that what actions people are willing to take is sensitive to their confidence in propositions that are relevant to the moral status of the actions they are contemplating. If one is sure that one is right, both about the likely effects of revolutionary action and about the moral imperatives relating to bringing about that revolution, one is more likely to be willing to kill or punish other human beings who one perceives to be standing in the way.[9]

These two downstream worries also help to explain what might otherwise be puzzling: why do so many revolutionary movements start off with humanitarian, egalitarian, democratic ideals and yet end up being implemented in morally horrifying, hierarchical, antidemocratic ways, with authoritarian leaders, repressive surveillance states, and unimaginable body counts constituting their most significant legacy? One sees this in the grave moral miscalculations revolutionaries make regarding whether the ends justify the means as well as whether this particular—violent, murderous, oppressive, anti-democratic—means is even required to achieve (or even a route to) the desired end. But one also sees it, more modestly, in the way that even many small-R revolutionaries argue and advocate for their cause,

9. Note that this point is separate from, although potentially relevant to, debates about moral and pragmatic encroachment, that consider the question whether the moral stakes of contemplated action might affect, for example, whether one *knows* or is *justified in believing* propositions relevant to the permissibility of that action. Here I am only making the empirical conjecture that people in fact are more willing to do morally serious things—kill, harm, punish, ostracize—if their beliefs that those things are necessary are more certain.

the way they mock and sneer at those who don't see things the way they do, and the way they might support leaders and political parties who even they acknowledge (at least at first) are awful on other significant things because they share their view regarding their small-R revolutionary cause.

A different explanation might point to the bad initial ideas behind revolutions—and some of these ideas have been bad, or at least significantly underdeveloped. But that can't be the complete answer, since that doesn't answer the question: why weren't the proposals or ideas abandoned in favor of better ideas, or reformed or revised to improve them, once evidence of their badness or inadequacy started to emerge? The story I've told does help provide an answer: evidence or testimony that would have revealed these problems or inadequacies was ignored, suppressed, or attributed to disinformation campaigns on the part of enemies to the cause.

So, too, with a second alternative explanation, which is to point to the (initially hidden) bad character of those people behind these revolutions. This suggestion maintains that, contrary to their early public commitments and values, these revolutionary leaders actually were immoral, megalomaniacal individuals who cared only about power. But this answer is unsatisfying in two ways. First, it doesn't explain *why* so many prominent revolutionaries were actually megalomaniacal villains. Second, and more significantly, why would it be that so many people followed those leaders down these paths? The story I've told so far helps to explain this. It might well be that people didn't start out as what figures like Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Maximilien Robespierre, and many others would become. They may have started with morally attractive ambitions but, through the mechanisms described above, have been eventually contorted into people who would be comfortable executing thousands and millions of people without trials or justification, who would be so convinced of their correctness that disagreement could reasonably be punished by death, who would put millions in prison, force them to relocate, and so on.[10]

Of course, much revolutionary action has not ended up looking so bad. Many revolutions have even been very good. One possibility is that some revolutionaries were just morally lucky: their cause or their methods happened to be ones which—even when taken to extremes or pursued in an echo chamber by closed revolutionaries—did not result in moral horror. It could have been otherwise, but, as it turned out, they were lucky to be on the right

10. It is also possible, although depressing, that we might be drawn to follow certain "strong" or "charismatic" types, just because of their strength or charisma, and regardless of their moral vision—although even there "strength" and "charisma" strike me more as placeholders than anything, and both might be related in significant ways to psychological confidence and the absence of expressions of doubt.

side of history. But as would-be revolutionaries ourselves, we might want to have something more than just the hope that we will be lucky.

That brings us to a second possible explanation for these morally successful revolutions: there might be some tactics or practices—perhaps actually implemented by some morally successful revolutionaries before us—that help to nourish and sustain revolutionary doubt; that help to maintain appropriate evidential responsiveness over time; that help sustain trust and appropriate engagement with testimony even across lines of disagreement; that help put the brakes on revolutionary action in contexts in which the available evidence regarding potential results and the moral preferability of that action doesn't (yet) support that action; and that do all this without thereby imperiling revolutionary action through uncertainty and attendant paralysis. These are worth thinking about more explicitly.

5.

So, you want to start a revolution, but in a good way. There are steps that are epistemically important—perhaps for everyone, but particularly for those of us interested in revolutionary action.[11] And even after one's epistemic house is somewhat more in order, there are important moral questions about how to proceed.

5.A.

Epistemically, two sets of practices seem essential: (1) those that help to combat the complex revolutionary ingroup social epistemic dynamics discussed above and (2) those that acknowledge but also attempt to reduce the doubt that it is appropriate to have about both the likely results of revolutionary action and the moral preferability of that action (by obtaining more evidence). It is important to introduce and instill the practices and norms in (1) before attempting to move forward with efforts relating to (2), so that efforts to reduce doubt are done in epistemically appropriate ways, rather than through the many troubling roads to reducing or eliminating doubt discussed earlier.

Although specific contextual details might alter exactly what form these practices should take, a variety of rules (norms, guidelines, standards) might help destabilize and weaken the epistemically troubling pressures that can otherwise form within ingroups, particularly ingroups comprised of people who share a revolutionary moral vision.

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11. Much of what I say applies to political actors and policy ideas that are not "revolutionary" under any description. The concerns are intensified as the proposed changes become more significant and dramatic and the evidence in support of them becomes weaker and more speculative, but they are present in much political life.

Begin with what is perhaps the most important:

Suggestion #1: inculcate respect of members of the outgroup as a core ingroup norm

Every group has its own internal norms and expectations for members of the group—who we are, what do we stand for, what do we expect of each other. There are pressures to create sharp divisions between the ingroup and the outgroup and to see distrust, punishment, vilification, and even suffering of members of the outgroup as untroubling or even desirable and appropriate. But if a group has an explicit internal group commitment to respect, even and perhaps especially for those who are or are perceived to be members of the outgroup, that can make a significant difference to the intensity of the documented social psychological effects of ingroup/outgroup division (Mason 2018, 132).

Respect of a person requires, at least, that they not be seen as morally insignificant, that costs to them are treated as real costs, that they are treated as genuine epistemic agents who merit at least attempts at engagement and who can be sources of knowledge about at least some topics, and that general moral constraints apply to them as they do to other persons. Respect of persons is in principle distinct from "tolerance" of their views, although in practice it might require similar things in terms of enabling people to have a say, engaging with members of the outgroup who are attempting to engage in good faith discussion and debate, and providing the same freedom of speech protections for outgroup members as for ingroup members. This is often easier said than done, as these social psychological pressures push against this kind of norm. The suggestion that respect for others is generally a good thing, but *these* people are beyond the pale, someone with *these* views doesn't merit respect, is tempting as a way for ingroup members to show their revolutionary bona fides. What is needed is for the commitment to respect of all persons—and a relatively thick notion of respect—to be such a core part of the ingroup identity that one cannot easily remain part of the ingroup while flouting or derogating it.

Strikingly, many successful and morally attractive non-violent revolutionary movements seem to embrace this suggestion, as they rely on seeing outgroup opponents as people who can be engaged, who have moral values that can be appealed to and contested, and who are (at least on some level) persons worthy of at least enough respect to make that engagement appropriate.

This suggestion focuses on norms that a revolutionary ingroup should adopt. But we might worry that ingroup/outgroup dynamics are powerful enough to block or contort our adoption of these norms, so that even if we

endorse them in theory, we will find some reason that they don't apply in our own case ("*our* outgroup opponents are particularly awful and unreasonable"). This provides a reason to embrace a different kind of suggestion, one more focused on what we do and with whom we do it, rather than anything more abstract:

> Suggestion #2: encourage, cultivate, and maintain relationships with outgroup members

This is importantly different than the recommendation just to engage with or have "contact" with outgroup sources, ideas, or media. As a person on the left, simply watching Fox News on a regular basis to "see how the other side thinks" is likely to make you enraged and more intense in your feelings of dislike, distrust, and disrespect. So, "contact" has to take a different form.

The suggestion from the work of Diana Mutz (2006) and others in the general political context is that to hear and have respect for people on the other side, it is essential to engage in "cross-cutting discussion" with "mixed political company," but to do so with people with whom one has some mid-level social connection, rather than close friends or family. One needs to have these discussions and disagreements with people one knows and is friendly with, but through "weak social ties": co-workers, people with whom one plays the occasional game of pick-up basketball, neighbors with whom one has semi-regular conversations, and so on. One concern in many places is that we have become so socially segmented that these relationships are difficult to come by.

What is true of political disagreement is likely also true of revolutionary disagreement. By having ties with people who are not revolutionary ingroup members, we continue to see even those who disagree with us about the need for revolutionary action as people with interests, epistemic agency, and moral rights. We should be wary of, and troubled by, revolutionary ingroups who look with suspicion on ingroup members who maintain social ties with non-revolutionaries or even people on the opposite side.

The suggestions discussed so far are aimed at weakening the intensity of the "closing down" psychological effects of group social dynamics. But we can also take more explicit steps and embrace more explicit epistemic practices and norms. Consider:

> Suggestion #3: introduce epistemic practices—such as red-teaming or alternative analysis and anonymous pre-discussion registering of views—that discourage groupthink and enable open discussion and disagreement to flourish

There are common difficulties across many social epistemic contexts: classrooms, corporate boardrooms, town hall meetings, jury rooms, newsrooms, revolutionary strategy meetings. These include social pressure to agree with those with power, pressure to be agreeable and get along with others, anxiety about looking foolish or immoral, and, as discussed above, pressure to remain within the ingroup and to make evident the intensity of one's ingroup bona fides and to 'out ingroup' even other ingroup members. These can result in groupthink, extremism, and contribute to the creation and continuation of echo chambers.

There are practices that can help lessen these effects. Consider practices such as red-teaming, alternative analysis, or devil's advocacy, in which some members of a group are explicitly tasked with raising objections, questions, counterarguments, and generally trying to poke holes in and challenge the group view or plan. In some cases, all members of the group know who has been assigned this role; in other cases, only those who have been given this assignment know. In either case, these practices create space for dissenting voices and counterarguments to be offered and for hard questions to be raised without thereby encouraging the inference that those making those arguments or raising those questions are less committed to the group cause or are being unfriendly, contrarian, or unsupportive. These are common practice in newsrooms, where some people will be tasked with attempting to poke holes in a major story before it runs. They are also common in military strategy exercises, where some are charged with thinking about how the enemy will respond, how decisions will affect and be responded to by civilians and the broader world community, and how one set of choices will limit or give rise to new problems and choices.

Similarly, requiring members of the group to write down their view, reasoning, or position on some topic prior to group discussion, and then sharing those pre-written contributions with the group, enables the group to avoid troubling anchoring and groupthink dynamics, information cascades (where those with counterevidence suppress it simply to avoid getting in the way of what looks to be a broadly supported option or idea), and other pathological elements of deliberation that can arise due to contingent path dependence of how ideas are presented and discussed and non-anonymity in who is presenting and discussing the ideas.

More generally, although some deliberative groups—faculty departments, revolutionary organizations—might be tempted by rules that require consensus agreement before acting, these rules actually force artificial conformity, suppress dissent and presentation of counterevidence, amplify the effects of hierarchical relations and demands for ideological purity, and re-

quire the group to act more certain than they are or ought to be, given their epistemic position. This will be intensified in cases in which there are powerful and agreed upon moral reasons to think inaction—simply keeping on with the status quo—is unacceptable. And that will often be the situation in contexts of would-be revolutionary groups. Learning how to move forward as a group, even in the face of internal disagreement, is essential. This provides some reason to embrace:

> Suggestion #4: treat ingroup consensus agreement and decision-making as inherently undesirable and suspicious

In almost all cases of considering a complex decision such as what revolutionary action to take, the evidence will be complicated and might suggest different paths as optimal. We should expect disagreement and also that disagreement might persist even after open sharing of evidence and argument. Given that, consensus group judgments—particularly as the group grows in size—provide some evidence that worrying social dynamics are driving the result.

5.B.

The foregoing suggestions have focused on protecting epistemically appropriate revolutionary doubt given social psychological dynamics and ingroup/outgroup divisions. If we are doing well in this regard (perhaps by also embracing other openness-preserving rules), we have a better chance to be open revolutionaries and to have epistemically appropriate doubt. But this might seem to leave us in a different kind of trouble: a place of doubt-ridden paralysis and inaction. We know we should have some doubt, and indeed we do have that doubt, but that might seem to make many kinds of substantial, significant revolutionary actions seem inappropriate. We don't want to let our appropriate revolutionary doubt turn into an entrenched status quo bias. This suggests two further steps are needed. The first is to think about how to reduce our doubt. The second is to think about how, morally speaking, we ought to act in light of our doubt.

Doubt regarding what will result if revolutionary action is taken and doubt regarding the moral preferability of some particular course of revolutionary action is, as argued above, in large part epistemically appropriate simply because we have only limited evidence about what will happen in the future. This lack of evidence is amplified in cases involving revolutionary actions, cases in which the actions we are contemplating are both broad in likely causal effects and significantly unprecedented. This suggests two natural responses. The first is to start small, so that the complexity of the changes introduced and the attendant complexity of the effects of those changes are

at least somewhat more limited. The second is to make it so the revolutionary actions, when they are taken, are less unprecedented, by creating and observing various smaller-scale precedents. Both suggestions motivate the use of small-scale "experiments" in the direction of revolutionary change prior to broader revolutionary action.

> Suggestion #5: start with relatively small experimental actions in the direction of one's revolutionary cause, observe and gather relevant evidence, and gradually scale up.

The overlap between would-be revolutionaries and people drawn to careful, small-scale experimentation and observation is . . . not total. Given the perceived moral urgency of revolutionary action, it can be difficult to move slowly and cautiously. Perhaps this is the revolutionary moment, and one doesn't have time to wait. It might not always be easy or even possible to start with small scale experimentation. But it often will be.

In some cases, there will already be similar examples in the world that one can learn from. Perhaps there is a comparable minimum "living wage" in some other jurisdiction and one can draw on that social scientific work that has been done to study the effects of that change. But it is a problem with many proposed revolutionary changes that there is no precedent, no closely analogous example, of the proposed change. In those cases, to generate relevant evidence, one must do something closer to what is done when medical researchers are studying some new proposed intervention, course of treatment, vaccine, medicine, and so on. One must conduct something like observational studies or controlled experiments.

There is a lot known about how to do these well in other contexts; much less has been said about how to do them in the political context. People have suggested that subunits of large political federations can serve as "laboratories" in which to try novel social and economic experiments and, to the extent allowed by the larger federation, political experiments as well. Famously, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis suggested that "a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country" (*New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann*, 1932, 285). In a more metaphorical sense, John Dewey (1927) and others have been attracted to democratic ideas in part because democracy allows for ongoing experimentation, gathering feedback, and responding in light of that feedback over time. These are not as careful as the controlled experiments one sees in scientific and medical fields; nor are they likely to emerge to test revolutionary ideas—at least not initially.

For would-be revolutionaries, there should be explicit discussion about what evidence already exists regarding their revolutionary ideas and how to test those ideas to improve the evidence base with which they are working. This requires several things. First, there must be people serving as institutional designers, conceptual engineers, norm architects, legislative drafters, and so on, who have concrete suggestions regarding different ways of implementing revolutionary ideas, which often begin rather underspecified. Second, there must be a context in which experimentation can take place and the specified changes can be introduced. Third, the experiment must be allowed to continue for an adequate (experimentally appropriate) amount of time. Fourth, there must be observation, study, and discussion of the results of the introduced changes, ideally conducted by people trained in relevant qualitative and quantitative methods. Fifth, there must be discussion and consideration of the limits of the experimental study, including questions regarding the external validity of the experiment as one considers expanding the changes to larger and larger contexts.

There are potential epistemic and moral pitfalls throughout almost every step of this process. And that's even after we acknowledge that there might be some revolutionary changes which simply don't have a 'small scale' analogue, or which simply can't be tested in this way.

Perhaps most significantly, there is a question of who will sign up to be part of the experiment, whether it will be possible to obtain informed consent in the way that we would expect and require in the context of medical experimentation, and how the possibly self-selected nature of those taking part in the experiment will affect the external validity of the study. One of the many troubling things about many revolutionary experiments of the twentieth century was that many were forced to be a part of them without their consent and faced serious consequences if they attempted to opt out (recall Huber Matos). If one starts small, this makes it easier to have people who are willing to take part. But it might also mean that those who take part are different than the broader society, at least in terms of being excited about this potential revolutionary change. That might affect the ability to learn about how things would go under other conditions. Still, if an experiment does poorly even under those conditions, that provides strong reason to reject the idea.

The smaller scale and limited duration of these experiments mean there will be questions about how they will scale up and what effects they might have in the longer term. The evidence available through experiments of this sort will be suggestive but limited. This provides reason to continue to monitor and evaluate things over time, just as in the case of medical interventions. As in the context of social science research more generally, it can be hard to

isolate and test the effects of a particular social or political change, and it can be particularly to do this while considering how those results might differ under somewhat different conditions. There are methods for attempting to do this, but they are imperfect and limited. The point is not that doubt will be fully eliminable, only that it might be possible to reduce it, at least modestly.

There are worries about whether those evaluating the results of the experiments will be biased in favor of seeing them as supporting their revolutionary idea. These worries arise with medical and scientific research, too, as individual researchers often have financial and professional incentives to find positive results. One way of addressing this worry is through having independent researchers, disclosures of funding, and elaborate systems of peer-review. Something similar might be possible in the context of revolutionary experimentation as well, perhaps relying on the existence of networks of social science researchers and others who might be well placed to help observe and discuss the results of these experiments in epistemically responsible ways.

The point in starting small and conducting experiments of this kind is not to eliminate doubt or ensure good results even at the much larger scale. That won't be possible; there will always be limitations and complications. But we can significantly improve our epistemic position regarding the likely results of some proposed course of revolutionary action, as well as the moral attractiveness of that action, even if certainty remains out of reach.

5.C.

Revolutionary action is often morally urgent. Even more often, it is perceived by would-be revolutionaries to be morally urgent. This fact, in combination with the aforementioned social dynamics, can lead to moral mistakes, even moral horrors. Some of those are borne of epistemic mistakes about non-moral matters. What will actually transpire if we implement this economic system? Others are more closely tied to epistemic mistakes about moral questions. Do these ends justify these means? Are these means necessary? Are these actions against counterrevolutionaries necessary, appropriately proportionate, compatible with respect for their moral rights? Can we—are we morally permitted to—just force these people to go along with our revolutionary cause?

It isn't possible to offer a full theory of the moral permissibility of revolutionary action here, providing answers to these general moral questions. I do want to draw attention to three central moral questions for would-be revolutionaries and to highlight potential pitfalls that arise in considering those questions in the absence of epistemically appropriate doubt.

For many actions that we might consider taking, we should not take those actions if we have some significant doubt about whether "blockers" to those actions obtain (Guerrero 2007). A blocker to an action is a state of affairs such that, if it obtained, the action would be morally impermissible. Consider, for example, a person charged with demolishing an apartment building in order to allow for the construction of a new building in its place. A blocker for that contemplated act of demolition is the state of affairs in which there is a human being or other creature with significant moral status still in the building. Would-be revolutionaries, like anyone contemplating any action, have a moral obligation to consider, in an epistemically appropriate, careful way, what blockers to their action might obtain, and also to investigate, in an epistemically appropriate, careful way, whether those blockers do in fact obtain. Revolutionaries should ask, initially and continually:

> Moral Question 1: What are the blockers for this revolutionary action? Do they obtain?

This provides one moral reason to engage in the small-scale experimentation: to gather evidence to become reasonably certain that blockers to the revolutionary action do not obtain and to identify blockers that might not have been known or anticipated in advance. This also draws attention to the *moral* importance of taking steps to address the potentially distorting social psychological factors that might affect our assessment of what blockers for our actions there are and whether those blockers obtain.

For would-be revolutionaries, there are strategic questions regarding the necessary steps for them to bring about the revolution they hope to see. This often requires revolutionaries to think strategically about how to deal with those who are not currently part of the revolutionary ingroup—how might they be convinced, bypassed, coerced, nudged, manipulated, and so on. But there are also important moral questions here. Like officials acting through more established political systems, would-be revolutionaries seem to be among those most tempted by the thought that they are morally permitted to use violence or other forms of physical and psychological coercion—typically morally off limits—because of their legitimate positions of power, the moral urgency of their cause, or both. But, as in the more familiar case of political action, there are significant moral questions regarding the use of violence and coercive means. To make those more explicit, would-be revolutionaries should ask:

> Moral Question 2: How may I treat those who are not yet on-board with the revolution?

This question focuses our attention on one subset of common blockers for revolutionary actions. Revolutionary actions tend to have effects that sprawl beyond the people leading the charge. The answer to this question depends on several factors, including the moral necessity of the revolutionary action, what is needed from those not on-board with the revolution for the action to be successful, and, crucially, what might be required to get those who are not on board with the revolution to be on board. This last is particularly important in contexts in which there are robust political freedoms and democratic rights, and potentially significant moral costs to bypassing or undermining those freedoms and rights on the way to revolutionary change.

Another reason, then, to build ties and respect for outgroup members is the need to communicate with them, to understand them, and, in many cases, to engage them as co-citizens. So, too, with the need to start small scale and gather evidence. Both are important for bringing along skeptical outsiders and for getting *informed* agreement to the revolutionary change from the broader community. There might be some uncertainty about exactly what steps they will follow, but those who would make significant changes that would dramatically affect others have an obligation to consider those effects, and, in cases where it is possible, to bring people along through their agency and agreement.[12]

Some would-be revolutionaries might be impatient and uninterested in taking the time to transmute their revolutionary cause to a broadly embraced political platform. But there are moral constraints in how we may treat others. These apply to revolutionaries, too. This doesn't always require working through the extant political system; the revolution, of course, might concern the operation of that system. But in contexts in which there is an opportunity to engage and convince rather than just to dominate and coerce, to have the changes be broadly embraced, not just violently or coercively imposed, there are moral (and not just pragmatic) reasons to do this. These reasons stem from moral principles concerning respect for individual rights of freedom and agency, moral prohibitions against bodily harm, moral prohibitions on the use of violence or coercive threats except when absolutely morally necessary and then only in a way that observes strict requirements of proportionality, and foundational considerations of respect for others. We can formulate these as principles that apply to revolutionary actors, but they have more general foundations. Consider, for example:

> Equal Respect: a revolutionary group is morally required to operate in a way that is compatible with, and indeed expresses and constitutes, a foundational commitment to the fundamental respect owed equally to

12. Lakey (1976) formulates strategies of non-violent revolutionary change that embody a similar commitment.

> all people, and in particular to all those affected by the revolutionary group's actions, so that they do not effectively dominate others.
>
> Respect for Individual Rights: a revolutionary group is morally required to avoid and minimize infringement of individual rights regarding life, bodily integrity, physical liberty, movement, speech, association, and thought.

A more particular moral question arises in some revolutionary contexts, where there are also people who are aware of the revolutionary suggestions and are actively opposed to them. In those cases, would-be revolutionaries must consider:

> Moral Question 3: how may I treat those who actively oppose the revolution?

Again, cases will differ significantly depending on the moral significance of the revolutionary action, the moral grounds of the opposition, and much else, but importantly there are significant moral constraints, embodied in the principles above, but also more specifically in principles like:

> Moral Constraints on the Use of Violence and Self-Defense: a revolutionary group is morally permitted to use violence only if doing so is necessary as a means of justifiable self-defense (requiring consideration of other moral principles relating to self-defense, including respecting requirements of necessity and proportionality).

Defending and explaining this principle or principles like it (what is "self-defense," etc.) is a project for a different paper. It's worth noting, however, that although this is a non-consequentialist principle, it is plausible that even consequentialists should also embrace a principle like this—at least as a rule of thumb the acceptance of which will bring about better results than accepting a principle on which one is permitted to use violence if doing so will bring about better results.

One of the central dangers of revolutionaries losing epistemically appropriate doubt is that they may judge far more as necessary and proportionate and may far too readily see using violence or intentionally inflicting harm as morally appropriate—misapplying moral principles of this kind, even when they accept them. That is true even for those who accept a non-consequentialist principle like this one. But these worries are heightened if revolutionaries embrace consequentialist—ends justify the means—kinds of principles, particularly regarding the use of violence.

6.

Through embracing the suggestions and observing the moral constraints above, would-be revolutionaries are more likely to remain open revolutionaries, to protect epistemically appropriate doubt, to be able to reduce that doubt as much as possible, and to act in morally appropriate ways, even given the doubt that remains.

Here's a lingering worry: keeping doubt alive might seem to imperil revolutionary action, resulting in paralysis borne of reasonable doubt. Our doubt makes it so that we don't *know* what the results of revolution will be, we don't *know* that the revolutionary action will be morally preferable to the status quo or to alternative actions we might take. If we need to know these things in order to justifiably take the revolutionary action,[13] it might seem that we won't ever, or only very rarely, be able to justifiably take revolutionary actions. Two points in response.

First, perhaps it is enough *that it is significantly probable* that the results of the revolution will be X, Y, and Z, and, if they are, then the revolutionary action will be morally preferable. This could be interpreted either in terms of epistemic or subjective probabilities (that it is significantly probable, given our subjective evidential vantage point, or given a somewhat idealized subjective evidential vantage point) or in a less subjective, non-agent-relativized sense of physical or objective probabilities. If that is right, it provides further explanation of the importance of gathering evidence, conducting small scale experiments to investigate further, remaining open in various ways, and so on. All of these are likely to help get us above the threshold or help us to realize that the probability is above the relevant threshold. We might then come to know that it is significantly probable that the results of the revolution will be X, Y, and Z, and use this knowledge as our basis for action.

Second, there are cases in which doing nothing may have grave moral consequences. In those cases, when the status quo has high expected moral disvalue, that alters the calculation concerning revolutionary (or any kind of) action, affecting how confident a person has to be—how 'significant' the probability has to be—about the likely outcomes of revolutionary action before it is morally permissible to proceed. All the notes of caution still apply regarding the dangers of conducting these calculations as closed revolutionary extremists in echo chambers, but genuinely open revolutionaries can and should factor in whether action now is essential or whether there is time for more investigation and broader outgroup engagement.

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13. For suggestions that connect knowledge and action in this way, see, for example, Hawthorne and Stanley (2008, 578), who suggest that "Where one's choice is p-dependent, it is appropriate to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting iff you know that p."

7.

Revolutionary action always faces significant obstacles. Those who are responsible for causing and maintaining a morally objectionable situation that might make revolution necessary often actively and even forcibly resist change. Insulation, something like radicalism or extremism, and a 'closing ranks' mentality might seem both necessary and natural in response. Anger at those who resist or object might seem and even be appropriate. Years of inconsequential struggle might make escalation seem justified. And it might be.

The challenging thought—and the thought I have tried to defend in this paper—is that revolutionaries should be open revolutionaries, even when this is socially and psychologically difficult (as it almost always will be). They should be open revolutionaries for epistemic reasons, but also for moral ones. And there are compelling reasons to think that long term revolutionary success requires this openness. Open revolutionaries are more likely than closed revolutionaries to bring about morally better results, results that will be stable and embraced by many, results that will help to weaken and alter the us vs. them dynamics that undermine meaningful community and lasting moral progress. It is not easy to be a revolutionary with doubt, but it is often the only way to be truly revolutionary.

Although they go beyond these ideas, the following lines from the remarkable Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai capture something of their spirit:

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

—Yehuda Amichai

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