

(<https://spectrejournal.com>)

# Reason is Red

---

## WHY MARXISM NEEDS PHILOSOPHY

**LONDON FRIM AND HARRISON FLUSS**  
**([HTTPS://SPECTREJOURNAL.COM/AUTHOR/FRIMFLUSS/](https://spectrejournal.com/author/frimfluss/))**

August 29, 2022

Landon Frim and Harrison Fluss's following article, "Reason is Red: Why Marxism Needs Philosophy" is a response to Aaron Jaffe's, "Marxism, Spinoza, and the 'Radical' Enlightenment," published as a provocation in the print edition of *Spectre*, issue 5. We encourage *Spectre* readers to read Jaffe's piece as well, which is accessible [here](#).

---

*No coarser insult, no baser aspersion, can be thrown against the workers than the remark: Theoretic controversies are only for academicians.*

—Rosa Luxemburg

In the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow, the Buddha tells of a man wounded by “an arrow thickly smeared with poison.”<sup>1</sup> His friends call a surgeon to remove the projectile, but the man protests. He will not have the object removed until he knows a great many things: the shape of the arrowhead, the type of bow, the name of the man who shot him, the name of his clan, and so on. But the Buddha comments on these requests for knowledge with apparently sage advice: “All this would *still* not be known to that man and meanwhile he would die.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, absolute certainty is impossible. The practical tasks ahead of us are urgent and clear enough. We have to get on with removing the poisoned arrow.

This is how many on the Left think about politics and political *philosophy* today. We can't be hamstrung by totalizing theories that get in the way of concrete struggle. There is too much at stake, and in any case, absolute certainty about the big questions is impossible. Best to proceed with removing the poison and leave the rationalist philosophers to their dusty books and abstract deductions.

But this ideology of “strugglism” raises the question: What kind of struggle is worth our efforts? What goals should we aim for? Whom should we build solidarity with, and why? A typical response is that all of this is just obvious. We care for and defend the oppressed, the exploited, and the marginalized. And besides, you can't know who to fight for, or why, until you're in the midst of an active, timely struggle. There are no set recipes for

activism and no master-keys unlocking all revolutionary potentials.

Our objection to this way of thinking is simple. It's not that activism is of second-rate import. It's that something as important as intervening in the world, and affecting people's lives, requires sound justification. If we are committed to "the idea" of communism, then we're also committed to its practical realization and all of the real-world consequences that this entails. Being serious about ideas means confronting their flesh-and-blood impacts when they come to fruition. Intellectual maturity, then, demands an accounting of our political ideals. We have to care that we are right and that our enemies are wrong. And this means something more than being on the "right side" of a particular issue; it means knowing that your politics are grounded in an accurate conception of reality and of what is objectively good for human beings. Otherwise, every political

thought-piece we pen, every protest we support, every party meeting we attend, is just an example of playing with other people's lives and futures. The Truth matters.

Everyone thinks they can get "the truth" from the daily news. Just look around, and it should be obvious that our world is plagued by poverty, war, and violence. On this, the socialist, the liberal, and even the reactionary can agree. But most people who open a newspaper are not magically transformed into Marxists. Why? It's because, contrary to the American idiom, the facts *don't* speak for themselves.

More than just a daily stream of facts, we need a systematic and total appreciation of our condition. We need to know why we are acting and for what ends. And for this, we need an adequate conception of human flourishing, human nature, and the nature of the world in which we are acting; in short, we need philosophy.

Typically, Marxist polemics shy away from laying all their cards on the table. It is much safer, and appears much more sophisticated, to merely offer negative criticisms (even ruthless criticisms) of political opponents. However, if we are to be confident in our politics, it is imperative that we are also confident in the theoretical outlook that underlies them. In this, we disdain to conceal our views: Marxism not only requires philosophy in general, but demands a specific kind of philosophy. It demands monism, the idea that the entire universe is an intelligible Whole.

“

*I can't understand my own identity without realizing my substantial identity with others.*

## MONISM AS THE BASIS FOR SOLIDARITY

How does monism support a Marxist politics? In the first place, Marxism is about the international solidarity of the working class. And the working class is affirmed, not on identitarian or "workerist" grounds, as though it was just one identity among countless others. Instead, the working class is unique because it represents the *universal* interests of humanity. In its struggle against capitalist exploitation, the proletariat have the historical mission of abolishing class society, and inaugurating a new world based on common material interests and flourishing.

In a monistic universe, there are no permanently discrete parts, but instead everything is a modification of Nature. As such, each individual thing—and each individual person—can only be understood through this substantial unity. I cannot form an adequate idea about myself without, at the same time, understanding my place in the world. <sup>3</sup> And therefore, I can't understand my own identity without realizing my substantial identity with others. Universal solidarity, the unity of all peoples, regardless of particular cultures or geographies, is built upon this more fundamental, *and metaphysical*, unity. <sup>4</sup>

Monism supports universal solidarity in yet another way: Nature is in a state of constant change, evolution, and movement. But since everything is part of an integrated whole, these changes are never spontaneous or miraculous. Instead, change is governed by natural laws that condition the mutual interactions among finite things. All things, in other words, have an “existential inertia”—they have an internal structure and movement, and this structure maintains itself unless acted upon by some outside force.<sup>5</sup> Everything, in this sense, is “positively charged,” as nothing randomly destroys itself (for no reason).

This universal tendency to persist in one’s being, (what Spinoza calls our “*conatus*”) is a feature of existence itself. But when it comes to sentient creatures, like us humans, this striving is transformed into a conscious desire. Insofar as we are rational, we are also governed by an indelible self-concern or egoism. Far from being a limit to compassion, this is its very springboard. The more rational we are, the more we clearly perceive our identity with others. In this way, our self-concern becomes generalized to include a concern for all sentient beings.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the Christian imperative to “love thy neighbor *as* thyself,” the monist understands that their neighbor literally *is*, in some substantial sense, themselves. They desire their welfare and flourishing just as immediately and directly as they desire their own. What could be a surer footing for international solidarity?

Many socialists will shy away from this whole picture. They will complain that exotic doctrines such as “monism,” “conatus,” and “existential inertia” are very costly premises for supporting something as commonsensical as universal solidarity. We don’t need these speculative categories to simply care about people. And others go further still. They claim that these metaphysical premises are not only costly but also useless. In a polemical blog written against our position, William Clare Roberts opined, “[a]dherence to abstract principles does not produce political demands.” Or put more directly, “I can understand you and still want to kill you.”<sup>7</sup>

But Roberts’ complaint says a lot more about his empiricist worldview than it does our own philosophy. A purely descriptive, empirical understanding of the world certainly can’t imply any sort of ethics. (You can’t derive the moral claim that “murder is wrong” from a technical understanding of the circulatory system.) If all we have is a pile of facts before us, then indeed, we might all be “equally human” and still decide to wage war on one another for no reason. In this case, any political agenda, all norms and ideals, will have to be artificially added to one’s “realistic” worldview (supposing we want to engage in politics or activism at all). In the end, this will always be a romantic and question-begging move. Empiricism always searches for a borrowed normativity not derived from “what is,” but only chosen according to one’s own whim.

Monism provides a way to bridge the gap between “what is” and “what ought to be.”<sup>8</sup> For only monism offers an account of nature which is normatively-charged. Precisely because it is not a mere empiricism, cataloging this or that fact, monism can make universally-descriptive claims about humanity and what’s good for human beings. Unlike the religious moralist, the monist does not try to “speak truth to power.” This would, again, set up a pious dualism between “what is right” on the one hand, and “what is the case” on the other. Instead, the monist simply uncovers the innate, rational tendency of human beings to maintain and increase their power by combining with others. Caring about the other is not a free-will decision, but instead is the natural outgrowth of maintaining our own existence. It’s not a choice, but a necessity.<sup>9</sup>

Anything else is liberalism. What contemporary liberalism involves is replacing metaphysical foundations, especially monism, with a methodological pluralism. Any theory will do, so long as it helps to bolster your politics. There is always a skeptical attitude taken towards absolute truth claims and an enforced humility when it comes to philosophy itself. This is what the founder of modern liberalism, John Rawls, called the “burdens of judgment.” Since there are no absolute answers to ultimate questions, the best we can do is to build policy consensus with diverse groups, using equally diverse justifications as a guide.<sup>10</sup> The liberal aims for identical norms, but for non-identical reasons.

The result is an eclectic attitude toward political philosophy. Under the guise of nuance and sophistication, there is an acceptance that theory is sometimes useful. but only when. in the words of Aaron Jaffe. “practical

potentials can be drawn from intellectual history in light of human needs today.”<sup>11</sup> Even rationalist philosophy is sometimes accepted, albeit in a patronizing manner. As Roberts puts it, “If you are committed to rationalism, then you should keep that commitment in mind as you make your arguments, not try to make your arguments follow from your rationalism.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, keep your pet theory if it makes you happy, just don’t take it too seriously, and agree with *my* politics in the end. Again, this is no different from the eclectic, liberal method of allowing all sorts of diverse, private beliefs, only so long as these result in the desired policies at the end of the day.

But taking theory seriously is really the most practical course of action. It avoids the common fallacy of trying to derive positive, political conclusions from the negative premise that “we just don’t know” about the nature of reality. Instead, monism demonstrates the unity of human nature and the human good; In so doing, it establishes the real basis for international solidarity.

“

*Marxism aims at universal emancipation, not some existential hero’s quest.*

## MONISM AS THE BASIS FOR ACTION

The next objection from our critics is that, even if monism is true, this is still too abstract for grounding a timely politics. Universal love and solidarity may sound good, but this ignores the concrete forms of oppression and exploitation endemic to late capitalism. Where is the class analysis? Where is the confrontation with racists, sexists, and transphobes? What grounds action?

It is true that monism *as such* cannot identify these divisions within humanity on its own. Philosophy operates at the level of abstract ideas, and seeks to define the most general contours of reality. Empirical analysis is, of course, needed to flesh out the picture. And the specific forms of exploitation are different in each epoch; they are not universal. But we can employ empirical observations without thereby becoming empiricists and pretending that we don’t need universal categories.

Monism supplies the universal *motivation* for stamping out suffering. We should care about the exploited worker, as well as oppressed races, genders, and ethnicities, not because there is something *sui generis* about their particular identities, but because they are all human beings. And conversely, we militantly oppose the capitalist, the racist, and the transphobe, not because they incarnate some alien, radical evil, but because they cause human suffering. Marxism isn’t Manichaeism; there is no cosmic battle between good and evil. It is rather the overcoming of contradictions that divide humanity against itself. Marxism aims at universal emancipation, not some existential hero’s quest.

To be clear, none of this yet touches upon the practical question of exactly *how* to motivate particular people to care about the oppressed. This is a question of raising political consciousness, and so depends on all sorts of local, historical, and ultimately empirical factors. However, neither does the monist position amount to a purely formal morality (of the Kantian variety), where what we “ought” to do hovers above the actual world. Instead, monism tells us—based on our shared human nature—that we *will* care about the exploited and the oppressed insofar as we are rational. Put otherwise, solidarity is the result of our insight into reality.

Still, rationalist metaphysics is perennially cast as ahistorical and unable to get a grip on contemporary circumstances. Again, according to Jaffe:

“The problem with Spinoza and the radical Enlightenment is that the emerging power of colonial states and the nascent mercantilist systems comprised a seventeenth century environment nothing like today’s fracturing geopolitical environment with its ever-rightward trending late capitalisms.”<sup>13</sup>

Spinoza’s categories supposedly don’t work because these are inextricably tied to his particular time and place in the Seventeenth Century Dutch Republic. Jaffe is explicit on this point. Even Spinoza’s most universal categories, such as “democracy” and “egoism,” cannot be considered as “brute facts corresponding to some transhistorical human nature.”

This suggests a hyper-historicism where there are no constants whatsoever between individual epochs. Not only democracy, but fundamental qualities of the human intellect (such as self-concern or egoism) are claimed to be epiphenomenal to this or that historical period. But if this were true—if there were no universal constants which ran through each time period—then all of human history would be perceived as little more than a disjointed, random sequence of events. History without universal concepts is a booming, buzzing confusion.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, while abstract categories do not produce history out of whole cloth, they do make historical events comprehensible. It’s not a question of monism being “sufficient” for historical consciousness, but it is absolutely “necessary.” Monism constitutes the immanent register, i.e., the unchanging, universal laws that condition and make intelligible the always-changing events. Just as with physics, where the law of acceleration does not accelerate, so likewise do metaphysical laws not undergo change. But for precisely this reason, they can register change, and allow us to make sense of rapidly evolving conditions over time. This uncovering of the absolute within the relative, identity within difference, and the universal within the particular is the very essence of dialectics.<sup>15</sup>

A dialectical monism asserts that all of nature is materially extended. There are no purely ethereal beings (no ghosts, no demons, no angels, and no souls). And likewise, all material things are intelligible (no unknowable objects, no Cthulhu monsters from the abyss). The value of this insight is that it rules out all manner of supernatural explanations for human events. We can no longer conceive of exploitation and suffering in terms of original sin, divine curses, or a providential plan. Neither can we condemn members of the ruling class as being simply motivated by an evil will, just as little as we would accuse them of being possessed by the devil.

Instead, monism entails materialism. Everything within nature is interconnected and governed by natural laws.<sup>16</sup> Human actions, just like natural phenomena, operate according to the rules of efficient causality. Present conditions produce future events, and every event can be traced back to some cause or causes. A proper grasp of history, then, will not make recourse to the ill-will of famous personalities. Instead, it will pay close attention to the logic of social and economic structures.

Marxism, specifically, seeks to diagnose modern exploitation as the consequence of capitalist property relations. Under these structures, capitalists are compelled to seek profits, minimize expenses, and reinvest in new technologies so as to outcompete their rivals. Perennial unemployment and crises of overproduction produce misery, want, and horrific waste when it becomes unprofitable to provide for basic human needs. This is to say nothing of imperialist wars of conquest for new resources and markets.

But the critics of monism will wave their hands and say that they don’t need *a priori*, ontological theories to know all this. It’s just obvious by looking around. Besides, they claim, in order to know anything about the world we need sense-experience. Their dictum is, *Nihil est in intellectu, quod non prius fuerit in sensu* [“Nothing is in the intellect which is not first in the senses.”].

Again, it is true that understanding the specific qualities of capitalism requires observation. We can’t directly deduce from monism the categories of “profit,” “exchange,” or “value,” let alone the more historically-mediated ideas of “ground-rent,” “compound interest,” or the “stock exchange.” However, these historical concepts are really parasitic upon a more basic—often unspoken—architecture of the world. These include such notions as

“cause-and-effect,” “object permanence,” “finite intellects,” and “self-interest.” Those that wish to do away with rationalist philosophy, and just stick to politics or economics, are smuggling in premises without arguing for them. They accept all the fruits of a rationalist monism—causality, extension, and the expulsion of miracles—as perfectly obvious. But they deny that this materialism needs to be philosophically grounded or argued for. This all sounds fine right up until the moment one steps outside their Leftist intellectual bubble; then, one confronts a great many people who absolutely believe in miracles, souls, and other superstitions as well.

The problem is all the greater when it is not just a matter of criticizing capitalism, but also explaining the shifts *between* world systems. Marxism wants to tell a story about historical change; social revolutions occur when the relations of production (how classes are organized) fail to keep up with new forces of production (innovations in labor, machinery, and resources). Historical materialism, then, is a theory of social change based on economic conditions and not individual wills. But this presumes that material conditions do, in the last instance, determine human behavior and events. And it is totally unclear how we can make this assertion without embracing materialism as such. Barring this, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, or the future triumph of socialism, will take on a mystical form. Crises of overproduction, or the decline in the rate of profit, will have no greater explanatory force than will “messianic hope” or the power of “redemption.”

But then, some Leftists do embrace this ethos of spiritualism and spontaneity.<sup>17</sup> They are happy to eschew rationalist materialism and believe that this will only help their politics. Rationalism, it is argued, deprives individuals and even whole classes of their agency. If all things happen according to some orderly cause-and-effect scheme, then where is the place for political passions, heroism, decision, and action? If everything is rational, then how can we indict the irrational and exploitative elements of class society? And if all the world is deterministic, then how can socialism break through the current doldrums to offer humanity something genuinely novel?

Yet all of this is to misunderstand the very word, “rationalism.” Hegel’s maxim that, “the real is rational and the rational, real” does not simply crown any current set of circumstances as beautiful or pleasant. Spinoza, the Enlightenment’s arch-rationalist, certainly had plenty of criticism for his own political milieu.<sup>18</sup> Instead, rationalism only asserts that all events, whether natural or man-made, whether good or bad, can in principle be understood. Everything has some determinate cause. This is no barrier to activism. To the contrary, all hope for deliberate action rests upon the intelligibility and predictability of the world around us. Without this, political tactics, let alone long-term strategies involving international coordination, would be totally unthinkable.

This is why Friedrich Engels affirmed one of Hegel’s most speculative formulations: “Freedom is the appreciation of necessity.”<sup>19</sup> That’s because freedom is not merely the negative, spontaneous, “freedom from” restrictions and domination. Rather, it is the affirmative control and agency that comes with understanding one’s circumstances. The point of socialism is to take into the collective hands of society the means of production in order to satisfy human happiness. How we will achieve this control, and how we will put it to useful ends, depends on an understanding of both human nature and material existence, or what Spinoza called, “the order and connection of things.”<sup>20</sup>

To summarize our argument so far, monism is necessary for a socialist politics because:

1. Monism dispels superstitions and supernatural explanations of worldly events.
2. It provides the “architecture of the universe” (cause and effect, object permanence, natural laws, etc.) which renders world events intelligible.
3. It allows us to think systemically and structurally about world events, rather than attribute these to free (or radically evil) wills.

4. Monism allows us to make sense of epochal change. It is the internal, material contradictions of a system which lead to revolution, rather than mere political decisions or spontaneous revolts.
5. It provides the basis for universal solidarity as a logical consequence of our shared human nature. Solidarity is not a supernatural duty or a free, practical choice.
6. Philosophies which reject monism are necessarily question-begging in their ethics. If the real is not rational, then all normative claims are ultimately a free decision.
7. It implies an intelligible world wherein we can intentionally improve our common circumstances and work toward definite social and political ends.

Only a self-causing, and thus monistic, universe that is governed by its own intelligible laws allows for human reason to accomplish any of this. For only in monism does human reason mirror the laws of Nature itself.

“

*Friedrich Engels said that the most important choice in the history of philosophy was the one between materialism or idealism. We agree.*

## MONISM IS TRUE

All that being said, it's not enough that monism is *useful* (or even indispensable) for a socialist politics. If monism is not itself true—if it does not describe the actual configuration of reality—then it is worthless. Belief in an idea, just because it is useful to you, is called prejudice. Intellectual honesty demands that our theories are not only convenient, but actually convincing. Besides, without some certainly true ideas, how do we even know that our conceptions of “human emancipation,” “progress,” and “freedom” are the right ones?

This means that we need some kind of demonstration or proof for monism. What's that going to look like? Immediately, we can rule out a few common approaches. First, one cannot argue for monism on empirical grounds. There is no collection of sense-perceptions that can demonstrate the infinitude of Nature, or that all things inhere in one substance. You can't taste causality or smell the infinite. As such, empirical arguments for universal conclusions are always inadequate and question-begging.

Second, monism cannot be demonstrated by recourse to pure intuitions alone. This approach would try to establish the infinitude of Nature upon nothing more than a subjective feeling of cosmic unity. This too, in the most obvious way, is question-begging. For perhaps one doesn't possess that subjective, ecstatic intuition in the first place. And in any case, there is no way to move from mere feelings to factual conclusions about the universe.

Third, monism cannot be established transcendentally. That is, one cannot affirm monism because it is the “necessary condition” for our desired politics. \$30,000 may be “necessary” to pay off your student loans—and this may be desirable to you—but that fact in no way affects the actual balance of your bank account. So, likewise, monism may secure the intellectual foundations of Marxism, but that in itself is no reason to be a monist.

Instead, we need good, independent reasons for our fundamental worldview and the activism that springs from it. These must neither be based on individual perceptions, uncountable feelings, nor political wishes. The only path forward is to develop a philosophical argument based on conceptual analysis. This will be an *a priori*, or in other words, a rationalist proof. The truth of monism must speak for itself, and be demonstrated through an unpacking of its own concept.

In the history of philosophy, this is known as the “ontological argument.” Even mentioning this term will likely produce derision. Contemporary political theorists have been enculturated into an academy dominated by postmodern and positivist attitudes. As Hegel would put it, they run away from metaphysics, i.e., “first philosophy,” like it’s the plague.<sup>21</sup>

The ontological argument certainly carries a lot of theological baggage. It has most famously been used by theistic philosophers, like St. Anselm, to demonstrate the existence of a personal God. But this fact obscures a whole subterranean, *and heretical*, tradition of such proofs which have a diametrically-opposed agenda. From Spinoza to Hegel, versions of the ontological argument have demonstrated pantheism. Rather than a personal creator, one affirms the eternal and self-causing nature of the universe itself. To paraphrase Joseph Dietzgen, pantheism is the only religion with a touch of the godless.<sup>22</sup> It is atheism, proven metaphysically.

And the pantheist versions of the ontological argument are not only different in aim, but also method. Theistic proofs tend to start with God’s greatness. This is nothing more than an assumed or posited definition, as in, consider a being “than which nothing greater can be thought.”<sup>23</sup> They then move to the conclusion that this hypothetical being must, in fact, exist (otherwise it wouldn’t be so great). It’s not hard to see how this, too, is question-begging. For perhaps we simply reject the original, merely putative, definition.

Spinoza’s pantheist argument is superior. It begins, not with a putative definition of God’s greatness, but with the undeniable premise that we have some knowledge. We begin with a rejection of absolute skepticism, and the positive claim that we are in possession of “some certainly true idea.”<sup>24</sup>

What is the content of this certain idea? In true Enlightenment form, knowledge must be both “clear and distinct.” In other words, mere sense-impressions or vague images don’t count. For knowledge to be worth its name, the very essence of an object (its nature) must be understood and clarified. This implies knowledge of at least one thing in its absolute simplicity—known in itself, and not mediated or conditioned from without. Our first idea, in other words, is of what Spinoza calls “substance.” That which is “in itself and is conceived through itself” alone.<sup>25</sup>

The advantage over the theist lies precisely here. Instead of starting with God’s putative “greatness,” we deduce Nature from the simplicity of substance. A simple substance must be self-caused and self-mediating, not conditioned or created by anything outside of itself. It therefore must also be absolutely infinite. For what could limit its self-creation? In the end, simple substance turns out to be an absolutely infinite Nature. It is this picture of Nature as *causa sui* (self-caused) which is at the very heart of a Marxist dialectics.<sup>26</sup>

This position, that Marxism is a Spinozism, is not unique to us. Marx himself invokes Spinoza as a dialectician, and credits him with the insight that every positive determination is, at the same time, a negation (*omnis determinatio est negatio*). Engels also cites Spinoza’s “substance as *causa sui*” as something that “strikingly expresses the reciprocal action” of dialectics. The father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov, in his polemics against the opportunist Eduard Bernstein, argued that Marxism should not drift toward the merely critical philosophy of Kant, but must return to Spinoza. And in the first decades of the Soviet republic, the legacy of Spinozism was jealousy contested by multiple factions of Marxist philosophers. According to Abram Deborin, the only legitimate heirs to Spinoza’s legacy were the revolutionary proletariat and dialectical materialists.<sup>27</sup>

But the reason why the Russian Marxists embraced Spinozian substance is that it constitutes the real foundation for materialism. Self-causing Nature is governed by its own, unbreakable rules. In this way, thought and extension are “parallel” to one another. The laws of nature, and nature as physically extended, are not separate entities—like a Creator god in Heaven, overlooking His creation. Instead, intelligible laws run through the very fiber of extended space itself.



Friedrich Engels said that the most important choice in the history of philosophy was the one between materialism or idealism.<sup>28</sup> We agree. Subjective thoughts and ideas do not freely produce themselves, but instead, are produced by and reflect the material world around us. To say otherwise is to lapse into an irrational panpsychism, where a vitalistic spirit (not material cause and effect) is what animates reality. At the same time, for the mind to be able to mirror physical existence, both must be subject to the same intelligible principles. Or, as Engels also says, dialectics is “...the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought—two sets of laws which are *identical in substance*...”<sup>29</sup>

The common prejudice is to say that in order to be a materialist, one has to get rid of all *a priori* thought, and stick to empirical insights alone. But this is wrong. Materialism only works with *a priori* foundations, universal laws which govern finite objects and changing events. Again, Engels is prescient on this point: “...one cannot bring two natural facts into relation with one another, or understand the connection existing between them, without theoretical thought. The only question is whether one’s thinking is correct or not...” And drawing out this insight, we can make a second deduction. Without the correct theory, observations can lead to any given worldview, however supernatural or paranormal. Thus, Engels criticized “the empirical contempt of dialectics” as leading to “the most barren of all superstitions,” ultimately landing at the seance table of Victorian spiritualists.<sup>30</sup>

If we fail to develop the correct philosophy, not only is our contact with reality imperiled, but our politics will be reduced to a faith-based exercise. In order to escape an agnostic liberalism, we have to embrace dialectics as our consistent method, and monism as our ontology. This does not mean ignoring activism, but rather supporting the tireless efforts of those who dedicate their lives to building political power. “We shall not say: Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly....Instead, we shall simply show the world why it is struggling....”<sup>31</sup>

Philosophical knowledge is for everyone; it’s not the private reserve of an academic elite. Precisely because monism is *true*, and reflects the actual organization of our shared reality, it is accessible to all. Clarifying our daily experience tends towards a dialectical understanding of the world as not governed by supernatural or spontaneous forces, but by what’s real, rational, and necessary. Lenin was right when he said that the scientist is a “spontaneous materialist.” The same can be said of all thinking people everywhere. Besides, as the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg wrote at the turn of the Twentieth Century, “No coarser insult, no baser aspersion, can be thrown against the workers than the remark: *Theoretic controversies are only for academicians*.”<sup>32</sup>

We must advance political struggle with a clear idea of why we fight, and how best to achieve our goals. We ought not to be scared by abstract concepts or rational proofs. As the Marxist Nikolai Bukharin put it in his philosophical notebooks, “This most abstract of concepts is at the same time the totality of everything concrete....This is the great substance of Spinoza’s *causa sui*....”<sup>33</sup> In other words, reason is red.

## SHARE



**LANDON FRIM AND HARRISON FLUSS**  
**([HTTPS://SPECTREJOURNAL.COM/AUTHOR/FRIMFLUSS/](https://spectrejournal.com/author/frimfluss/))**