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### Advocacy:

#### A just government ought to recognize an unconditional right of workers to strike.

#### That’s a fundamental part of international law that solves oppression and preserves democracy worldwide---states have a moral obligation to enforce

UN 17 UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, partially quoting Maina Kiai, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, March 9, 2017. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21328&LangID=E> //AHS

GENEVA (9 March 2017) – Further to the Human Rights Council side event on freedoms of association and of peaceful assembly in the workplace which took place on Monday 6 March, and on the occasion of a key meeting of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, is recalling that **the right to strike is a fundamental one** enshrined in international human rights and labour law, **and** that its protection is **necessary in ensuring just, stable and democratic societies**: “As the 329th session of the Governing Body of the ILO starts today, I wish to reiterate the utmost importance of the right to strike in democratic societies. As stated in my 2016 thematic report to the General Assembly (A/71/385), the right to strike has been **established in international law for decades**, in global and regional instruments, such as in the ILO Convention No. 87 (articles 3, 8 and 10), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 8), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 22), the European Convention on Human Rights (article 11), and the American Convention on Human Rights (article 16). **The right is also enshrined in the constitutions of at least 90 countries**. The right to strike has in effect become customary international law. **The right to strike is** also an intrinsic corollary of the fundamental right of freedom of association. It is **crucial for millions** of women and men around the world to assert collectively their rights in the workplace, including the right to just and favourable conditions of work, and **to work** in dignity **and without fear of** intimidation and **persecution.** Moreover, protest action in relation to government social and economic policy, and against negative corporate practices, forms part of the basic civil liberties whose respect is essential for the meaningful exercise of trade union rights. This right enables them to engage with companies and governments on a more equal footing, and **Member States have a positive obligation to protect this right, and a negative obligation not to interfere with its exercise.** Moreover, protecting the right to strike is not simply about States fulfilling their legal obligations. **It is also about** them creating **democratic and equitable societies that are sustainable** in the long run. The **concentration of power** in one sector – whether in the hands of government or business – inevitably **leads to the erosion of democracy**, and an **increase in inequalities and marginalization** with all their attendant consequences. **The right to strike is a check on this** concentration of power. I deplore the various attempts made to erode the right to strike at national and multilateral levels. In this regard, I welcome the positive role played by the ILO’s Government Group in upholding workers’ right to strike by recognizing that ‘without protecting a right to strike, freedom of association, in particular the right to organize activities for the purpose of promoting and protecting workers’ interests, cannot be fully realized.’ I urge all stakeholders to ensure that the right to strike be fully preserved and respected across the globe and in all arenas”, the expert concluded.

### Advantage: Democracy

#### Democracy is nearing its brink but has potential to spur back

House 3/22’ [Freedom House, 3-22-2021, "NEW REPORT: US Democracy Has Declined Significantly in the Past Decade, Reforms Urgently Needed," <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-us-democracy-has-declined-significantly-past-decade-reforms-urgently-needed>]

Today, Freedom House released a special report, From Crisis to Reform: A Call to Strengthen America’s Battered Democracy, which identifies three enduring problems that have undermined the health of the US political system: unequal treatment for people of color, the outsized influence of special interests in politics, and partisan polarization. This report comes in response to a decade-long decline in US democracy and is based in Freedom House’s global comparative research. The report concludes that these three major problems compound one another, creating a vicious circle of distrust and dysfunction, and that addressing them with urgency and conviction is crucial to restoring Americans’ faith not just in their government, but also in democracy itself. “Our democracy is in trouble,” said Michael J. Abramowitz, president of Freedom House, “and the strength of American democracy is important for people everywhere, not just here at home. Congress and the Biden administration must make it a priority to strengthen our institutions, restore civic norms, and uphold the promise of universal liberty on which our nation was founded.” “The state of US democracy has implications for freedom and democracy around the world,” said Sarah Repucci, vice president of research and analysis at Freedom House. “Democracy movements in other countries look to the United States for inspiration and support, and authoritarian leaders falsely point to America’s problems as proof of democracy’s inherent inferiority and as a sort of license for their own abuses of power.”

#### Current strike protection is weak which decks unions---the AFF is key

HRW 21 April 29, 2021 6:00AM EDT Why the US PRO Act Matters for the Right to Unionize: Questions and Answers | <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/29/why-us-pro-act-matters-right-unionize-questions-and-answers> HRW (Human Rights Watch investigates and reports on abuses happening in all corners of the world. We are roughly 450 people of 70-plus nationalities who are country experts, lawyers, journalists, and others who work to protect the most at risk, from vulnerable minorities and civilians in wartime, to refugees and children in need.)///(\*ak)

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the [difficult economic and social realities](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/02/united-states-pandemic-impact-people-poverty) for many working people in the United States and has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Low-wage workers, who are disproportionately women, migrants, and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, have largely borne the brunt of the pandemic’s economic fallout.

Weaknesses and deficiencies in US labor law have made the situation worse. Workers face major obstacles to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain for [fair wages](https://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/inwork/cb-policy-guide/declarationofPhiladelphia1944.pdf), decent benefits, and safe working conditions. On numerous fronts, US laws fall far short of international standards on freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Now there is an opportunity to strengthen US labor laws. The Protecting the Right to Organize Act (the PRO Act), H.R. 842, S. 420 passed the US House of Representatives on March 9, 2021 with a bipartisan vote. If approved by the Senate, it would significantly strengthen the ability of workers in the private sector to form unions and engage in collective bargaining for better working conditions and fair wages. If enacted into law, the PRO Act would be the most comprehensive worker empowerment legislation since the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935.

This question-and-answer document addresses the PRO Act through a human rights lens, with a focus on the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. It examines the challenges of unionizing in the US and explains how the PRO Act would be a corrective. Current US law excludes certain categories of workers, makes it difficult for workers to join unions, hampers the fight for better working conditions, and has failed to keep up with the disruptive role of workplace technologies in organizing efforts. Addressing these shortcomings could help to bring US law closer to international human rights standards, and slow or reverse decades of rising economic inequality.

#### Unions are make for break for democracy.

Levitz, 19 (Eric, “Democracy Dies When Labor Unions Do,” New York: Intelligencer, 9/18/19, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/09/democracy-dies-when-labor-unions-do.html>)

But these facts say less about the deficiencies of democracy than they do about about the insufficiency of elections — by themselves — to produce popular self-rule. The alternative to naive faith in the omnicompetence of the individual voter need not be an equally naive faith in that of unelected technocrats. The most vital mediating institutions in a liberal democracy are not those formed by elites to check the irrational appetites of ordinary voters, but rather, those formed by ordinary voters to check the avarice of elites. Democracy asks too much of the individual. But if individuals organize collectively, they can force democracy to give them a better deal.

Which is a fancy way of saying: To repair American democracy — and fortify it against future threats — Democrats must not only bring more Americans into the electorate, but also, more American workers into labor unions.

Democracy begins at work.

There’s a strong argument that giving ordinary Americans a say over how their workplaces are governed is just as fundamental to democracy as giving them the ballot.

These days, political liberty is often defined narrowly as the freedom to vote in fair elections. But in earlier eras of American history, genuine political freedom was thought to have a material component: To truly participate in self-government, one needed not only a voice in public affairs, but also a modicum of power in one’s economic life. Franklin Roosevelt articulated this principle when introducing his economic bill of rights in 1944, telling Congress, “We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.” This sentiment might have struck some of FDR’s fellow “economic royalists” as un-American. But the notion that self-government is impossible without a degree of economic autonomy was common among our republic’s founding generation. The historian Terry Bouton writes of America’s original grassroots revolutionaries:

[M]any Pennsylvanians believed that economic equality was what made political equality possible. They were convinced that “the people” would never have political liberty until citizens had the economic wherewithal to protect their rights. To them, concentrations of wealth and power led to corruption and tyrannical rulers, while widely dispersed political and economic power promoted good government.

… Farmers and artisans declared that the Revolution was about “the freemen of this Country” stating that “they do not esteem it the sole end of Government to protect the rich & powerful.” … [G]overnment should promote the interests of “the mechanicks and farmers [who] constitute ninety-nine out of a hundred of the people of America.” In short, the objective of the Revolution was bringing “gentlemen men … down to our level” and ensuring that “all ranks and conditions would come in for their just share of the wealth.”

The revolution’s elite architects had other objectives. But while they typically did not believe that all white men (let alone, all people) were entitled to political liberty, they agreed that one needed economic power to exercise such freedom. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist Papers, “[A power over man’s subsistence amounts to a power over his will.”](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed79.asp)

If we accept our founders’ premises, then the true measure of a democracy — which is to say, a system of government in which all citizens enjoy political liberty — cannot merely be how many offices its people get to vote on. Rather, to gauge how democratic a society is, one must examine how much power ordinary citizens have over the terms of their own subsistence, and how evenly economic resources are dispersed across the demos. Judged on these terms, it is clear that the contemporary United States is the [opposite of “excessively democratic”](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/12/inequality-is-rising-globally-and-soaring-in-the-u-s.html) — and that it will remain so, absent a revival of its labor movement.

In the founding era, classical republicans imagined that the great masses of ordinary (white male) Americans could attain the economic autonomy necessary for political liberty by becoming small landholders, or independent artisans. But the industrial revolution rendered that vision obsolete. Today, the vast majority of Americans are not self-employed, and spend the bulk of their waking hours answering to bosses who have power over their subsistence. In this context, most workers can only secure a degree of control over their economic lives by organizing collectively to check the power of their employers. Which is to say, they can only do so by forming unions.

That trade unions do, in fact, increase their members’ power over their own working lives is confirmed by the [wage and benefits premiums](http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/union-effect-in-california-1/) that unionized workforces enjoy. But organized labor does not merely democratize individual firms; it also democratizes economic power throughout the economy. As America’s [private-sector unionization rate](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/01/democrats-paid-a-huge-price-for-letting-unions-die.html) collapsed over the past half century, the middle-class’ share of productivity gains went down with it. And [a large body of economic research](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/05/unions-are-not-a-special-interest-group.html) confirms that this is no mere correlation. When workers organize, they secure a voice within the “[private governments](https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/7/17/15973478/bosses-dictators-workplace-rights-free-markets-unions)” that rule their economic lives, and they (typically) use that voice to rationally advance their own material interests — which, most of the time, also advances the self-interest of most Americans (a.k.a. the public interest). In other words, by forming trade unions, ordinary citizens achieve much of what critics of democracy insist it can’t deliver.

Thus, even if organized labor did nothing to increase voter participation, or the responsiveness of elected officials to popular demands, it would still serve an indispensable democratic function by fostering the material preconditions for popular self-government.

Unions make electorates more representative.

Many items on the Democratic Party’s democracy reform agenda are aimed at making the American electorate look more like the American people. Automatic voter registration, a federal Election Day holiday, and felon enfranchisement are all aimed at reducing class and racial disparities in voter participation. And such reforms are laudable. But no plan for lifting America’s low voter turnout rates is complete without a plan for boosting its [piddling rate of unionization.](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/09/democrats-unions-2020-labor.html)

As the Center for American Progress (CAP) [has noted](https://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/economy/reports/2012/01/25/10913/unions-make-democracy-work-for-the-middle-class/), the U.S. states with the highest unionization rates also have the highest rates of voter turnout, and the same correlation holds between nations. And the political science literature suggests this is not coincidental. As David Madland and Nick Bunker wrote for CAP in 2012:

A 1 percentage point increase in union density in a state increases voter turnout rates by 0.2 to 0.25 percentage points according to[analysis](http://www.jstor.org/pss/2669299) by Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis, political scientists at the University of Notre Dame and the State Department, respectively. In other words, if unionization were 10 percentage points higher during the 2008 presidential election, 2.6 million to 3.2 million more Americans would have voted.

Similarly,[research](http://lera.press.illinois.edu/proceedings2006/zullo.html) by Roland Zullo, a labor studies professor at the University of Michigan, shows that self-described working-class citizens — whether unionized or not — are just as likely to vote as other citizens are when unions run campaigns in their congressional district. Yet when unions don’t run campaigns, working-class citizens are 10.4 percent less likely to vote than other citizens.

A similar pattern holds for communities of color. Voters of color are just as likely to vote as white voters in districts with union campaigns but are 9.3 percent less likely to vote in districts without campaigns.

A [2018 study](https://jamesfeigenbaum.github.io/research/pdf/fhw_rtw_jan2018.pdf) of the electoral impacts of so-called “right to work” (RTW) laws lend credence to these findings. Such laws undermine organized labor by allowing workers who join a unionized workplace to enjoy the benefits of a collective bargaining agreement without paying dues to the union that negotiated it. This encourages other workers to skirt their dues, which can then drain a union of the funds it needs to survive. On the plus side, such state-level right to work laws provided political scientists at Boston University, Columbia, and the Brookings Institution with a natural experiment to test the relationship between unionization and electoral outcomes. By examining how voter turnout changed before and after the passage of RTW in a given state’s border counties — and comparing those shifts to the control group of adjacent counties in non-RTW states — researchers found that right to work laws are associated with 2 to 3 percent reduction in voter participation.

Separately, unions also appear to facilitate the kind of cross-racial civic solidarity that scholars like Rosenberg fear our species may be evolutionarily ill-equipped to achieve. Although the American labor movement has often been a bastion of white supremacy — one that channeled the “economic anxiety” of white male workers into causes like the Chinese Exclusion Act — it was also at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, and helped to keep the bulk of white workers in the Midwest in a partisan coalition with African-Americans for decades after backlash politics painted the non-union South red. According to that 2018 study, the passage of right to work laws is associated with [a 3.5 percent drop in the Democratic Party’s share of the presidential vote](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/01/democrats-paid-a-huge-price-for-letting-unions-die.html). Which is to say: Had tea party governments not passed such measures in Wisconsin and Michigan, it’s plausible that the union movements in those states would have kept a critical mass of white non-college voters from chasing the siren song of white identity politics in 2016.

The proletariat needs lobbyists, too.

One testament to American democracy’s dysfunction is the cartoonish incompetence of its commander-in-chief. A less conspicuous — but more consequential — one is the chasm between popular preferences and public policy. The Trump administration’s decision to prioritize tax relief for corporate shareholders over new spending on infrastructure, public education, health-insurance subsidies, or addiction treatment [in the middle of a historic drug overdose epidemic](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/10/the-opioid-crisis-is-an-emergency-for-american-conservatism.html) didn’t merely buck majoritarian opinion among Americans writ large, but also,[among self-identified Republicans](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/9/28/16375174/tax-cut-poll). And the same can be said of the White House’s prioritization of various polluters’ profit margins [over the cleanliness of America’s air and water](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/05/democrats-are-ignoring-their-partys-strongest-2020-issue.html), or Congress’ perennial prioritization of the [pharmaceutical industry’s profitability](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/08/poll-marijuana-legalization-data-for-progress-radical-ideas-popular-aoc.html) over the affordability of prescription drugs, or the myriad other ways that well-heeled interest groups overrule the bipartisan consensus of ordinary Americans in opinion polls.

One could attribute such policy outcomes to the median voter’s failure to meet democracy’s heavy demands; her struggle to sift through large amounts of information, and refusal to sacrifice her limited free time to the obligations of civic engagement. But the average American worker — and typical American CEO — are each working with the same archaic evolutionary hardware. The fact that the latter has proven so much more adept at using democratic freedoms to advance her interest is a function of resources, not psychobiology.

Influencing elections and legislative processes requires investments of time, money, and attention. Wealthy individuals and corporations can easily shoulder such expenses; ordinary voters can’t.  For this reason, if the average House member betrays the interests of the oil company based in her district, she will see her voice-mail box fill up, and campaign coffers empty out; if she betrays her median constituent’s avowed desire to see carbon pollution more tightly regulated, by contrast, said voter probably won’t even notice.

This simple reality — that economic power is easily converted into the political variety — is an inherent constraint on popular sovereignty in all capitalist democracies. But trade unions help to mitigate it, both by reducing inequalities in economic power (as we’ve already seen), and by enabling working-class voters to collectivize the costs of political engagement.

#### Democratic backsliding empowers authoritarian regimes – risks global conflict

DIAMOND 19 senior fellow @ Hoover Inst., founding coeditor of Journal of Democracy 2019 (Larry, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. For more than six years, he directed FSI’s Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, where he now leads its Program on Arab Reform and Democracy and its Global Digital Policy Incubator. He is the founding coeditor of the Journal of Democracy and also serves as senior consultant at the International Forum for Democratic Studies of the National Endowment for Democracy., Ill Winds: Saving Democracy From Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, And American Complacency, (Penguin Press), p. 285 [CORNELL DBT] note://// indicates par. breaks) [AR WAKE19]

In Frank Capra's 1946 movie It's a Wondeiful Life, the uncle of a generous banker named George Bailey innocently misplaces a large deposit, which will let a greedy rival take over the bank and the entire town. Despondent, George (played by Jimmy Stewart) prepares to jump from the town bridge on Christmas Eve. At the last moment, a guardian angel intervenes and shows George all the good deeds that would never have been performed if not for him. "You've been given a great gift, George," the angel says. "A chance to see what the world would be like without you." //// If there is a silver lining to the disaster that has been Donald Trump's presidency, it is this: as Trump has insulted our closest democratic allies, undermined NATO, and encouraged the breakup of the European Union; as he has pulled the United States out of the global climate accord, the Iranian nuclear deal, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership; as he has started gratuitous trade wars with friends and foes alike; as he has excused and befriended Vladimir Putin and a grim list of other brutal dictators; as he has made common cause with nativist bigots abroad and at home; as he has revived the old, nasty, and specious slogan "America first"; and as he has shaken every moral and strategic pillar of the postWorld War II liberal order, we are all being given a glimpse into the possible future: a chance to see what the world would look like without American leadership and steadfastness. //// For democrats everywhere, this is a frightening prospect. But for the belligerent autocrats in China and Russia, it is a gift: a startling, almost too-good-to-be-true opportunity to bring down the global architecture of norms and alliances that has kept the peace in Europe and the Pacific for nearly three quarters of a century-and enabled an unprecedented expansion of democracy and freedom. //// The global crisis of democracy has been long in coming. It did not start with Donald Trump, and it will not end when he leaves the White House. Yet American moral and geopolitical leadership--our defense of democratic norms, our assistance to democratic governments and movements, our support for freer trade and broader economic development, and our willingness to deter aggression and denounce oppression-has enabled waves of democratic expansion to roll forward across the world. //// To be sure, the United States has often been inconsistent and imperfect in its foreign policy. But over more than a century, it has also been what former secretary of state Madeleine Albright rightly called "the indispensable nation" for democracy-indispensable in advancing human rights, indispensable in stirring democratic hopes, indispensable in building the international institutions and alliances that have enabled freedom to thrive. //// Ideals matter in world politics, but so does power-and the United States, for all its flaws and blunders, has been the rare great power to fuse both might and right to create space for the expansion of democracy. Since the end of World War II, a strong, steadfast American presence has kept the democracies of Europe and the more pluralistic states of Asia from throwing in their lot with the Soviet Union, Maoist China, and their successor dictatorships. Take away American power, presence, and principles, and most Asian states would jump on the bandwagon of the emerging Chinese imperium in Asia. Remove America as the bonding cement of NATO and a counterweight to Russia's ambitions in former Soviet states like Ukraine and Georgia, and it will doom hopes for freedom throughout the former USSR-probably even in the Baltic states-and cast a long, dark shadow over the remaining democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. The European Union might not survive such a U.S. retreat, and if the EU did, it would feel intense pressure to reconcile with a resurgent Russian empire. The world without us would be a far more frightening and dangerous place, with muscular, corrupt dictatorships dominating large swaths of the globe through both blatant coercion and covert subversion. //// To borrow a phrase from Bill Clinton, the power of our example has mattered more than the example of our power.2 The assistance we have provided and the example we have shown have helped inspire and support democratic change in Latin America, Africa, and even-after a long, sordid period of unquestioning U.S. support for Arab dictatorships the Middle East. We have often erred and failed to live up to our best traditions. But on balance, American ideals, broadcasts, grants, and diplomacy have pressured autocracies to change, warned them not to resort to devastating repression, and opened up space for people around the world to claim their own inalienable rights. Take all of that away, and it is not clear when-or if-the transitions to democracy would have occurred in such places as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile; South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines; South Africa, Ghana, and Tunisia; and all the countries once locked behind the Iron Curtain. //// Until recently, American power and principle have helped enable many societies to make peaceful transitions to democracy. American resolve has kept the ill winds of Russian rage, Chinese ambition, and populist authoritarianism from reaching hurricane force. But today, another gale is raging: that of America's own political decay, rooted in cynical politicians,

#### There is no other explanation for declining violence.

Dafoe and Russett 13, Allen Dafoe and Bruce Russett, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale and Dean Acheson Research Professor of International Relations and Political Science at Yale, Assessing the Capitalist Peace, p.110, October 2013, ME)

The democratic peace—the empirical association between democracy and peace—is an extremely robust finding. More generally, many liberal factors are associated with peace and many explanations have been offered for these associations, including the effects of: liberal norms, democratic signaling, credible commitments, the free press, economic interdependence, declining benefits of conquest, signaling via capital markets, constraints on the state, constraints on leaders, and others. Scholars are still mapping the contours of the liberal peace, and we remain a long way from fully understanding the respective influence of these different candidate causal mechanisms. All this being said, the robustness of the democratic peace, as one interrelated empirical aspect of the liberal peace, is impressive. The democratic peace has been interrogated for over two decades and no one has been able to identify an alternative factor that accounts for it in cross-national statistical analyses. Democracy in any two countries (joint democracy) has been shown to be robustly negatively associated with militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), fatal MIDs, crises, escalation, and wars. The democratic peace is for good reason widely cited and regarded as one of the most productive research programs.

### Framework

#### The standard is maximizing expected well-being:

#### Extinction comes first under any framework

Pummer 15 [Theron, Junior Research Fellow in Philosophy at St. Anne's College, University of Oxford. “Moral Agreement on Saving the World” Practical Ethics, University of Oxford. May 18, 2015] brett

There appears to be lot of disagreement in moral philosophy. Whether these many apparent disagreements are deep and irresolvable, I believe there is at least one thing it is reasonable to agree on right now, whatever general moral view we adopt: that it is very important to reduce the risk that all intelligent beings on this planet are eliminated by an enormous catastrophe, such as a nuclear war. How we might in fact try to reduce such existential risks is discussed elsewhere. My claim here is only that we – whether we’re consequentialists, deontologists, or virtue ethicists – should all agree that we should try to save the world. According to consequentialism, we should maximize the good, where this is taken to be the goodness, from an impartial perspective, of outcomes. Clearly one thing that makes an outcome good is that the people in it are doing well. There is little disagreement here. If the happiness or well-being of possible future people is just as important as that of people who already exist, and if they would have good lives, it is not hard to see how reducing existential risk is easily the most important thing in the whole world. This is for the familiar reason that there are so many people who could exist in the future – there are trillions upon trillions… upon trillions. There are so many possible future people that reducing existential risk is arguably the most important thing in the world, even if the well-being of these possible people were given only 0.001% as much weight as that of existing people. Even on a wholly person-affecting view – according to which there’s nothing (apart from effects on existing people) to be said in favor of creating happy people – the case for reducing existential risk is very strong. As noted in this seminal paper, this case is strengthened by the fact that there’s a good chance that many existing people will, with the aid of life-extension technology, live very long and very high quality lives. You might think what I have just argued applies to consequentialists only. There is a tendency to assume that, if an argument appeals to consequentialist considerations (the goodness of outcomes), it is irrelevant to non-consequentialists. But that is a huge mistake. Non-consequentialism is the view that there’s more that determines rightness than the goodness of consequences or outcomes; it is not the view that the latter don’t matter. Even John Rawls wrote, “All ethical doctrines worth our attention take consequences into account in judging rightness. One which did not would simply be irrational, crazy.” Minimally plausible versions of deontology and virtue ethics must be concerned in part with promoting the good, from an impartial point of view. They’d thus imply very strong reasons to reduce existential risk, at least when this doesn’t significantly involve doing harm to others or damaging one’s character. What’s even more surprising, perhaps, is that even if our own good (or that of those near and dear to us) has much greater weight than goodness from the impartial “point of view of the universe,” indeed even if the latter is entirely morally irrelevant, we may nonetheless have very strong reasons to reduce existential risk. Even egoism, the view that each agent should maximize her own good, might imply strong reasons to reduce existential risk. It will depend, among other things, on what one’s own good consists in. If well-being consisted in pleasure only, it is somewhat harder to argue that egoism would imply strong reasons to reduce existential risk – perhaps we could argue that one would maximize her expected hedonic well-being by funding life extension technology or by having herself cryogenically frozen at the time of her bodily death as well as giving money to reduce existential risk (so that there is a world for her to live in!). I am not sure, however, how strong the reasons to do this would be. But views which imply that, if I don’t care about other people, I have no or very little reason to help them are not even minimally plausible views (in addition to hedonistic egoism, I here have in mind views that imply that one has no reason to perform an act unless one actually desires to do that act). To be minimally plausible, egoism will need to be paired with a more sophisticated account of well-being. To see this, it is enough to consider, as Plato did, the possibility of a ring of invisibility – suppose that, while wearing it, Ayn could derive some pleasure by helping the poor, but instead could derive just a bit more by severely harming them. Hedonistic egoism would absurdly imply she should do the latter. To avoid this implication, egoists would need to build something like the meaningfulness of a life into well-being, in some robust way, where this would to a significant extent be a function of other-regarding concerns (see chapter 12 of this classic intro to ethics). But once these elements are included, we can (roughly, as above) argue that this sort of egoism will imply strong reasons to reduce existential risk. Add to all of this Samuel Scheffler’s recent intriguing arguments (quick podcast version available here) that most of what makes our lives go well would be undermined if there were no future generations of intelligent persons. On his view, my life would contain vastly less well-being if (say) a year after my death the world came to an end. So obviously if Scheffler were right I’d have very strong reason to reduce existential risk. We should also take into account moral uncertainty. What is it reasonable for one to do, when one is uncertain not (only) about the empirical facts, but also about the moral facts? I’ve just argued that there’s agreement among minimally plausible ethical views that we have strong reason to reduce existential risk – not only consequentialists, but also deontologists, virtue ethicists, and sophisticated egoists should agree. But even those (hedonistic egoists) who disagree should have a significant level of confidence that they are mistaken, and that one of the above views is correct. Even if they were 90% sure that their view is the correct one (and 10% sure that one of these other ones is correct), they would have pretty strong reason, from the standpoint of moral uncertainty, to reduce existential risk. Perhaps most disturbingly still, even if we are only 1% sure that the well-being of possible future people matters, it is at least arguable that, from the standpoint of moral uncertainty, reducing existential risk is the most important thing in the world. Again, this is largely for the reason that there are so many people who could exist in the future – there are trillions upon trillions… upon trillions. (For more on this and other related issues, see this excellent dissertation). Of course, it is uncertain whether these untold trillions would, in general, have good lives. It’s possible they’ll be miserable. It is enough for my claim that there is moral agreement in the relevant sense if, at least given certain empirical claims about what future lives would most likely be like, all minimally plausible moral views would converge on the conclusion that we should try to save the world. While there are some non-crazy views that place significantly greater moral weight on avoiding suffering than on promoting happiness, for reasons others have offered (and for independent reasons I won’t get into here unless requested to), they nonetheless seem to be fairly implausible views. And even if things did not go well for our ancestors, I am optimistic that they will overall go fantastically well for our descendants, if we allow them to. I suspect that most of us alive today – at least those of us not suffering from extreme illness or poverty – have lives that are well worth living, and that things will continue to improve. Derek Parfit, whose work has emphasized future generations as well as agreement in ethics, described our situation clearly and accurately: “We live during the hinge of history. Given the scientific and technological discoveries of the last two centuries, the world has never changed as fast. We shall soon have even greater powers to transform, not only our surroundings, but ourselves and our successors. If we act wisely in the next few centuries, humanity will survive its most dangerous and decisive period. Our descendants could, if necessary, go elsewhere, spreading through this galaxy…. Our descendants might, I believe, make the further future very good. But that good future may also depend in part on us. If our selfish recklessness ends human history, we would be acting very wrongly.” (From chapter 36 of On What Matters)

#### Anticipating nuclear extinction breeds empathy and entangled care. Distancing ourselves from considering extinction reifies detached elitism.

Offord, 17—Faculty of Humanities, School of Humanities Research and Graduate Studies, Bentley Campus (Baden, “BEYOND OUR NUCLEAR ENTANGLEMENT,” Angelaki, 22:3, 17-25, dml) [ableist language modifications denoted by brackets]

You are steered towards overwhelming and inexplicable pain when you consider the nuclear entanglement that the species Homo sapiens finds itself in. This is because the fact of living in the nuclear age presents an existential, aesthetic, ethical and psychological challenge that defines human consciousness. Although an immanent threat and ever-present danger to the very existence of the human species, living with the possibility of nuclear war has infiltrated the matrix of modernity so profoundly as to paralyse [shut down] our mind-set to respond adequately. We have chosen to ignore the facts at the heart of the nuclear program with its dangerous algorithm; we have chosen to live with the capacity and possibility of a collective, pervasive and even planetary-scale suicide; and the techno-industrial-national powers that claim there is “no immediate danger” ad infinitum.8

This has led to one of the key logics of modernity's insanity. As Harari writes: “Nuclear weapons have turned war between superpowers into a mad act of collective suicide, and therefore forced the most powerful nations on earth to find alternative and peaceful ways to resolve conflicts.”9 This is the nuclear algorithm at work, a methodology of madness. In revisiting Jacques Derrida in “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),”10 who described nuclear war as a “non-event,” it is clear that the pathology of the “non-event” remains as active as ever even in the time of Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un with their stichomythic nuclear posturing.

The question of our times is whether we have an equal or more compelling capacity and willingness to end this impoverished but ever-present logic of pain and uncertainty. How not simply to bring about disarmament, but to go beyond this politically charged, as well as mythological and psychological nuclear algorithm? How to find love amidst the nuclear entanglement; the antidote to this entanglement? Is it possible to end the pathology of power that exists with nuclear capacity? Sadly, the last lines of Nitin Sawhney's “Broken Skin” underscore this entanglement:

Just 5 miles from India's nuclear test site

Children play in the shade of the village water tank

Here in the Rajasthan desert people say

They're proud their country showed their nuclear capability.11

As an activist scholar working in the fields of human rights and cultural studies, responding to the nuclear algorithm is an imperative. Your politics, ethics and scholarship are indivisible in this cause. An acute sense of care for the world, informed by pacifist and non-violent, de-colonialist approaches to knowledge and practice, pervades your concern. You are aware that there are other ways of knowing than those you are familiar and credentialed with. You are aware that you are complicit in the prisons that you choose to live inside,12 and that there is no such thing as an innocent bystander. You use your scholarship to shake up the world from its paralysis, abjection and amnesia; to unsettle the epistemic and structural violence that is ubiquitous to neoliberalism and its machinery; to create dialogic and learning spaces for the work of critical human rights and critical justice to take place. All this, and to enable an ethics of intervention through understanding what is at the very heart of the critical human rights impulse, creating a “dialogue for being, because I am not without the other.”13

Furthermore, as a critical human rights advocate living in a nuclear armed world, your challenge is to reconceptualise the human community as Ashis Nandy has argued, to see how we can learn to co-exist with others in conviviality and also learn to co-survive with the non-human, even to flourish. A dialogue for being requires a leap into a human rights frame that includes a deep ecological dimension, where the planet itself is inherently involved as a participant in its future. This requires scholarship that “thinks like a mountain.”14 A critical human rights approach understands that it cannot be simply human-centric. It requires a nuanced and arresting clarity to present perspectives on co-existence and co-survival that are from human and non-human viewpoints.15

Ultimately, you realise that your struggle is not confined to declarations, treaties, legislation, and law, though they have their role. It must go further to produce “creative intellectual exchange that might release new ethical energies for mutually assured survival.”16 Taking an anti-nuclear stance and enabling a post-nuclear activism demands a revolution within the field of human rights work. Recognising the entanglement of nuclearism with the Anthropocene, for one thing, requires a profound shift in focus from the human-centric to a more-than-human co-survival. It also requires a fundamental shift in understanding our human culture, in which the very epistemic and rational acts of sundering from co-survival with the planet and environment takes place. In the end, you realise, as Raimon Panikkar has articulated, “it is not realistic to toil for peace if we do not proceed to a disarmament of the bellicose culture in which we live.”17 Or, as Geshe Lhakdor suggests, there must be “inner disarmament for external disarmament.”18 In this sense, it is within the cultural arena, our human society, where the entanglement of subjective meaning making, nature and politics occurs, that we need to disarm.

It is 1982, and you are reading Jonathan Schell's The Fate of the Earth on a Sydney bus. Sleeping has not been easy over the past few nights as you reluctantly but compulsively read about the consequences of nuclear war. For some critics, Schell's account is high polemic, but for you it is more like Rabindranath Tagore: it expresses the suffering we make for ourselves. What you find noteworthy is that although Schell's scenario of widespread destruction of the planet through nuclear weaponry, of immeasurable harm to the bio-sphere through radiation, is powerfully laid out, the horror and scale of nuclear obliteration also seems surreal and far away as the bus makes its way through the suburban streets.

A few years later, you read a statement from an interview with Paul Tibbets, the pilot of “Enola Gay,” the plane that bombed Hiroshima. He says, “The morality of dropping that bomb was not my business.”19 This abstraction from moral responsibility – the denial of the implications on human life and the consequences of engagement through the machinery of war – together with the sweeping amnesia that came afterwards from thinking about the bombing of Hiroshima, are what make you become an environmental and human rights activist. You realise that what makes the nuclear algorithm work involves a politically engineered and deeply embedded insecurity-based recipe to elide the nuclear threat from everyday life. The spectre of nuclear obliteration, like the idea of human rights, can appear abstract and distant, not our everyday business. You realise that within this recipe is the creation of a moral tyranny of distance, an abnegation of myself with the other. One of modernity's greatest and earliest achievements was the mediation of the self with the world. How this became a project assisted and shaped through the military-industrial-technological-capitalist complex is fraught and hard to untangle. But as a critical human rights scholar you have come to see through that complex, and you put energies into challenging that tyranny of distance, to activate a politics, ethics and scholarship that recognises the other as integral to yourself. Ultimately, even, to see that the other is also within.20