Stands in Politics

John Nelson

University of Iowa

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Stands in Politics

John S. Nelson
The University of Iowa

The stand in politics is a major form of current political theory, as it is of all political theory intended for times of trouble. It possesses special characteristics, concerns, and connections to aspects of political life. This essay contrasts the stand to other forms of theory and projects of action. Then it samples stand making and taking among recent political theorists. Stands coalesce into an unusual kind of action, so that theorists making stands may conceive themselves to be key political actors. The essay concludes with prospects for future stand making and taking, including forums other than political theory.

Much current political theory escapes our standard categories, corresponding to neither utopia nor ideology, treatise nor history, dialogue nor confession. Two concepts which can clarify current theory are the political stance and the political stand. The stance fits the give and take of ordinary politics, when principle is created by and for compromise. But when compromise is the corruption of principle, a more rigid and lasting posture is called forth. The political stand offers a way of taking responsibility for the world as well as oneself, without eroding principles.

I

It is immensely moving when a mature man—no matter whether old or young in years—is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: "Here I stand; I can do no other." That is something genuinely human and moving. And every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realize the possibility of finding himself at some time in that position. In so far as this is true, an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man—a man who can have the "calling for politics." (Weber, 1946, p. 127)

Echoing the famous declaration of Martin Luther, this familiar passage from "Politics as a Vocation" draws into public affairs that deep-seated,

* Conversations with Edward Sharp, Lane Davis, and C. R. Boynton refined the argument of this essay. I also thank Booth Fowler, Vernon Van Dyke, and Youlika Kotsovolou Masry for detailed comments on earlier drafts.
spiritual commitment which Weber himself argued to be the mark of religion rather than politics. In this politically ultimate sense, taking a stand probably is not something for all seasons or even many. But it is fitting and perhaps required for times of terrible trouble, when the very possibility of politics seems imperiled. It is the politics for "a polar night of icy darkness and hardness" (1946, p. 128). As such, it is what Weber believed to be the politics appropriate for his times, as it is for many since, because Weber's times are our times. Taking a stand is an important project of political action in our day. Accordingly, making a stand is a major form of postmodern political theory.\textsuperscript{1} Where such action and theory converge, the stand passes beyond an occasional recourse of regular politics to become a distinctive politics for times of trouble. Thus I argue here that the concept of a political stand has special significance for current politics.

More particularly, my first thesis is that taking a stand is a distinct project of political action. One of its more remarkable features is its emphasis upon theorizing as a mode of action. In turn, articulating stands is a discrete form of political theory: separate not only from ideologies and utopias but also from platforms, commentaries, treatises, and the like.

Often as not, the cutting edge of postmodern politics has been the dagger of the stand, not the broadsword of ideology. This second thesis is not derived from the frequency of the stand in comparison with other projects and forms. Instead, it is a claim about the contributions of many leading actors and thinkers in our day. Indeed, taking the stand seriously as action means reclassifying some "mere thinkers" in order to give their projects of political action proper recognition.

Many theorists of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen politics in terms of cultural diremption and decay. Their works demonstrate that stand making and taking are typical of such times. This leads to a third thesis: the stand is part of the politics of turmoil and uncertainty in the West. Of course, not all politics turn toward stands in response to cultural crisis. Nor is this response usually unalloyed. But the stand is common enough during cultural crisis that there is reason to regard it as characteristic of such times of trouble.

Some theorists are convinced that ours is a time of troubled transition. The issue here is not the accuracy of that diagnosis but its current prominence and its significance for the near future. Insofar as stands fit our situation, seen in such apocalyptic terms, preoccupation with stand making and taking will continue in coming years. And that is my fourth claim.

\textsuperscript{1} The idea of our times as a postmodern period is specified and defended in Nelson (1977, 1983); see also Arendt (1968, pp. 17–40).
Let me emphasize that not everyone responds to crises of culture by making and taking stands. Even when this is a person's main response, it is usually mixed with others. Certainly what is studied here from the standpoint of stands should be studied from other angles as well. I claim only that this notion can add much to our understanding of politics.

My argument involves various theorists of recent politics. Keeping the argument to an essay (instead of a book) means focusing on only a few figures of special significance, and sorting among their projects in a highly schematic and abbreviated way. This leaves lots of room for omission, overemphasis, and other occasions for criticism. But I encourage you to take this limitation as an invitation to join in the argument, furnishing an independent investigation of the forms and projects of current politics. Then, even as you test my claims by your own sense of current conditions, practices, and theories, the concept of political stands will enter the arena of public thought and action. Because my examples must be few and elliptical, I invite you to work through your own, to share my burden of inquiry. For the same reason, my rhetoric is meant to echo that of recent stand takers, to convey the common flavor of their projects. In the end, when this essay encounters deeper questions, those it must confront but cannot answer adequately, we should be well into the discussion I want to begin.

II

Every virtue and every prudent act ... is founded on compromise. ... (Burke, 1775)

Important principles may and must be inflexible. (Lincoln, 1865)

What is the stuff of political stands? When making a stand, what is it of? When taking a stand, what is it on? The standard answer is "principle," and the conventional opposite of standing on principle is "compromise." Thus stands and stances differ in their relation to principle and compromise.

Conventional wisdom sees "compromise" as synonymous with "sell-out" (see Tussman, 1960, 104–21). Compromise is called the corruption and destruction of principle, not a responsible route for carrying it into practice. It is conceived as the very opposite not only of standing on principle, but of principle per se. These days, "principled compromise" sounds like a contradiction in terms. Little wonder, then, that politicians in particular and politics in general are now held in low regard.

Ordinarily, though, this view misconceives compromise, principle, and politics. Not only are compromise and principle both crucial to politics as usual, but they complement and shade into one another so much as to
be almost indistinguishable in some lights.² Good but ordinary politics is so thoroughly textured of compromise that standing on principle is either taken as a posturing preliminary to compromise or as an outright obstruction of politics. Henry Fairlie notes, "the politician who says that he is taking a stand on some issue will, if he is wise, cross his fingers, and mutter under his breath that it is only shifting sand on which he has a footing" (1977, p. 44). Because principle and compromise can and must go together in ordinary times, the language and practice of stands should not be a part of everyday politics.

But what are we to call the choice and dynamics of principle in usual politics? I suggest we talk of "taking stances." In the declaration of Martin Luther, "stand" implies a firm, unmoving, enduring commitment. It evokes such phrases as "Custer's last stand," "standing by someone," "standing for something," "standing up to be counted," "standing pat," and so on. But "stance" carries opposite connotations. It is synonymous with "posture." Stances and postures are temporary; they are either preliminary or intermediary. We talk of the batter's stance at the plate prior to swinging at the ball or the posture of the dancer at the height of a leap. Stances and postures connote snapshots of action scenes, and they can even imply the artificiality or superficiality of being posed. This is apparent in our related notion of "posturing." But its recent overtones of insincerity, lack of substance, or even lack of principle disqualify "posturing" for use here.

Overall, then, ordinary politics is best described in terms of stances or postures. Holding out for a better bargain may look for a while like a stand, but it is only a result of stance strategy (see Wills, 1976). Stands may occur in ordinary politics, but they will almost always be misunderstood and (if of any consequence) deplored. They may look saintly at first but soon seem petty and self-righteous. Yet although they do not belong in politics as usual, stands are mainstays of troubled times.

III

[T]here are periods in history in which it is not possible to reconcile the hopes of the moment and the needs of the future, when a congruence between one's personal life and the collective direction of all mankind cannot be established without doing violence either to one's existence or to one's understanding. I believe that ours is such a time and that we must learn to live with its irreconcilable conflicts and contradictions. (Heilbroner, 1975, pp. 167-68)

When institutions are thoroughly corrupt; when terror, resentment,

² Plainly there is more to be said about the relationship between compromise and principle, but that leads beyond my immediate argument here.
and exploitation are the principles of politics; when criticism and reform are debased, forbidden, or forgotten; when compromise is capitulation, if even conceivable: then ordinary politics is out of the question, and it is time to stand on principle. Heilbroner is hardly alone in regarding our era as one of irreconcilable conflicts and contradictions. Such are times when politics itself is put in question, when troubles seem so severe that not even revolutions suffice. Then compromise is corrupt or incoherent, and the ethics of politics and religion converge. Tom Paine's era tested political talent and imagination: trying men's courage, conviction, and capacity for action. But what Heilbroner has in mind would truly be times that try men's souls.

The key question in such an era is what consistent moral stand we could recommend to a person of good will (Heilbroner, 1975, p. 167). How can good will be given a concrete shape or program? When the problem is to find any ethical ground at all, it is time to ponder standing pat on whatever principles promise to coalesce into a responsible position.

Whereas days of revolution are haunted by injustice, times of terrible trouble are possessed by it. Then it is almost instinctive to look to your principles, to seek to guard them as they are to guide and guard you. And where evil, apathy, or oppression seem so widespread that revolution becomes immoral or impossible, it is time to worry whether proper principles can be conceived, let alone effected intact. If ordinary politics offers shifting sands, then the winds which rip through times of trouble whip those sands into a single, stinging gloom. Fighting loss, some invoke the facility for making and taking stands. This explains and justifies the prominence of stands in hard times. True compromise cannot occur in a world dominated by corruptions and caricatures of politics. Then the challenge is to achieve any plausible and consistent principles. When even extraordinary politics is elusive, stands come into their own.

Times of trouble are marked by what their more perceptive inhabitants see as a radical split between thought and action. Because normal patterns and resources of thought are inadequate for understanding common occurrences or coping with everyday problems, a gulf is opened between practice and theory (as well as between practice and principle). New theories, new patterns of thought must be created to keep open the possibility of controlling life enough to take responsibility for one's own actions. Thus the main part of taking a stand typically turns out to be the theoretical effort of making a stand. Such fusion of theory and practice is one reason that our usual talk of politics should be supplemented with a terminology of stands and stances.

3 Detailed comparison of revolutionary strategies and times with stands and times of trouble is another topic that this essay can only skirt.
Despite occasional appearances, the language of stands and stances is not common. It is seldom encountered in studies of recent political theory, for it has not been recognized as providing a set of concepts for assessing politics or political theory. Largely, this reproduces the current gap between thought and action. We tend to divide political concepts into two compartments: theory and practice. But stands and stances bridge the two.

By "stands" or "stances," I do not mean only theories about the world, visions for it, or techniques of acting in it. Instead, I mean their confluence. Stands and stances toward the world include or are informed by theories. But in addition to explicit cognition, let alone highly structured theory, they involve less conscious and less rationalistic components to shape personal relationships to the world. Stands and stances are the patterns of these relationships. On the other hand, they are not merely habitual ways of being in the world, even if habits are grounded in principle. For stands and stances involve not only intellection but also relations to unusual situations. Most importantly, stands and stances include patterns of action in the world: ways of expressing and effecting theories, moralities, principles, visions, emotions, and the like. Thus they are more than simple techniques for action; they extend to the choice and ordering of ends as well as means. The element of action needs emphasis, since no study examining only theories enunciated in speech or writing can hope to fathom fully what differentiates one stand or stance from another. Not only must proposals for effecting views be studied, but also actual deeds: both public and private.

That stands and stances must be described by joining terms of theory and practice suggests that our split between thought and action is wide and deep. This supports a diagnosis of our times as troubled. The gap comes from basic uncertainty about both the proper relationship between thought and action and the ways (whatever their propriety) in which thought and action may be brought into any regular and productive relationship.

In turn, our uncertainty has many sources. Common to all is a tie to our calamitous actions. Evidently, neither compromise nor revolution now allows even the greatest skill to transform moral aims into practical realities with sufficient integrity or reliability. In times of trouble, the world seems so warped that any remaining area of action must distort and pervert intention beyond recognition. Yet when few intentions can be projected even approximately intact, the very possibility of action is put in doubt. Thus stand takers believe that routes to political action are practically nonexistent. Worse, such doubt about present practices unsettles categories of thought and standards of judgment, which are supposed to make sense out of the arena of action. The result is serious
disruption of ties between thought and action or even thought itself. When action atrophies, true thinking wastes away (see Arendt, 1971; Nelson, 1975; Sykes, 1967).

Paradoxically, the gap between thought and action becomes so radical in troubled times that true thinking is made into a kind of action. When thought loses contact with current practices, it loses access to the fresh observations and unexpected experiences which allow it to reform and redirect itself. In bad times, one who really thinks is taking responsibility for self and world in the only way widely available: for few have access to space for constructive political action. In ordinary politics, thinking and acting may be quite distinct, but, in the stand taker's attempt to create an extraordinary politics for hard times, they converge. Then to project thought into speech is virtually to act, insofar as action can occur in such severe circumstances. Thus explicit theorizing becomes an arena for scarce action.

This explains why the main part of stand taking typically is the theoretical task of stand making, for taking a stand cannot even begin without new patterns of thought for coming to grips with current perplexities. Indeed, given the dearth of alternate arenas for action, the only practical path to worthy principles is simply to formulate them. In extreme conditions, stand making can be identical to stand taking.

Then the task is truly to think. As Hannah Arendt argued, "this may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down" (1971, p. 446). Then stands become not just fundamentally but fully defensive and individual. Even when stand taking is not wholly swallowed by stand making, two corollaries arise. First, the political theorists of troubled times may be reckoned among the key actors of the day, for the posturing of ordinary actors may be beside the point. And second, although study of theories cannot complete the study of most stands, it can go far toward a good grasp of their structures and dynamics.

IV

Today's hero is not skeptical, dilettantish, or decadent; he has simply experienced chance, disorder, and failure. . . . He lives at a time when duties and tasks are unclear. He has a sharper sense of human liberty and of the contingency of the future than anyone has ever had before. Taking everything into account, nothing is certain—not victory, which is still so far away, and not other people. Never before have men had such good evidence that the course of events is full of twists and turns, that much is asked of daring and that they are alone in the world and before one another. . . . The contemporary hero is not Lucifer; he is not even Prometheus; he is man. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 186–87)

The stand departs from other forms of theory and projects of action in its characteristics, concerns, connections, and contrasts. Once ex-
plained, these areas of departure clarify two lines of convergence between stands and stances.

**Characteristics of the Stand**

There are many ways to describe the stand. The characteristics to follow are by no means exhaustive. These seven features are sufficient but not necessary conditions for a theory or course of action to be a stand.

1. **Disillusionment.** Almost always, political stands are products of the profound disillusionment common in troubled times. These days, some theorists reject the politics of incremental technique and apocalyptic revolution; they reject not just the Enlightenment, but the Modern Age itself; they despair of Western Civilization and perhaps of civilization per se. Failure is feared, but so is success; idealism is attacked, but so are ideals; optimism is assailed, but so is hope. Yet in a Cartesian denouement, others become caught up in distrusting their own doubt. Spawned by pervasive disillusionment is an equally pervasive desperation. It lunges after a critical commitment that our disillusionment tends to make into a contradiction in terms. In response, stands defy despair by fixing upon a few principles for a refuge in troubled times and a promise of better things to come. Stands make this possible by accepting disillusionment with all but the most immediate ideals, activities, and individuals. Much disillusionment is accommodated in order to protect against even more. This ethos is readily evident in recent political theory. Among its three most repeated particulars are the next three characteristics of the stand.

2. **Rejection of Rationalism.** The stand taker accepts abstract, analytical intellection as a proper part of responsible living but rejects the rationalism which would make it into the sole guiding force for human existence. In this sense, rationalism is the idolization of that analysis upon which the West is founded. It should not be confused with rationalization, its specifically late- or postmodern form. In premodern times of trouble, stand takers renounced versions of rationalism peculiar to the

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4 Sometimes stands are not based on disillusionment. But then they are usually romantic, immature, or rooted in misjudgments of the times. Stands not grounded in disillusionment are likely to be evangelical and optimistic in ways which neglect most complications of the human condition.

5 See Shklar (1972, p. 134): “The contents of Pandora’s jar are scattered among men—sorrow, disease, and misery. Only hope does not escape, because Zeus prevents it from leaving the jar. Even hope is denied men.” Or Schaar (1974, p. 178): “The right reading of the story of Pandora’s box is not that hope was released after all the other evils so that they might be endurable. Rather, hope was the last of the evils.”

6 When the stand taker does not reject rationalism but embraces it, then the usual result is something like the peculiar stand of pluralism, which I explore toward the end of the essay’s fourth section.
times. But in our times, to reject rationalism is to renounce the modern autonomization of reason and the subsequent threat to rationalize all aspects of life. After Weber's image of the iron cage, rationalization is portrayed as the antinomy of freedom and the epitome of shallowness. The modern confidence in automatic mechanisms of regulation or progress has collapsed, and the postmodern observer sees instead only accident or perverse control. To keep rationality within proper bounds, other faculties are revived if not exalted. Will, imagination, and emotion reemerge to qualify intellect. We try to rediscover the virtues of habit and tradition. In response to the acid or arid criticality encouraged by rationalism, the stand taker seeks a solid ground of commitment for digging in and establishing roots to resist troubles. For us, this may mean repudiating the modern worship of science and technology. But with Weber, one can stand on at least some of the virtues and projects of such science and still reject rationalization itself.

(3) Rejection of Impersonal Equality. Most who feel forced to take a stand see recent corruption at least partly as the reduction of human possibility to a very low and common denominator. Thus some castigate mass society as the unrestricted reach of system, closure, and sameness. Then stands are understood to rescue persons increasingly deprived of individuality. Given extreme threats to personal integrity, concern with the individual easily becomes concern with the self. In a way, stand taking tries to protect the self first and foremost, for otherwise there may be too few critics left to give visions of better conduct and communities a chance to stay alive in such corrupt conditions. An obvious danger is lapsing into some sort of narcissism (see Malcolm, 1971; Hougan, 1976; Lasch, 1978). But if our times are deeply troubled, then protecting the integrity of the self may indeed be our main moral challenge. Further, true stand takers reject mass society to promote the principle of individuality for all, not merely for themselves.

(4) Rejection of Ordinary and Large-Scale Politics. The stand taker rejects large-scale political enterprises for the same reasons as ordinary political compromises: they seem futile; worse, they spread rather than constrict violence, corruption, and fear. Many think that the reach of revolutionary politics has caused the last several centuries to go "arise, ye wretched of the earth" (Koestler, 1941, p. 98). The repeated perversion of revolutions suggests that large-scale politics is easily derailed to destroy rather than renew. More generally, stand takers see overblown ambitions behind twentieth-century corruptions. Perhaps politics is always a dirty business, but even stand takers who agree will insist that politics in their day is fully and unnecessarily filthy. To promote large-scale, collective tasks is to prompt atrocity and disaster. As stand takers assess them, political actors in times of trouble possess almost no capacity to encourage
events in desirable directions. Considerable disillusionment comes from the repeated collapse of collective projects and the miscarriage of adventurous ideals (see Crossman, 1949; Shklar, 1957). Political stands often arise from the conviction that cultivating sweeping political aims through present action is courting moral suicide. Yet for all this, stand takers typically refuse to reject politics per se and remain committed to a peculiar kind of action. It is meant to have a large impact but only as an indirect result of deeds severely restricted in immediate import. Otherwise, risks cannot be kept within reasonable bounds.

(5) Insistence on Personal Responsibility. Stands are not based on an ethic of absolute ends, if by that is meant indifference to the consequences of holding fast to personal principles. With Weber, stand takers see stands as the only way to exercise personal responsibility in hard times. Stands embody a belief that, for the time being, purity of principle is the only real route to responsibility for the consequences of personal conduct. To take a stand is not to withdraw wholly from politics, let alone the world. Stands seek neither cynical avoidance of responsibility nor hermetic restriction of it to oneself. The very notion of responsibility verges on incoherence when the world is ignored in favor of concentration solely on oneself, and stand takers know this. Probably their main problem, then, is finding a formula for responsibility beyond the self—but without becoming corrupted and without contributing to a politics and a world which are fundamentally corrupt. How can they be involved without being implicated?

(6) Insistence on Limited Politics. Generally, stand taking responds to the problem of personal responsibility by trying to create small-scale politics of severely limited ends and means. It tries to be constructive, for stand takers typically regard slipping into defeatist stances as a major temptation of the times. Lately, this temptation is sometimes said to be compounded by attractions of nihilism (see Arendt, 1958; Polanyi, 1960; Nelson, 1977). Indeed, avoiding nihilism has been a central impulse toward stand taking. Although stands are never strictly defensive, their constructive aspects exist beside their deeply defensive purposes, for the possibility of constructive action depends on protecting individual stand takers.

Beyond that, direct efforts seldom extend farther than small groups of friends. Stand takers regard overextension as another great danger of political endeavor in hard times. A largely personalistic politics results. It is a very limited politics, providing little more than small arenas of direct action even while protecting actors and deeds from being engulfed by threats of the day. Although stand takers want to extend effective action as far as possible, they worry about overextension to the point of coaching against getting their hopes up and letting their guard down.
Some stands are even predicated upon suspicion of their own, perhaps apparent, success. Accordingly, limited politics leads to highly limited projects of action.

(7) Insistence on Limited Action. Providing positive projects of action while also protecting stand takers means limiting both the scope and nature of action. Four forms of limited action dominate recent stand taking. In order of increasing severity, they may be described as reductions of action to personal example, to speech, to theory, and to thought.

The first reduction, of action to personal example, is the main (and often the only) mode of overt, positive endeavor readily recognized by stand takers as action. The effects of good examples of personal conduct can reach beyond close associates, but seldom directly and thus seldom forcefully. Even so, their effects should not be underestimated. For as Weber observed of charisma, we often emulate exemplary patterns of conduct. Even when the positive effects fall far short of full success, personal example often remains the only mode of action which avoids implicating stand takers in the corruption everywhere about them. Nor is it strictly self-oriented, since it seriously intends a principled influence on the lives and politics of others. Such personal projects draw together the purposes in politics, ethics, economics, religion, and other spheres. Because their point is to provide examples of the whole, well-rounded, responsible person, stands try to overcome the compartmentalization of postmodern life. In part, to take a stand is to try to stand out as an example to others.

The three reductions of action to speech, theory, and thought echo my earlier claims about the reduction of stand taking to stand making. All are justified by the absence of any more overt, intrusive, or active ways to influence the course of human events. Other ways, although more easily recognized as action, seem to stand takers to be too vulnerable to miscarriage and corruption. Likely, they will not only fail, but fail disastrously. They require accommodations which jeopardize integrity and yet offer no real prospects of success. Indeed, conceptions of action proposed by recent theorists come close to reducing all action to speech, theory, or thought (see Nelson, 1977, pp. 685-702, 710-14). This reduction reflects recent perversions of action to push beyond these limits. We know few instances of unequivocally successful action transcending them. To protect capacities for future action, stands tend to reduce all current action to criticizing, creating visions of a better world, and communicating those views. As Arendt suggested, stand takers often insist that the best available acts are those which set examples of excellence in theorizing.
Concerns of the Stand

From these characteristics of the stand, at least four main concerns are evident. They deserve separate discussion.

(1) Praxis. Almost obsessively, stand takers are fascinated by problematics of theory and practice, which tie closely to the problematics of critical commitment just noted. Ceaseless discussions of proper participants, purposes, premises, and strategies of action signal deep doubt about whether theory and practice can be well connected.

As a result, there has been a revival of thought about politics and action. The last half-century has seen many attempts, at least in theory, to return politics to the center of reflection and direction in human affairs. Recent theory has replaced other symbolic forms (especially society and economy) with politics as the category of totality: the sphere responsible for comprehending and coordinating all other domains of understanding and endeavor. But such theory has not been matched in practice, where economy and society remain entrenched in areas formerly or at least properly political. This split between theory and practice is behind the recent renaissance in political theory but has also held it back from the full flowering it desires. And political stands have become important precisely because few thorough thinkers now have much confidence in the coherence of large-scale, active connections between theory and practice.

(2) Community. In rejecting large-scale endeavors and impersonal associations, stand takers seek to protect and revitalize individuals (especially themselves). But they typically recognize that recovering lasting individuality requires overcoming the loneliness, the lack of intimate connection and cooperation, that erodes the security needed for full independence. For this reason, stand takers often cultivate a keen concern for community, seeing it as the one soil rich enough for viable individuality to take root and flourish. However abstract their principles of justice, they do directly engage the world in this context of community. Here stand takers assume much of their burden of responsibility for others. Their visions of alternate politics for the future usually emphasize close communities. In addition, their interim actions are typically predicated on the presence of small communities of colleagues or converts. They provide protected spaces for the limited politics meant to last out hard times. Thus concern for individuality becomes concern for community.

(3) Communication. The importance of the stand-taking concern with communication is evident from the reductions of action to speech, theory, or thought. (After all, even thought requires contact with others to be independent and effective.) This significance is suggested also by
the stand-taking concern with community, since "the precondition of community is communication" (Mayer, 1975, p. 4). A focus on communication is evident in the increasing study of political language, which now seems to be leading political theory into perhaps the most intense interest in rhetoric since the Renaissance (see Nelson, 1983). Such concern for political language and rhetoric is common in times of trouble and might even be among their distinguishing marks. In the previous century, this concern turned back on itself to produce systematic studies of historical sources and structures of human thinking. In Hegel's hands, these studies led to the phenomenology of mind; and in Mannheim's, to the sociology of knowledge. Thus does the stand's concern with communication modulate into its concern with the origins and natures of human knowing.

(4) Epistemology. In the unsettled conditions of troubled times, self-conscious stand takers are almost inevitably drawn to issues of epistemology. To ask where to stand leads to asking how to stand and on what. Eventually such questions lead us to wonder what "standing" is; by that point, we are well within the sticky web of the study of knowing. Thus not all stand-taking interest in epistemology comes from current conflicts over the status of political theory in an era of political science. Many deplore that "the contemporary literature on political theory advises us . . . to approach political theory as though it existed within the philosophical framework of the problem of knowledge or as though it were a subcategory of the dispute over scientific methodology" (Ashcraft, 1975, p. 16; and see Kress, 1979). To the extent that this is true, it becomes more understandable and defensible when the vantage of stands is taken into account. In hard times, corruption makes not only action and thought but even perception suspect. What should be done is hard to specify—at least partly because what can be known is unclear. What ordinarily would be problems of politics are pushed back into epistemology. Politics comes to lean on epistemology to an extraordinary degree, which leads political theory to do likewise.

Linking great political theory with drastic political change has become commonplace, but linking both with epistemology is every bit as justified. Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke, Kant and Hegel, Marx and Mill: all interwove theories of acting with theories of knowing. Political theory and epistemology converge in crisis, because the conditions which unsettle the one also unsettle the other. Intertwinings of epistemology and politics are yet another respect in which theory can be considered action in bad times. Seeing our times as troubled times, the current concern for epistemology makes sense, even as it may also draw us away from concrete responsibilities into absorption with abstract conjectures.
Connections of the Stand

The main connections of the stand are plainly implicit in its concerns and characteristics. The first connection is to catastrophes and corruptions of the times. Recent atrocities and disasters include clusters of world wars and imperialisms, attempted genocides and successful fratricides. Ours is the century of totalitarianism, mass society, pollution, nuclear proliferation, and the population explosion. In the face of such threats, politics appears to have gone wrong or been inadequate. Thus a further connection is to that complicated shift in sensibilities associated with various existentialisms. These decry our problems but refuse to leap to large-scale, collectivist solutions. Instead, they focus upon individual responsibility for coping with corruption and making sense out of absurdity. Their injunctions to action flirt with nihilism, utopianism, and ideology; but mostly they pull back toward a few principles for guiding individual action. Certainly, existentialists themselves embrace exemplary action.

The connections to religion and depth psychology have structures similar to that of existentialism. All three usually reject rationalism. All three try to attend to the individual in all aspects and responsibilities, and they are heavily involved in the epistemological struggles of our times. All three seek a basis for critical commitment and action to withstand the temptations and threats about us. Recent stand taking draws deeply from these sources, as evidenced by its political symbolism. Prometheus and Faust are largely left behind. As Albert Camus's characters suggest, stands respond to our troubled times after the fashion of Sisyphus or the Stranger. And there is some of these in the stand taker. But more apt is Camus's figure of the Rebel. For what could be more reminiscent of stand takers than the short description, injunction, and prophecy which conclude the instruction of the Rebel?

Each of us tells the other that he is not a God; this is the end of romanticism. At this moment, when each of us must fit an arrow to his bow and enter the lists anew, to reconquer, within history and in spite of it, that which he owns already, the thin yield of his fields, the brief love of this earth, at this moment when at last a man is born, it is time to forsake our age and its adolescent furies. The bow bends; the wood complains. At the moment of supreme tension, there will leap into flight an unswerving arrow, a shaft that is inflexible and free. (1954, p. 306)

Inflexible and free, so stand takers would leap into unswerving flight in our times of supreme tension. The Rebel is a stand taker's text.

Equally apt as symbols of the stand are images in Heilbroner's Inquiry into the Human Prospect. As a response to bad times, Heilbroner appeals to the model of the monastery. With overtones of a religiously grounded fortress against decline and corruption, this model stands well for stand
taking, especially its concern for community and its small-scale action by example and neighborhood assistance (1975, pp. 161-62). Even more evocative is Heilbroner’s symbol of the stand taker as an Atlas waiting out troubled times.

The question, then, is how we are to summon up the will to survive—not perhaps in the distant future, where survival will call on those deep sources of imagined human unity, but in the present and near-term future. . . . At this last moment of reflection another figure from Greek mythology comes to mind. It is that of Atlas, bearing with endless perseverance the weight of the heavens in his hands. If mankind is to rescue life, it must first preserve the very will to live, and thereby rescue the future from the angry condemnation of the present. The spirit of conquest and aspiration will not provide the inspiration it needs for the task. It is the example of Atlas, resolutely bearing his burden, that provides the strength we seek. If, within us, the spirit of Atlas falters, there perishes the determination to preserve humanity at all cost and any cost, forever. (1975, pp. 143-44)

To conjoin Camus and Heilbroner is to see the Rebel as Atlas and vice versa. What results is the ultimate symbol of the stand taker as proposed by both Weber and Merleau-Ponty: the symbol is man. This is because the ultimate challenge in times of trouble is to withstand all the forces which would lessen individuals by tempting them to more or by terrorizing them to nothing. Whether or not stand takers believe with William Faulkner that man will prevail, their task is to insure, at the least, that man will endure.

Contrasts with the Stand

Considered as a form of political theory, the stand differs from such other forms as the treatise, dialogue, and history in having a project of action to propose. As a highly personal form, it often converges with the essay, yet the essay also tends to avoid projecting a course of action. This personal orientation gives the stand some resemblance to the confession, after the fashion of Augustine or even Rousseau; but the stand is less concerned to declare deficiencies and more directed toward articulating principles for conduct than is the typical confession. Of course, political theory takes many other forms, any of which can at times be amalgamated to the stand, but none of which would ordinarily be confused with the stand, considered as a form.

The two forms of political theory most like the stand are those which most obviously follow it in combining a form for theory with a project for action: the ideology and the utopia. Much has already been done to contrast the stand with the ideology. The stand is usually more cautious, self-doubting, and defensive; the ideology is usually adventurous, rationalist or even “scientific,” and offensive. The stand emphasizes small-scale action by individuals or close communities; the ideology emphasizes large-scale action by movements or masses. The stand is a few principles
for endurance; the ideology is a vast program for progress or even revolution. According to this specific, historically restricted conception of ideology, the main instances would include modern liberalism, socialism, and conservatism (see Mullins, 1973; Nelson, 1980). An important political development of our times is the frustration and fragmentation of such ideologies. In picking up their pieces, many postmodern people put them back together more as stands than as ideologies. As argued below by example, many current projects now classified as liberalisms, socialisms, or conservatisms are better viewed as attempts at personal stands than programmatic ideologies.

To contrast the stand and the utopia is more difficult since the stand usually includes a utopian vision, however vague. Actually, there are two contrasts: between the stand and the modern utopia, and also between the stand and the classical utopia (see Shklar, 1965). All utopian projects offer concrete visions of alternate ways of life. But the modern utopia is distinctive in two respects. First, it insists on a vision of the good life, so that it is always a eutopia. Second, it insists on a confident, even programmatic, expectation that its vision will be realized, often in the relatively near future. Thus despite its smaller concern with precisely how to get from here to there, the modern utopia converges with the modern ideology. They are close enough that contrasts with the stand are the same, with one qualification. Stands are usually less concrete and detailed in their visions of alternatives than are modern utopias. Stands echo the caution sounded by late-modern ideologies, from Hegel on, which doubts the possibility of being specific about what will or can happen in the future.7

The classical-utopian vision gives a critical comparison for current culture. It is not a program to be realized, and it does not pretend to be the good society. Thus the classical utopia is more a thought experiment than an action project. That is why it is named after nowhere. The stand's vision usually has the same purpose of critical comparison with present conditions; indeed, its abstraction preempts other purposes. Hence it is usually less specific than the vision of the classical utopia. But the basic difference goes deeper to the very idea of taking a stand. As Peter Euben has written, "given that utopian means no place, it suggests that standing no place, i.e., adopting no stance or standpoint, is utopian, coming from nowhere" (1977, p. 25). Even when reducing action to theory or thought, the stand presents itself as a project of action, not merely as an exercise in thought. And thus even when it involves utopian visions, it cannot be reduced to them alone. While stand takers experiment in

7 Of late, almost the only concrete, detailed, yet credible projections of other ways of life have been, not ideologies or utopias, but dystopias.
thought, they cling in practice to the principles which make up their stands.

Convergence of Stands and Stances

In general, the stand is appropriate for extraordinary politics, while the stance finds its home in ordinary politics. Nevertheless, they converge in two ways. First, the stand is designed to be enduring but not eternal. It is grounded in the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary politics, and that means it must, however implicitly, look toward a return to ordinary politics. The stand is designed to make man endure until hard times have passed and better days are at hand. By projection, it works to make itself into a stance at the proper point in history. Hence it must continually reconsider its justification, in the hope that it may have succeeded in working itself out of its job. In the interim, the stand must try to keep a certain flexibility. This is a flexibility less of principle than of mind: a quality of self-criticism to be kept in careful control, lest it undermine the stand itself. In this first respect, the stand/stance distinction remains important, although subtly less dramatic than may be implied by previous parts of this essay.

Second, the stand and the stance can converge by virtue of a paradoxical possibility: some stands can be stances. Two examples come readily to mind. One is the stand based upon systematic criticism and pluralism. Its main principle is a firm commitment to the priority of ordinary politics, as understood by pluralism. Rules and processes are what count, with less attention to products and substance. In a sense, this stand refuses to accept any substantive principles as a firm enough grounding. But what has been said about troubled times implies that this stand tends to undermine itself. Survival in such times apparently requires some substantive principles for self-definition, let alone for defining responsibilities to others. This stand's peculiar lack of concrete content makes it inordinately difficult to sustain. At best, its ambition to avoid substantive principles is practically bound to fail, with some of its concrete products—not its processes—coming to be its real basis as a stand.

The other is the stand which offers itself as a sort of super-stance. It insists on shifting relentlessly from stance to stance. This is a kind of "ironism" (Nelson, 1977, pp. 14–43). To stand on pluralism is to avoid all concrete and substantive principles in favor of a particular set of abstract and procedural ones, but to stand on ironism is to reject all principles save those which specify the distrust of principle. Whereas the pluralist stand emphasizes the partial validity of at least most available positions, the ironist stand stresses the partial error of all available positions (save itself, perhaps). While the stand of pluralism parcels stances to the political
field at one per person per situation, ironism runs the ironist himself through diverse stances within each situation.

For ironists, the world is so corrupt that all principles, stances, and commitments can (and practically must) be assumed to contain some seeds of corruption. Hence they seek to endure untainted by staying one step ahead of temptation, switching from stance to stance before the seeds of corruption can flower for them. By this principle of unceasing movement among principles, ironists strive to keep alive relatively worthy examples, to remain able to act in at least limited ways, and to sustain the possibility of some better form of life in the future. Accordingly, the ironists’ symbolic embodiment would be Proteus, steadfast only in continual change. Probably no more apparent antinomy to Atlas could be imagined; and yet, in a curious way, protean ironists can indeed count as stand takers. As for all other stands, the purpose of ironism is to allow individuals to withstand torturous times while still taking responsibility. Hence ironism may be the most extreme stand: a last possible defense against trouble, but still a stand.

V

One of the most serious questions arising from the disappointing and tragic events of this century is how man—not merely man generically, but every individual human being—can participate in history. (Tinder, 1974b, p. 547)

Today, on one side many people are fiercely determined to transform society through action; on the other side, the number of failed plans and the scale of political violence in recent times have brought many others to a state of political despair. Civility is an effort to stand clear of both extremes, and neither to count on historical transformation nor to fall into political despondency. (Tinder, 1974a, p. 465)

Current stands span the standard political spectrum. Here I identify some clear candidates for study in light of the concept, highlighting a few special features in each case. Let me begin with Glenn Tinder. Since his “civility” is proposed self-consciously as a stand, it easily sustains the full list of characteristics, concerns, connections, and contrasts of the stand. Tinder divides civility into three main principles: (1) historical autonomy; (2) comprehensive communality; and (3) exemplary action.

Historical autonomy involves “standing off from history” (1974b, p. 551). It despairs of ideologies, groups, and leaders; it demands that the person maintain doubt and distance from the mainstreams of history, without withdrawing from responsibility and participation. “One cultivates civility when the primary question in every historical situation is not ‘How can such and such an historical goal be reached?’ but rather, ‘How should I bear myself?’ ” (1974b, p. 553). Recognize limits, but act nonetheless.
Comprehensive communality involves availability, an unreserved attentiveness and readiness to respond to others. "Such attentiveness expresses a concern for all human experience, an unwillingness that anything should remain unheard or unknown" (1974b, p. 554). Yet "only a few of the most prominent political and cultural leaders can speak to all mankind; many people may feel that they have no opportunities to speak seriously at all—not even to those to whom they are closest. Hence all that can be asked of most of us is that we be prepared to respond to our 'neighbor'—to the one whom we happen to encounter in a situation with communal possibilities—and in responding to speak of the concerns of mankind" (1974b, p. 555). This is not to pull away from principles or dissolve the stand in a flood of fellow feeling which would overcome autonomy. Instead, "comprehensive attentiveness and availability engage one in a universal relationship which precludes total absorption in any particular relationship; in this way they dissolve ideologies and group demands" (1974b, p. 555).

Tinder's idea of exemplary action is much the same as mine. He explains that "although civility expresses a dislike of action, it is not simply a form of inaction. . . . [R]esponsibility in the absence of community entails action. The problem is to find a formula for action that is congruent with autonomy" (1974b, p. 555). The solution is to "carry out those acts which [one] believes would be historically beneficial if all, or at least all in some particular class to which [one] belongs, were to carry them out. Adhering to such a standard expresses a responsibility toward all human beings. At the same time it permits autonomy" (1974b, p. 555). Tinder's exemplary action epitomizes Weber's ethic of absolute ends. The actual consequences of action are subordinated to the hypothetical results which would occur if the examples were followed by most people. Not all exemplary action need downgrade actual effects, but Tinder's fuses insistence on responsibility with absolution for the actual results of standing on principle. A better merging of Weber's ordinarily opposite ethics to withstand troubled times could hardly be concocted.

Clearly, Tinder's stand of civility arises from an analysis of our conditions as hard times. Indeed, Tinder tends to read this into the very nature of politics and history (see 1964, 1979, 1980, 1981). Many stand takers do this, for it provides a way to slide between stands and stances. Thus the hope, humility, and responsibility without illusions at the center of civility may slip easily into willingness to compromise under favorable conditions. Such resonance with pluralism points to other key aspects of Tinder's stand. Tinder connects civility with virtues of liberalism, forging the fragments of that ideology into a postmodern stand. This is especially true of his treatment of tolerance and individual autonomy (see
Liberalism is peculiarly vulnerable to the shift from ideology to stand because it enjoys presenting itself as the enemy of ideologies. But connections common for stands are clear in the case of civility, for Tinder is explicit in erecting his stand upon perspectives and principles drawn from religion and existentialism. In these respects and others, Tinder's civility shows itself to be a stand in the wake of liberalism.

Stand taking is apparent also in afterglows of socialism and conservatism. Robert Heilbroner affords a socialist example. Since he is a source of my definition, there should be no doubt that his diagnosis of our times falls under the category of troubled times. Already quoted are his concern for formulating a stand on the principles of Atlas. One root of that stand reaches into ancient stoicism (thereby suggesting yet another, much earlier stand in times of trouble). But its other main root is unquestionably nourished by democratic socialism. This is obvious from Heilbroner's earlier work (e.g., 1962, 1963, 1972), but it is plain enough in justifying that stand for our times.

Still, Heilbroner parts with ambition, collectivism, rationalism, and other mainstays of socialism in favor of an emphasis on personal responsibility for human survival. With all stand takers, he knows that "it is one thing to appraise matters of life and death by the principles of rational self-interest and quite another to take responsibility for our choice." To be sure, "there are moral dilemmas to be faced even if one takes one's stand on the 'survivalist' principles." But this "essential commitment to life's continuance gives us the moral authority to take measures, perhaps very harsh measures, whose justification cannot be found in the precepts of rationality, but must be sought in the unbearable anguish we feel if we imagine ourselves as the executioners of mankind" (1975, p. 174). As he says, this principle is grounded in religion; and it contrasts instructively with Tinder's considerably more cautious conception of action. But they agree that "to accept the limitation of our ability, both as individuals and as a collectivity, seems to be the most difficult idea that Promethean man must learn. But learn it he must and learn it he will. The only question is whether the teacher will be history or ourselves" (Heilbroner, 1975, p. 168).

If anything, modern conservatism is even more anti-ideological than liberalism. This leaves postmodern conservatism ever on the verge of easing from an ideology into a stand. Peter Berger has made that move. His "conservative humanism" concedes that bad times call for adjustments, and his assessments of current conditions portray us in troubled times, so that his stand is far from always with the status quo.8 Berger finds all

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8 See Berger (1974, p. 231): "Our time is full of visions of the future, loudly and arrogantly proclaimed. Moral self-righteousness is evenly distributed throughout the political spectrum."
other ideologies dated and perverse (see 1974, pp. 198–228). But while his brand of conservatism contains some time-honored principles of that ideology, it fits as well or better the contours of a stand. For Berger, “a conservative accepts the messiness of history and is suspicious of the idea of progress.” “A conservative is skeptical of innovation. He is doubly skeptical of violent innovation.” “A conservative accepts human beings as they are” and “values order, continuity, and triviality in social life.” “A conservative is skeptical of grand intellectual designs for the improvement of society” and “of ‘movements.’” “A conservative is inclined to leave people alone.” Berger eschews political programs because they must inspire masses of people; he would address individuals. And nowhere is his stand clearer than in its “very simple political maxims: Learn how to refuse the existing orthodoxies. Learn also how to refuse the would-be orthodoxies of tomorrow. Participate in the lives of others, but think your own thoughts. Accept ‘alienation’—it is the price of freedom. Learn how to stand apart” (Berger and Neuhaus, 1970, pp. 20–30).

Berger’s interest in religion and the sociology of knowledge, two connections common among stand takers, is well known. His concerns for community and action are equally evident. His turn toward a stand surfaces in his insistence that “it is necessary to cultivate the quiet art of disbelief. It is necessary to act quietly and disbelievingly, out of that compassion which is the only credible motive to any actions to change the world.” For few “visions survive a single generation. Few historical actions lead to the intended consequences. This insight need not be paralyzing. Political morality does not demand visions or certainties, only that we act as best we can. The best political morality is informed by the heavy knowledge of the past. Its fruits are humility and compassion” (Berger, 1974, p. 231). Celebrating humility, compassion, independent action, restrained responsibility, and the rest, Berger both sings the praises of ordinary politics and yet shapes the principles of autonomy for periods when politics as usual break down or get abandoned. A full-scale study of Berger’s work (especially his “political morality”) would show the stand at least as prominent in his project as the standard forms of ideology, social science, or critique.

Such stress upon ingredients of stands is scattered throughout the work of recent political theorists.9 Previous citations suggest some of the ways

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9 Modern ideologies have not disappeared altogether, so that self-professed liberals, socialists, and conservatives today include some ideologists. An easy source of American ex-
in which Hannah Arendt was a stand taker (see Nelson, 1978). The same holds for Camus and Merleau-Ponty. All came to be uncomfortable with any ideology, even the ones with which they started. In this, they repeated the political pattern of Weber, finding in our iron-cage conditions the call to take a stand. Just as Weber’s two late essays on “Politics as a Vocation” and “Science as a Vocation” combined to state his stand, so Arendt, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty became increasingly specific about the stand side of their thought and action. In all these cases, the commitment to define what Merleau-Ponty termed “a new humanism” signaled a turn toward the stand.

Sheldon Wolin and John Schaar may fit this mold. Both argue the inadequacy of ideologies in form, content, and project, whatever their location from left to right. But neither proposes a blueprint for an alternative, and both are cautious in their visions for the future. They prize the individual but criticize individualism; they praise community but only on a small scale. Inspired to some extent by stoicism, Schaar counsels against hope but for patience and irony. “Hopeful people, when hope is too often defeated, frequently turn spoiled and bitter; or, what is equally debilitating, vacillate between hope and despair. Sustained struggle is more likely to spring from an outlook that catches up both of the opposites and transforms them into something different from each. I have no name for this outlook, but I am pretty sure that its chief ingredients are patience and irony” (1974, p. 178).

Wolin (1969) treats political theory as a vocation, a project of exemplary action in our times of trouble. Moreover, he argues that theorists in other times have taken this stand, thereby creating an epic tradition of political theory pursued as political action. “The phrase ‘epic tradition’ refers to a type of political theory which is inspired mainly by the hope of achieving a great and memorable deed through the medium of thought. Other aims that it may have, such as contributing to the existing state of knowledge, formulating a system of logically consistent propositions, or establishing a set of hypotheses for scientific investigation, are distinctly secondary” (1970, p. 4). In this context, Wolin mentions not only Achilles but also Plato to exemplify the glorious political actor. And Wolin’s own theory seems to strive for that aim. If we ask what Schaar and Wolin are trying to accomplish in their theory, the best single answer may be “a stand.”

The same might even be said for some of the Frankfurt School. Martin

amples is the neconservative ideology of classical liberalism. But some neoconservatives are better seen as stand takers. In addition to Berger, they include Robert Nisbet and Garry Wills. Even George Will may be migrating in this direction.
Jay's book on the dialectical imagination (1973) of its early members emphasizes their criticism of ideologies, including the Marxism with which they began. It traces their preoccupation with praxis, which arose from distress at recent revolution and despair about the appearance of some true agent of change. It even notes their "cosmic irony," their penchant for future visions almost too abstract to be utopian, and their focus upon Critical Theory as our closest possible approximation to responsible political action. Thus the works of Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse may be plumbed from perspectives of the stand. There are few plainer examples of the stand than Marcuse's "Great Refusal" (1964). And there are few harder indictments of the twentieth century as an interim of irreconcilable conflicts and contradictions than these thinkers provide. Even later members (like Jürgen Habermas) may be turning toward stands. They seek no new ideologies, but concentrate on Critical Theory as a kind of action, and they express concerns with praxis and communication. Indeed, some lean toward the extreme, unstable stand of ironism.

Certainly, there are other prominent theorists of our times whose work eludes standard categories for political forms and projects. Leo Strauss, Michael Polanyi, and Eric Voegelin come quickly to mind. But they are only a few on the list of possible stand makers and takers. Even the work of Henry Kariel (who stresses continual movement, open systems, and redefinition of self) can be explicated in terms of taking a stand. In Kariel's case, of course, the stand must be pretty peculiar to be capable of incorporating his repeated stress upon keeping open not just options but principles. Yet it is this very feature which calls to mind ironism, that most paradoxical of stands. Especially in promoting "experimental action," Kariel seems to call for the strategy of Proteus in withstanding troubled times (see 1969a, 1969b, 1972, 1977; and Nelson, 1977, pp. 837-42).

Still, we need not confine the concept of the stand to our own period. We should expect some stands in all times of civilizational turmoil—and especially when prospects for constructive, at least partially controlled change seem poor. The key is not so much a period's objective character as its subjective perception on the part of individual thinkers and actors. This determines whether to turn away from utopias, ideologies, stances, or other projects, and toward some stand, as well as what the stand will be. But of course, the validity and viability of a project depend importantly on how accurately we assess the objective ethos of the times.

VI

I've seen fire and I've seen rain.
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end.
I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend.  
But I always thought that I'd see you again.  
Look down upon me, Jesus, you've got to help me take a stand.  
You've just got to see me through another day.  
My body's aching and my time is at hand.  
And I won't make it any other way.  (Taylor, 1971)

The issue here is how to understand current political forms and projects, especially among political theorists. I argue that diagnosing contemporary conditions as troubled times encourages taking political stands, that many twentieth-century theorists make that diagnosis, and that their projects are often better interpreted as stands than otherwise. The issue here is not whether ours are times of trouble, for that has been assumed more than argued. Still, it must claim a few words in closing. Plainly, I do think there is some reason to interpret our times as times of trouble, which means that there is now much to recommend making and taking stands. And if that is true, then not all the outstanding political actors of our day are revolutionaries or great practitioners of ordinary politics. Stand-taking theorists, whose exemplary action may be more in tune with the times, deserve serious consideration as some of our greatest political figures. When we see among the glorious political actors of the past not only Achilles but also Plato, Aristotle in addition to Alexander, and More as well as Henry VIII, we are reminded that this judgment is far from unprecedented, let alone undue.

It follows also that we may expect the making and taking of stands to continue to comprise a significant part of political theory and practice in years ahead. Of course, we should expect different degrees of awareness in doing so. In fact, some of the most fascinating cases are middle ones, where individuals do not set out to take stands, but explicitly eschew other options, and end up enunciating or embracing a few basic principles as protection against corruption and irresponsibility.

Political theory is only one arena among many in which a small community may be sought and a protected space for exemplary action found. After all, there are a number of other forums that can provide a suitable space to stand. Among the most obvious are literature and art, which can contribute exemplary action for close colleagues and converts, plus modes of communication for reaching others. Another is the religious communalism of our times, which should serve as a reminder of the sphere Weber originally intended for ethics of absolute ends. Indeed, interactions among political and religious movements of late signal this possibility even without Weber's nudge. In these and other places, stands will be made. Even when outside ordinary politics, they will tend to be, in a significant sense, political stands. For in the well-known words of
Thomas Mann, “in our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms.”

To stand times of trouble, there are few substitutes for holding fast to the most fundamental principles of responsibility. When old institutions and hopes collapse, the fires and rains of trouble rage unabated, and the time comes to make a stand or be swept away. In the winds that blow then, only the protection of the strongest principles and the firmest friends can suffice. Only they can afford a sheltered space to survive the storm. And only there can we stand upright.

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