Twitter Thread by (((E. Glen Weyl)))

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@glenweyl

I am grateful to @slatestarcodex for taking the time to respond to my critique of technocracy. There is a lot there to respond to and in general I think the exchange speaks for itself. However, I think there are few points where clarification is important for the exchange to be

productive, which I'll briefly address here. I suspect many fellow travelers (e.g. @audreyt @dsallentess @JohnnieM @MichelleRempel @VitalikButerin @mds49) will find the exchange fairly ironic/revealing. I'll post this as a response on this blog as well.

1. Let me start with concessions. There are many points where @slatestarcodex correctly highlights various areas where my grasp of beliefs and facts are limited or wrong, especially in the depth of my grasp of the views of the rationalist community.

I freely admit that there are serious limits to how much I've been able to research the views of people in this community and I certainly hope they are not as I characterized them, though as I will point out below many elements of @slatestarcodex's response confirm my concerns.

2. Given the last point, I fully acknowledge the danger of throwing stones lest I shatter my own glass house. However, leaving aside any blame, I think to make sense of my piece and @slatestarcodex's response requires a bit of context that clearly he lacked. First, outside

some specific blog post I wrote, I am best known as a mechanism designer. To cast me as a general opponent of technology and mechanisms runs against literally everything I am known for and have worked on my whole career. The piece was as much a self-critique and caution

about taking the sorts of work I do in the wrong, over-zealous spirit as I had seen many in the rationalist community doing as anything else. Second, if responding to anything directly, it was this review of my book by https://t.co/d5kY78j5va.

I think that piece perfectly exemplifies the spirit I am responding to and critiquing. I think we need to avoid that spirit of mechanism design.
3. @slatestarcodex claims that critics of technocracy always critique precisely the same examples. This is odd, given that my essay

has several examples outside that cannon. Did @slatestarcodex not see these? I was blowing the whistle on one (https://t.co/IV9Z1o8q7z) at roughly the same time I wrote the technocracy piece. These are contemporary, not chestnuts, and conducted by precisely the circle

whose condescending critiques of transparency and public engagement I was responding to.
4. Furthermore, the positive examples of technocracy @slatestarcodex refers to are...surprising. Two examples. To call school desegregation a technocratic invention

papers over decades of community activism for desegregation. Perhaps even more dramatically looking at the coronavirus as an example of the success of technocracy runs against pretty much any reasonable reading of the international data. @dsallentess and I have a piece coming

out on this, but perhaps the sharpest point here is that the country, Taiwan, which performed best in the virus was led in part by @audreyt who moved back to Taiwan after being immersed in and repulsed by the rationalist movement in Silicon Valley

and dedicated herself to doing things differently in Taiwan (see her amazing poetic job description here: https://t.co/ml0X3x6Adl).

> My #OSOSNZ prayer. Thank you all fabulous people! pic.twitter.com/d3kBl8gLy8
>
> — Audrey Tang \u5510\u9cf3 (@audreyt) August 23, 2016

5. The last part of the piece is explicitly about the role I see mechanism playing in a democracy. I find it hard to understand how one could see the piece as opposed to mechanisms. My argument was that the appropriate way for mechanisms to be adopted

Is through public communication across lines of difference and in different value systems/communicative modes. One thing I find striking in the history of technology is that the vast majority of technologies that are actually useful today were pioneered by people

who had similar critiques to mine here of technocracy, while those who zealous defend technocratic approaches have generally either not themselves actually developed successful technologies or have great technological dreams that have generally led to poor social outcomes.

Consider Douglas Engelbart, Norbert Wiener, Jaron Lanier, etc. Calling people like this, most of whom were not even willing to express their views in the rationalistic terms I wrote in, "anti-technology" redefines technology to be only rigid and inhuman systems that fail.

The process of socio-technological change has a far greater element of the "socio" when it succeeds than those focused on autonomous "technology" allow. Communication and collaboration outside of affordances of the technology itself are always critical to success.

See, for example, Don Norman's Design of Everyday Things, or anything else in the field of human-centered design.

6. I think @slatestarcodex's insistence on breaking apart mechanisms v. judgement from top-down v. bottom-up misses a key part of the argument and of what sociologists of science have long said. There is no unitary thing called "science" or "mechanism". There are a variety

of disciplines of information processing across academic fields, across cultures, across communities with in a culture, etc. "Mechanism" is just how one group of people seeks to claim that their mode of reasoning is uniquely unbiased and unaccountable to other ways of

processing information. It is precisely this move, the unwillingness to think, speak or justify oneself on terms acceptable to those who think differently from you, that his response manifests and that concerns me.

7. A particularly striking example of this was his identification of "democracy" with the one-person-one-vote rule, an identification I have in the past been guilty of (hence the self-critique). This is not coterminal with what democracy means to most people, nor how most

political scientists think of it. I will not belabor this here, but I think it is a nice illustration of how much one's views can be narrowed by only looking through a "mechanistic" lens.