

# Neoliberalism & Alienation

*An Interview with Angie Speaks*



Angie Speaks is a cultural commentator and critic, whose popular videos, podcasts, and Newsweek columns analyse neoliberalism, popular culture, and the increasing problems of the left from a perspective both spiritual and Marxist. Lately, she's written significantly about the problems of alienation and atomization in modern society, its causes in neoliberalism and identitarianism, and the "woke" left's complete failure to provide an alternative.

The following is a discussion interview with her.

## ***Rhyd Wildermuth***

You've been a very influential voice critical of the online left and especially many of the excesses and contradictions in thought which have come to define it. You've also spoken and written a lot

about the problem of identity politics or identitarianism on the left, especially the way it reduces entire people groups into simplistic categories and seems to ignore other causes for social, economic, and political injustices.

Can you tell me more what you've seen, and how you came to this place?

## **Angie Speaks**

I started making YouTube videos about 4 years ago in my early 20's, during the rise of the YouTube "Left" political sphere. My videos stood out because they were not simply following the incentives in the left media at the time (dunking on conservatives and fear mongering for views and clicks). During the early period of my YouTube excursion, I already saw issues with the way content was made, promoted and monetised in the "Left Sphere" and how much of it was focussed on defining ones content in opposition to conservatives on YouTube, striking up adversarial discourses to generate outrage and attention.

I decided to curate my channel as an alternative to this trend, to focus on the psychological and spiritual impact of consumerism, commodity fetishism and all the other corrosive aspects of the neoliberal paradigm we all exist under. This has been the reoccurring motif of my work: a much needed spiritual and psychological excavation of the post-industrial age. I felt like this kind of perspective was sorely needed, not just specifically for the left, but for anyone—regardless of their political affiliation—who feels alienated from the culture we inhabit.

I had some success for a while, and I think it's because people thought what I was attempting to do was novel and interesting compared to the sea of contentious and capricious content that was coming out of the "left YouTube" sphere. But then, before I could really establish myself, some of the hostility in the leftist YouTube sphere descended upon me.

I started to notice how the very psychological and spiritual maladies caused by neoliberalism were being celebrated by the "left" that I was adjacent to. Things like celebrating atomisation were normal, celebrating and embracing identity fetishism over universality and solidarity. Also normal was a contentious "will to power" in the media realm, which often manifested in attempts to "cancel" and defame heterodox media rivals in order to enforce a lib-left hegemonic line. My critique became more pointed and focussed on these trends, so it naturally made me the target of a lot of hate, derision and contempt.

I was swiftly ostracised from the left media fold, slandered and discarded *en masse* by my peers and those who I viewed as my friends and colleagues at the time. This was an incredibly difficult period for me, because I went from feeling secure and understood to feeling rudderless and discarded.

At the same time, my analysis also seemed to be resonating with people from all over the political spectrum, those who also saw the trends I was addressing but had trouble articulating the phenomenon or expressing how "now" feels. It didn't take long for me to find my footing again as a dissident thinker, occupying a nebulous realm where political affiliation matters less than the desire to excavate and understand the current historical moment and to analyse the impact it is having on our collective values, our sense of collective purpose and hope.

I think part of the reason the attacks from the left were so severe (and still are to an extent) is because what currently operates as the credentialed, official “left” are really just the foot soldiers of neoliberal capitalism. They seem to exist to manufacture consent and generate moral camouflage

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for the current order. You see it in the way the left celebrates atomisation, in the way it prioritised identity narcissism over pressing class issues. You see it in the way the most revered thought leaders march in lockstep with the official narrative on every issue of importance, and in the way they demonise people who dare to question. From COVID to Ukraine, the left has failed to capture the sentiments, hopes, and fears of the working class they claim to speak for.

I kept beating the drum and kept expressing my concerns in my videos, on my podcast (*Low Society Podcast*) and in my social media presence. Despite being met with intense resistance, new opportunities began to spring up from unexpected areas. I was offered the opportunity to write for publications like *NewsWeek* (and others to come soon) as an outlet for my social and political commentary.

So that’s me, Angie Speaks. I’ve been in the trenches for a while doing the work to establish a more open and less hostile discourse where people can explore and discuss areas of shared interests and concern without fear or coercion. I hope to help people discover more about what they have in common, rather than hyper focus on the aspects of life and culture that divide us.

The general problem I’ve noticed is the issue of *identity fetishism*, which serves two purposes on the left. On a personal level, it is part and parcel of the narcissistic preoccupation with “the self” that is encouraged and incentivised by neoliberal consumer society.

“The self” has been the major driving force behind marketing and social engineering since Edward Bernays. Modern identity politics, despite its radical posture, is really just another evolution of this ethos. Identity politics serves the purpose of carving everyone up into atomised consumer identities, and we are encouraged to distinguish ourselves and to signal allegiance through vapid and meaningless signifiers. For a lot of young people, this sort of false solidarity takes precedent over real and lasting connections and social bonds. Familial bonds, relationships of affinity rather than identity, and the true purpose and meaning of community are reduced to consumer demographics warring for prominence in a digital hellscape.

The second function of identity politics is to obscure paths to solidarity and class consciousness. This for me is the most pernicious aspect of the two-pronged spear of identity politics. It convinces people that they have more in common with people who share arbitrary characteristics with them than they do with the people in their community, the people they share tangible ties like social responsibility and material interests.

Identity politics generates the alienation that it claims to remedy a lot of the time, and the people who adhere to it the most end up further atomized, disconnected from the world and disconnected from the more meaningful and powerful aspects of themselves that exist outside of identity signifiers. It’s impact has been very tragic.



## **Rhyd Wildermuth**

There are several primary themes to your critique which seem to stem from one primary (and perhaps we can say rotten) root, that of our situation within neoliberal capitalism and the dominance of its social forms over our own attempts to find meaning and connection. Especially, you make connections between the alienation of people and their oftentimes obsessive search for meaning through identity categories.

This is something that has probably been particularly brought to people's attention as of late on account of the high-profile doxxing of the user behind *Libs of TikTok*, a subject you just wrote about for your column at *Newsweek*. That account gains its popularity from showcasing the most narcissistic extremes of identity politics, extremes that liberal/left commenters pretend do not exist. We see that same sort of silence or wilful ignorance when black Marxist critics such as yourself or Adolph Reed are attacked and silenced for challenging the identity politics norm, something which I've witnessed repeatedly occur to you.

What do you think is behind these kinds of attacks, and why is it that we don't see many attempts to iterate a mature analysis about identity, neoliberalism, and especially the alienation you point out?

## **Angie Speaks**

The simple answer to your question is because it is *profitable*. Not only does proximity to victimhood generate social currency, it's also an effective marketing tool, one that encourages people to identify themselves in opposition to one another and adhere to strict categories of consumer signifiers. It also serves hegemonic power by acting as a distraction from what's really important and the systemic changes that would improve our cultural and material conditions.

**On a spiritual level, identity narcissism is a form of "false purpose," a void-filling exercise.**

I also think that on a spiritual level, identity narcissism is a form of "false purpose," a void-filling exercise. We are living in the "age of death" where consumer goods are prioritised over the collective good, so naturally the impulse to view yourself and others as commodities will flourish too. The spiritual void this creates in an environment where people are totally rudderless makes narcissism appealing as an antidote to nihilism.

The most challenging aspect of the period we currently inhabit is that the values and institutions that once gave people a sense of cohesion are no longer viable under neoliberalism; therefore, this new form of "cope" is posing itself as

the new meta-narrative despite being part of the problem

## **Rhyd Wildermuth**

It's interesting to me, because the idea of neoliberalism creating a spiritual void is a critique seen from certain thinkers on both the left and the right. Unfortunately, the fact that two supposedly diametrically opposed political currents point to the same problem has led some of the more ideologically-driven of the left liberal sphere to create conspiracies about a red-brown alliance. The less conspiratorial among them still nevertheless reject such an analysis of neoliberalism merely on the grounds that if anyone on the right believes a thing, it must therefore be a right-wing belief.

On the other hand, it was Marx and Engels themselves who first described capitalism as a force which disrupts social relations, de-spiritualizes life, de-stabilizes communities, and in their words reduced familial relations "into mere money relation."

So I guess I really have two questions for you. First of all, how do you understand this rising critique from multiple political frameworks that neoliberalism is a spiritually-deadening and alienating force? And secondly, do you think it's possible to develop a leftist politics that could articulate a revolution back to community and authentic social relations outside of the politics of identity?

## **Angie Speaks**

I think it's amazing that critiques of neoliberalism emerge from both right and left. Of course both factions arrive at vastly different conclusions about how the issue should be addressed but the coalition of thought across the political spectrum about the failures of neoliberalism illuminate the fact that ideology is simply not enough. I know that will come across as blasphemous to the dogmatists among us, but there is something deeply spiritual and psychological about the alienation we all experience under neoliberalism, something profound that the shared humanity in every individual recognised regardless of their political affiliation. I don't think it's really possible



for one to have a coherent understanding of our current predicament without acknowledging the spiritual and psychological fallout of neoliberalism so it does not surprise me that critiques emerge from both right and left.

Even though I don't consider myself right wing, many of the most poignant critiques of neoliberalism emerge from right leaning thinkers like Christopher Lasch and others. Critiques that have greatly enriched and informed my perspective

As for the second question I'm afraid to say it but I'm deeply pessimistic about the potential of the left, especially as it currently exists. The left is so wrapped up in the neoliberal paradigm that it is virtually indistinguishable from it. And I also struggle to believe that there really is a "left" that exists outside of neoliberalism at this point in history.



I am incredibly skeptical and weary of anything posing itself as a leftist movement, but I think that hope exists within the broad coalition you described that exists across the political spectrum. I think that something new needs to emerge from the ashes of what once was, something founded on shared interests, real tangible community relationships and a recognition of the alienation we all feel that is devoid of political labels and factional affiliation.

People are looking for an antidote to the alienation that neoliberalism has created and that antidote is each other. I believe that there is hope when community and struggle are formed around real, tangible interests and aspirations with people instead of vapid political and ideological labels

My mind could change on this but this is the avenue that I've found the most hopeful in terms of collective struggle against our current predicament. During the Covid Pandemic I saw a lot of hope

in anti-mandate and anti-lockdown protests which contained working class people from all over the political spectrum gathering around shared goals

I believe it is possible for a coalition like this to form when driven by the same goals.

## **Rhyd Wildermuth**

I definitely share your analysis about the left as it is currently iterated, especially the sense of pessimism regarding the possibility of the left ever divorcing itself from the neoliberal order to which it's become increasingly trapped.

Also, it's interesting to me that you mentioned the kind of spontaneous and organic movements that arose involving anti-mandate and anti-lockdown protests. Here on the continent, countless protests arose using the same sort of model we saw for the *Gilets Jaunes* in France, for Occupy throughout the world, and especially a much older and mostly forgotten mass movement from two decades ago, the anti-globalisation movement.

Of course, the liberal-left or Woke narrative about any movement that draws in the lower classes from both the left and the right must actually be a right-wing movement, the whole 'red-brown' conspiracy popular among US Antifa. But Seattle wasn't shut down by a dogmatic and pure 'left' during the WTO protests in 1999—there were just as many non-leftists and conservatives in those protests. Everyone was out in the streets for a multitude of reasons, many of which converged, some of which diverged.

We saw this same phenomenon during the Anti-War movement soon after. Being against war isn't a natively leftist position (as we're seeing now in much of the left's anarcho-imperialist stance regarding NATO and Ukraine). And it's not a natively conservative position, either, though there are of course tendencies such as libertarianism which absolutely oppose military interventions except in the case of clear defense.

It seems to me there are many such causes and positions that the lower classes might come together, places where the left/right divide falls apart and only serves to prevent action and solidarity.

So, what other kinds of coalitions do you think are possible? And what do you think it would take to create a movement that resists identitarianism in both its fascist and woke forms?

## **Angie Speaks**

Sorry if my answer to your question is disappointing, but I simply have no idea. I think only the confluence of history will tell.

There are areas of hope in terms of shared sentiments among people in the underclass, most of whom reject the political narcissism of liberal elites and the ideological frameworks they manufacture to justifying themselves, but there's also no central pillar for these shared sentiments to manifest around as of this point.

There have been issues here and there like COVID mandates and some of the other things you mentioned, but nothing ubiquitous or foundational enough to really be a glue that binds people together. On that front I believe that there is still a lot of work to be done.

I believe the work I and many others do in highlighting universality is a drop in the historical bucket, but I can't really speculate on outcomes—just following the *Tao*.

## Angie Speaks



Angie Speaks is a cultural commentator. You can view her videos on her [YouTube Channel](#), subscribe to her [Low Society](#) podcast, and read her [columns at Newsweek](#).

## Rhyd Wildermuth



Rhyd is a druid, theorist, and writer living in the Ardennes. You can follow his writing at [From The Forests of Arduinna](#)