

MILITANT NORMALS

A Meritocracy without Merit

That there are Normals implies that there are Abnormals. But the term *Abnormals* is not really a useful formulation. Instead, let's call them the Elite, for lack of a better term, though very few of them are actually "elite" in any meaningful sense. Rather, many in the Elite are aspiring to be elite, but most just end up as people who base their own self-image upon their certainty in their moral and intellectual superiority to the Normals. These are the affiliate Elite. They are the run-of-the-mill smug liberal diversity trainers, government bureaucrats, and internet loudmouths who spend their time safely #resisting people who would never actually hurt them.

Are they liberal? Most are—the Elite embraces Frankfurt School–derived modern American liberalism because the feel-good nostrums of liberalism flatter the Elite's sense of moral superiority. Liberalism in the Elite is like an intellectual bedbug infestation—contagious, difficult to cure, and gross all at once. That's why even those who enter the Elite as conservatives risk infection. Look at the allegedly "conservative" representatives like Jeff Flake who arrive in Washington, DC, and promptly "grow"

in office into illegal alien-loving, gun-grabbing big spenders. One bite of the bug can be fatal to your conservative principles.

Liberalism informs and defines their lifestyles and values, and it is through the taboos they respect and the shibboleths they honor that the members of the Elite seek to define themselves as not being members of the Normal caste. Exclusivity is part of the appeal, though it's the simplest thing in the world to join the Elite. You just have to believe. You don't actually have to do anything. America's Elite is a meritocracy that has abandoned the notion of merit.

Few institutions demonstrate this better than our colleges. The key to the value of college is not mastering the curriculum. It is gaining admission. Once you get in, the hard work is done.

Let's take the example of Harvard, which is America's greatest institution of higher learning, according to everyone who ever attended Harvard and won't shut up about it. It has certified its own students as prodigies. The *Harvard Crimson* reported on December 3, 2013, that the median grade at Harvard was an A-, while the most common grade was an A.¹

Well.

Now, this is not to say that Harvard graduates are unskilled—for example, they are remarkably adept at infiltrating the fact that they went to Harvard into every conversation they participate in. That has to count for something. But this near-horizontal grading curve does raise the question of how the grade of A, which generally signifies “outstanding,” is so readily available? If most Harvard students are “outstanding,” or at least “outstanding minus,” you have to wonder, “Compared to whom?” It can't be to other Harvard students.

Either Harvard has rejected the idea of competition, which

grades used to measure, or Harvard is comparing its students to everyone else in the world and simply assuming its students have prevailed. It might well be both, and neither should come as a surprise.

Obviously, Harvard has not completely rejected the concept of competition—it prides itself on how competitive it is to be admitted. But four years of high school grinding and trying to perfect an enrichment activity–packed résumé that will make the admissions officers drool is the last really hard work a student has to do to get this coveted credential. The diploma is what matters, not what you studied. And you get the diploma if you get in. Whether you major in computer engineering or create your own Gender Identity Issues in Belgian Literature of the Seventeenth Century major, you’re essentially done before you start.

You get into Harvard or another Elite college, and you’ve got your invitation to the Elite—as well as an opportunity for training in the correct attitudes and behaviors of an Elitist, courtesy of the faculty and an army of helpful social justice warriors who wander the campus with verbal cattle prods to enforce their version of order.

Unlike the affiliate members of the Elite, these students have the ability to eventually rule because academia offers them the promise of power, both political and cultural. Membership in the Elite is a basic prerequisite to obtain an Elite position where you can actually wield some authority—usually in the pursuit of Elite goals and objectives.

Washington, DC, and every state capital are packed with aspiring entrants into the Elite. They all want to someday be the one who makes the rules and issues the commands, to use government or an institution to impose their will. And, as members

of the Elite, they are steadfast in their confidence that they are capable of doing so—nay, that they are *called* to do so, to shepherd the poor begotten souls who live outside of the weekend driving distance of a beach and cannot guide their own lives. Liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat, if you are within the Elite, the impulse to control is the same.

I am called upon to rule. Heed my commands, little men and women, for I know best.

And in the cultural meccas of Hollywood and Manhattan, the homes of the entertainment industry and the media, the impulse is the same. It is influence and even control, to decide what is right and what is wrong on behalf of that dreary lump of humanity that has never walked a red carpet or been a talking head on Jake Tapper's show.

Now, of course, the vast majority of the Elite never reaches the lofty heights of influence or fame. Most members of the Elite live lives of quiet presumption, identifying with those who wield real power and thereby claiming a sliver of it for themselves. They aren't personally powerful, but if they subscribe to the Elite's dogma, then they can feel a tiny thrill when they observe some more potent member of the Elite exercise his power.

That explains the joy of some associate adjunct professor of Marxist poetry whose toes are peeking out of the socks he wears with his Birkenstocks when he watches a strapping frat boy brought low by a faculty kangaroo court for not getting a notarized videotaped statement of consent from the buzzed sophomore Chi Delt who accused him of assault after she got woke in her Gender Studies seminar seventeen months after he stopped returning her texts the morning after he got to second base.

That explains the giddy high that a sour, divorced middle-aged

marketing consultant from Chicago gets when she learns that Congress has imposed another restriction on the rights of people far away to buy AR-15s, which apparently shoot automatic clip bullets or something.

That explains the pure delight the ironic pork pie hat set in Brooklyn feels when learning that some Christian cook will be bankrupted because he felt his religion compelled him not to spell out “Steve + Frank Together 4ever” on their devil’s food wedding cake.

For most members of the Elite, there is not much actual eliteness involved in being members of the Elite. Elite status is just a placeholder for actually achieving something—maybe you can’t actually *be* better than others, but damn it, you can sure *feel* like you are. For the majority of those within the Elite, there is merely the vicarious thrill of being part of something bigger than themselves—something bigger than themselves that takes as its reason for existence bullying everybody else.

After all, what’s the fun of being Elite if you can’t rub the Normals’ nose in their own subordination?

But usually, it is a voluntary subordination. The Elite does serve a role—the Elite does the necessary jobs within society that Normal people don’t want. It provides experts to operate the institutions. The Elite gets power in order to do so. A Normal generally does not want to wield power. It’s not attractive. It’s not what matters to him. Instead, the Normals want to focus on faith, family, and work. Political power? Politicians are hacks at best, and most of the time simply a pack of crooks. Cultural power? Rock

stars and movie idols are drug-addled losers with personal lives of Mogadishu-levels of chaos.

Normals don't want to do this stuff. Not if they don't have to.
Enter the Elite.

Now, the Elite is eager to do the job of running the country and the culture. And a bit of attitude about doing so—having some pride in doing so—is a natural human reaction. “People like us guide the rest of the people of this country,” the Elite tells itself, and that is true, to a point. The problem arises when the Elite doesn't do it very well.

After all, if you are going to announce that you are “the best and the brightest,” you kind of need to demonstrate some basic competence. Otherwise, it gets awkward.

But what happens when the Elite not only screws up the job it was given to do—and for which it is paid in power and status—but when it simultaneously decides it actively hates the people who hired it in the first place and whose interest the Elite has been entrusted to represent?

Every society has a class that distinguishes itself by not being common, by not being like the dreary regular people. Every society's elite naturally succumbs to some level of elitism. Smugness, of some level, is a natural characteristic of any elite. That's part of the payoff for being elite. You get to be smug. But sometimes the focus of a society's elite becomes enjoying the privileges of being elite, rather than doing the job of an elite. The problem arises when being elite becomes an end in and of itself.

In recent decades, America's Elite has more and more fixated

on distinguishing itself from the Normals. But what it pursues is much more than mere differentiation. It is unvarnished domination.

What our Elite today feels is not duty to the Normals but, rather, contempt for them and a desire to break the Normals to the Elite's will. Politically, this manifests in the Elite pursuing policies that at best ignore the needs of the Normals and, at worst, seek to punish them. Transgender bathrooms aren't about boys pretending to be girls feeling better about their delusions. It's about letting the Normals know that the Elite can violate their most sensitive and private moments if it feels like it—and that the Normals can't do a damn thing about it.

Culturally, this takes the form of a nonstop barrage of hatred and invective aimed at everything the Normals hold sacred. The Elite claps like trained seals for overpaid morons in tights and helmets kneeling during the national anthem because—well, no one has ever provided a coherent reason why. There isn't one. It began as a poke in the Normals' collective eye by a millionaire of questionable quarterbacking skills and ended up a poke in the Normals' collective eye by the entire Elite.

Take that, people who had absolutely nothing to do with whatever the hell pissed off Colin Kaepernick. And the Elite nodded along, an idiot chorus singing along with the mindless tune.

It felt good. It felt *better* than good—it felt positively wonderful to spit in those rubes' faces.

Would-be rebels trying to safely scandalize the bourgeois by transgressing the Normals' old, tired mores—always the society's traditional mores—are as old as history. Young Romans and Athenians did it. Alcibiades got out of town ahead of the headsman after being blamed for castrating some holy statues, exactly

the kind of thing one does to freak out the squares. Look at the bohemian artists and the hippies, both experimenting with free love and scandalizing all decent folk. While not necessarily wielding political power, they certainly wielded cultural power in their respective times and places. Other members of the Elite might not consider these ruffians “elite,” and they certainly did not approve of such shenanigans—no need to antagonize the masses. The Elite largely shared the same morals and values, even if paying tribute to them only in their breach. The difference today is that now our Elites cheer as one for whatever transgression any other member of the Elite launches. They are united in their transgressive conformity.

Thus, today we have hip, young Elite rebels like Lena Dunham rejecting conformity while announcing “I’m with her!” regarding an elderly, warmongering corporate collaborator.

Edgy.

The Elite has become much more unified across its various factions because almost every sector of it embraces Frankfurt School American liberalism. While there are conservative Elites, many of them members in good standing in Conservative, Inc., liberalism is still the common tongue of those who think they are destined to rule, a language based on hack clichés and faulty premises, but whose intricate grammar is mercilessly enforced by a not-so-secret police consisting of angry feminists working out their daddy issues, perpetually outraged sophomores who think dissenting opinions are violence, and middle-aged diversity consultants who warn that holiday parties are horribly exclusionary unless they are a celebration of the solstice. Can’t have any Wiccans upset on their watch.

You have the political Elite, the cultural Elite, and a social Elite

(like hipsters, with their rarified tastes for things like undrinkable pumpkin-infused IPAs and their inexplicable fetish for primitive vinyl albums). Then there is the affiliate Elite, like the suburban mommies who clenched their perfectly manicured fists as they watched foul-mouthed has-been Madonna talk about blowing up the White House at the Women's March following Trump's inauguration.² They aren't edgy and they aren't exercising any power themselves, but damn it, they are showing solidarity like a boss.

But these are unofficial labels. Elite status can also be formal, or at least so rigidly engrained in a society that it might as well be written in the statute books. Look at England. They actually have a codified elite, the royals. The English take their monarchy a lot more seriously than in other European monarchies, where you might find yourself in the checkout line at the market buying muesli next to His Royal Highness King Olaf the Haphazard. The Brits actually hold to the notion (or at least, embrace the effect of the notion) that some people are "noble" by the grace of God or, in wacky Prince Charles's case, Gaia. Princes, dukes, barons, queens—there is a whole ridiculous hierarchy of carefully stratified individuals who are, somehow, better than everyone else because of who they were born to, even if their formal political power has long been circumscribed by the commoners.

Note that the truly powerful half of the bicameral Parliament is the House of Commons, with the House of Lords having had its members' powers limited to the point that they now seem more of a gaggle of eccentric old men (and a few women) than a real power center. Of course, the House of Commons is made up mostly of very uncommon commoners, and long has been. Any deliberative body that includes the likes of Winston Churchill—a

scion of privilege and the image of a member of the Elite at its best—should hardly reference “Commons” in its name.

The nobility is relatively rare in real life, but it is ubiquitous on the front pages of the Fleet Street tabloids displaying behavior that once scandalized English Normals until they became inured to it—“Oh, there’s a snap of bonny Prince Zippy wearing an SS uniform and goose-stepping through Piccadilly Circus with his chums from Eton. Hmmm. Pass me a crumpet, luv.”

What is much more common are the commoners who are hardly common at all. They are the toffs, the well bred and well born. But except for their detachment from the man in the street, or riding the Tube, they are nothing like Churchill. They are much more like Neville Chamberlain, sadly.

The informal class system of England makes pikers of Americans trying to throw shade at their presumed social inferiors—largely because American Normals don’t feel particularly inferior to members of the American Elite, while a dozen Englishmen dropped at random onto a desert isle will immediately sort themselves out into a hierarchy utilizing social clues and cues only they can detect. After a couple minutes, Bennie will be calling Bertie “Sir,” and Bertie will be calling Bennie “Higgins” and having him fetch his liege a coconut.

The British elite has cracked open the once tightly barred entry door just a bit. The elite granted newcomers a bit of access to the most selective schools and jobs that are the tells indicating an upper-class toff. Don’t be fooled, though, into thinking that the English elite has been democratized. Your father still matters, as does your grandfather. And your race, though they’ll be really nice to your face if you’re from one of the wrong ones because

it's now fashionable to be seen palling around with a descendant of someone whose great-great-great-great-grandfather was shot by your great-great-great-great-grandfather at the Khyber Pass.

Still, the elite and the rest shared in common both their formal religion, through the Church of England, and their informal religion, patriotism. You could be the most humble farmer, or a cab driver, or a duke, but by God, you were an Englishman, and that meant something. Today, Christianity is merely a punchline when the Anglican Church's own bishops aren't turning it into blasphemy. The elite and the truly common share their alienation from God as well. Church is for old ladies and the occasional funeral. And patriotism? If you wave the Union Jack someone is likely to report you for committing a hate crime—and worse, the bobbies are likely to show up and nick you.

While the barriers between classes were higher, in the past there was at least a sense of obligation of the big people to the little men and women. Being a gentleman didn't merely mean you got to slip past the nineteenth century version of the velvet rope at the nineteenth century's version of a nightclub. It meant you owed something to the little people and that you held yourself to a certain standard.

That's why when all hell broke loose, the captain of the RMS *Titanic* chose to go down with the ship rather than take a seat in a lifeboat from a passenger. History is replete with stories of English gentlemen in battle standing by their men when they could have run—sure, they had their batboys bring them roasted Cornish game hens and a fine Madeira at dinner the evening before while their men devoured who knows what, but when the lead flew, there they were, out front. Because that was what gentlemen did.

Perhaps the last gasp of this old elite was Margaret Thatcher,

who grew up over her father's shop. She became elite, but it was her embrace of the English version of normality and its centrality to the English identity that made her a success and gained her so many enemies among the establishment. She was the one who told George H. W. Bush—a member of the American Elite if there ever was one—not to go all wobbly in the face of Saddam Hussein. When the IRA blew apart the hotel where she was to speak, killing a number of her party members, she damn well spoke anyway because the hell with those mick bastards.

Today, not so much. Contrast the steely resolve of Lady Thatcher with the goofy antics of the prime minister played by Hugh Grant in that celluloid abomination *Love Actually* (2003). “Look!” the movie seems to say. “Why, he’s just a regular guy!” Leaving aside whether regular guys ditch Elizabeth Hurley to pick up genderfluid hookers off the Sunset Strip, because you can’t forget that sordid anecdote when watching Grant on-screen, the film seems to be one big excuse for dropping the standards that once distinguished gentlemen and ladies from the rabble. Our elite is free—liberated!—to act like fools, it tells us. Oh, the elite doesn’t have to give up any power. It’s still in charge and still gets all the perks of being elite, but it just doesn’t have to do any of the stuff that sometimes made being elite inconvenient, like having to act like adults.

The “Cool Britannia” nonsense of Tony Blair that sought to substitute cheesy pizzazz and empty celebrity for what remained of traditional English values accelerated the decline. Now the modern English elite is much like the modern American Elite. They certainly believe they have more in common with each other than their respective Normals. And that’s bad.

As we have seen, the American Elite takes many forms, but

like Normals, there are qualifications for membership. The key one is a rejection of the idea that you are a Normal, that you are one of those regular guys, which often translates into one of those unenlightened cro-mags lurking in states the Elite usually visits by crossing over at thirty-six thousand feet.

Someone in the Elite is special, at least in his own calculation. He is *not* like others. Normals are proud of who they are, while a member of the Elite is proud of who he *isn't*.

Being Elite means being special, even if that specialness comes from merely choosing to affiliate yourself with it. Being Normal is just that—it's not a status you look to acquire. You just are. Normal status is a label, not an identity. But Elite status is an identity, one that fills a void in the psyche of one who bears the label. Elitism is, therefore, largely defined by rejecting Normality.

While it is remarkably easy to join the Elite in general, certain branches, like the political or cultural Elite, may take some effort to join. But being inside the big Elite tent is easy. You choose to be. One of the myriad mandatory beliefs of the American Elite is the bizarre notion that you can change your gender on a whim, but, in fact, you can choose to identify as Elite simply by doing so—and by signing on to the ideological baggage that comes with it.

For some, the choice to enter the Elite is made for them at about the time they come out of the womb, having survived their mother's right to choose. They are born into it, and they grow up around the Elite. No other future is possible. They compete for entry into the top preschools and, later, the top colleges—this is one of the only competitions the Elite really approves of. But the skids are greased—a child of a *New York Times*-subscribing lawyer and a freelance blogger with a pussy hat in the closet of their Brooklyn townhouse is destined to join the Elite well before he,

she, or xe gets accepted into the Department of Gender Studies at Wellesley.

Others make a conscious choice, because being Elite at least appears to mean that you are, well, elite. Lots of members of the Elite grew up in Normal homes. And many of them look at their Normal parents and wince. But the cognitive dissonance is worth it. It can be very attractive to be special, to know that you are a part of a club whose membership serves to distinguish you from, well, all those Normals.

You *know* more. You *feel* more. You *are* more.

It's seductive, and that is why many millions of people identify as Elite whether they are, in fact, elite in any meaningful sense or not.

The easiest strata of the Elite to spot are the celebrities. In fact, you can't not spot them. They are everywhere. Of course, the term *celebrity* has been so stretched out and distorted over the last few decades that it pretty much constitutes anyone many other people are aware of, regardless of context. There are the usual rock stars and movie idols, but real celebrities are relatively few and far between. With a zillion bands out there, "celebrity" encompasses both the drummer for U2 and the drummer of The I Ate a Hamster Experience, which you probably never heard of but is totally on the cutting edge of the new alt-folk underground trend, and it records only on vinyl for that authentic sound those in the know demand.

The galaxy of "stars" now includes both Tom Cruise and the guy who plays the sassy co-worker on the Netflix original series *My Mom the Zombie*. Then there are the people with millions of fans because they have a YouTube channel where you can watch them narrate their Call of Duty games or watch them examine

their new Harry Potter action figures. Others have a lot of Twitter followers because they tweet incessantly about their lunch entrées or their stupid dog.

But while celebrity does not exclude the possibility of Normality—Hollywood stars like Adam Baldwin and Nick Searcy are famously Normals, with solid family lives and none of the attitude that characterizes the Elite—celebrity does make it hard to be Normal. That’s because a key element of Elitism, as currently manifested, is the joy Elitists derive from making other people bend to their will.

Now, the will that folks are to be bent to is not really the will of the individual bender. Rather, it is the will of the Elite caste itself that the lesser humans must be bent to. That will often manifest itself in the Elite’s dogma, which is often described as “political correctness.” The Catholic Church would be hard pressed to match it in complexity and inflexibility. It’s all tiresome liberalism, all the time. Luckily, for those interested in mastering the minefield of problematic acts and wish to learn the catechism, you can flip on MSNBC and hear Rachel Maddow preach it.

The Elite have their rituals and their taboos, their sacred texts and their conventional wisdom. All of it is rigidly enforced, and it must be positively exhausting to try and keep up with it and avoid the scowling scolds who make it their life’s work on media, both social and otherwise, to enforce it. For example, the phrase *chain migration* went from a perfectly adequate description of a troubling policy to racially insensitive (the word *chain* evokes slavery, context be damned) literally overnight. Of course, besides the tedious moral preening, this sort of thing has the added effect of putting powerful, evocative language off limits, replacing it with terms like *family reunification migration* that obscure the meaning.

Besides language, there are the Elite beliefs a member just cannot reject and remain acceptable. Imagine the aforementioned Tom Cruise coming out on a talk show again—okay, maybe that’s a stretch after his couch jumping wackiness the last time. Imagine hard, then imagine him coming out on the set, with the audience hooting and slapping fins like an army of ecstatic trained seals, and telling Ellen DeGeneres, “You know, I really don’t buy this global warming stuff.”

Cue the record scratch noise.

This will never, ever happen. It will never, ever happen even if Tom Cruise believes that global warming is nonsense. He might. He’s not a dumb guy—crazy, maybe, but not dumb—but he’s never going to *say* it. You just don’t do that in polite company, meaning Elite company. No Elitist is going to do it. Not Tom Cruise. Not the guy who plays the wacky neighbor on a TV Land sitcom. Not the guy who got a billion views of his self-tattooing videos. Not the hooker who got arrested with a New York governor and started her own fragrance collection called “Executive Sweat.” They are all going to toe the line. Dissent just isn’t done. Because when it is done, you get excommunicated from the Elite.

Remember Nick Searcy and Adam Baldwin—stars, right? But not Elite.

There are those in the Elite who hold positions of real authority—the politicians and bureaucrats. That’s a relatively small group—the damage the political class does to America is far, far out of proportion to its members’ actual numbers. And there is some overlap with the celebrities—a politician can be a celebrity, too, but except for the most prominent ones that usually only happens in Washington, DC, where it’s possible to dazzle a

young lady and get laid by trading on your gig as the Assistant Undersecretary of Agriculture for Legume Issues.

But the real role of the politicians vis-à-vis the Elite is to turn the desires and goals of the caste into reality.

They do that not just through legislation, but through infiltration into the bureaucracy. And, what's more, they consider this a sacred trust that they exercise on behalf of the American people—a trust they more and more exercise without bothering to consult with the American people, because they are the experts and they know better.

After all, they are members of the Elite.

But the Normals the Elite serves—though its definition of *serve* is largely service-free—are a cipher. Even if the Elite were to care, which it does not, the Elite has no idea what Normals truly want or need, and what the Elite *thinks* they want or need, the Normals often don't really want or need. And besides, what the Elite thinks the Normals want or need is morally wrong on every level.

Here's the really interesting part. What the Elite wants or needs is *always* morally right on every level. All the true and good and moral policies they enact and enforce? Well, those totally happen to correspond to the tenets of the Elite consensus. How about that?

It's remarkable. And super convenient.

For the Elite.

We saw a wonderful illustration of the political Elite in action when Trump was elected. Now, we should spare some pity for our poor Elite overlords in their hour of pain and confusion. All of them had been fully utterly completely totally convinced that The Smartest Woman in the World was going to mop the floor with the orange-pated provocateur from Queens. It was going to be

wonderful—with a woman in the White House and at the helm of the eager bureaucracy, they were going to finish the work Barack Obama had done on beginning the fundamental transformation of the United States into a version of Venezuela with more snow and fewer *telenovelas*.

But then the Normals betrayed their benefactors and picked . . . him.

The bastards.

So what did all those hundreds of thousands of members of the Elite infesting the federal government do? Well, they lost their collective shit.

Some of it was hilarious. Doddering functionaries tendered their resignations as if this was some sort of powerful act of defiance, only to receive a “meh” in response. It’s a tribute to how out of touch they are that they believe bureaucrats quitting is going to wreck the Normals’ day. Then there were the internal resisters who wanted to fight a rearguard action against things like wetlands regulation reform by comparing themselves to the secret society of plucky young wizard rebels in *Harry Potter*.

Sometimes, it seems like liberals have only read one book.

Other antics were not so funny. The most dangerous manifestations of this phenomenon were the top-level hacks and slugs who had spent the last eight years disgracing the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The leadership of the DOJ and the FBI, in conjunction with the holdovers at the White House, decided that they ought to unleash the full power of the United States government’s surveillance capacities on their political enemies because that was perfectly cool. It was totally different when Nixon did it, you know.

He wasn’t a Democrat.

Trump was a Republican, and he wasn't even one of those reasonable, Elite Republicans who helpfully rolled onto his back and displayed his soft, vulnerable tummy whenever a liberal Elitist on television or in the *WaPo* got angry. He was defiant and vulgar, and, worst of all, he displayed none of the respect and reverence due these proud public servants. Respect and reverence are vital perks for the Elite. And this Trump fellow refused to offer them.

So these proud public servants, these experts entrusted with our most powerful institutions, harnessed the authority of America's law enforcement and intelligence communities to attack their personal political enemies and told themselves they were doing God's work.

Except none of them actually believe in God. Their god was the government, but only as long as the government was run by people like them.

So, in a way, the Elite's god is themselves. And that's the crux of the problem. The Elite is its own higher authority, and it answers only to itself.

How could that go wrong?