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Varieties of Neoliberalism

Simon Glendinning

The Copernican Earth is no longer at the centre of the universe, and this is more and more the case one could say. . . .

—Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*¹

The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*²

Abstract

The term “neoliberalism” is encountered everywhere today. In popular leftist political rhetoric it is often simply a place-holder for “contemporary capitalism,” “austerity politics,” and “all that is bad in our world,” giving that rhetoric the appearance of a new diagnostic edge. However, one could be excused for thinking that its intelligibility is in inverse proportion to its ubiquity. By defining it in terms of its conceptual relationship with classical liberalism, this paper offers a justification for thinking about our time as a period in which a particular “community of ideas” has sought (with some success) to establish a neoliberal hegemony. Doing so reveals, however, that there are in fact a variety of neoliberalisms, and that the period we now inhabit is best conceived in terms of the rise of a distinctively *economic* variation. Europe’s history is sketched (anachronistically) in terms of shifting patterns and transitions in which neoliberal variants vie for power. Setting those transitions within a wide-angled vision of Europe’s modernity as inseparable from a movement of the decentering of our understanding of “man,” the chance for a new shift is identified – one to be accompanied, no doubt, by “a surge of laughter” that has been heard, regularly and without fail, throughout the entirety of Europe’s history. **[AQ: It is not our practice to have abstracts; would you like to keep this text as an introduction or delete?]**

1. Liberal Man

In a lecture delivered in Prague in 1935, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl introduced a worry he felt regarding what he called “the total world-view of modern man.”³ That world-view was one that, he thought, **constituted a** “turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 97–8.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, ed. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), §455.

³ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 6; henceforth CES, followed by page number.

genuine humanity” (CES 6). These are “questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence” (ibid.). Blinded by the astonishing success of the natural sciences, “modern man”—which he will identify strongly with the culture of modern European humanity and its “birthplace” in ancient Greece—has become indifferent to what natural sciences are themselves indifferent to. As he put it, “merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people” (ibid.). Husserl made the following plea to his listeners in 1935 regarding the “decisive” questions:

Do not these questions . . . demand universal reflections and answers based on rational insight? In the final analysis they concern man as a free, self-determining being What does science have to say about reason and unreason or about us men as subjects of this freedom? The mere science of bodies clearly has nothing to say; it abstracts from everything subjective. As for the humanistic sciences, on the other hand . . . we are told that the scholar carefully excludes all valuative positions Scientific, objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world . . . is in fact. But can the world, and human existence in it, truthfully have a meaning if . . . history has nothing more to teach us than that all the shapes of the spiritual world . . . form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves . . . ? Can we console ourselves with that? Can we live in this world, where historical occurrence is nothing but an unending concatenation of illusory progress and bitter disappointment? (CES 6–7)

This is a wonderfully rich passage, beautifully summarizing a sense of the contemporary predicament of modern Europe: of European humanity in the times of science finding itself paradoxically but increasingly resistant to any substantive philosophy of history in terms of which “historical occurrence,” *especially its own*, is the very opposite of an “unending concatenation of illusory progress.”⁴ We could explore all of its corners and cornerstones. But I want for the moment to pick up on just one of its most clear, open, and ultimately most problematic assumptions, namely its conception of “man”—the conception of the being that “we men” ourselves are—as essentially “a free, self-determining being,” the conception of “man,” and hence of ourselves, as *rational subjectivity* (CES 290).

This conception of human life is not one among others. Indeed, it is the conception that informs the very sciences that so obsess modern European humanity. Man pursues science and can grasp the

⁴ The internal relationship between the classic philosophical history of the world and the classic discourse of Europe’s modernity is explored in Jacques Derrida, “Of the Humanities and the Philosophical Discipline: The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitical Point of View,” trans. Thomas Dutoit, *Surfaces* 4 (1994), pp. 5–21.

objective truth about the world. The reason for this is fundamentally related to reason itself, to the possibility of “man” freely determining himself to achieve a rationally grounded and disinterested cognition of the world and genuine knowledge of the facts.

The great masters of the philosophical tradition, from Plato to Descartes to Kant and beyond, all subscribe to something like this view of man, of the pure humanity of man as rational subjectivity. I am going to come back to Plato shortly, to an incredible moment in an incredible philosophical text, a text that (incredibly) helped decisively to shape the whole intellectual culture of Europe. But first, I want to note, with Husserl, that *none* of these great thinkers supposed that the only form of rational inquiry worthy of man was the exercise of theoretical reason (the pursuit of science). On the contrary, the classic view would be that there are *various* forms of rational activity, and not all of them aim at empirical knowledge of facts. Here is a selection of candidate *interests of reason*, all of which those who cleave to a conception of man as rational subjectivity might regard as (at least sometimes) worthy of man to pursue. I will describe them as *varieties of rational cognition*, but the point here is not to presume that they all aim at knowledge of facts. I simply mean that the proper appreciation of their “objects” that they aim to achieve in this or that domain are all taken to require the exercise of reason, and hence are, for this tradition, one and all regarded as distinctively human cognitive interests.

Theoretical reason—rational cognition of the world leading to empirical knowledge.

Practical reason—rational cognition of right action leading in the ethical sphere to moral knowledge and in the commercial sphere to economic knowledge.

Aesthetic judgement—rational cognition of the beautiful and the sublime leading to aesthetic knowledge.

Religious faith—rational cognition of the super-sensory leading to knowledge of God.

Pure reason—rational cognition of rational cognition leading to wisdom (**philo-sophia** [GREEK]).

Let us suppose (*concesso non dato*) that “the pure humanity of man” is, indeed, in the final analysis, as Husserl puts it, that of “a free, self-determining being.” If this were true, what would be the optimal conditions of human flourishing? What would be those conditions in which what is here called “man” can most fully realize his being as a free, self-determining being, as rational subjectivity? What are the conditions for the emancipation of rational subjectivity? And are these questions capable of being given “answers based on rational insight” as Husserl supposes?

Although I do not really think it is restricted to political liberalism, for reasons that will emerge, I am going to construe what I will call *classical liberal thought* as offering a positive answer to **the last** question. The classical liberal response to Husserl’s worries that I am envisaging passes through three steps.

First step: a satisfactory account of the conditions for human flourishing must acknowledge the varieties of rational inquiry just outlined. Or to put it differently, classical liberal political thought aims to optimize opportunities for free performance in different and autonomous *domains of human life* connected to the different interests of reason:

Theoretical domain—that part of life lived in devotion to knowledge and wisdom (knowledge/ignorance).

Economic domain—that part of life lived in devotion to wealth creation (profitability/non-profitability).

Political domain—that part of life lived in devotion to a community of citizens (friend/enemy).

Moral domain—that part of life lived in devotion to right action (good/evil).

Spiritual domain—that part of life lived in devotion to God (faith/doubt).

Artistic domain—that part of life lived in devotion to beauty (beautiful/ugly).

Domestic domain—that part of life lived in devotion to family (love/hate).

The first six are domains that are usually regarded as part of the *public* sphere; the last is the *private* sphere. Classical liberal thought has been, we should note, distinctively gendered with respect to the

analysis of rational subjectivity it offers. Women's "proper" interests are supposed to belong almost exclusively to the private sphere.

Second step: *power* should aim to organize the social world in such a way that each person's capacity to freely perform (if and where proper) in each of these domains is optimized. Historically, for women this has meant very little at all in anything but the private sphere. For men, however, there should be, within reason, and **insofar as it is** compatible with the scope for other men to do so too, as wide as possible **an** opportunity for devoting oneself freely to whatever one especially wants to devote oneself.

The ambition of liberal thought is thus to organize society in such a way that it can offer its citizens as great (**and as appropriate**) an opportunity as possible to pursue their rational interests. One can imagine the classical liberal seeing all sorts of conflicts, all sorts of trade-offs here: individual efforts to strike a balance between incommensurable ambitions and desires and the sacrifices one might have to make in pursuit of one's chosen interests. There will also be questions about what assistance in all this should be provided by the State and what can be left to individual or collective initiative beyond the State, perhaps with State regulation but without State ownership or control. Government will perforce be *limited*, however, if the aim is to secure and ensure room for freely chosen life plans.

What sort of society would optimize opportunities for the pursuit of freely chosen life plans and patterns of devotion? The liberal political thinker aims at realizing the greatest chance for the greatest number of people to pursue their own interests unfettered by irrational forces or alienating institutions or customs. This requires knowledge of and respect for the norms of conduct of rational inquiry in all its various forms. And it requires doing what one can to realize a society that can institutionally cherish those norms and enable them to flourish.

Third step: human history, and especially the history of Europe, is the movement of increasing *progress* in realizing such a society. Human history, and especially the history of Europe, is the movement of the emancipation of rational subjectivity **over** time: from origins in primitive

human animality, human societies are moving in stages toward the optimal realization of man's rational powers in a properly civilized society, with Europe at the head.

Husserl's remarks about the world-view of modern European man suggest that what I am calling the classical liberal view is in crisis. Suddenly, the movement of our history seems not to be taking the path we thought we were on. History seems no longer a sequence of increasingly congenial spiritual worlds but a random series of worlds that "form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves."

2. Neoliberal Hegemonies

What has gone wrong? What is to be done? I said I would go back to Plato. I am not going to say just yet what he proposed as the way to get us on track. But I do want to preface everything I am going to say here with the words that prefaced his own account of what is to be done. In the course of his discussion of an *ideal form* of society, Plato claims that there is a fault to *all* the forms of society that have ever *actually existed* that prevents them from running as they should—prevents them from running, that is to say, in anything like the way the ideal state would run. But Plato also thought that there was a way of putting things right, and very surprisingly, he supposed there was just one thing needful. Here is Plato, speaking through Socrates, in conversation with Glaucon and Adeimantus (Plato's elder brothers):

"I think we can show that the transformation can be effected by a single change," I said, "but it's hardly a small or easy one, though it is possible."

"Tell us what it is."

"I'm now facing what we call the biggest wave," I replied. "I'll tell you what it is, even if it swamps me in a surge of laughter and I'm drowned in contempt."⁵

The laughter and contempt has not gone away. And I imagine it will return in another wave when the reader reaches the conclusion of this text too. So be it.

To introduce the Platonic cause of the wave of laughter, first recall the Husserlian anxiety with the waves of failure. Husserl's paradoxical suggestion is that a new *doubt* about progress in

⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Henry Desmond Pritchard (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), 473c.

human history arises in the wake of the *undeniable* progress in what should be humanity's greatest achievement: in the European sciences of nature. I will be affirming a variation of that thought in this essay, but it is a variation that conceives Husserl's own position as part of the problem. Husserl cleaves to the thought that philosophy too should aim to be a science of some (very special) sort: namely a science of the transcendental ideality of the essence of everything empirically objective. While the kind of knowledge in view here (a radical form of self-knowledge) has a modern form (taking its point of departure from the thinking subject, the *ego cogito*), Husserl's account of ideal essences as the (non-spatio-temporal or irreal) "objects" of some sort of "intuition" displays a cognitivism about philosophy's results that has been a mainstay of philosophy since Greek antiquity and has a fundamental source in Platonism.⁶ I will want to refer Husserl's worries to an understandable anxiety that arises when such cognitivism is no longer something we can seriously entertain. However, I won't **take that to negate [sugg: argue that the contemporary implausibility of this cognitivism negates]** his general conception of the formation of modern Europe's societies; **the conception [sugg:, which is a conception]** of a form of communalization that is *fundamentally* shaped by the emergence of *philosophy* in Greek antiquity. And it is to Plato that I want to turn first for an explanation of why it may be that "all the shapes of the spiritual world" we have witnessed hitherto might seem to amount to no more than "fleeting waves."

Plato compares governance in states with captaincy on ships:

Suppose the following to be the state of affairs on board a ship or ships. The captain is larger and stronger than any of the crew, but a bit deaf and short-sighted, and similarly limited in seamanship. The crew are all quarrelling with each other about how to navigate the ship, *each thinking he ought to be at the helm . . .* They spend all their time milling round the captain and doing all they can to get him to give them the helm. If one faction is more successful than another, their rivals may kill them and throw them overboard, lay out the honest captain with drugs or drink or in some other way *take control of the ship . . .*⁷

⁶ While it is unforgiving in the extreme on this particular point, Gilbert Ryle's reading of Husserlian phenomenology **at least has the merit of making it [AQ: Could you please clarify what you mean here?]**. See Gilbert Ryle, "Phenomenology," in *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1971), pp. 167–78, and "Phenomenology versus *The Concept of Mind*," in *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1971), pp. 179–96.

⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 488b; emphasis added.

In the spirit of this description, I want to propose the following hypothesis. The history of efforts to realize the classical *liberal* conception of human flourishing—efforts to achieve the emancipation of rational subjectivity—have been subject to more than one *neoliberal* usurpation or coup by some faction or (as I will put it) *community of ideas* that wants to achieve hegemony.

The thought here is that, like the factions attempting to seize control of the ship, efforts to optimize opportunities for leading a life proper to rational subjectivity have given rise to movements that attempt to achieve *the hegemonic domination of the norms that belong to only one of the domains of rational life*. Those who belong to the community of ideas that represent or defend the interests of just *one* of the domains of life attempt to take charge of the *whole*; they attempt to “take control of the ship,” they want to seize power, become hegemonic, and thence, for as long as they hold the reins of power, displace and subordinate the interests of every other domain to their own interests. Plato’s ship seems occasionally to be overwhelmed by its factions. On the story I am telling, such an achievement is really *very* rare. Mostly we have been ruled by the “deaf and short-sighted” who are “limited in seamanship.”

I define neoliberalism in general, then, as the outlook of a community of ideas that seeks *the limitless extension of the norms of conduct of one domain of life to the whole of life*. Its emancipatory claim is that it will achieve the optimal flourishing of the whole of life by coordinating and controlling it in terms dictated by the norms of that one domain. The guiding assumption of every neoliberal community of ideas is that human flourishing in life *in general* requires that one particular domain of life—the interests of one particular community of ideas—should *rule*.

Anachronisms are (perhaps) piling up.⁸ The liberal conception I am describing will have only recently taken that name, and the term neoliberalism is of even more recent vintage and passes for many today as a kind of catch-all for everything bad about capitalism. However, conceptually

⁸ I say perhaps, because finding early incarnations and affirming “the antiquity of liberal ideas” is actually very hard to resist. For this, see Roger Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 270.

speaking the two terms together are well-suited for this discussion, particularly if we accept that behind the various appeals to the idea of neoliberalism made today, there is a basic (if typically poorly articulated) conception of it as a hegemonic movement that seeks *the limitless extension of the market model to all spheres of life*; a kind of realization of ourselves as *homo economicus*. Neoliberalism in our time is, that is to say, understood as an *economic* neoliberalism. It is construed as an ideological conception that says every problem has a market solution or a solution within the logic of the market. Proponents of it might say: the aim of applying market-oriented reasoning *everywhere* is to optimize the conditions for human flourishing *in general*.⁹

It is important to distinguish this kind of economic neoliberalism from, for example, policy preferences for the privatization of previously state-controlled sectors of an economy. That aspiration is compatible with classical liberalism, which would accept that certain kinds of activity might flourish most successfully if they are subject to the rigors of “market disciplines” of competition, of profitability, and so on. The classical liberal would not think, however, that *every* domain of life should likewise be governed by these norms (cultivation of fairness among friends, love, beauty, wisdom, etc. have other, incommensurable, norms). The defining feature of the

⁹ This way of describing neoliberalism is not as idiosyncratic as my introduction of it may make it appear. In fact, many thinkers of the contemporary social and political situation say essentially the same thing, and what one might call “the extension thesis” may even be the prevailing understanding in academic literature on the subject. Colin Crouch opens his book on this theme with the claim that “behind [the many branches and brands of neoliberalism] stands one dominant theme: that free markets in which individuals maximize their material interests provide the best means of fulfilling human aspirations” (Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011], p. vii). Peter McLaren claims that “neoliberals wish to extend the market principle into the entire social universe” (“Class Struggle Unchained: An Interview with Peter McLaren,” in Pierre Orelus and Curry Malott, eds., *Radical Voices for Democratic Schooling* [London: Palgrave, 2012] p. 26). Paul Treanor suggests that the “typical” expression of neoliberalism is the “extension of the market principle into non-economic areas of life” (“Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition,” <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html> [accessed September 14, 2015]). I could extend these affirmations of the extension thesis almost *ad nauseam*. I would recommend, however, that the reader take a look at Jean-François Lyotard’s discussion of “advanced liberalism” in *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) for an astonishingly rich introduction to its historical emergence in the **post-war world** [AQ: Could you please clarify what you mean by this phrase? Do you mean “post-Second World War”? Or, is “post-war” a technical term of Lyotard’s?].

community of ideas that seeks the hegemony of economic neoliberalism is not a demand that any and every entity be held in private hands, but that there is no domain of life that is not appropriately subject to the rule of market-oriented reasoning.

To give an example that will prove not to be one example among others, consider the university. Not every classical liberal will have principled objections to the idea of a private university, and some might even have a preference for that. But the classical liberal will not think that what is called “success in academic inquiry” should itself be conceived and measured in the terms appropriate to a business model, nor would such a liberal regard the activity of a university as something to be measured exclusively by its contribution to economic interests outside it. The economic neoliberal disagrees on both fronts: academics deliver products to consumers and those products can be assessed in the same way we assess any product or commodity—in terms of satisfying consumer preferences. Moreover, the university as a part of wider society should also be judged in terms of its service to national (or more generally commercial) economic goals and interests. A classical liberal might object that while running a university on business lines is fine, the best way of doing so, the best way of delivering the most competitive institution, is, as far as possible, to free a space of “play” within the general economy that *maximizes the opportunity for rational inquiry to be unfettered by anything*, whether immediate student satisfaction, rapid external impact, or exploitable commercial relevance.¹⁰ I’ll come back to this.

However, there is a feature of our time that Husserl remarks on in the passage I began with that fundamentally interrupts this ahistorical *conceptual* contrast between classical liberalism and economic neoliberalism, and it is a feature that can make one feel altogether despairing: namely the absence in our time (unless we are Marxists) of the kind of substantive “philosophy of history” through which the classical liberal conception, in its third step, had understood our lives. We live in a time that, whether temporarily or permanently we do not know, has more or less abandoned such

¹⁰ I explore this idea of the university in detail in Simon Glendinning, “Thinking about (going to) the university,” *Critical Quarterly* 47:1-2 (2005), pp. 111–17.

grand historical narratives of world history. The idea of the history of the world as the emancipation and progress of rational subjectivity is (I will claim) simply no longer credible (no more than the idea of world history as leading toward the emancipation of the working subject *qua* universal subject).

In such a time—in a time when we have become increasingly resistant to such teleological meta-narratives—the only game in town for decision-makers within the social world is to **make attempts at making “the system” function without undue problems; of improving the “efficiency” of institutions, of “optimizing the system’s performance”** [sugg: attempt to make “the system” function without undue problems, to improve the “efficiency” of institutions, to “[optimize] the system’s performance”—with no higher end but improving its functioning.¹¹ In other words, into the space left open by the falling away of classic discourses of emancipation and progress, the community of ideas that champions economic neoliberalism and its market criteria of efficiency and performativity have been able to occupy the field virtually unchallenged. With regard to those who get caught up in *any* neoliberal seizure of power, the imperative is simple: “be operational (that is, be commensurable [with the norms of the hegemonic domain]) or disappear.”¹² With economic neoliberalism there is a “level of terror” associated with this hegemony that is very often, as Jean-François Lyotard says, “hard,” utterly unforgiving.¹³ And, as Husserl anticipates, it all seems despairingly hopeless, making our existence fundamentally pointless, tragically meaningless.

It doesn’t look good. But the situation only seems one of existential “crisis” if, with Husserl, you think that the only way our lives could be regarded as meaningful is against the background of the thought that world history follows a teleological or teleo-eschatological path, program, or design (whether of God, nature, or man). Husserl thinks we cannot find consolation in anything short of

¹¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

such a background. How can the history of the *entelechy* of rational subjectivity be other than teleological? Indeed, how can it. So perhaps it is not the history of rational subjectivity . . .

In the face of this new situation, if we are to learn to see it as something other than the total disaster for European societies today that Husserl worried about we need to learn two things. First, (*pace* classical liberalism in its third step) we need to learn to see that the idea of living a worthwhile life—what Husserl calls a meaningful existence—really does not depend on the truth of a teleological philosophy of world history. And second, (*pace* economic neoliberalism in its first step) we need to learn to see that the form of social life that Husserl so clearly, and in my view rightly, wants to protect and defend, namely (and here we see the point of the university example) one which is cultivated or irrigated by and in turn cultivates what he calls “a community of purely ideal interests” (CES 287)—which Jacques Derrida calls (keeping the old name for strategic purposes) “the university without condition”¹⁴—cannot be sustained, or has no *chance*, in conditions of the limitless extension of economic reason, the logic of the market.

In our time, what one might call *the historical task* for European societies may appear modest. Instead of striking out toward a final end of history, the task, as I see it, is to protect and defend a form of communalization **that has hitherto been** most strongly (but not by any means exclusively) linked to the history of European universities, the development of which is inseparable from what Immanuel Kant claimed to be *the* distinctive European cultural achievement: the formation of an “*educated public* which has existed uninterruptedly from its origin [in classical antiquity] to our times.”¹⁵ This is a form of communalization that, as Husserl suggests, spreads out from philosophy (CES 286). In other words, and it can now be seen that this is not such a modest proposal, the task is one in which the community of ideas (supposing for a moment that it is one) that has classically championed the *unfettered inquiry after truth*—the community, that is to say, of

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” in *Without Alibi*, trans. and ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 202.

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Siegbert Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 52n.

those we call “*philosophers*” and its distinctive *will to truth*—**sustains within society, and as dissidents in an era of economic neoliberalism, a certain *will to power* [sugg: sustains a certain will to power within society, and functions to provide voices of dissent in an era of economic neoliberalism].**

3. Unless we are Marxists

What I want to represent as the *opposite* of the kind of culture that this aspires to is the one found in apocalyptic texts such as *Brave New World* and *1984*. Here the idea is to arrange things such that the main forms of self-understanding available are of a sort that conditions people to *want* to be “operational” in a life that is, as it were, essentially hostile to the will to truth. On this view, to keep the system performing you only need to ensure that enough people *think* they are living worthwhile lives, and so are more or less happily operational creatures of the ruling hegemonic order. They think they are living worthwhile lives, but really they are not. They are alienated by the system, but they think they are not.

Some theorists of Europe’s contemporary condition encourage us to think that our situation is already rather like this. For example, some see in Foucault’s ideas of “governmentality” something very like the vision of life imagined in *1984*.¹⁶ And Marxism has long held the view that our appreciation of our condition is systematically distorted. Here, from the Marxist thinker Alex Callinicos, is one way of making this point:

To diagnose alienation is to draw a contrast between the present situation, where the subject may be misled by appearances into failing to recognise her loss, and a counterfactual condition of authenticity, where she has all the powers proper to her.¹⁷

At least part of the problem with this kind of diagnosis is that it depends on having, or claiming to have, at our disposal *now* a viewpoint that is, in principle, immune from the allure of such present appearances and which others *now* frankly and sadly lack. The worry is not that you need

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁷ Alex Callinicos, *The Resources of Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 4.

exclusively to inhabit such a viewpoint but that some people, unlike most of us in this condition, are nevertheless sometimes able to do so. And, as the sketch from Callinicos suggests, this seems to require that one has at one's disposal a conception and grasp of the powers that *really are* "proper" to human beings. That kind of cognitivist presumption (the idea that there is *something to be known* on this subject—call it a *truth or meaning of man*) is fundamental to classical liberal political thought as I am (anachronistically and misnomically) presenting it here. And it is a cognitivism about the truth or meaning of man that **is increasingly** found *incredible*. As David Wiggins put it in the midst of the Cold War:

Unless we are Marxists, we are more resistant [today] than the eighteenth- or nineteenth-centuries knew how to be [to] attempts to locate the meaning of human life or human history in mystical or metaphysical conceptions—in the emancipation of mankind, or progress, or the onward advance of Absolute Spirit.¹⁸

In our time—and this is what really worries Husserl too—we no longer find it compelling, indeed we seem to **profoundly resist it**, conceiving issues concerning the worth of our lives in terms of a contrast between a final or objective truth of man, a truth which the well-adjusted mind manages, despite alluring appearances, to adjust itself to, and various kinds of deluded conceptions which are the upshot of being misled by the shadow play of appearances. On the other hand, as we shall see, the idea of a contrast between the meaningful and the meaningless life, a contrast that Callinicos (with Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, Husserl, et. al.) implicitly insists on, is something I will not want to give up on *at all*. Moreover, we can be encouraged in this by noting that a concern with this kind of contrast is not in the least restricted to an epistemically privileged minority. On the contrary, it seems to me that even today the number of willing "victims of the system," those who might be thought of as "misled by appearances into failing to recognise [their] loss,"¹⁹ is shrinkingly small. For example, it is encouraging how few people actually seem to want a society everywhere framed by the norms of economic neoliberalism: in contrast to a conception of a life that most of us are

¹⁸ Wiggins' essay was first published in 1976. I will return to the significance of the Cold War context at the end of this paper.

¹⁹ Callinicos, *The Resources of Critique*, p. 4.

already quite capable of imagining, it is hard to find anyone who thinks the current neoliberal hegemony is likely to realize it.²⁰

So we certainly need to retain that idea of a contrast. But, we should abandon the idea of an epistemically privileged viewpoint **for drawing this contrast**. We need to accept that among the conditions under which people can be said *actually* to be living anything *short* of a worthwhile life are conditions in which people actually *think* they are. (Values are like secondary qualities in that respect.) Myths of governmentality and radical alienation encourage the idea that the social world we inhabit creates conditions in which people can think they are living worthwhile lives when really they are not, and hence that the reforms or revolutions that would be needed are at once virtually wholesale and (given people's thoughts on the subject) depressingly unrealizable. But, first, (if values are like secondary qualities) it is not clear to me that the premise of such radical alienation

²⁰ Two points on this. First, it is a strange mantra sometimes heard on the political Left that affirms that people find it hard to imagine an alternative, or have come to think that there is no alternative to economic neoliberalism (fully knowing that they themselves can imagine one). Of course, if by “alternative” one means: “a fully worked out political-economic model,” then I am sure nobody can “imagine” (plan) it. I just mean: people are sensitive to *injustice* and the *inadequacy of current conditions*. For example, very many people think it is not fair or just that city bankers get such (comparatively) high remuneration for their work, and they can easily imagine conditions in which they do not. Knowing how to bring about those conditions is not required for that sense of injustice—though knowing how even to start to bring about those conditions is obviously no small matter. However, on that point, and second, while most people are quite capable of imagining an alternative to what they see as unjust, I think that *too many* think they do know how to or what will solve the problem. Supposing, as Husserl did in the 1930s and we might well today too, that “the European nations are sick; Europe itself . . . is in crisis” (see CES 270), then one can hardly deny, now as then, that “we are by no means lacking something like nature doctors” who would “proscribe medicine for nations and supranational communities” (ibid.). Indeed we are practically inundated by a flood of suggestions for reform. And as Derrida notes similarly with respect to the present world crisis, “there is no lack of interpretations or analogies—we have too many of them” (“Economies of the Crisis,” in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002], p. 70). Although it won't please those who want everything now, I am inclined at this point to affirm a variation of the thought expressed by Henry David Thoreau: that speaking practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-representative-government men and women, I ask for, not at once or soon a no-representative-government, but at once and for the foreseeable future a *better* representative government. See the opening three paragraphs of Thoreau's great text “Civil Disobedience,” in *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*, ed. Philip Smith (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1993), pp. 1–2. There is a lot to be done just there.

makes any sense, nor, second, does it seem to be true that we really are so fully duped by the system.

For reasons that should now be growing much clearer, I want to illustrate this second point once more with the university example (although, again, it is not one example among others). Here is an attestation from a participant of some unremarkable—but really important—truths about the limits of economic neoliberalism with respect to the temporality of intellectual achievement:

Higher education is not about results in the next quarter but about discoveries that may take—and last—decades or even centuries. Neither the abiding questions of humanistic inquiry nor the winding path of scientific research that leads ultimately to innovation and discovery can be neatly fitted within a predictable budget and timetable.²¹

Values related to such economic incalculables [strike hyphen] really do struggle to be heard under an increasingly economic neoliberal hegemony, but that does not mean that participants are typically “misled by appearances” into failing to recognize them. It is hard to imagine that anyone who is not benefiting personally from the formation of “executive teams” in university administrations could feel remotely close to the language in the document, from King’s College London in 2010, explaining that the institution must “create financially viable academic activity by disinvesting from areas that are at sub-critical level with no realistic prospect of extra investment.”²² This is truly, madly, and deeply stupid. And in the end, that is always going to be the kind of reason why we should decisively resist those who belong to the community of ideas that promotes the economic neoliberal hegemony. It is why we do.

On the other hand, I would not reject it here as the vice of capitalism (if there is such a thing as capitalism, or such a thing as capitalism as such, which I doubt; we know today better than

²¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, “The University’s Crisis of Purpose,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/books/review/Faust-t.html?_r=0 (accessed September 14, 2015).

²² There have been many excellent discussions that pierce the shiny, powerful, but ultimately profoundly fragile facade of economic sophistication in university management in the United Kingdom. See for example, Anthony Grafton and Jeffrey Hamburger, “Save the Warburg Library!,” *The New York Review of Books*, September 1, 2010, <http://blogs.nybooks.com/post/437005501/britain-the-disgrace-of-the-universities> (accessed September 14, 2015).

before that, insofar as we can speak of it, there are varieties of capitalism, with a variety of vices and virtues). Of far greater significance, I think, is that in a time of incredulity toward the great historical narratives of emancipation and progress, we understandably struggle in these conditions to coherently articulate our (continuing) interest in emancipation and progress themselves. And in a situation in which the community of ideas that calls for the functional “optimization of the system” and its ever greater “efficiency” in terms of economic norms holds so much of the field, prospects for those classic interests can seem bleak indeed.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to suppose that the “performativity” criterion has to be dominated by a neo-liberal community of ideas. The “level of terror” endured by those expected to be operational is not *bound* to be “hard” and beyond reform. Indeed, “the performativity of the system” itself has no chance at all if its continued functioning is constantly threatened by dissatisfaction, demoralization, and resentment. And yet this still sounds immensely depressing. I mean, what’s the *point* of all this “functioning”?

We have for a long time supposed that it is the progressive movement of our forms of social life toward distant ideals that alone gives meaning to our lives. But one does not need such a teleological vision in view to affirm that the future matters to us: one can simply want to make it so that what one does, individually and collectively, *here and now* will have been some kind of a progressive preface to what remains to come, without any such vision of a final end. Elsewhere in the same essay cited a moment ago, Wiggins recalls that part of the unease that many feel about factory farming, intensive livestock rearing, the general spoliation of nature, and the extinction of innumerable animal species is that it shows us modern men and women, as in a mirror, as at certain points akin to a form of life we might well think “profoundly alien”: akin, that is, to an animal with “no non-instrumental concerns and no interest in the world considered as lasting longer than the animal in question will need the world to last in order to sustain the animal’s own life.”²³ Such a life

²³ David Wiggins, “Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life,” in *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 102.

is no preface to what remains to come *at all*, and “functioning” to such a destructive end is not just depressing but runs totally against the grain of a participant’s sense of the temporal “here and now” of a human life as one in which “the dead and the unborn are also present.”²⁴ The time of our lives is one that “connects us to worlds before and after us.”²⁵ Our lives, our sense of who we are, is conceived out of and within that temporal stretch. “Functioning to no end” might describe the infrastructure of a presently operational life-support system, but not the horizon of a human life worth living; the *milieu* of our “spiritual spheres”—the “locus of our cares and endeavours” (CES 272)—is a “present” that *should be* fundamentally linked to those who are not there.²⁶ **Derrida claims that “it is in the name of justice that it is necessary to speak about . . . ghosts, inheritance, and generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain others who are not present, nor presently living . . .”²⁷ He continues to summarize as follows:**

No ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. No justice . . . seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present . . . before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of war, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism.²⁸

And I think Husserl is right to think that, for *European* humanity, the characteristic of the “spiritual worlds” that flow through us is *most worth defending*, **and** is inseparable from the astonishing development of what Husserl calls the “community movement of education [*Bildung*],” (CES 286) an enculturation tied to the “ancient canons,” **as Derrida calls them,²⁹ and which** Kant has in view in his description of modern Europe’s “uninterrupted” classical heritage. **This characteristic is tied** to those canons but is not “bound to the soil” of any specific region or locale (CES 286). It is a

²⁴ Roger Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously about the Planet* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 234.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ I explore this in detail in Simon Glendinning, “Settled-there: Heidegger on the work of art as the cultivation of place,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, 1:1 (2014), pp. 7–32.

²⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xix.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” p. 208.

European cultural (spiritual) *milieu* then, *without* radical attachment to any specific geographical *milieu*, European or otherwise.

We inherit these “ancient canons.” But it is not something to inherit without more ado. Indeed, it is *also* the heritage of the anthropocentric, androcentric, and Eurocentric conception of the meaning of human life and history—the conception of man—that *today* we are more resistant to than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries knew how to be. And yet, for reasons I will return to, I am at one with Derrida in affirming that these “ancient canons . . . ought to be *protected at any price*.”³⁰ The basic claim of the philosopher, then, is that it is the classical European culture—supranational in its essential tendency—“that radiates out from philosophy” (CES 286), radiates out from the community of ideas (if it is one) **that is** committed to unfettered inquiry after truth. **It is that** will to truth that must, today more than ever, assert its will to power. **This claim, no doubt, provokes a wave of laughter.**

We know that the hegemony of economic neoliberalism will not do. However, I want to add immediately that things will not be helped if power is seized instead by those who belong to the community of ideas that seeks the hegemony of *political* neoliberalism—the limitless extension of the political to every sphere of life. Here the force jostling for hegemonic power is not the one that calls for the maximization of *utility*, but the one that calls for the maximization of *equality*. While it seems to be on a distinctly more gilded path than its economic neoliberal cousin, with respect to becoming operational within its hegemony, political neoliberalism is, if anything, worse. **I will explain [sugg: Let me now explain this].**

4. The Varieties of Neoliberalism

In the course of a remarkable history, part of the post-war settlement in Europe—part of the slow turn toward the current economic neoliberal form of “optimization of the system”—has been the emergence of an increasingly professional, managerial, and technocratic political class and a

³⁰ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

correspondingly dramatic falling away of political participation by the citizenry. This has led many to call for a *re-politicization* of society in a more or less traditional sense: the mobilization of a citizenry who actively, self-consciously, and especially *directly* participate in projects aiming at the realization of greater social and economic equality. This desire for traditional re-politicization in a time of economic neoliberal hegemony is understandable and not in itself unwelcome, but *insofar as it seeks social hegemony for political reason* it remains nonetheless, in my view, wrong and misguided.

In the last three hundred years, European humanity has experienced a fundamental changeover in its default understanding of the world and the significance of our lives: from a primarily religiously construed default (God and God's plan for **humanity**), to one that is not religiously construed (**humanity's** plan for **humanity**). Although they do not fully or simply hold the field in these periods, each is characterized by the significant presence and activism of two communities of ideas, two distinctively *teleo-eschatological* visions of a neoliberal hegemony: a radical *religious* neoliberal faction in the Middle-Ages prior to the Enlightenment, followed by factions that desire a *political* neoliberal hegemony in the wake of the general movement of democratization that flows out of the French Revolution. The first supposes that every problem has (or ought to have finally) a religious solution. The second supposes that every problem has (or ought to have finally) a political one. And we have here the germ of the political neoliberal ideal of a society in which a *completed* political hegemony will have finally transformed social conditions so as finally to realize the good life (on earth). Europe's political history is inseparable from the growth of this idea.³¹ There have been many, many great political victories and developments in

³¹ This is a more complicated point than it looks. Europe's modern political history can be broadly conceived with two narrative paths out of the French revolution: its mainstream history, which is primarily narrated in terms of the development of representative, parliamentary, and liberal democracy (occasionally fired and inspired by, but also typically almost ruined by revolutionary activists); and, alongside and inside that, revolutionary history, which is primarily narrated as a history of betrayals and failures (the results of which revolutionaries will see as unfolding in the development of parliamentary politics) in which efforts to shift to genuine workers' power or the people's power are tragically thwarted. I think both sides of this narrative will recognize it (one way or the other). See, for example, Alain Badiou, "The Paris Commune: A Political Declaration on

this time, not least the long struggle for, and still painfully uneven progress of women's equality. However, when political reason achieves hegemony, in *a society in which the political saturates life*, we do not have a democracy of ideal adequacy: **we have the worst [AQ: Could you please clarify what you mean here?]**. Be operational, comrade, or disappear. It is a truly terrifying scene of political intimidation. Here is Lenin describing the scene of life in conditions of what he calls "actual equality":

For when *all* have learned to administer and actually do independently administer social production, independently keep accounts and exercise control over the **parasites**, the **sons of the wealthy**, the swindlers and **other** "guardians of capitalist traditions," the escape from this popular accounting and control will inevitably become so incredibly difficult, such a rare exception, and will probably be *accompanied by such swift and severe punishment [emphasis added]* (for the armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals, and they **will** scarcely allow anyone to trifle with them), that the *necessity* of observing the simple, fundamental rules of **human intercourse** will very soon become a *habit*.³²

[AQ: The 2009 version of this text that you cite has certain differences in phrasing that I have noted in bold; if you would like to keep the phrasing that you originally cited, we will have to cite another edition. Could you please let me know what you would prefer to do?]

The transition to a communist society takes place, Lenin suggests, through the process he thinks of as *completing* the democratization of the state. This is a transition **that** brings the need for *democratic government*—an electorally approved political or ruling class—to an end. The end (*telos* [GREEK]) of democracy is thus the end (*terminus*) of democracy as a state system or regime of representative government; it is a condition in which *all* the members of society completely take over the work of administration *for themselves*. At the same time that political struggle *disappears*, society would, as it were, have become political *through and through*; one is a citizen in every dimension of one's being. And if you do not play the game, if you are not operational, you are an enemy of the people and you must disappear; your failure to conform to the norms in force will "be

Politics," in *Polemics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), p. 284. My point is that political neoliberalism belongs with the revolutionary wing of this history. Political liberalism is center-stage in the mainstream.

³² Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *State and Revolution*, trans. Foreign Languages Publishing House (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2009), pp. 107–8.

accompanied by such swift and severe punishment” that for most people it will, understandably enough, “become a habit” to conform—a miserable habit.

The mobilization of identitarian affects in the name of equality is the aim of those who belong to the community of ideas that seeks hegemonic power in political neoliberalism. It was the aim of both national and international socialism: the aim is for every properly German citizen or for every properly communist comrade to *want* to be political through and through, a citizen at every moment, a comrade to the end, etc. It is the ambition to forge a community that really *is* one because it has become a community that really *is one*: “The whole of society will have become a single office.”³³ Terrifying—at least I think so.

I am sure the reader will now have a good sense about where I am going with this, if not why. But to take us there, consider first the following alternatives, the varieties of neoliberalism that have most tenaciously vied for power in Europe’s pre-modern and modern history:

Homo Theologicus, Religious Neoliberalism—the limitless extension of religious reason to every sphere of life, the aim of which is to maximize fidelity to God.

Homo Politicus, Political Neoliberalism—the limitless extension of political reason to every sphere of life, the aim of which is to maximize equality.

Homo Economicus, Economic Neoliberalism—the limitless extension of economic reason to every sphere of life, the aim of which is to maximize efficiency.

Perhaps there have been other candidates,³⁴ but the one I want to bring onto the stage here is Plato’s “biggest wave,” the one that has surged through the centuries of Europe’s history, centuries of laughter, the joke ambition of what we call “the philosopher,” **and which, in the form of the *philosopher kings*, was Plato’s cause.**

³³ Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p. 107.

³⁴ I am not sure what to say about other possibilities. In principle, the list can be extended as far as you can think of some life interest that someone might wish to rule over the whole of life. For example: *Homo Romanticus*: a (specific) Aesthetic Neoliberalism—the limitless extension of aesthetic reason to every sphere of life, the aim of which is to maximize beauty. Or, *Homo Hedonicus*: a (specific) Moral Neoliberalism—the limitless extension of moral reason to every sphere of life, the aim of which is to maximize pleasure.

The Platonist conception was, as I have indicated, problematically *cognitivist*. It implies that the ruler possesses peculiar and distinctive *knowledge* of the essence of *everything* empirically actual, *every* domain of life and, hence, is best placed to rule over the whole of life in an ideally *just* way. A novel form of this cognitivism survives in Husserl's subjectivized transcendental phenomenology too, which he had hoped would effect "a complete reorientation of view" for man (CES 18) in terms of his "teleological sense" (CES 269). But the history of the movement Husserl founded, as well as the wider history of philosophy in the last hundred years or so, has witnessed a marked acceleration in what one might call a "deconstructive" turn that exposes and turns away from philosophy's Platonist cognitivism (turns away from its ontology of an "ideal logos" of "pure idealities"). However, *one does not have to be a cognitivist of this kind to embrace the neoliberal cause for philosophy inaugurated by Plato*. Even a radical non-cognitivist, like Nietzsche, can hope to see what one might call *the limitless extension of philosophical reason to the whole of life* and can hope to see **actual philosophers rule**.³⁵

Homo Philosophicus, Philosophical Neoliberalism—the limitless extension of "philosophical reason" to every sphere of life, the aim of which is to maximize justice.

The idea of the philosopher as ruler recurs throughout the history of Europe in different guises, but always with the biggest wave of laughter and, hence, always remaining ahead of us as *merely* (perhaps only barely and perhaps even not really) "possible." Possible, as Plato says, merely in the sense that we can approximate it. As an ideal, it is impossible, beyond practical, and we admit it. But: the impossible as "possible," we still say. "Hardly a small or easy [change]," says Plato.³⁶ So it seems it will not be coming anytime soon—not tomorrow, and not the day after either. But do we even know what such an event would be? Do we know what the philosopher rulers to come will look like? For us, today, the idea is still like a joke, totally absurd. It remains a cause of laughter.

³⁵ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 112.

³⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, 473c.

5. The Pure Humanity of Man

What then might the philosopher *today* say *this time*, once more to save the name, to honor the name, of the philosopher king? Plato had his word on the idea of a condition in which justice was at one with power. But it depended on an idea of a special kind of knowledge of the super-sensible that “*I, philosopher*” today am not willing to countersign. Instead, today, I will say this. This philosophical neoliberalism is fundamentally different to every other form of neoliberalism: the norms of the domain that would want to seize power in this case, the norms governing its will to truth, norms concerning *what it is to inquire philosophically*, are *not given* but *remain* in question. And in a culture **run through** with an openness to endless philosophical in-questioning, even the classical liberal idea of the given “domains of interest” loses its rigor. What it means to be “operational” in such a neoliberalism—the practical levels of terror—should be optimally minimized. The *question* of how to live is *sustained*, not finally *closed*.

In a post-cognitivist world, the philosopher’s “knowing,” i.e., what the philosopher specializes in, is no longer the attaining of a certain (special) kind of *truth*, but *remains*, as Nietzsche notes, inseparable from aiming at a certain (maximal) reach of *responsibility*:³⁷ not just responsibility in this or that (supposed) domain of life (logic, politics, or art, for example)—*not membership in this or that community of ideas*³⁸—but responsibility *for the whole of life* and, hence, the meaning of our existence: “their ‘knowing’ is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is—*will to power*.”³⁹

But what do I mean by our living in “a post-cognitivist world”? Let’s go back to Wiggins for a moment, and add a little more to his conception of our time:

Unless we are Marxists, we are much more resistant [today] than the eighteenth- or nineteenth-centuries knew how to be [to] attempts to locate the meaning of human life or human history in mystical or metaphysical conceptions—in the emancipation of mankind, or progress, or the onward advance of Absolute Spirit. It is not that we have lost interest in emancipation or progress themselves; but whether temporarily or permanently, we have more or less abandoned the idea that the importance of emancipation or progress (or a

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 124.

³⁸ I am picking up here on the remark by Ludwig Wittgenstein that heads this essay.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 123.

correct conception of spiritual advance) is that these are marks by which our minute speck in the universe can distinguish itself as the spiritual focus of the cosmos.⁴⁰

Wiggins specifies our time as a time after Darwin.⁴¹ However, his description of human decentering seems clearly to invoke our time also and (at least) equally as a time after Copernicus. And this recalls Freud's discussion of the decentering blows to narcissism in the times of science:⁴² the Copernican blow, in which we can no longer conceive our planetary home as the center of the cosmos; followed by the Darwinian blow, in which we can no longer conceive of our animal existence as inherently special or the center of creation; followed, Freud thought, by his own blow delivered by psychoanalysis, in which we could no longer even regard ourselves as "master in [our] own house."⁴³ I have explored Freud's story in detail elsewhere⁴⁴ and want only to suggest here that this movement of decentering blows maps onto the historic movement in Europe, so clearly perceived by an anxious Husserl, of increasing resistance to philosophies of history, which claim to articulate a final end of man: the anthropocentrism, androcentrism, Eurocentrism (**and, yes, the narcissism**) elaborated in the classic philosophical history of the world. And at this point we might add a fourth decentering blow—linked to the opening words of Wiggins' Cold War description from 1976—suggested by Derrida: "the Marxist blow."⁴⁵ Not the blow affected by Marx with his non-theological, non-mystical, scientific, and philosophical account of world history as the history of class struggles, but the blow struck by Marxism in the twentieth century. As Emmanuel Levinas put it, the greatest trauma for Europe in our time is not the work of an extraordinary scientific achievement, it is an event, a terrible event: "the end of socialism in the horror of Stalinism, is the greatest spiritual crisis in modern Europe The noble hope [of Marxism] consists in healing

⁴⁰ Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, p. 91.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis: Parts I and II*, vol. 15 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), pp. 284–5.

⁴³ Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 284.

⁴⁴ Simon Glendinning, "The End of the World Designed with Men in Mind," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 26:3 (2013), pp. 291–317.

⁴⁵ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. 97–8.

everything, in installing, beyond the chance of individual charity, a regime without evil. And the regime of charity becomes Stalinism and [complicitous] Hitlerian horror.”⁴⁶

The fact that this blow is not the work of a new scientific paradigm in some domain is of special significance. The other blows knock “man” off his pedestal in one way or another and give us newly decentered ways of thinking (about our planet, about our evolution, about our motives) in their place. But *in the event* of the fourth blow (and with the others surging in again with it), the whole modern European conception of the meaning of man—the *conception of man as progressing in a history of the emancipation of rational subjectivity from savage human animality to civilized rational society with Europe at the head*—ceases to be a living or vital discourse on our being. With the advent of the nightmare of *political* neoliberalism—the terrifying failure of the ideal of a man-made program designed (without God, without nature) for the complete emancipation of rational subjectivity and the “end of man”—the classic European conception of man finally loses credibility as a discourse through which we can understand the “who” that we are. In the face of the horror of Stalinism and Nazism (its inseparable adversary), **the old European (hi)story of man and the history of man** [AQ: Could you please clarify what you mean here?] is exhausted, finished.

On the other hand, as Wiggins’ declaration of a surviving commitment to emancipation and progress attests, this “end” is not a dead end. The demise of the old concept of man and the associated discourse of a movement of emancipation and progress toward a final “end of man” does not mean it is all over for us in our time, leaving us with nothing more than “functioning.” Derrida puts it like this:

In the same place, on the same limit, where history is finished, there where a certain determined concept of history comes to an end, precisely there the historicity of history begins, there finally it has the chance of heralding itself—of promising itself. There where man, a certain determined concept of man, is finished, there the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of man *as other* begins or has finally the chance of heralding itself—of promising itself.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 80–1.

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 74.

What is heralded by the end of the old European self-understanding is the chance and the promise of a new self-understanding to come. **This self-understanding is one according to** which our “pure humanity” is no longer normed by the old prejudices **that** projected a superiority of European man over every other man, and that is no longer simply opposed to “mere animality” either. This, then, is the great task of those creators that Nietzsche called forth as the philosophers of the future: responsibility for the creation of a new self-understanding, a new meaning of human existence, beyond anthropocentrism, beyond androcentrism, and beyond Eurocentrism—beyond “man” in a time that is “*more and more*” a time after Copernicus.⁴⁸

But why “philosophers”? **Precisely because philosophers are those who are the most** committed to the preservation and enhancement of the space within the body of our culture for what already belongs fundamentally to the formation of its body as a whole: to keep the space open for the “intimate community” of those “bound together” by their unconditional commitment to the “critical stance [that] resolves not to accept unquestioningly any pregiven opinion or tradition” (CES 287), where “nothing is beyond question.”⁴⁹ This community—the community of those who do not belong to *any* particular community of ideas—responds to the call within the biggest wave of Europe’s history: the call to engage in a renewed effort of “absolute self-responsibility” (CES 283), where “it is a matter of nothing less than rethinking the concept of man.”⁵⁰ This intimate, powerless, and yet still forceful community are the guardians of the heritage that gave life to Europe’s old universities and to the “community movement of education [*Bildung*]” those universities cultivated. Whether or not their future waves must or can or even should be situated “within the walls of what is today called the university”⁵¹—that is another question.

⁴⁸ I am picking up here on the remark of Derrida’s that heads this essay.

⁴⁹ Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” p. 205.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.