

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE LIBERAL SPIRIT AND THE DAWN OF THE SAVAGE

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I propose to undertake a critique of contemporary American liberalism, specifically what is commonly called "neo-liberalism," from the foundation of a phenomenological reflection on modern consciousness. Liberalism, as a political formula for self-consciously organizing society, is fatefully bound to the continuance of the modern understanding of life and cannot survive the failure to instantiate that understanding into consciousness, to make it the very constitution of consciousness. The current talk about a postmodern historical period appears, therefore, to be an admission that liberalism is a thing of the past. Yet the very term "postmodern" is empty of any positive content, subsisting tensely to signify a craving for its own transmutation into something fundamentally new, a fresh description of the structure of life that would carry with it a transfigured politics. There is also a radical uncertainty in the postmodern mind, a suspicion that there is no transformation on the horizon, that consciousness is incarcerated in the categories of modernity and must face the realization that the human self has at last become fully lucid to itself, that now is the time to learn to live within a final self-understanding and not to escape into new visions. Taken together the craving for radical novelty and the nagging doubt that it is a genuine possibility make postmodernism another instance of *avant-garde* modernism, perhaps the last one, the final modern irony.

Postmodernism is the modern reflection on the loss of dynamism in modernity, its self-closure, and the inability to get beyond it: postmodern consciousness bounds the boundless, but the "dynamic insight" of continuous change, as Karl Mannheim called it, has been inextricably associated

with modernity. Thus, postmodern consciousness is the pure dialectical negation of modern consciousness, locked in an embrace with it, decreeing that it must assent to just what it is most unwilling to hold close to itself, its own being as a static form. Postmodernity is the most acute instance of the "unhappy consciousness," an empty craving for liberation, for the unlimited, crashing against the success of self-determination. Politically, it is decomposed or deconstructed liberalism, a spasmodic hope for progress unhinged from life by a corrosive, nostalgic doubt.

Postmodernism is the most recent of the "waiting philosophies" that have characterized twentieth-century Western culture, the most profound of which is Martin Heidegger's effort to open himself to the voice of Being, undertaken within an "interregnum." I shall initiate a phenomenological reflection on modern consciousness by questioning waiting philosophy, which is constituted by the pure intentionality of a receptive strain towards that which does not appear and the appearance of that which is held in doubt. The intentionality itself cannot be criticized on its own terms: it is a possible structure of consciousness that is not self-contradictory; that is, one can form one's being-in-the-world according to uncertain expectation. Thus, a critical approach to the unhappy consciousness of postmodernity will have to proceed by treating it as a symptom of an act of evading a more primary intentionality, as a form of neurotic compromise between a judgment of the truth about personal existence and a wish that the judgment was false. The life of uncertain expectation is a form of dissociated existence in which one carries out all daily activities according to the requirements of social function and legal fiction, while experiencing these activities as detached from any unifying significance. The sense of importance is fully transcendentalized into the experience of waiting — the round of life becomes reduced to killing time, whereas inwardness is intensified into a restless tension and dis-tension, according to the vicissitudes of doubt. Such a consciousness wrenches itself into a groundless hopefulness through nostalgia for a lost unity, translating deprivation into craving for novelty. It is the breakdown product of the religious will, the historicized wish for salvation divested of its object and even of any symbolization of a questionable object. The waiting attitude is based on the judgment that it is better to hold on to the religious intentionality than it is to become coincident with life, verifying Max Weber's observation that the modern life that they had created for themselves was too much for human beings to bear. Postmodern consciousness is the very thinnest, almost transparent veil thrown over the modern understanding of life, a *nisus* towards the beyond superadded to finite mundanity and, therefore, the most austere of the modern cultural neuroses. As the pure wish for a transformation that is held to be questionable or even, more purely, impossible, it discloses its other, its dialectical reciprocal, without any necessity of interpretation. That other, detached from the vacantly straining expect-

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tation, but always juxtaposed to it, is the formed content of modern life itself.

Modern consciousness may be grasped most generally through the act by which the self seizes itself from within in a declaration-deed; that is, the self actualizes its own being through a declaration. My paradigm here is the Cartesian *cogito* through which the self is realized partially as a "thinking substance" though not yet as a complete life. Indeed, the phenomenology of the modern mind is a remorseless, uncompromising process of enriching and intensifying the inward center of individuated life until it reaches the limit of its empire, and must then either try desperately to transcend itself or learn to live within the boundaries that it has made lucid to itself. The historical moments of modern consciousness are familiar. From the Cartesian starting point of the thinking ego one passes to the self-legislating will of Kant and finally to Nietzsche's passionate and personated flesh, best captured by Unamuno's designation, "the man of flesh and bone, who is born, suffers, and dies." One of the great ironies of post-modern consciousness is that it recreates the Cartesian starting point through an inversion. When Descartes, frustrated in his efforts to discover certain knowledge that would enable him "to walk with confidence in this life," finally was impelled to make himself the object of inquest, he seized a thinking ego from which no linkages could be made to his daily life. Indeed, his only connection to the other-than-self was transcendental, was to the idea of perfection. Lacking a bridge to mundanity, he devised a "provisional morality" that enjoined him to live with good will according to the usages of those around him. For Descartes there was hope that genuine and satisfactory connections would be made to the world through rational investigation, so his was a patient waiting. Now with the modern closed in upon itself the waiting returns, only it is desperate and impatient. There is the same detachment of life from spirit, but it is not the pregnant suspension filled with expectation of the unfolding of a new age; it is bitter nostalgia ungirdled from perfection, craving for miracle: the *cogito* has become the *pour soi*, thought has become the manipulation of signs, and only the barest interiority remains at the very margin. This interiority is necessary to express the judgment that interiority is a useless passion or, in a flight of bad faith, a word functioning to legitimate racial, patriarchal, capitalistic, or, most radically, linguistic domination.

The burnout of modernity is the scorching of the desire to live as a finite individual. What came between Descartes and the postmoderns was a daring growing-into life: Descartes needed a way into life; the postmoderns crave for a way out. The mainstream of modernity wanted life and followed Goethe's dictum: "Become who you are." The self-closure of modernity is the success of this great pedagogical project: a complete self-understanding through the inwardly grasped self is now available to anyone who is strong enough to tolerate it, and, as in the case of any foundation, it is all too simple to express, all too obviously true to those who

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grasp it, and all too difficult to bear. When I grasp myself from within, now, as the twentieth century moves to its close, with all the modern self-discoveries suffused through my being, I seize myself concretely as conscious flesh, as a sensible, desiring, and self-interpreting body. And that is the modern truth, the end of the search for the *res vera*, the richly-laden truth, bearing the purest pleasure and the most agonizing hatred within it; that all I can assent to primordially is an utter surd, a failure by its own requirements, yet the very plenitude of being itself and the generator of all of the interpretative projections that take it away from itself — restless, conscious flesh. Yes, I acknowledge that I sprang from a womb. But I feel the tensions of my organs destroying me and I feel the pleasures that are fuller than any ideas of perfection. My immanence is immediate, my transitivity phantasmic. I cannot be grateful for being born, nor can I feel any obligation to that which sustains me, because my existence is a great tease: life is too marvelous to surrender and too horrible to affirm.

For Dostoevsky, living in the period between the Kantian moment of moral will and the present horizon of carnal consciousness — the transitional moment of the arbitrary, irrational, and, for him, spiteful will — everything was possible because nothing was forbidden. Now Dostoevsky's consciousness has split in two. Those who are wounded by the absence of prescription yearn for a new order. Those who live in the plenitude of possibility know that nothing is necessary — they have no obligation, only a default drive, the body living them. And here is the curse that plagues and haunts liberalism — the restless monkey who is revealed through the insistent demystification and concretization of life, who has finally demystified society sufficiently to objectify it as an aspect of the natural environment, a simple opportunity structure. Each individual in the West today lives in conscious or unconscious tension with the finality of the finite flesh, acknowledging or suppressing the enormous idea that everything about life's conduct is a matter of strategy and that nothing is a matter of duty. Indeed, an examined life is so difficult to live that it is tempted, nay, compelled, to tell itself that there are no moral restraints on it because the great tease is a dirty trick — individuated life is a losing proposition, but it is the only game in town. Who can swallow the deromanticized Nietzsche? Who can acknowledge themselves to be the savage, the true savage who is the secret of modernity; not the noble savage, but the civil savage, the one who knows civilization as an animal knows its ecological niche, as a wilderness? This is the wild card of liberal society and it is dealt to every hand. But who does not try to domesticate it by converting it to a regular member of the deck? And in doing so liberal society is made to suffer its death agony. But it is an interminable death. The civil savage, the fruit of modernity, the masterless man disposing of his estate, his body, dwells with a crowd that has committed itself to the hospice called liberal society. Would that it were a half-way house, but hospice it must be for

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the legions who cannot live with the finite eschatology of the modern process.

Liberalism cannot tolerate the Nietzschean fulfillment of modernity, the appearance of a dis-banded ape who returns to his wits after a long romance with reason. And this ape cannot tolerate himself, unless gifted with massive infusions of Hume's "moral sentiment," the emotional lithium for dispelling autism. But moral sentiment has never been in sufficient supply to sustain a civilization and today even less so than ever with the disappearance of its traditional supports in customary community. The famous "cake of custom" of Walter Bagehot has once and for all been broken beyond repair and mild cases of schizophrenia are increasing at a faster rate than are cases of AIDS. Liberalism's immune system, the sense of duty, has broken down, dividing society into two life-forms, predators and parasites, both of which symptomize an intolerance for the living modern truth, the civil savage, and from that intolerance fall into a chronic demoralization. The predators are those who are fortunate to be in a social position in which they can exploit the less favored, so they declare their independence from any obligation to serve others. Yet they are poisoned by guilt and must perform the disgusting and unedifying rite of justifying themselves: Ivan Boesky pontificated, "You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself;" and the crowd of students at UCLA cheered. The parasites are the unfortunates who are ever reminded of their dependence on others and seek, therefore, to make everyone servants. They mewl about community or snarl about alternative life-styles, but their aim is to place everyone in their position of social failure, which is why their intellectual advocates scream that the ego is a linguistic fiction. Calculating and consuming egos versus linguistic fictions is what the fashionable Nietzsche/Marx debate comes down to on the street-level of academia, the convention floor. Liberalism has imploded and two illiberalisms have been sucked into the void, the old anarcho-capitalism strutting in the black mask of Nietzsche and the even staler Jacobinism parading under the red flag of Marx. And sitting on the imperial throne of the West as 1986 ends is the predator-parasite, Ronald Reagan, the logical successor of the parasite-predators, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini et al.

Modern life has developed beyond liberalism, beyond its own social support system of institutions, and confronts radical human weakness, which is expressed as the specious independence of the dependent exploiter and the resentful dependence of the anxious exploited: it inscribes the fulfillment of the master-slave dialectic without the saving grace of the servant's self-overcoming. The life of strength, which is the demand of an overripe modernity, is based on the simple acknowledgment of irremediable human frailty and failure without any superadded compensation. From there one makes do, creating the social bond out of sentiment and sensibility, whether it is a more primary erotic feeling or a more reflective sympathy. Strength is assent to weakness followed by the determination to hang on

tenaciously and, perhaps, to find and cultivate the Epicurean garden, not behind walls but in the streets. And street life has become ubiquitous, if only in the bizarre simulacrum of video. The modern romance has come full circle, returning to the ground of all civilization, to the recognition of the insufficiency of the flesh, but without any symbolic escape from it and promising only the disturbing tubes and switches of the intensive-care unit. And everywhere the signs intrude and indicate that human beings cannot tolerate such an existence. People clutch and claw each other, seek completion in the other, an effort doomed to failure because in the other they confront themselves, though this is the one thing that they will not admit. This is not the war of all against all but the ramshackle playroom of the bourgeois man-child, Disneyland after the rides have rusted out and the parents have gone home. Modernity is the deconstruction of civilization itself, demystifying the symbols of transcendence and leaving only the reflection of human fallibility and all of the desperate attempts to avoid owning up to it.

It is far more accurate to call the present era postliberal than postmodern. For the great liberals, such as Hobhouse, Dewey, Croce, and Ortega, the statement would be a contradiction in terms, because in their time modernity had not yet deconstructed itself, had not found its basis in the individuated flesh which is resistant to and unassimilable by any institution. The high point of liberalism was reached at the second great moment of modernity, that of the Kantian moral will. Before the turn of the nineteenth century liberalism had been a counterpoint to absolutism, but lacked a foundation for organizing social life, opening restricted spheres of autonomous activity such as commercial enterprise, scientific investigation, and secular art. Under the sign of the Cartesian ego, the modern spirit filled itself out in each special area of life, but had no thematic organization of its own save the passive reflection on totality through reflective thought — rationalist metaphysics and empiricist epistemology. The notorious split in Locke's thought between an empiricist theory of knowledge and a voluntaristic political philosophy epitomizes the adolescence of liberalism, an incipient ideal for social life not yet interiorized by the self as essential to itself. Kant undertook that interiorization by making the will intrinsic to the self, determining it morally. Kant liberated the will from religious mystification, thereby removing the traditional supports for social relations, such as, Edmund Burke's "pleasing illusions", and leaving as their distilled essence a principle of conduct, known as the categorical imperative, which he believed to be inherent to human thought. Suddenly the Cartesian ego was transformed into a moral self, capable of constituting society out of its own resources, at least in principle. At this point, liberalism encounters its sustaining truth, its principle of self-organization, which is revealed to be an ideal: liberal society is constituted by the project of universalizing the moral will, that is, of creating a voluntary solidarity of human beings based, most profoundly, on practical assent to the imperative to treat others

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as ends-in-themselves, never as means only; thus it is the moralization of politics.

Viewed historically, the failure of liberalism is the failure of the duty to sustain modern society. At the root of the Kantian revolution is the bold dare to live with others in a disposition of forbearance, to sacrifice the pursuit of objects of one's own inclinations when that pursuit would deprive others of their freedom to create a life. Kant, in the dawn of the democratic age, did not believe that the moral will actually could constitute a social order. He discoursed about a rational being, not a man of flesh and bone, and was clear about the distinction, affirming most of the early-modern realism about the necessity of external threat and punishment for disciplining his concrete individual, the "unsociable social being." His realism, however, had no inward foundation and was merely the mirror image of Locke's voluntarism — the counterpoint had become the melody. In the generations succeeding Kant, liberals were left with the task of showing how society was, could be, or inevitably would be constituted on the basis of voluntary solidarity. Hegel's notion of voluntary solidarity as a self-conscious affirmation of rational necessity, Stirner's proclamation of the union of egoists, and Marx's sublime principle "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" are the great expressions of the liberal ideal. And all of them founder on the rock of the end-in-itself, which is progressively revealed to be the "ill-construed organism" of Alfred North Whitehead.

As in the case of every dialectical process, the negation of the liberal moment began almost simultaneously with its affirmation. Kierkegaard, with a desperate nostalgia, challenged the fundamentality of the moral will, just as Pascal had earlier attacked the Cartesian ego, because it did not express the claims of his inwardness for a satisfaction unavailable in mundanity. But even more fateful was Schopenhauer's proclamation of the insatiable and ever-frustrated will to live, so astutely understood by Georg Simmel to be the result of the first pure reflection of life upon itself, the moment at which life itself becomes fully its own object. This is the appearance of the wild card in modernity, of its deconstructing element, which renders any principle of social organization gratuitous by bringing to lucidity that which can never be socialized, but which can only be suppressed or repressed in the interest of common life, if it is not self-limited in an act of compassionate humility. Modernity now begins to outrun liberalism, to blast its synthesis of will and morality, the rational being as citizen. It is only a short run from Schopenhauer through Dostoevsky's "underground man," who will not be a piano key for others to play upon and who asserts with futility the "freedom to be free," to Nietzsche's mendacious animal who will not face the truth of his constitutive imperfection and ends up avoiding it by the spiritual surgery of the "last man," the blinking consumer. Through Nietzsche's conduit streams the modernist understanding of the conscious flesh — Freud's mordant insight that the conflict

of Eros and Thanatos is resolved for the individual through the will to die at one's own proper biological time; Sartre's gasp of the useless passion, so chilling that it transmutes into the purest liberal *ressentiment*, the terroristic decree that "none is free until all are free," inverts voluntary solidarity, the grimacing mask of intolerance; and finally, the philosophy of the nursery, the current fascination with the Nietzsche of the devolutionary dialectic of camel, lion, and child. Liberalism was a passing phase of modernity, its young adulthood, and not its permanent structure, a hope and never a fulfillment, as much a romanticism, a mystification, as the totalitarianisms it destroyed and the chilisms that have overwhelmed it, especially the ultimate chiliasm of the overman as bionic man. Liberalism is burned out because the crawling flesh does not aspire to be a moral being, the liberal substitute for the immortal soul. It has (passed that wish by in) favored biological romanticism. Nazism was not an enormous aberration, nor was it the revelation of the depth of "man's inhumanity to man," nor the culmination of modernity, capitalism, German idealism, the modern state system, or desacralization, but merely an instance of life reflecting upon itself with intolerance, with hatred. It is the precursor of the substitution of tubes and switches for the flesh, of the laboratory for life.

Prior to the French Revolution, liberalism was a leavening agency in absolutist institutions. Now, in the Nietzschean moment, it is a *trompe d'oeil* covering techno-bureaucratic organization. During its own time, liberalism fought to concretize the moral universal. Indeed, the institutions of liberal democracy may be understood as neurotic compromise formations between the ideal of voluntary solidarity and the predatory and parasitical wills. Such is a post-Freudian interpretation of constitutionalism, bills of rights, representative government, checks and balances, separation of powers, rule of law, loyal opposition, competitive party systems, and all of the other devices of liberal political mechanics — all of which are neuroses synthesizing the Kantian super-ego and the old Adam. Of course, they are not as such for liberals, who clutch them as earnestly on the fulfillment of the ideal, as hard-won victories in the struggle for liberty that warrant appreciation and gratitude, and that should incite to fresh efforts at reform. Whether or not one is a liberal depends, in the terms I am using here, on how one values these institutional devices and the whole project of spinning out mediations between morality and organized predatory-parasitical lust. A mediation between conflicting intentionalities becomes neurotic when the wishes that must be restrained and reshaped become too refractory to be satisfied in a sublimation and begin to infect and transform the blocking wish into a distorted representation of themselves; in this case the moral will is impressed into the service of the exploitative will and, thus, becomes demoralized, taking such forms as *ressentiment*, projection, rationalization, splitting, displacement, and reaction formation — the defense mechanisms. And then a deadly repetition proceeds, a slow downward cycle of corruption marked by ever-new "adaptive structures," ever-

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more mechanisms — boards, committees, agencies, special prosecutors, consultants — to rectify the failure of the older mechanisms. Finally, as E.M. Forster wrote, “The machine stops,” but probably not for a long time. The liberal will say that there is nothing else to do but keep working on the system because it’s still the best mechanism around — one-half of a cheer for democracy, maybe? The alternatives are worse, aren’t they? Liberalism with a fascist streak looks better than socialism with an inhuman face, doesn’t it? There’s no harm in trying; something good might come of it. Anyway we have our whole world to lose and it doesn’t look like there’s anything else to win. Richard Rorty looks around and finds nothing better than bourgeois democracy. His imagination fails him. The civil savage maps the new wilderness and applies his imagination to strategy and tactics — Lenin interiorized, with all the projections withdrawn from the liberal ruins.

As a compromise formation, liberalism undergoes a continuous process of alteration as the relation between the super-ego, the Kantian moral will, and the desires that ever threaten to dissolve public order change. Desire here is understood not merely as an inward experience of individuals, though it is most primordially that, never shedding its subjective root, but as the entire organization of the pursuit of objects in the public field of social action. Thus, the project of mapping the wilderness takes the form of presenting a “diagnosis of the times,” as Mannheim called it. The civil savage is the heir of the “free-floating intellectual,” the living precipitate of the burned-out liberal polity; not a hyper-civilized functionary composing social conflict into a putative harmony, as such mature liberals as Mannheim and Ortega envisioned, but a genuine negation, the dialectical other, of his spiritual progenitor. The free-floating intellectual, aware of all the possibilities of programmatic social change, performed a secondary reflection on them, creating an ideal synthesis, an image of a comprehensive order that allowed for the preservation of every value backed by organized power. This reflective operation is the final moment of the Kantian procedure of receiving the culturally-formed given and eliciting the ground of its possibility through a transcendental move. In contrast to Kant’s transcendental critique, which results in the separation of the forms of the given from their contents, however, the free-floating intellectual’s reflection eventuates in a new formed-content, a reconciliation of ideology and utopia, a compromise formation at a second remove from the conflict of lust and morality, a sublimated neurosis. As the negativity of the free-floating intellectual, the civil savage retains the hyper-civilized awareness of the multiplicity and relativity of programmatic possibility, but appropriates the sociology of knowledge as a means to mapping and charting, not as a springboard to totalization. Instead of that totalization, he undertakes a deconstruction, an analysis that brings the given of programmatic political thought back to the elements out of which it was composed, those forces that created its being as political neurosis; that is, the dialectical other of the free-floating intellectual’s reconstruction is deconstruction. The civil

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savage is as much a healer as his forebear, but he is not society's physician: he takes seriously the dictum of Lev Chestov: "Philosopher, heal thyself." Wholeness, for the civil savage, cannot be reclaimed within the bounds of the liberal-democratic machinery but only through the recovery of corporeality, which is accomplished by radically objectifying all social images of the self, appropriating them as masks, personae, or better, as the masks of the primitive. The new social therapy is the withdrawal of projection, the reversal of inserting the self into a greater whole, of investigating how the many individuals become one social order. Now it is a matter, as Nietzsche understood, of what the flesh can assimilate from civilization, of treating civilization according to the standards of nutrition.

There is a new liberalism rising in the United States amid the collapse of the right-wing reaction that followed the suppression of the "liberation movements" in 1968. In order to chart that liberalism it is necessary to understand what the reaction signified, which is now easy to do, since it reveals its essence in its demise. I shall begin with the figure of Ronald Reagan, the representative man of the reaction, the negation of Machiavelli's Prince and all of his offspring, the social type of leader. In the dialectic of the modern spirit Reagan is determined as the purest individuation of Nietzsche's "last man," the predator-parasite, a gutless blinker, a creation of public relations, void of will, existing at the margins of Machiavelli's discourse, attempting, unself-consciously, to make the appearance of virtue stand completely for its reality. The phenomenon of Reagan can be understood only through the insight that modernity has outrun liberalism. From the very start neither he nor his advisors evinced any respect for the legal mechanics of a liberal society. Perhaps his great joke on constitutionalism was to offer Gerald Ford a "condominium" over the Presidency in return for his accepting the place of Vice-President on his ticket. But Reagan was never intended to be a President, in the sense of governing anyway. The man who would not even broach the question of trade with Nakasone, because he didn't want to argue with a "friend," who hates conflict and is, therefore, the man who is well liked by everyman — the incarnation of Willie Loman — styles himself as a "marketer" of policy, not as an executive, that is, an executor. The man who needs cue cards to think, who reads political fantasies and watches movies to prepare for summits, who calls his wife "Mommy" and keeps a Nancy doll with him in the hospital, embodies the consciousness that the social world is a second nature, made for him, which takes care of itself. Far more deeply than a negation of liberalism, Reagan represents the negation of modern politics itself, which is predicated on the figure of the protector, the Prince, Hobbes's sovereign. He is what the media call a "disengaged" President, their euphemism for the predator-parasite who feeds upon a civilization unaware of the virtue required to sustain it, the fulfillment of Josiah Royce's "vicariously acquired naiveté."

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The President as salesman, as cheerleader, and — most deeply — as rationalizer of his constituents' predatory and parasitical lusts is the measure of citizenship in the contemporary United States. Indeed, Reagan's Presidency symbolizes the American mind because, unlike the modern leader, who has qualities of will and determination that distinguish him from the followers, Reagan is but the public image of the ordinary self-understanding of the mass. The long-observed splitting of Reagan's mentality into "ideologue" and "pragmatist," again a euphemistic characterization, is merely the structure that is encountered in every panelled den, cocktail lounge, coffee shop, cafeteria, and meeting room in the United States, where the "cheap grace" deplored by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is dispensed with political flavoring. Everyday political consciousness in the postliberal era employs political ideas primarily as incitements to feeling good about oneself, specifically through the stimulant-depressant of *resentiment*. The noble savage becomes the noble sucker and is proud of himself for being so. What can be more self-flattering than to take pot shots at the Evil Empire, to degrade "Washington" while being at its center — the blind eye of the hurricane — and to rail against parasites when one is the parasite king? That is the so-called "ideological side" of the Reagan mind, but it does not comprehend ideology in the conventional senses of vision or apology. It is politics serving neurosis, the thought of the "good man" who excuses his failures and vents his hatreds by pretending that the wicked have stomped all over him only because he was too nice a guy to fight them in the gutter. But now, the good man will tell you, things are going to be different — we're going on a crusade. Of course, that is all talk and meant to be no more. The predator-parasite is fundamentally a parasite, not a predator like Hitler was. As parasite, he intends that his thought be taken seriously only as provocative of emotion. What he really wants is to live his ordinary life as comfortably as possible, strictly defining his obligations to the bare minimum, leaving maximum "quality time" for the enjoyments of mass consumption, like the supreme gratification of televised football. And this is what passes for "pragmatism." But, of course, it is not that, not even expediency. It is sheer flaccidity, letting things go, doing no more than what one is intimidated into doing because one hates to fight, which is why, in the Reagan era, it has frequently been so difficult to determine just what governmental policy is: it is not that Reagan is a "yes man," rather he can't say "no." Strutting around as the apostle of anti-terrorism and then dealing arms for hostages is not, essentially, an instance of hypocrisy or of self-conscious mendacity, as the liberal mind must understand it, but an evidence of a neurotic splitting, the moral equivalent of a stroke, in which the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. The unity of the Reagan mind is not ideational, but is constituted by his impulse to feel good about himself, to desperately give a hopeful emotional cover to his own inadequacy, and it is this passion that unites him to the public-at-large. The crusade against "state-sponsored

terrorism" is not meant to be undertaken, but to make Americans experience the feeling of moral strength and resolve. Dealing arms for hostages was the easiest thing to approve when some parasite-predators proposed it: it was too hard to say "no," or even to think of saying "no," and far too easy to whip up sufficient enthusiasm and rationalization to say "yes." Therefore, direct action, which Ortega identified as the negation of liberalism, became the essence of American politics, in the form of "loose cannons," the cute media euphemism for adventurism.

Reagan's is the postmodern mind encountered at the level of the panelled basement den, the preferred "site" of his mass constituency. Enconced in his easy chair, nibbling on snacks with his cronies in front of the TV, he is free to turn political program into the quip, soothing the wounds of his masculine pride left by all of the craven concessions he made to the ambitious exploiters who weaseled their ways into access to him during the day. Then he appears with those same viciously naive quips on the screens of TVs in dens across the country. Life goes on in its everyday round and so does the englobing fantasy of the externalized imagination, the bizarre simulacrum of TV. Here pop culture becomes fully coincident with *avant-garde* modernism. For what is the Reagan mind but the child-man's waiting philosophy, the last man's embrace of everyday life with a transcendental reflection superadded to it? The Presidency is a retirement village, the office is part-time work, execution is pure delegation. Only now, at the end of 1987, the mass rebels against its own image — it doesn't really want a President who wants to be protected by others; it wants a protector. It also wants to keep dreaming: it doesn't want a protector who will demand anything from it but one who will keep dispensing cheap grace to it — it doesn't want a parasite-predator who will put it to work and war, because it wants to remain a predator-parasite. It wants the impossible, a liberal fascism ruled by a benevolent protector; someone who likes it — since it is incapable of feeling love — just for what it is. And above all, the mass wants to feel good about itself.

"You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself." Ivan Boesky, that other representative man of the late '80's, the parasite-predator, the arbitrageur who epitomizes the self-cannibalization of corporate capitalism, is the legacy of the "me generation" to the emerging neo-liberalism. The military science fiction of "Star Wars" and the financial science fiction of "supply-side economics" may pass with economic recession, but the degradation of modern consciousness, the dark night of the liberal spirit will not go away. In the current social-science blockbuster, Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*¹, a trenchant analysis of the standard interpersonal relation in the United States today is depicted as a therapeutic connection; that is, the common ground of meeting the other is the implied contract — "I'm OK, you're OK." Each offers to the other an affirmation of sanity and asks in return that nothing more be requested but that which is required by conventional and minimal expectations. All individuals are free

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to create a self-satisfied self out of whatever they can scrounge from the environment, as long as they don't bother others in the pursuit of the same — everyone a bag lady, the yuppie as bag lady, the bag lady as yuppie. If the pursuit of a lonely self-consumption fails, one must suffer in silence, because if one gives way to overt discontent there is a place waiting in that fast-growing service industry, the private psychiatric hospital or in a half-way house or mass shelter. There is nothing worse for the predator-parasite than to miss the "good" experiences that he or she "deserves" from life. Moral grace is bestowed on those who "do something for themselves." The predator-parasite is a weak ego, ever-slipping into the lonely despair of the dying flesh, ever-looking to inflate itself with what it has acquired, especially the empty "strokes" that others give it. Just this type of mentality believes Ronald Reagan to be a "nice" man. It, indeed, lives in dread of the "not nice," the reminders of everything that goes wrong with life. The formula for the mind of the United States is a strong sense of self and a weak ego, the deep feeling of me-ness and the deeper insecurity about one's ability to cope with the trials of life. Enthusiasm that masks fear is pervasive; this is how Ronald Reagan has cast his spell for years. Now that the spell has been broken, what will restrain the parasite-predators? This is the question that neo-liberalism addresses; it is the popular alternative to fascism and, therefore, the way in which modern politics drags itself along as it lives out its prolonged death agony.

There are no paradigmatic texts expressing the new liberalism, just statements of Democrats plotting appeals for 1988, overviews of journalists, and fragments of opinion writers. This absence of programmatic content is symptomatic of liberal burnout, but it is surely intelligible in light of the spoliation wrought by the late reaction, because liberalism today has the unhappy and thankless task of building upon scorched earth, of imposing austerity on a debt-ridden society that has glutted itself with imports; of scaling back its military might and, therefore, retreating from spheres of influence; of saving a service economy when the rest of the world has learned the secret that anyone can sell insurance. The United States, king of the debtor nations, is the new Argentina: it will be handed over to the liberals now that it is going broke and has suffered humiliation in foreign affairs at the hands of the right wing. But the children who inhabit this rusted Disneyland want nothing to do with austerity; they don't want to be wakened from their dream. This is the terrible dilemma of the new liberalism, why it has no program, no totalizing vision: it must impose pain while seeming to provide pleasure. In the wake of the bankruptcy of the public treasury through the "arms buildup" it must become the loyal friend of capitalism rather than its friendly adversary, as it has been since the Great Depression: liberalism must become fascism with a human face merely to save a severely weakened society, constituted by a corrupt mass, from the rigors of the classical corporate state of the 1930s. Its mediation between morality and desire must therefore be more strained than it ever

was in the past; it must resort to compulsion or simply become the precursor of fascism. If Ivan Boesky and Ronald Reagan are the problem, then the solution must be the fabrication of a "we generation" out of the scant materials of "Live Aid," "Farm Aid," and "Hands Across America." People must be convinced to "feel good about themselves," as Joan Baez claimed that she "felt good" about herself after participating in "Hands," by joining a sacrificial community. The political formula of neo-liberalism is the capitalistic community of sacrifice, the jamming together of the tension of modern liberalism in the apotheosis of therapeutic fantasy. The rhetorical device of the new liberalism has been sounded by Mario Cuomo: Americans are one big family and must treat one another as good relations. Try it, you'll like it. The civil savage laughs without any bitterness at this vain posturing. It is more sad than disgusting. There will have to be a new crusade, a new dream, but how uninspiring — America must get itself into shape to ... win the trade war. Will it be World War II all over again?

Understandably, the new liberals resist being forced to thematize a program. They have in common only a concern with keeping the less fortunate in the fold of the Democratic Party as they broaden the coalition to include the good people of the broad middle class and gain sufficient financial support to mount a successful campaign. The essence of their mediation may, indeed, never be expressed in any popular forum, because it juxtaposes anarcho-capitalism and Jacobinism far too closely, without any buffer to comfort the ordinary mind. That essence has been described by Mickey Kaus, a journalist for *The Washington Monthly*, in his reply to Randall Rothenberg's overview, *The Neoliberals*.² According to Kaus, his brand of neo-liberalism has two principles:

First, instead of tolerating capitalism, neoliberalism champions its positive virtues — risk-taking, creativity, and the excitement of change and accomplishment.... Second, instead of trying to muffle the material inequalities generated by the marketplace neoliberals would restrict the world in which these inequalities matter. They would carve out a communitarian sphere where class distinctions are dissolved, where the principle of equal dignity in citizenship prevails, where it is recognized that money is, after all, only money. The idea of national service and the neoliberal insistence on saving the public schools should be seen as attempts not just to help out the economy, but to preserve a community life where a kid from the ghetto and a kid from Beverly Hills meet as equals.³

This is the prescription for capitalist Jacobinism or Jacobin capitalism, depending upon which of the two principles is made the dominant theme and which the counterpoint. Or, it might best be called liberal fascism, a managed capitalism in the context of a compelled community, under the motto "dignity in citizenship."

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Neo-liberalism is the romance of reindustrialization, the fantasy of industrial policy. Most deeply, though it is liberalism that has outrun itself, that has lost its footing in voluntary solidarity and has at last surrendered to the state as the basis of community, an action which political thought must do when traditional solidarities have been worn away and there is no longer any hope for voluntary solidarity. From Kaus's principles follow all of the specific neo-liberal policies — a revived NRA, a new CCC, subsidization of entrepreneurship in growth industries, workfare rather than welfare, restoration of the draft, university-industry research centers, education for skills, worker participation in management, and the scaling back of entitlements. Some of these measures will surely be enacted, others will be diluted, and others passed by, depending upon the severity of economic conditions and the degree of fear within the population; but what appears clearly on the horizon is the appeal to state-sponsored community, enjoining sacrifice and holding out safety under the cover of the joy of serving together in a grand national effort to catch up and pull ahead in the great technological race. The predator-parasites will acquiesce more or less in this kind of program — they are already frightened, now that the Reagan myth is being dispelled, and need more togetherness than the “new patriotism” provided. They will, of course, be refractory, which only means that the new liberalism will be a holding action against the day in which Jacobinism and capitalism finally fuse into techno-fascism. There will be plenty to manage in the coming order for the parasite-predators, who will bring the manipulation of consent to a high art. The civil savage will exist in the interstices of the new order, feasting on the leavings of the old liberal civilization while building up a tolerance for the humiliation of the flesh.

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Notes

1. Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
2. Randall Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals: Creating the New American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).
3. Mickey Kaus, “Too Much Technology, Not Enough Soul,” *Washington Monthly*, 16, 8 (September, 1984), p. 53.