

Beyond the Metonymic Left: Towards a Truly Universal Welfare State.

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(Received: 20th February 2023; Revised: 13th May 2023; Accepted: 14th May 2023)

What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I.

G.W.F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*,
Section B, *Self Consciousness*.

As 1968 began to ebb into 1969, however, and as “anticlimax” began to become a real word in my lexicon, another term began to obtrude itself. People began to intone the words “The personal Is Political.” At the instant I first heard this deadly expression, I knew as one does from the utterance of any sinister bullshit that it was—cliché is arguably forgivable here—very bad news. From now on, it would be enough to be a member of a sex or gender, or epidermal subdivision, or even erotic “preference,” to qualify as a revolutionary. In order to begin a speech or to ask a question from the floor, all that would be necessary by way of preface would be the words: “Speaking as a...” Then could follow any self-loving description. I will have to say this much for the old “hard” Left: we earned our claim to speak and intervene by right of experience and sacrifice and work. It would never have done for any of us to stand up and say that our sex or sexuality or pigmentation or disability were qualifications in themselves. There are many ways of dating the moment when the Left lost or—I would prefer to say—discarded its moral advantage, but this was the first time that I was to see the sellout conducted so cheaply.”

Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch 22, A Memoir*

In what follows, I contend that the New Left, as it is currently conceptualized, has become *metonymic*, much in the way words like “Shakespeare” or “Hollywood” are metonymic.¹ I develop my argument by positing the idea that this metonymic left has become a signifier divested of all historical, materialist agency and construction. Because of this, its scope for meaning has become so wide, diverse, and ambiguous that it can be used in an illimitable number of contexts—often in a truly negative fashion. This linguistic event horizon opens the figure to appropriation and mischaracterization, often subverting its original political intent and semantic currency. I contend that the phrase has become, to coin a moniker from the

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¹ “Metonymic” meaning the name-shift of a word to mean something much more particular or general: hence “I like Shakespeare” doesn’t mean I’ve met and known the man, but that I enjoy reading the works of Shakespeare. I like “Hollywood” often means the mainstream movie industry, rather than the geographical location itself. Roman Jakobson also famously delineated the difference between the *metaphoric* and the *metonymic* poles in literary studies; in this parlance, metonymy also means *synecdoche* (the part for the whole: my new “wheels” can mean my new car). In this paper, I am using metonym in its more traditional sense. The signifier is equated with another through close experience with it.

parlance of Marx himself, *fetishized*.² This fetishization has shaken the philology of the original word to such a degree that it has been rendered, at worst, stripped of its original value, and at best, subject to misappropriation and misalignment within the purview of Liberal identity politics. However attractively democratic these positions may initially appear to be, they have only sufficed to further degrade the working alliances of the political Left. This has left them with little, if any, political bite.

I further this polemic by arguing that both traditional Marxist and also Hegelian political economies traditionally strove towards an organic universal end, one with which we—more than ever—need to reconnect. I conclude by presenting the argument that phrases such as “Right” and “Left” are no longer fit for use. Consequently, and in the neoliberal age of post-capital, we need a new political vocabulary through which to articulate the needs of working men and women, whatever their gender, religion or sexual orientation.

What or “Where” is “The Left”?

It was during the period of the 1789 French Revolution and the subsequent seating arrangements of the General Estates that Jacobins or Girondins (indeed any political stakeholders in sympathy with the revolution) would sit on the left of the house. They therefore usually opposed the *Ancien Régime* and its attendant *Bourbon Monarchy*. The term left-wing came to be used more disparagingly after the 1815 Restoration of the French monarchy. It’s a metonymic figure, like that of “Hollywood,” which has developed a linguistic biosphere of its own in the past 230 years or so.

The “Left” has therefore come to signify many different political concepts depending upon one’s political persuasion. This is clearly instanced through the misunderstandings and appropriations of the metonym by people as diverse as Jordan Peterson, through to many thinkers who indulge in the discourse of conspiracy theory (C.T), such as W.S. Lind. Lind is the thinker who first coined the conspiracy theorists’ currently favorite hypernym “cultural Marxism”—a term Marx himself would have no doubt derided—but which has spawned many phrases of hyponymy from both fringe and, increasingly, mainstream proponents of more “right-wing” political systems of governance.³ The New Left, as such, has become associated with a number of notions spawned within the conceptual biosphere of Modern Liberalism.

² For an explanation of Marx’s concept of “commodity fetishism” see the citation below from his explanation of fetishism in *Capital Vol. I*. In brief, and in this context, the figure of metonymy that is the “Left” has been handed down as a gift, a token, drained of all historical meaning and agency, continually used way out of the context that is supplied by history. The study of language in terms of use and historical context is called philology. As such, this essay is, at least in part, a philological study. Andrew Doyle commences his excellent monograph, *The New Puritans: How the Religion of Social Justice Captured the Western World* (2022) by citing the example of a former close friend calling him a “fucking Nazi Cunt.” (p.1). It would seem, on the available evidence, that signs as fetishes, handed down as a-historical tokens, is a regular linguistic occurrence.

³ The current conspiracy theory of a more Marxist radical system of institutionalized warfare was originally promulgated in the extended essay “New Dark Age: Frankfurt School and ‘Political Correctness’” (1992) written by Michael Minnicino, which was originally published in *Fidelio* magazine. Later, in 1998 Paul Weyrich equated “cultural Marxism” with the concept of “political correctness,” even though “political correctness” originated under the aegis of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, who were hardly bastions of the Left. Later in the 1990s, Paul Weyrich commissioned William S. Lind to write a history of cultural marxism, and hence in 1998 the term was formally born. However, it has only been since around 2011 that the term has slowly gained currency. One reason for this may of course be the mushrooming proliferation of the “freedom” of the internet. The interesting semiotic aspect of this is how so many conspiracy theorists take cultural Marxism as what Durkheim would call a “social fact,” with precious little, if any, actual historical acuity or actual serious academic research.

These include identity politics, trans-gender-theory, postcolonialism and even political correctness.

This has culminated in a somewhat neutralized term that holds no fixed signifying weight anymore, because it has become used in the service of any political narrative that runs counter to what is perceived as the mainstream. Furthermore, the “Left” has become negatively connotated, which is the same transformational process that befell the term “Romantic” in the 1800s. (J.V. Goethe actually came to define Romanticism as a “sickness”). Metonyms such as “Wordsworth,” “Bollywood,” or “The Deep South” have clearly defined semantic parameters, not open to the philological ambiguity that political phrases such as the “Right” and the “Left” engender. Similarly, figures of synecdoche such as the raised and clenched fist or the hammer and scythe demarcate a wider discursive whole, of which they partake. Certain signifiers are open to more closed, denotative readings, whereas others are much more connotative and open in their potential significatory spectrum. In losing its historical agency, the Left has retained its identity as a figure of political intent. However, the original agency, rooted in the historical-materialist conditions of post-revolutionary France, has become diluted by a second-order signification, denoting any political discourse that runs against the grain of the current political status quo. It has become associated with concepts such as gender, sexuality, race and personal identity. Therefore, putative attacks “by the Left” or policies purported as to be “of the Left” are often obfuscated or *mystified* uses of language that delete actual historical agency or material conditions. This is the exact danger discussed by Marx in works such as *Grundrisse* or *The German Ideology*: shadowy, dreamy, mystified and illusory uses of language, constructed in the service of a wider, more pernicious, ideology. These sorts of language codes, as promulgated in the mainstream media, were delineated brilliantly in the pioneering work of linguists such as Fairclough (2001, 2002) and Fowler (2018). These political discourse analysts based their work upon the grammatical research of Halliday (1985), pioneering the political close reading strategy of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).⁴

At this juncture, few concrete examples of an *uncritical linguistic absorption* into this new discourse of the “metonymic Left” should serve to clarify my point. Firstly, I recently read a *Facebook* post that enunciated the following: “All of the Left in the UK hate the British Royal Family.” Now, aside from the obviously presumptuous nature of this phrase, one would further like to ask: Who exactly are the Left in the UK? Or, perhaps: Do you have to be a card-carrying monarchical misanthrope in order to be of “the Left”? Likewise, when a politician such as Ron DeSantis claims in the news that “The Left is playing for keeps.” This ambiguous phasing and use of nomenclature is extremely problematic. Each time these phrases are used with the putative grammatical subject “The Left,” one is reminded that historical agency and conditioning has been removed from what Halliday would term the *ideational* parsing of these phrases. Any reader with the most cursory grasp of CDA would be able to discern the removal of historical agency in these commonplace utterances.

⁴ M.A.K Halliday’s revolutionary work on grammar and linguistic analysis, particularly the aspect on the “ideational” uses of language, had a profound effect on the latter CDA work of Roger Fowler and Norman Fairclough. Their analysis of agency and the deletion of political agency in the mainstream media centered around grammatical devices such as nominalization, the use of passive as opposed to the active voice, and verb-constructions such as the ergative construction, which took close political readings to a higher level in the 90s. In the context of this study, the nominal use of terms such as “the Left” has clear connections both to new power-relations and deletions of agency in the current media representations of “the Left.” Further CDA of how political dynamics within the era of Neoliberalism work would no doubt yield some fascinating results. More recently, Fairclough has addressed this phenomenon in the context of New Labour, in his book, *New Labour, New Language* (2000).

However, the “Right” has similarly been classified under other such variegated conceptualizations of Liberalism.⁵ The political-philosophical consequences are such that we need a new discourse to address socioeconomic “wicked problems” such as poverty, healthcare deficiency, and poor-quality education. This, I believe, requires a shift beyond the old “Right/Left” paradigm. A reworked vocabulary or discourse would not only reject such trite metonymic notions as the *Left* and *Right* but would address social problems, such as the requirement of a Welfare State, in a more nuanced and localized framework. It is therefore important not only to move beyond reductive metonymic uses of noun phrases such as the *Left* and the *Right* but also to address ideals such as the universal welfare state in a more nuanced discourse that deconstructs and moves beyond such binary reasoning. With this goal in mind, I would therefore argue for a reinvigorated notion of political economy that refocuses upon a genuinely universal conceptualization of the post-capitalist state.

If the main thrust of my working thesis is correct, the “Left” is commonly used as a *metonymic* term that has come to be used in a supremely generalized way to present a huge and wide variety of ideas and political actions, which are often contingent upon one’s political vantage point. Similarly, the phrase “the Right” has also, to some degree, become not only dislocated from history, but often used as a term of insult to someone who may not, for example, agree with some of the cultural aspects of *political correctness*. Or equally, it may be used to denote someone who may hold political views that are simply conservative or may not concur with recent events, such as Brexit in the UK, or the iconoclastic tearing down of statues in public spaces. Mantras such as those used by people on marches from both aspects of the political spectrum, like “If you’re not with us, you’re against us,” clearly demonstrate a lack of respect not only for dissenting or opposing views but also show a myopic sociological awareness and a distinct lack of historical perspicuity. This is a doxa that has unfortunately begun to permeate academia also, risking further division at a wider sociological level—and rejecting *tout court* any polemical or even political position that is not perceived as fitting the currently sanctioned rubrics of debate and dialogue. This is a pathological form of what one is tempted to flag as intellectual promiscuity.⁶

There were, and always are, inevitabilities regarding this form of discursive myopia. In the present context of the Left, this was an idea explored by Jacques Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx* (1994). Derrida, it seems to me, was correct in arguing that the signifier “Marx” would be bifurcated and broken into signifying *traces* before later being taken up by all kinds of other political movements in modernity, calling for social justice. This call for justice comes from under the stage (read Marx as Hamlet’s father’s ghost): “Swear.” Derrida places this injunction in the context of *mourning*:

First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists in always trying to ontologise remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization,--philosophical,

⁵ See for example the labelling of Donald Trump as “fascist”. In line with Roland Barthes’ ideas on semiotics and signification, in his seminal text, *Mythologies* (1957), I would contend that this is an example in which a signifier is drained of all historical content and almost “zombified” in a whole new semiotic context, entirely emptied of its original content. In effect, a new or third-order signification is instantiated, in which the sign takes on a whole new context. This is the case unless the agent is using the signifier “fascist” as a trope to present Trump in a certain rhetorical light.

⁶ I am also a member of the organization SAFS (the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship), www.safs.ca and sincerely hope more new academics will join organizations like this, rather than bowing to divisive and often unwarranted, pressure from faculty and admin staff keen to tick the PC checklist.

hermeneutical, or psychoanalytical—finds itself caught up in this act of mourning, but, as such, it does not yet think it; we are posing here the question of the specter, to the specter, whether it be Hamlet's or Marx's, on this near side of such thinking).

Derrida, 1994, p.9.

This is the Janus-faced specter that both haunts history and perpetually localizes it “out of joint” with Hamlet's decree: “The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,/ That ever I was born to set it right.—/ Nay come, let's go together.” (1.5.198-191). On this reading, one is perpetually haunted by historical specters in historicized characterizations. These specters can be found in historicizing projects such as psychoanalysis or phenomenological hermeneutics. Marx and Engels recognized the specter of *Communism* in Europe, meaning the *traces* are both from the past and the future to come. It seems that, on my thesis, the “Left,” as a metonym, has become orphaned or dislodged. It has become a figure for *any historical sense of injustice*. The problem is, as in using “Marx” as a metonym, it has (ironically) become dislodged from its *materialist* origins. It has also been used as a term of both derision and as a more positive, superordinate signifier.

This has had a duly pernicious effect. Thinkers such as Jordan Peterson have found an easy target in identifying the “Left” with identity politics and, even worse, “postmodernism.” The reason is that, as a *trace*, or a *specter*, it can be located as a generalized and politicized sense of *injustice*. Without careful philological analysis, without an acute historical awareness, without a strong sense of materialist history, we continue to chase spirits that are dislodged from that very history—or in structuralist parlance—disembodied, *floating signifiers*.

These metonymic signs, fueled with traces from both the past and the future, have also become ironically *fetishized*. Their agency and historical structure have become drained, and various discourses appropriate them in the intellectual marketplace, such as those of Peterson on one side of the political divide and Fredric Jameson on the other. They are consequently used for, and invested with, both positive and negative connotations. This inevitable openness to textual trace means these signifiers are used as semiotic pieces upon a continually fluctuating, historical chess board.

In *Capital: Volume One* (1867), Karl Marx describes commodity fetishism in the following terms:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence, it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social. [...] In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There, the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

(Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 1990, 164-65)

For Marx, therefore, commodity fetishism is a form of mysticism that can only be demystified when we understand the true nature of the capitalist system, which is a system that hides its true workings and produces a one-size-fits-all, homogenized view of abstract labour-value. It presents a mystified viewpoint that obscures the real and personal labour value involved in the ultimately alienating system of what was at that time *laissez-faire* capitalism. In just this way, metonymic signifiers such as “Left” and “Right” are equally fetishized and used in mystical fashions without a true historicist or materialist sense of their philology. The system of capital contaminates not only the production of labour but also the *production of meaning*.

The conflation of the “Left” with the “Postmodern.”

As I observed above, more recently, the “Left” has been further fetishized, mystified, and conflated with the “postmodern.” In large part, this is connected to the postmodern notion that *certainty* is a questionable notion, everything is bound up with “power,” and all identity is contingent, constructed, and therefore open to question. Specifically, many of the attacks upon the “New Left” conflate it with postmodernism, which is categorically incorrect. See for example, the important contentions of Terry Eagleton (1991), and Slavoj Žižek (2012). Eagleton famously claimed that postmodern aesthetics and criticism break down the subject of modernity and, at the same time, celebrate (and calibrate) art as a modern commodity, in distinction to its modernist counterpart. The postmodern uncritically partakes in the modality of late capitalism, whereas modernism and the avant guard had more utopian goals. Moreover, the postmodern disavowal of metanarratives such as Christianity, Hegelianism and Marxism does not accord at all with the dialectical metanarrative articulated by Marx.

For a more philosophical approach to current epistemological questions, there is the *neo-pragmatist* work of Richard Rorty (1989). Furthermore, Walter Benn Michaels and Stephen Knapp famously carried on the earlier Rortyan model (1979) into the area of literary criticism, with their seminal critical essay “Against Theory” (1982). Moreover, Michaels, in particular, went on to attack the possible epistemic dangers of postmodernism and equated it with neoliberalism (2004). This was a position in opposition to the more recent stance taken by Peterson who has repeatedly equated postmodernism with his incoherent notion of “the Left” (a Left apparently without the metanarrative that Marx *a fortiori* lends to “Marxism”). However, this is the floating metonymic signifier, open to dehistoricized appropriation. In terms of identity politics, Mark Lilla has also brilliantly pointed out the dangers of a more identity-based political left, which loses sight of its original causes and the drive for values celebrating our commonality. His 2018 book, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, clearly examines the dangers of moving towards a more amorphous and atomized New Left. For Lilla, this is a quandary that faces the modern Democratic Party in the US but that can also be attributed to Liberalism at large. More radically still, Patrick Deneen has pointed out the limits of Liberal political economy and held it in sharp relief to more communitarian notions of a truly democratic polity. In his tome *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018), he presciently writes:

What’s needed now is not to perfect our philosophy any further but to again do more honor to ourselves. Out of the fostering of new and better selves, porously invested in the fate of other—selves-through the cultivation of cultures of community, care, self-sacrifice, and small-scale democracy—a better practice might arise, and from it, ultimately, perhaps a better theory than the failing project of liberalism. (Deneen, 2018, p.19).

The current trend for a conflation of the “Left” with the postmodern arose because the specter that haunts history calls out *injustice*, from the grave localizes it and provides it with new corporeality—or identity. This may find current articulation in trans-gender theory, identity politics, or some such theory based on individual rights-based political economies. However, individual rights-based political economies, stemming from the right to legislate one’s own identity, have led, as Christopher Hitchens noted in the introductory citation to this essay, or Lilla points out in his monograph, to the genuine atomization of the so-called New Left.

Theories that place individual identity over social stratification and class are, of course, essential to the *Infinite Conversation* as Maurice Blanchot has termed it (1993). They also attest to the constant sense of dynamism and dialogue that permeates genuinely social democracies. However, it’s a dangerous practice to label all such political theories “Left.” This is the juncture of *atomization*, where the orphaned, free-floating, metonymic signifier becomes fostered by the newer neoliberal, rights-based political economies. These signifiers operate under a different ethical register to either communitarian or deontological ethical theories, theories under whose banner one would respectively include Kantianism in the former, and utilitarianism, consequentialism or Marxism in the latter.

The neoliberal rights-based political economy is an off-shoot of the philosophy of Liberalism, with a *capital L*. It is the economy of desire, commodification, the culture industry, and fluid identity. The sky is the *limitless boundary*. However, more traditional political economies require closed structure (whether biological or socially stratified), in order to *delimit* their self-representations. These theories require *cooperative, relational, mutually achievable* teleologies. At some point, sacrifice is built into the traditional politics of the Left; one discerns this in possibly the greatest of the Left-wing revolutionaries: Jesus Christ himself. These political economies go well beyond the individual and require duty to a higher principle, which was grandfathered into the original, Jacobite notions of the Left back in 1789. If one thinks of the ten “planks” of the original *Communist Manifesto*, one has to acknowledge that many of the notions adumbrated in this precis have already been borne out in modern social democracies. Here we find the blueprint for the modern welfare state, universal education, and improved working conditions.

The postmodern, however, raises yet another specter, that of Pyrrhonist (or perhaps even academic) skepticism. If one makes the philosophical category error of conflating philosophical skepticism with Marxism, one finds oneself within the prescriptive rubric descired by many current critics of the “postmodern Left.” However, even a cursory philological glance in the direction of these phrases, together with a critical, historicist awareness, countenances the error and the intellectually indolent nature of these conflations.

Towards a more nuanced language or discourse of the welfare state: Hegel’s theory of the Concrete Universal and its implications for the welfare state

Marx’s predecessor, G.W.F Hegel, famously delineated, as part of his dialectical logic, two forms of universalism. He conceptualized the *concrete universal* as opposed to the *abstract universal*. These definitions roughly correspond to the older scholastic definitions of a *totum* and a *compositum*.⁷ The concrete universal precedes its parts, whereas the abstract

⁷ The distinction was first made in Idealist philosophy by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), §77, in which he delineates the antinomy between analytic and synthetic universals: “Therefore our understanding has this peculiarity as regards judgment: when cognition occurs through our understanding, the

universal is abstracted from the whole. Moreover, the concrete universal makes its parts possible, whereas the abstract is only *made possible by its preceding parts*. Politically, the concretely universal state for Hegel is of a higher and more complete composition than the abstract because it is not *abstracted from* the whole; it is the self-actualized State in its logical unity. The teleology of a liberal, individual, rights-based economy remains, paradoxically, in the *abstract universal* state of dialecticism. This is because it remains beached upon premises that are *deduced from* an overall idea, ideas that remain individualized, or *particularized*, in Hegel's parlance. The concrete universal is actualized *through* actual social processes in the real world of reason, not *abstracted from* the world of reason.

Consequently, this results ultimately in the ethical State, or ethical substance: "Right" eventually becomes ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). This is fully objectified freedom found within the organic mechanisms of the state, in-and-for itself. Freedom for Hegel is attained through mutual acknowledgment (*Anerkennung*), which is, in effect, actualized through the mechanisms of the modern, rational, liberal State. The key trope though which to decipher these two universals is that the abstract universal is secondary, mechanical, and imposed upon civil society through the rational state, whereas the other is organic, primary, and grows out of the existing civil society. This latter is not a rational state imposed upon civil society, such as in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, but one that organically grows out of the state. This organic state provides the legislative apparatus required to facilitate the growth of the concrete universal liberal executive.⁸

In this sociological and ontological model, the State (and by extension the welfare state) is not *over and against* individual citizens or their preferences. Instead, it is the *vehicle through which* we exercise our democratic freedoms and rights. This is the philosophical precis within which much political economy sustained its own ideals, ultimately requiring at some point a sacrifice through duty, faith and reason to attain mutually acknowledged societal rights.

particular is not determined by the universal and therefore cannot be derived from it alone. And yet this particular in nature's diversity must (through concepts and laws) harmonize with the universal in order that the particular can be subsumed under the universal. But, under these circumstances, this harmony must be very contingent, and must lack a determinate principle as far as the power of judgment is concerned.

The point is this: Our understanding has the peculiarity that when it cognizes, e.g., the cause of a product, it must proceed from the *analytically universal* to the particular (i.e., from concepts to the empirical intuition that is given); consequently, in this process our understanding determines nothing regarding the diversity of the particular. Instead (under the supposition that the object is a natural product) our understanding must wait until the subsumption of the empirical intuition under the concept provides this determination for the power of judgment. But we can also conceive of an understanding that, unlike ours, is not discursive but intuitive, and hence proceeds from the *synthetically universal* (the intuition of a whole as a whole) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts. Hence such an understanding as well as its presentation of the whole has no *contingency* in the combination of the parts in order to make a determinate form of the whole possible." p. 407.

⁸ In Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) the *compositum* state was imposed upon the "State of Nature" in order to facilitate the acquisition of mutually acknowledged political ends. As such, this was imposed as a mechanical adjunct *onto* the state of nature that existed without any rational state. This is the sort of Neoliberal State apparatus that is currently being exercised in the name of the newer individual rights-based political economy. Paradoxically, this is producing more division and difference in the name of liberal freedom. This is the universal state that Hegel was opposed to in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821). It should also be noted however that Hegel believed that "Absolute Knowledge" and "Sittlichkeit" (ethical substance) had been realized in the Prussian State within which he at the time held a prominent political position. One of Hegel's numerous academic rivals, J.F. Fries, had argued that Hegel's "metaphysical mushroom has grown not in the gardens of science but on the dunghill of servility." Hegel was therefore perceived by many of his contemporaries as also being a man of the right—in both senses of the word.

However, in the current individual rights-based model, varying individual rights have been abstracted from the universal state, creating a permanently dissoluble sociological problem. This fragmentation will, it seems, only breed more division as opposed to more coherent, unified notions of statehood. If we place our individual, *particularized* preferences and inclinations above a higher *universal* good, we will remain more divided than ever, and the divide-and-rule ethos of late, neoliberal capital, will remain in the ascendancy.

A new vocabulary that reflects our shared ‘Species Being.’

Addressing current socioeconomic “wicked problems” such as poverty, healthcare deficiency, and education requires a shift beyond the old “Right/Left” vocabulary. A reworked paradigm or discourse would not only reject such metonymic, particularized, and *abstract universal* notions such as the *Left* and *Right*, but would both reassess and rearticulate social problems. It is imperative that we move beyond metonymic, particularized (and incorrect) uses of noun phrases such as the *Left* and the *Right*. This requires addressing ideals such as the universal welfare State in a more nuanced discourse that moves beyond such binary logic and towards a genuinely concrete universal conceptualization of the State.

However, this cannot be instantiated through abstracted ideals such as gender-identity rights and new legislation concerning non-binary washrooms. These individualistic notions are *abstracted from* a universalized notion of liberalism. Their emphasis upon *difference* that is abstracted from a moral notion of liberalism is not produced from a concretely instantiated universalised whole; in fact, it is *superimposed upon* the universal whole that is civil society. Paradoxically, this imposition forces other groups in society into their own respective group-mentality. In effect, it produces more particularization within society, atomizing society in a retrograde fashion. One could baldly argue that Neoliberal identity politics were at least partly the cause for the current fragmentation of identity that is taking place in both the US and parts of Europe. As Lilla and Deneen have correctly prognosticated, the politics of identity, over and above the politics of our essential commonalities, will produce a more bifurcated, atomized civil society. In Hegelian parlance, the concrete universal state that grows organically from the current rational legislature, or the *totum*, will only succeed when grown organically out of mutually recognized rational interests, when not superimposed by the executive branch of government upon the civil society. This State can, in part, be attained in a model of the welfare state premised upon mutual acknowledgment and moving towards a more organic conception of the welfare state.

On this organic model, a truly functional and modern welfare state, which acts as a protection or buffer against the inherent dangers of late capitalism, can only be founded upon a reciprocal model of mutual recognition that transcends the binary logic of “right wing” and “left wing.” Furthermore, it should transcend identity, caste, and sexual orientation, in turn requiring a universal mode of social or mutual recognition. This requires resistance to the current metonymic formulations of the Left, which have made the metonymic left become its own worst metonymic enemy.

A concrete universal conception of rights, requires, in the first place, an organic recognition of particularized political views. This should be irrespective of whether they fall on the left or the right side of the assembly, producing a rational state that does not inculcate a new doxa or puritanical social program but encourages reconciliation of political ideals, based upon an “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I.’” This is of course a political challenge; in fact, this is THE political challenge. This is also something not to be countenanced within the

springes of the essay format, although one hopes perhaps to raise a new specter through which to haunt the currently baroque political landscape.

The rational state shouldn't be coercive but should lay the ethical groundwork for flourishing, something that speaks to Aristotle's *Eudaimonia*. Through rational agency, both Hegel and Marx, in the same sense as contemporary thinkers such as Robert Pippin, Deneen and Lilla, advocate truly communitarian civil societies. In fact, individualistic, rights-based political economies are in a major sense a step back from the politically organic polities truly fit for the post-capitalist Age.

To conclude, and to return to Marx, in his early *Paris Manuscripts* he also privileged a form of mutual recognition as a key to political solidarity, borne of a mutuality that would not only transcend, but also provide the key to civic society. For Marx, it was our shared *Species Being* (*Gattungswesen*) that would help, through mutual awareness, to build a civil society based upon what we *share*, rather than upon inessential, personal nuances that divide us.

This relationship also demonstrates the extent to which man's *needs* have become *human* needs, hence the extent to which the *other*, as a human being, has become need for him, the extent to which in his most individual existence, he is at the same time a communal being.

(Marx, 1992, 347)

On this view of human nature, over and above the straw man arguments usually levelled against socialist political economy, it is in and through our mutuality and our recognition of our commonality that we articulate civics and commit to the rubric of the organic model of the putative rational state. By recognizing our *shared species being*, not our nuances and differences, we can formulate truly democratic, socialist polities.

If there is to be a more equitable notion of political economy in the future, it is to come from recognition of our essential species being: through recognition of our commonalities, the shared human needs and values of civil society—the shared rights that are truly, universally, human. These rights speak to a thoroughly concrete-universal configuration of the state. Moreover, they entail an organic process growing from within an existing polity and are unlike Hobbe's putative *Leviathan*, which is instantiated as an adjunct to our natural forms of society. Furthermore, this organic political economy is not realized through the elevation and politicization of individual nuance and difference. It will transpire, finally, through political vocabulary that isn't premised on metonymic signifiers such as "Left" and "Right," which do indeed *haunt* our present, whether it be European, African or Asiatic.⁹

⁹ This essay is a much-expanded version of the keynote speech that I presented at a conference organized by The International Research Forum: *The Welfare State is Possible: The Rise of the New Left and the return of the Universal Welfare State*. At the Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University, on the 12th October, 2019.

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