By Crispin Sartwell

The arrangement of positions along the left-right axis - progressive to reactionary, or conservative to liberal, or socialist to capitalist, or for that matter Democrat to Republican - is conceptually confused, ideologically tendentious, disconnected from reality, and historically contingent. Any position that is comfortably located anywhere on the left-right spectrum is infested by contradictions. We need to think *about* the left-right spectrum rather than *from* it. It can seem permanent and inevitable. But the left-right terminology arose in revolutionary France in 1789, where it referred to the seating of royalists and anti-royalists in the Assembly. It is plausible to think of an early version of the conceptuality, though not the terminology, as emerging in Europe in the run-up to the Revolution, in figures such as Rousseau and Burke. The first use of 'left' and 'right' in something like its current political sense in English is attributed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* to Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* in 1837. The left-right spectrum only crystallized fully with the emergence of and under the aegis of Marxism, in the middle of the 19th century, and was not fully current in English-speaking countries until early in the 20th century. Before that, or elsewhere than in the West, there have been many intellectual structures for defining and arranging political positions, as I will show in some concrete cases as we go on.

One way people talk about left and right is in terms of time: progressives want time to continue to move forward or even want to accelerate it, taking us into a future bright with promise, while conservatives want time to stand still or even to run it backward to a golden age. Either approach appears to depend on a conception of time on which it is extremely malleable, its pace and direction depending on the outcome of the next election. Well, that's what you get if you move from Kantianism to the social or linguistic construction of reality: a nice turn of phrase and time is running backwards or accelerating so fast that you can't keep up. I think such a picture is incompatible with any plausible conception of time in metaphysics or in ordinary experience. Putting it gently, the idea that one can retard or accelerate time has a certain . . . psychotic quality. No one needs to help make sure that time keeps moving forward and, proverbially, no one can stand in its way. Ted Cruz and Rafael Correa, the Taliban and Beyoncé, the 'stone-age' Suruwaha people of the Amazon and the prime-time hosts of MSNBC: they coincide in time, all moving temporally in the same direction at the same rate, contemporaneously. Among other times, they all exist precisely now, as I write.

Perhaps progressives (and real reactionaries, if there are any) would say that the idea of hastening or retarding time is a sort of shorthand or metaphor. But I think the matter is much more complicated than this. Both sides of the American political spectrum are continuously appealing to American traditions, principles, bromides, and so on. And one typically "makes progress", to whatever extent one does, by revivifying or re-interpreting existing traditions: Barack Obama engages in this rhetoric no less than Rand Paul. It's never a matter of simply starting afresh employing no assumptions; both sides are engaged in interpreting and re-applying existing traditions, and both sides are doing that under constantly mutating conditions, so that each re-application is a new and potentially controversial interpretation. Time is relentless in that sense too.

Another way that the left-right spectrum is conceived is as state against capital, and that concepuality is what I focus on below. It is central to contemporary American

politics, as Democrats urge that government makes many positive contributions to our lives, while Republicans argue that it is a barrier to the prosperity created by free markets. The basic set of distinctions on both sides and in the middle rests on the idea that state and corporation, or political and economic power, can be pulled apart and set against each other.

The left/right spectrum is an arrangement of practical politics, and most political parties in most parts of the world might understand themselves as falling along that spectrum somewhere. But as a framework or taxonomy of political positions, or for the purposes of, say, research in political science, it has got to be optional. You've got to keep open the possibility that it is a flawed paradigm or could be replaced qua explanatory framework. If not, then you are yourself embroiled in the ideologies that you're supposed to be accounting for or categorizing. The left-right spectrum is an historical artifact, like any other taxonomy of political systems. But it is an excruciating mess. Let me make a few bald claims: no position that can be plausibly ranged on this spectrum is internally coherent. The whole thing is, in a way, a single ideology, and could be opposed as a whole; one feature of it, in my opinion, is that any location on it amounts among other things to advocacy of extreme hierarchy.

If we are conceiving left/right as state/capital, then on the outer ends we might pit Chairman Mao against Ayn Rand in a cage match: state communism against laissez-faire capitalism. The basic set of distinctions on both sides and in the middle rests on the idea that state and corporation, or political and economic power, can be pulled apart and set against each other. This brings us to

Little Crispy's Big Law (LCBL): ***hierarchies tend to coincide.***

Corollary: ***resources flow toward political power, and political power flows toward resources; or, the power of state and of capital typically appear in conjunction.***

As a practical matter, if you recommend any hierarchy, whether of experts, races, capital, the Party, etc etc, you are in reality recommending hierarchy in every dimension. So, if a hierarchy of education or expertise is important in your society, then resources and political power will flow toward experts. Same with a hierarchy of beauty or athletic prowess or race or gender, or whatever it may be. But the fundamental dimensions I want to pick out are economic and political. I'd say it's obvious that LCBL is roughly true, and everyone knows it to be true. A white-suprematist polity in which black people were wealthier than white people, for example, would be extremely surprising. It would be no less surprising if regulatory capture were not pervasive, for example. You could keep trying to institute reforms to pull economic and political power apart: I wonder what it would take empirically to show you that this was counter-productive. It's counter-productive because when you beef up the state to control capital, you only succeed in making capital more monolithic, more concentrated, and more able to exercise a wider variety of powers. (Consider the relation of Goldman Sachs to the Treasury Department over the last several decades, or Haliburton and Defense, or Google and NSA. The distinction between "public" and "private" is rather abstract in relation to the on-the-ground overlap.)

Thus it is time to deploy the second of my stunning principles, which is a description or definition of the form of government we labor under today over much of the world.

squishy totalitarianism: the political/economic/aesthetic/psychological system or syndrome shared in common, for instance, by contemporary China, the European Union, Russia, and the United States. It is characterized by a complex so-called 'technocratic' merger of state and capital; large-scale mechanisms of subject-formation such as compulsory state education and regulation/monopoly ownership of the media; welfare-state or 'safety-net' programs that stabilize consumption and render populations (within limits) secure and dependent; a relative tolerance for some forms of diffuse dissent and scope for individual choice, particularly in consumption, combined with pervasive state and corporate surveillance; overwhelming police and military force and sprawling systems of incarceration; entrenched extreme hierarchies of wealth and expertise; regulation of the economy by monetary policy and central banks in conjunction with banking concerns; an international regime of national sovereignties combined with international state/corporate mechanisms for the circulation of wealth.

State and economy have merged in different permutations in Iran and Egypt, in China and Japan, in the US and the EU. Once they have, everyone is over the barrel, and you might as well let them tweet their little opinions. You want them fundamentally to conceive themselves as consumers and receivers of benefits from the state, and you want them to think of their freedom as primarily a freedom to choose between different things to buy or benefits to receive (which is, however, a real freedom). Then your economy will be a self-stimulating spiral of growth, your tax coffers will fill, and your elites will grow in wealth, prestige, knowledge, and power.

The familiar picture is that, to the degree that you reduce the power of the state, you increase the power of capital, and vice versa. Putting it mildly, this claim is non-empirical. The rise of capital, its consolidation into a few hands, and the enduring structures of monopoly or gigantism to which it gives rise are inconceivable without the state, as I will argue with many examples below. Even Marx saw this, in a limited way: he regarded the modern state as the agent of the bourgeoisie. Putting it gently, that was more or less true. But then Marx recommends placing communications, banking, agriculture, transportation, and so on in the hands of the dictatorship of the proletariat. You might as well hand them all to Cornelius Vanderbilt, because whoever actually makes the decisions with regard to these things is who will actually become the dominant class or group. No dictator is a proletarian.

Anarchists such as Kropotkin also saw the connection, and did not present an alternative that just made the nightmare worse. Here he is in 1901, stating the obvious: "The State (state-justice, state-church, state-army) and capitalism are, in our opinion, inseparable concepts. In history these institutions developed side by side, mutually supporting and re-enforcing each other. They are bound together not by a mere coincidence of contemporaneous development, but by the bond of cause and effect, effect and cause."[1] We might say that the current Chinese state combines the best features of

[1] *The Essential Kropotkin*, Emile Capouya and Keitha Tompkins, eds. (New York: Liveright, 1975), 83

Maoism and corporate capitalism: it's all devoted to generating maximum cash and putting it on a barge. Destination: the very top of the hierarchy. And yet it also attempts to bestride the earth, stomping that ass with the iron boot of collectivist totalitarianism. Now, your basic taxonomy of political and economic systems or ideologies would regard this as an incoherent merger. A conventional political scientist associates capitalism with John Locke and Adam Smith and democracy: 'liberalism,' I suppose. On the other hand, if socialists reject free enterprise and engage in grand redistributivist schemes, then of course they require a big, extremely powerful state. (Then once you're done with the redistribution, the state either withers away, or deposits your entire country in their leaders' Swiss accounts and absconds; I forget which.) So for a long time people thought of the Chinese system as combining opposed or contradictory elements. At a minimum, I'd say no one is so sure anymore.

We should think instead of the contemporary Chinese state as a provisional culmination of both state socialism and corporate capitalism. In ideology, they are opposites. But we don't live in the textbook for a course on political ideologies. We live in a world where*, from the outset, corporate capitalism completely depended on state power, and the basic practical thrust of left statism was annexation of the economy.* The Soviet Union was a variety of monopoly capitalism, and the modern American state is a variety of state socialism.

What went wrong in our thinking is that we believed the account these ideologies gave of themselves. But the scrim of philosophy, theory, ideology, rhetoric was always thin. There are capitalist theoreticians who have fantasized and recommended stateless free markets, and there are communist theorists who have fantasized no markets at all, always slightly glossing over the fact that what they actually meant was an entire permeation of every aspect of life, including markets, by the state. But these were indeed fantasies. What these people wanted appeared to be entirely opposed. But they were each devoted to their own sort of hierarchy, and hierarchies tend to coincide. They were designed to rationalize or moralize what is really a single indefensible system, or to enhance the self-esteem of ideologues while pursuing the hard work of subduing populations and gathering up all the resources.

The cold war disguised the fact that the systems were, in playing out their real essences, converging toward a situation in which state and economy are fully integrated and held in very few hands: a truly permanent, systemic, chronic, sclerotic hierarchy with the world's worst rhetoric. One of the meanings of 'globalization' and the various 'international mechanisms' that go with it, may be that it is a premonition of a world system of this variety, which is already emerging. (One name is 'technocracy.' If you insist you could call it 'late capitalism' or 'neo-liberalism', with the proviso that it is enthusiastically statist and really has very little do with classical liberalism. I like to call it 'Jurgen Habermas'.) But there are many barriers to overcome, from nationalism and tribalism to religious chauvinism and individualism/tribalism of the 'I/we dissent/withdraw/slack off/sabotage/hack' variety.

Now, if LCBL is true, then the left/right spectrum is mumbo-jumbo. So, for example, consider the Soviet system. What nationalizing industry, imposing five-year plans, and so on did was not make the society more equal; it just made the communist party a committee of capitalists. State and economy merged, but sadly the state turns out to be

actual people, as opposed to whatever the left thinks it is. What people faced in communist totalitarianism was a particular and particularly extreme form of the merger of state and capital, which is one good meaning of the term 'totalitarianism.' And what you have created when you've finished is an overwhelming power that confronts you now as a sheer alien force while also trying to work on everybody's mind and everybody's family through propaganda and secret police procedures. Just to put it squarely: if you supported the communist revolution or helped spearhead it, you richly deserved your show trial and execution: you helped create the force that killed you. You could have been an anarchist, son. You could have joined Makhno, say, and at least died for something. And the result was completely predictable; the only reason you didn't see it is because your head was filled with palpably ridiculous fictions. I hope it had a moment of clarity as it was dangling on that noose.

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The main historical point I want to make is this: the rise of capitalism is not explicable without state power, which has increased throughout the capitalist period. The modern nation-state and capitalism have the same origins, or arose together, or really - simplifying slightly - are one thing in different dimensions or aspects. It will be important to try to deal from the outset with the interlocked state/capital formations arising in the early modern period rather than exclusively with later theorizations of these developments, with the history of political economy rather than the history of political-economic theory and ideology. Economists who undertake as broad a project as 'defining' emerging capitalism or tracing its history invariably connect it to the emergence of the modern state. Michel Beaud in his *History of Capitalism* finds the state connection criterial:

> What one in any case should remember is the importance of the state in the birth, the first beginnings of capitalism; this is linked, too, to the national character of the formation of capitalism: there is no capitalism without the bourgeoisie, which developed within the framework of the nation-state at the same time as the rise of *nations* occurred. . . . Within Europe itself, the primary transforming factor is the state. National unity, currency standardization, juridical coherence, military strength and the beginnings of a national economy: all these were created and developed by the state, or with the state as organizing principle.[2]

The way an anarchist would frame this is that statism and capitalism emerge together. There is extreme ambiguity, I must remark, around the term *state*. Perhaps we've had states since ancient Egypt and China, proceeding to religious states like the caliphate and imperial states such as the Romans or Mongol horde states, feudal states, and tribal states. Or perhaps these are all different sorts of non-state configurations and there have only been states since the peace of Westphalia in 1648, and perhaps in a few other places and periods historical epochs such as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in

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[2] Michel Beaud, *A History of Capitalism, 1500-2000,* trans. Tom Dickman and Anny Lefebvre (New York: Monthly Review, 2nd ed 2001 [originally published 1981]), 42-43.

China. In some ways I think the term is irremediably ambiguous, actually. Indeed all the terms are irremediably ambiguous and are constantly being hijacked or annexed for someone's ideological project.

Proceeding with these items as rough and ready notions, the sorts of events that economic historians focus on in the development of capitalism are, for example, the rise of the city-state of Venice and the great banking families of Europe, such as the Medici; the sixteenth-century influx of South American gold into the economy of Spain and into this same financial system; the development of securities, futures and other "abstract" instruments and markets for them in Holland and Great Britain; enclosure of internal commons and the establishment of international tariffs and free-trade zones; war both internal and external to establish and police boundaries and territorialize and commodify and garrison entire regions and continents[3]; manufacturing, trade, and technological development in part to equip belligerents in civil and international strife; and so on. In no case can we imagine what these developments in the history of capitalism would have been like without simultaneous developments in the crystallizing and internationalizing state. Even right-wing historians tell a similar tale, and the sort of figures who later came to be considered conservative icons, such as Smith, Hume, and Ricardo - both in their historical and prescriptive moments - centralized in their accounts the legitimate role of state action in regulation of internal markets and conducting international trade.

One way to read this history is, as Marxists do, as showing that liberal democracy/constitutional monarchy were bourgeois forms. Another is simply to read it as showing that state and economic power are indissoluble, hence that attacking capital by beefing up the state or adding capital flatly to the state portfolio is not promising as a road to justice. Leftists got into this pickle in part because under Marx's influence they came to perceive only economy as reality, and hence to hold that political hierarchies are not real hierarchies at all. This delusion reached a literally psychotic state, so that Stalinist Russia or Maoist China - two of the most rigidly and murderously hierarchical societies in world history - could be justified on egalitarian grounds. However, Marxism also yields plenty of insights that could be used to float the other way. Indeed, strands of leftist economic thought are currently being used to clarify this situation even as other strands are dedicated to obscuring it. An example is Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin's book *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire.* They write:

> One of capitalism's defining characteristics, compared with pre-capitalist societies, is the legal and organizational differentiation between state and economy. This is not to say there was ever anything like an actual separation between the political and economic spheres of capitalism. The distinction between *differentiation* and *separation* is so important because as capitalism developed states in fact became more involved in life than ever, especially in the establishment and administration of the juridical, regulatory, and infrastructural framework in which private property, competition, and contracts came to operate. Capitalist states were also increasingly major actors in trying to contain capitalist

[3] Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

> crises, including as lenders of last resort. Capitalism could not have developed unless states came to do these things. Conversely, states became increasingly dependent on the success of capital acumulation for tax revenue and popular legitimacy.[4]

The political and economic institutions are completely interdependent and mutually entwined, for Panitch and Gindin. Yet the distinction of the spheres is important. Partly, it is important to the right/left ideology on both sides; neither could be justified without the distinction. But I too endorse the distinction of spheres in this sense: I do not believe that political power can be reduced to economic power, as in classical Marxism. They are distinct and mutually interdependent. The President is not the wealthiest American. The danger in collapsing them is that if one reduces either to the other, one ends up justifying and intensifying both. If political hierarchy is epiphenomenal while economic hierarchies are real, then one can institute a totalitarian political regime without even noticing that one is in fact advocating inequalities of the most extreme variety. On the other hand, if only political oppressions are real and economic inequalities merely natural and salutary, you get in the name of liberty varieties of "free-market" capitalism deranged in their practical oppression. For example, if you are starving you are not free, especially if others have more than they can imagine consuming.

Panitch and Gindin concentrate on the international effects of the projection of American capital and markets on the world by the American state, culminating in an account of "neoliberalism", or in their preferred terminology, "informal empire", by which they mean very much what I mean by 'squishy totalitarianism'. "Despite the Reaganite rhetoric in which neoliberal politics were enveloped ('government is not the solution, government is the problem'), it was the state that was the key actor. . . . Neoliberal *practices* did not entail institutional retreat so much as the expansion and consolidation of the networks of institional linkages to an already globalizing capitalism" (*Making of Global Capitalism,* 15). Both left and right accepted an ideological framework in which state and capital were opposed; indeed to a large extent the left-right spectrum just is this idea. And yet as soon as this opposition is prodded empirically with regard to any particular fundamental development in practical political economy, it disintegrates. Panitch and Gindin adduce also the world financial crisis of 2007-2008, which was created in part by the American government's support for home ownership and the development of financial instruments based on it. Of course the American government and those of other nations, as well as international coalitions of bankers and officials, massively infused specific private financial concerns with cash in response to the crisis. The United States government purchased and then re-sold domestic car manufacturers and both it and European governments circulated trillions of dollars through "private" banking and insurance firms in response to the crisis.

The interlocked histories of the corporation and state war machines, for example Krupp in Germany or Halliburton in the USA, must on any account be regarded as fundamental to the nature and growth of both the modern state and the modern

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[4] Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (VNew York: Verso, 2012), 3

corporation. Adam Smith approvingly and accurately describes the origin and basic function of the modern state as a military machine, and connects national military establishments to the rise and nature of capitalism fundamentally. The military establishment and the capitalist economy are seen to be mutually reinforcing. This is true internally and externally, because organizing a nation on a military basis requires imposing on it a systematic system of taxation and conscription, while the industry configured around the production of military equipment such as uniforms and artillery pieces transforms the economy and drives technological innovation and advances in productivity.

> As it is only by means of a well-regulated standing army that a civilized country can be defended; so it is only by means of it, that a barbarous country can be suddenly and tolerably civilized. A standing army establishes with an irresistible force, the law of the sovereign through the remotest provinces of the empire, and maintains some degree of regular government in countries which could not otherwise admit of any. . . .
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> The first duty of the sovereign, therefore, that of defending the society from the violence and injustice of other independent societies, grows gradually more and more expensive, as the society advances in civilization. . . . The great change introduced into the art of war by the invention of firearms, has enhanced still further both the expence of exercising and disciplining any particular number of soldiers in time of peace, and that of employing them in time of war. Both their arms and their ammunition are become more expensive. A musquet is a more expensive machine than a javelin or a bow and arrows; a cannon or a mortar, than a balista or a catapulta. . . . . The canon and the mortar are, not only much dearer, but much heavier machines than the balista or catapulta, and require a greater expence, not only to prepare them for the field, but to carry them to it. As the superiority of the modern artillery too, over that of the antients, is very great; it has become much more difficult, and consequently much more expensive, to fortify a town so as to resist even for a few weeks the attack of that superior artillery. In modern times many different causes contribute to render the defence of the society more expensive. The unavoidable effects of the natural progress of improvement have, in this respect, been a good deal enhanced by a great revolution in the art of war, to which a mere accident, the invention of gun-powder, seems to have given occasion.
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> In modern war the great expence of fire-arms gives an evident advantage to the nation which can best afford that expence; and consequently, to an opulent and civilized, over a poor and barbarous nation. In antient times the opulent and civilized found it difficult to defend themselves against the poor and barbarous nations. In modern times the poor and barabarous find it difficult to defend themselves against the opulent and civilized. The invention of fire-arms, an

> invention which at first sight appears to be so pernicious, is certainly favourable both to the permanency and to the extension of civilization.[5]

The force projected internally and externally is continuous, and is continuous with the economy; for Smith, it is above all *as war machine* that the state and capital are interlocked. This is one moment among many in Smith of direct descriptive realism rather than mere ideology, and yet he reads it ideologically as well, and pens tributes to the wonders of gun-powder for civilizing all sorts of persons for all sorts of reasons. One wants to be rich in order to defend oneself and expand one's force abroad so that one can become richer so that, and so on. At least Smith doesn't pretend that the whole thing doesn't rest on killing.

Smith's basic account of mercantilism in *Wealth of Nations* (V: 1) could certainly describe today's interlocked state/capital military machine. An early model of squishy totalitarianism was provided by the European East India and West India Companies, state/capitalist hybrids or state-enforced and regulated private monopolies fielding public/private armies here and there but by their own lights engaged primarily in maximization of profits for shareholders, who in turn were often government officials of one sort or another. The profits reaped were presented as being also of patriotic service to the home countries and of humanitarian service to the persons with whom the companies were trading or whom they were conquering. I will return to this example. Similar state/private hybrids have been central to the construction of all large capitalist economies, and would include entities such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, or American utility companies in coooperation with government bodies. "Infrastructure" is constructed or repaired in the current American economy through state contracting, and the entire economy of the DC region is dominated by Federal contractors.

Smith justifies such entities on various grounds. Parliament or the King could grant an exclusive monoply to a group of merchants and stockholders over the trade in some region, constituting the East India Company, the Africa Company, the South Sea Company, and so on.

> Some particular branches of commerce, which are carried on with barbarous and uncivilized nations, require extraordinary protection. An ordinary store or counting house could give little security to the goods of the merchants who trade to the western coast of Africa. To defend them from the barbarous natives, it is necessary that the place where they are deposited, should be, in some measure, fortified. . . . [I]t was under pretence of securing their persons and property from violence, that both the English and French East India Companies were allowed to erect the first forts which they possesed in that country. . . . The interests of commerce have frequently made it necessary to maintain ministers in foreign countries, where the purposes either of war or of alliance, would not have required any. The commerce of the Turkey Company first occasioned the establishment of an ordinary ambassador at Constantinople. The first English embassies to Russia

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[5] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981 [published 1776]), vol. II, 706-708

> arose together from commercial interests. The constant interference which those interests necessarily occasioned between the subjects of the different states of Europe, has probably introduced the custom of keeping, in all neighbouring countries, ambassadors or ministers constantly resident even in the time of peace. This custom, unknown to antient times, seems not to be older than the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century; that is, than the time when commerce first began to extend itself to the greater part of the nations of Europe. (*Wealth of Nations,* 731-32)

Many historians have emphasized that the conception of the nation-state emerges in this period because or insofar as an international system emerges in Europe. Certainly the military square-off and the fortification of various borders within the continent were central to this consolidation of the modern conception and reality of the state. But just as certainly the interaction across borders in trade was also central, as was the co-operation or merging of "state" military force and "private" capital in the colonial project of globalizing Europe and putting the rest of the world to tribute or the gun. In either case, the nation and the international system of modern Europe emerges with various state/capital configurations, from fantastic fortunes accumulated and squandered by Spanish lords to the rise and fall of centuries-long state-capital enterprises such as the great British or American banks.

Both state and company fleets defended various companies' monopolies, others plying the trade routes being considered pirates. This is the origin of the very idea of monopoly capitalism. The companies would be responsible for fortifying or securing land access from the sea, establishing a chain of forts around the world, defended by both company and state forces, between which there was little distinction in many cases. The investors stood to earn huge profits if all went well, and the capital of these companies would be invested in turn in governement bonds, enabling a permanent military establishment, particularly an unprecedented construction of naval forces. These bonds would pay an extremely reliable return, funding yet more company expansion. Military needs would be fed by private textile and steel mills which would employ millions of people. Labor would have to be organized on a quasi-military basis, but wages would establish a reliable pattern of domestic consumption. Certainly such policies were disastrous for many people all over the world, and were a mixed bag in terms of their success at home. This squishy colonialism also proved a successful alternative to the Spanish and Portugese strategy of annexing continents and subduing/converting whole populations directly from Madrid or Lisbon. It also led to one of the most entrenched and unjust domestic and international hierarchies ever devised, or the first really global hierarchy, in which the immiseration of the third world was interlocked with the prosperity of the first. But Smith argued that though this approach had had its successes, it had proven "burdensome and useless" because it had "either mismanaged or confined the trade" (*Wealth of Nations,* 733).

One way to frame the debate between Democrats and Federalists, or Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians, in the early American republic is as a debate between an agrarian, or quasi-feudal (and of course slave) interest and an emerging market and financialized economy centered in New York. It was the capitalist interest that demanded an activist

state, in particular in economic matters. Hamilton's primary concerns were securing a tax base (he particularly favored taxing spirits), paying the national debt, establishing a national bank that could stabilize currency values and facilitate credit markets, and closely regulating and taxing foreign trade in both directions. Such steps ended up being taken by every emerging capitalist economy, and required larger and larger structures of state surveillance and control of various sorts of transactions. It was primarily with regard to the development of such economies and the shift from an agrarian to a manufacturing to a service model, for example, that education was made compulsory and has come more and more to be regulated at national and even international levels; indeed procedures of subject-formation have become ever-more elaborate in both state and private sectors, even as such techniques are constantly revealing their limitations. The way state and capital institutions mutually reflect one another in bureaucratic structures and procedures and in aesthetic preferences is remarkable, and every advance in management, from the cubicle to the institution-wide commitment to teamwork and excellence is a shared legacy.

State repression of striking workers, for example the severe outbreak in the US in the 1890s, or the less violent outbreaks in Thatcher's Great Britain or Reagan's United States, is a tried and true tradition. Obviously, capital massively wields state police power to protect itself. State regulation of business concerns increases barriers to entry into the market and hence helps consolidate markets in established hands. This effect increases exponentially when the regulators are themselves essentially representatives of those very concerns, who after all are the only ones who understand their segment of the market, the health of which depends on their activity. The way the FCC has actually imposed corporate oligarchy on communications is entirely typical; in the public interest it auctioned off and licensed first radio and then television frequencies, and now cellular bandwidth. This made the great broadcast networks possible, and for some time most Americans had perhaps four sources of information, all basically purveying the same interpretation of the world. Or again, the state enforced copyright laws in such a way as to limit publishing or the dissemination of recorded music to a few large corporations. But it did the same with the railroads and mineral rights in the 19th century, for example, leading directly to the great American personal fortunes of that period.

The state has been a key force in territorialization of many dimensions of the world and human experience. The consolidation of the European nation-state took place in complement to the annexation of whole continents, and as every Marxist has well asserted, one central function of the rule of law is the establishment of private property. Ownership of intellectual property - like the ownership of land - cannot possibly be maintained without exhaustive bodies of records and archives of various kinds, a central function of the state from time immemorial, necessary to taxation and to trade. Of course ownership of land also requires police power in some form. It has gotten to the point where state and corporation mutually enforce ownership of sequences of tones, strings of symbols and other abstract pseudo-objects. By the 1890s the American economy was being bailed out by J.P. Morgan, a gesture which it has repaid to the financial sector many times, and in response to which the idea of a central or national bank was expanded to include uniform regulation of currency under the Federal Reserve. These mechanisms for mutual stabilization of state and capital were refined and internationalized throughout the twentieth century, though they still have their little glitches.

One effect of a state which presents itself to the population primarily as a distributor of benefits - welfare benefits, healthcare benefits, retirement and disability pensions, food assistance, and unemployment insurance, for example - is that it stabilizes supply and demand, or manufacturing, sales, and consumption, by, for example, giving many people a certain amount to spend every week or month. Consumption can be increased by increasing such benefits, for example in a slump with regard to unemployment benefits; this assures retailers, for example, of a certain minimal level of sales. To look at state and corporate interests as opposed in these dimensions is, as everywhere, distorting.

The mutual reinforcement of economic and political hierarchies that has occurred in its capitalist permutations at least since the 17th century is a kind of apparently infinite spiral, in which we might say the right and left have colluded since there have been a right and left. In oscillating between liberal and conservative or Democrat and Republican, we oscillate between beefing up one segment of the hierarchy or another, and if I had to identify a direction of history, it would be simply be in terms of ever-increasing inequality of both varieties. This has reached the point of the worst outbreaks of violence in human history, of great annihilating wars and genocides. It might well lead to human extinction, and our collusion in allowing squishy totalitarian systems to emerge entails that our extinction will be well-deserved. But even if it led to a relatively mellow world democratic state (which would surprise me), I would be completely opposed to it. I think it ignores a fundamental moral fact about us: we're mostly more or less the same. You are not that much smarter or more industrious or more right in your ethics or more likely to abide by it than anyone else. The sorts of hierarchies to which everyone on both sides offer their prayers and their lives cannot be morally justified on any plausible grounds. They rest essentially on the self-delusion of superiority of some groups over others. You yourself should always suspect yourself when you effortlessly assume that you or people more or less like you, or also people you admire for one reason or another, have a clear idea about how other people or people *like them* should live, particularly when the people you are proposing to transform seem to disagree.

The idea that free markets are historically distinguished from large, powerful states is, in brief, a completely ahistorical ideology, shared by the capitalist right and the communist left and even by almost everyone in between. In this regard and in a number of others, we might think of the left-right spectrum as a single ideology rather than as a taxonomy of opposites. Thus, the left-right split, which defines politics in a hyper-repetitive, mechanical set of partisan bromides about free markets and positive government programs with egalitarian results, depends on a historical mistake.

4.

Insofar as they embody anything definite, both the left and the right are incoherent positions. One place the left runs aground is on its central value of equality: defining it exclusively in economic terms, the left proposes to achieve it by the imposition of extreme political hierarchy. One place the right runs aground is on its central value of liberty: people who are essentially being forced to labor to enhance the wealth of the people exploiting them are not free. A realization of the vision of either annihilates in the world the ideals that drove it, and that has actually happened over and over to both positions.

The left-right spectrum, since it is linear and not infinite, can be characterized in terms two extreme poles. One way to see that the thing is incoherent is that these poles can be defined in a number of mutually incompatible ways. So, for example, in the 1930s it was Marxist communist as against fascism. It is odd that the left could define the right pole as fascist one minute, laissez-faire the next. I don't doubt that you can make them identical by some conniption-fit of dialectical materialism, but then you're just writing fiction. The left pole could be a stateless society of barter and localism; or a world of equality in which people are not subordinated by race, gender, and sexuality; or a giant Pentagon-style welfare state; or a Khmer-Rouge re-education-by-execution regime. The Nazi Party, the Catholic Church, hereditary aristocracy, Ayn Rand go-go capitalists, and redneck gun enthusiasts are *all on the same side* in the left-right conceptuality. So are hacktivists, food-stamp officials, anti-globalization activists, anarcho-primitivists, and advocates of a world government.

In my suggested bipolar replacement, there are two political philosophies: hierarchical and anti-hierarchical, statist and anarchist, totalitarian/squishy totalitarian and resistant. But whereas the squishy-totalitarian side funnels into a single situation - a frozen economic and political and knowledge hierarchy - the anarchist side is thousands upon thousands of possibilities, as many as there are possible voluntary arrangements: a million mutant communities. Don't think of it as single thing, think of it as all possibilities but one. Now on the up/down spectrum, hereditary aristocracy, monopoly capitalism, the Communist Party, military juntas, and American liberals are on the same side, some more extremely or mildly than others. I am a lot more comfortable with that, and I think it's more plausible. But of course any linear account is awfully simplistic.

Ayn Rand and Vlad Lenin, Kim Il Song and Barry Goldwater, Barack Obama and Rand Paul, Francois Mitterand and Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Fidel Castro, Friedich von Hayek and Leo Trotsky, Slavoj Zizek, and Augusto Pinochet, for all I know, disagreed on several matters. But they agreed on this, or said they did: the state was a force that was historically pitted against private capital. To reduce one was to increase the other and to increase one was to reduce the other. They vary inversely and the balance between them that you recommend constitutes the fundamental way of characterizing your political position. From an anti-authoritarian, anti-statist, or anarchist point of view, this spectrum stretches from authoritarianism on the one end to authoritarianism on the other, with authoritarianism in between. It makes anything that is not that incomprehensible. It narrows all alternatives to variations on hierarchy, structures of inequality, or profoundly unjust distributions of power/wealth. And also as a single ideology, it is merely false. Massively, quite obviously false; throughout the last five centuries, economic and political hierarchies have been massively mutually reinforcing. This is not to say that in some local moment the balance could really shift according to some left or right political program; it is meant to point out that the choice is extremely constructed and incoherent.