

The saving power of *Regime Change*¹

Economy withers the thriving blooms of ἄτη.²

Take the myth handed you from the Fathers and work to make it your own.³

There are two classes in society: the few and the many (*passim*); aristocracy and commons (154-155); the elite and the mass (155); the powerful few and ordinary people (160); the leadership class and ordinary people (188); the ruling class and those it governs, those who must be ruled (189, 211); the ascendant and the masses (211); the up and the down (167); the top and the bottom (230).

The “oldest political division” is just this cleft of society into two classes (xii); “the political division described by all ancient political philosophers as inescapable and fundamental: the few against the many, or *oligarchy vs. demos*.” (158) Of the two classes, ordinary people “are the most instinctively *conservative* element in a social and political order. They seek stability, predictability, and order within the context of a system that is broadly fair . . .” (93) “The common good is the sum of the needs that arise from the bottom up, and can be more or less supplied, encouraged, or fortified from the top down.” The common good is “always either served or undermined by a political order [i.e. the order consisting of the two classes]—there is no neutrality on the matter.” (230, 231)

This division is the source of the fundamental problem of politics: discord between the classes. The classical political thinkers, and Machiavelli too, “believed that the clash between these two main elements of society—the *grandi* and *popolo* (or, nobility and the plebes)—was inevitable and unavoidable.” (165)

The reconciliation crafted by political theorists in antiquity, reaffirmed by the schoolmen of the middle ages, and re-urged by de Tocqueville is the mixed constitutional order. “The genuinely ‘mixed constitution’ becomes a ‘blending’ of the various parts, no longer discernible as internally divided because it has achieved an internal harmony. That harmony comes about by aligning the sympathies and interests of the powerful few to the needs and interests of ordinary

¹ Patrick J. Deneen, *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future* (Sentinel 2023). Reference to page numbers in Deneen’s text is noted here in parentheses. All emphasis his unless otherwise indicated.

² Εὐνομία . . . ἀυαίνει δ’ ἄτης ἄνθεα φυόμενα. Text from Maria Noussia-Fantuzzi, *Solon the Athenian, the Poetic Fragments* (2010) 86 (fragment 3).

³ *Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, Erwirb es um es zu besitzen*. For variant English renderings see Hermann Barnstorff, “Translating and Interpreting Goethe’s *Faust*, I, 682/3,” 58 *Modern Language Notes* 288 (1943).

citizens to live in a stable and balanced order.” (160) For a successful mixed constitution “what is needed is for all of these forms [guild, ward, and congregation composed of working class people], and their dominant ethos of solidarity and subsidiarity [*Volksgemeinschaft?*], to guide and inspire the ruling elite as well.” (164) “The aspiration for ‘mixed constitution’ rests on an ideal of relative stability and balance, undergirded by a social order that is wary of upsetting the hard-won equilibrium of otherwise divisive forces in society.” (210)

The advent of progressivism—“the liberationist ethos of progressive liberalism” (201)—has destroyed the mixed constitution. “The demise of ‘mixed constitution’ theory resulted from the rise and eventual dominance of the philosophy of *progress*.” (210) “The aim of modern liberal civilization is individual expressivism and self-creation . . .” (53) “What had previously been considered as ‘guardrails’ came instead to be regarded as oppressions and unjust limitations upon individual liberty. As a result, the advance of liberal liberty has meant the gradual, and then accelerating, weakening, redefining, or overthrowing of many formative institutions and practices of human life, whether family, the community, a vast array of associations, schools and universities, architecture, the arts, and even the churches. In their place, a flattened world arose: the wide-open spaces of liberal freedom, a vast and widening playground for the project of self-creation;” such that “the remaining resistance to this civilizational project has been increasingly isolated to various Christian and other orthodox religious traditions . . .” (5, 53) Progressivist ideology has always “been hostile to the authoritative claims of the village.” (226)

The vice of progressivism is its underlying assumption “that there is no objective ‘Good’ to which humans can agree in any time and in any place, so the only defensible political form is one in which every individual pursues his, her or his idea of individual good . . .” (227) The consequent liberal indifferentism has “led to the evisceration of ***the institutions that are supposed to save us.***” (229, my emphasis)

For the project of restoring the mixed constitution “What is first needed is a ‘mixing’ that shatters the blindered consensus of the elite, a mixing that must begin with the raw assertion of political power by a new generation of political actors inspired by an ethos of common-good conservatism.” (164) “The aim should not be to achieve ‘balance’ or a form of ‘democratic pluralism’ that imagines a successful regime comprised of checks and balances [i.e. the failed mechanisms of Montesquieu and Madison], but rather, the creation of a new elite that is aligned with the values and needs of ordinary working people.” (164) “The power sought is not merely to *balance* the current elite, but to *replace* it. If *fear* is to have a salutary effect, those who seek to remain in the ruling class must be forced to adopt a fundamentally different ethos.” (164) *In terrorem* measures then are a component of Deneen’s recommended “Machiavellian means to Aristotelian ends.” (167) The new conservatism of this future elite “rejects

globalization both as an economic and cultural project. In its valorization of stability, continuity, cultural inheritance, and national heritage, it is a rejection of the broader modern commitment to a project of *progress* that seeks to displace, dismantle, and overcome all boundaries and limits to infinite choice and self-creation.” (94)

“Every political order rests on certain theological assumptions.” (228) In the common-good order “We are called [*sc.* by God] to erect imitations of the beauty that awaits us in another Kingdom.” (184) *Accord* A. C. Barrett: “fulfill the promise of being a different kind of lawyer. . . . always keep in mind that your legal career is but a means to an end, and . . . that end is building the kingdom of God.”⁴

The return of stability, predictability, order, equilibrium, harmony, *das Erbe*:—the hegemonic fantasm⁵ of common-good conservatism embodies, if that’s the word, the thought that, in Bernard Williams’s formulation, “somehow or other, in this life or the next, morally if not materially, as individuals or as an historical collective, we shall be safe; or, if not safe, at least reassured that at some level of the world’s constitution there is something to be discovered that makes ultimate sense of our concerns.”⁶ So Deneen claims, “The cure [for contemporary social ills] lies in the development of a new elite who are forthright in defending not merely the *freedom* to pursue the good—and who then shrug their shoulders when ordinary people drown amid a world without boundaries or life vests—but instead is dedicated to the promotion and construction of a society that assists ordinary fellow citizens in achieving lives of flourishing. . . . The day is late, but a lighted shelter can be discerned amid the gloom.” (232, 236) *Das Rettende als Bergung*.

Now let us recall Heidegger’s claim that “Human existence is a self-interpreting, self-articulating entity.”⁷ Evidently *Dasein*’s self-understanding is artefactual, consisting largely of fictions and myths.⁸ Deneen’s account has the same structure as—surprise—the myth of Christianity. There are three structural moments to this mythical narrative as Sheehan sets them out:

⁴ Amy Coney Barrett, “Diploma Ceremony Address” (2006):

https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=commencement_programs . So also, it follows, a legal career of constitutional adjudication is but a means to building the Kingdom.

⁵ “[Hegemonic fantasms] are all consolidating and consoling *archai*—their saving power lets us live, but this normative difference never says what it is that crushes life.” Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies* (tr. Reginald Lilly 2003) 22.

⁶ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (1993) 164.

⁷ *das Dasein selbst ist sichauslegendes, sichaussprechendes Seiendes*. Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*. Gesamtausgabe Band 20: 418: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=20.00&pg=418> .

⁸ “We have to distinguish between myths and fictions. Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. . . . If we forget that fictions are fictive we regress to myth . . .” Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* ([1967] 2000) 39, 41.

“(a) Insofar as it recounts paradisaal beginnings (sacred time), it is a *theology* of divine origins. (b) Insofar as it narrates the alienated in-between (sinful time), it is a *hamartiology* or doctrine of the sinful fall from these origins. (c) Insofar as it prophesies the apocalyptic end (redeemed time), it is a *soteriology* of return to the sacred origins.”⁹

“One of the most persistent fantasies,” Williams observes, “at least of the Western world, is that there was a time when things were both more beautiful and less fragmented . . . But it is always a fantasy, and no serious study of the ancient world should encourage us to go back to that world to search for a lost unity, in our social relations to one another, or, come to that, in our relations to Being.”¹⁰ Deneen’s account does not purport to be a serious study of politics or of social relations in the ancient or the medieval world. He invokes Aristotle, Cicero, Polybius, and Aquinas only to display them as forsaken relics of the lost unity that was the mixed constitution; whereas Madison’s mechanics of equipoise is waved around for the stink of decay clinging to it from the Fall, the Enlightenment.

The decadence that is modernity manifests as fragmentation, disintegration. Modern progressivism has “*encouraged* the division of society—many against the few, elite against the people—that the classical tradition had sought to reconcile.” (70) “[T]he alternative to a liberal order rests far less on systemic political arrangements, and more on a different way of understanding the human creature in relation to other humans and with the world and cosmos. Ideals and ends of integration must confront and defeat liberal *disintegration*.” (188) “More than ‘mixing-as-balancing,’ what is ultimately needful is ‘mixing-as-blending.’ For this to occur, a successor regime must eschew liberalism’s core value of *separation*, and instead seek a deeper and more fundamental and pervasive form of *integration*.” (187)

Schürmann contends that “the philosopher-civil servant of humanity declares the law by repressing the counter-law.”¹¹ Common good conservatives would promote their “different way of understanding the human creature” by repressing the counter-myth. Adrian Vermeule, for

⁹ Thomas Sheehan, “Myth and Violence: The fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist,” 48 *Social Research* 45, 69-70 (1981). Frye: “The entire Bible, viewed as a ‘divine comedy,’ is contained within a U-shaped story of this sort, one in which man . . . loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation. . . . But the accidents of a mythological tradition are not real mythology, the central line of which is re-created in every age by the poets.” (And by some political theorists) Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1981) 169, 38.

¹⁰ *Shame and Necessity* 166-167. Schürmann: “A favorite opinion among the theoreticians of modernity, who either condemn it or exalt it, is that at the beginning of normative thought everything held together as in the compact ball that Parmenides invokes. At the opposite end of history, the recognition of language games is to have ended by dispersing all referents having normative force. The disparity, into which Parmenides’ ball explodes, supposedly is the work of the moderns.” *Broken Hegemonies* 31.

¹¹ *Broken Hegemonies* 28.

instance, declares that under a common-good regime the proposition “that each individual may ‘define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life’ should be not only rejected but stamped as abominable, beyond the realm of the acceptable forever after;” because “there exists an objective common good that transcends human will” and “the common good is also a good for individuals, indeed their highest good,” “the highest individual interest.”¹²

Heidegger articulates the counter-myth in *Being and Time*. He claims that “Opened-upness [*Entschlossenheit*] constitutes the loyalty of existence to its own self [*zum eigenen Selbst*]. As openness which is ready for anxiety [*angstbereite*], this loyalty is at the same time a possible way of revering the sole authority which a free existing can have [*der einzigen Autorität, die ein freies Existieren haben kann*—of revering the retrievable possibilities of existence [*Erfurcht vor den wiederholbaren Möglichkeiten der Existenz*].”¹³ ‘The retrievable possibilities of existence’:—in a word, *Seinkönnen*; *Seinkönnen* is the sole authority a free existing can have. *Seinkönnen*’s call is ‘Become what you are;’ shake off the heteronomy of *das Man* and ‘choose your hero.’ Etc.

Kant’s version was ‘Think for yourself,’ and in the above passage Heidegger is very close to Kant’s version of the counter-myth, at least in Hilary Putnam’s interpretation of Kant. Putnam’s explication of Kant’s view (and by proximity Heidegger’s) brings out most clearly its contrast with common-good conservatism. According to the medievals, says Putnam,

“as Alasdair MacIntyre has reminded us, we possess a capacity to know the human ‘function’ or the human ‘essence’. We might also express their view by saying we know what Happiness (or Eudaemonia) is, where Happiness is understood in the ‘thick’ Aristotelian sense; that is, not just as a positive feeling, or a combination of gratifications, but as the ‘inclusive human end’. If this medieval view is right, and we know what the human essence is, what the human *ergon* is, what the inclusive human end is, and we are capable of knowing all this by using reason, then the problem of using rationality and free will, first to discover what one should do, and then to do it, is, in certain ways analogous to an engineering problem. . . . So we have to figure out what we are required to do given the human function, given the nature of Eudaemonia, perhaps to lead the contemplative life, or perhaps to live lives of civic virtue, etc. . . . or to be good Christians or Jews or Moslems, or whatever, and then, having determined this, we have to do it. And we can be given good or bad marks both for our success or

¹² Adrian Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism: Recovering the Classical Legal Tradition* (2022) 42 (quoting from the majority opinion in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992)), 70, 26, 167.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson 1962) 443 (translation modified); *Sein und Zeit* 391.

failure to figure out what the objective standard requires of us and for our success or failure in living up to it. But (*pace* Alasdair MacIntyre) Kant understands that this will no longer wash.”¹⁴

Replace ‘medievals’ with ‘common good conservatives’ and you see where this is going. If Kant is right, Putnam continues,

“our position is not at all the one Thomas Aquinas took us to be in. To be blunt, we are called upon to use reason and free will in a situation which is in important respects very dark. The situation is dark because reason does not give us such a thing as an inclusive human end which we should all seek (unless it be morality itself, and this is not an end that can determine the *content* of morality). . . . What Kant is saying, to put it positively, is that we have to think for ourselves without the kind of guide that Alasdair MacIntyre wants to restore for us, and that fact is itself the most valuable fact about our lives. *That* is the characteristic with respect to which we are all equals. We all share in the same predicament, and we all have the potential of thinking for ourselves with respect to the question of How to Live.”¹⁵

In this myth and counter-myth we have a textbook thema/antithema pair in Holton’s sense.¹⁶ In any case a difference. Which triggers Heidegger’s persistent question, ‘What is the dimension in which this difference is embedded?’

The suggestion, according to Harry Frankfurt, “that a person may be in some sense liberated through acceding to a power which is not subject to his immediate voluntary control is among the most ancient and most persistent themes of our moral and religious tradition. It must surely reflect some quite fundamental feature of our lives.”¹⁷ So *Befreiungslust* may name the dimension out of which arise two determinations, two opposing myths of liberation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Hilary Putnam, “Equality and Our Moral Image of the World” in *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures* (1987) 48. *Dubitandum*: “we all have the potential of, etc.” Williams: “Most advantages and admired characteristics are distributed in ways that, if not unjust, are at any rate not just, and some people are simply luckier than others, The [especially Kantian] ideal of morality is a value, moral value, that transcends luck. It must therefore lie beyond any empirical determination. It must lie not only in trying rather than succeeding, since success depends partly on luck, but in a kind of trying that lies beyond the level at which the capacity to try [“we *all* have the potential”] can itself be a matter of luck.” Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985) 195.

¹⁵ “Equality” 49, 50.

¹⁶ Gerald Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein* (rev. ed. 1988).

¹⁷ Harry G. Frankfurt, *The importance of what we care about: Philosophical essays* ([1988] 1998) 89.

¹⁸ “we need not resort to powers with a character other than that of Dasein. (*Being and Time* 323) The Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can never get that basis into its power . . . Thus ‘Being-a-basis’ means never to have power over one’s ownmost Being from the ground up. (330) Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way of escape, fabricated for the ‘overcoming’ of death; it is rather that understanding which follows the call of conscience and which frees for death the possibility of acquiring *power* over Dasein’s *existence* and of basically dispersing all

We can also think of the respective determinations of deliverance as two poles of a continuously varying ontological reaction norm (contour of the individual capacity for taking-as, for ex-sistence, *eigenen Seinkönnen*): one the extreme of safety-seeking (stability, predictability, order, equilibrium, harmony, shelter) and the other of risk-seeking (self-creation, Solon's flowers of folly, Schiller's *Spieltrieb*, Schürmann's 'singular,' the later Heidegger's *an-archie*¹⁹). Taking reaction norm as a continuous variable ranging between these two poles we can imagine a safe-to-risky scale of comportment. So Deneen's blending-project becomes one of regulating the mix of comportments within the American population. We can then drop the two-class construct and take the whole population as one mass of variant reaction norms; which conception allows a statistical-engineering approach to quality control, call it 'eunomics.'²⁰ Holland describes this kind of problem as

"a conundrum that has long bedeviled conventional problem-solving methods: striking a balance between exploration and exploitation. Once one finds a good strategy for playing chess, for example, it is possible to concentrate on exploiting that strategy. But this choice carries a hidden cost because exploitation makes the discovery of truly novel strategies unlikely. Improvements come from trying new, risky things. Because many of the risks fail, exploration involves a degradation of performance. Deciding to what degree the present should be mortgaged for the future is a classic problem for all systems that adapt and learn."²¹

So also March:

"A central concern of adaptive intelligence within a path-dependent, meandering history is the relation between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties. Exploration includes things captured by such

fugitive Self-concealments. (357) The ontological source of Dasein's Being is not 'inferior' to what springs from it, but towers above it in power from the outset. (383) If Fate is that powerless superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversities—the power of projecting oneself upon one's own Being-guilty, and of doing so reticently, with readiness for anxiety Dasein, by anticipation, lets death become powerful in itself, then, as free for death, Dasein understands itself in its own superior power, the power of its finite freedom, so that in this freedom, which 'is' only in its having chosen to make such a choice, it can take over the powerlessness of abandonment to its having done so, and can thus come to have a clear vision for the accidents of the Situation that has been disclosed. (436) Fate is that powerless superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversities—the power of projecting oneself upon one's own Being-guilty, and of doing so reticently, with readiness for anxiety." (436) My best guess: The *Endlichkeit/Schuldigsein/Seinkönnen* complex constitutes a power not subject to the individual's voluntary control; acceding to which power is in some sense liberating, empowering.

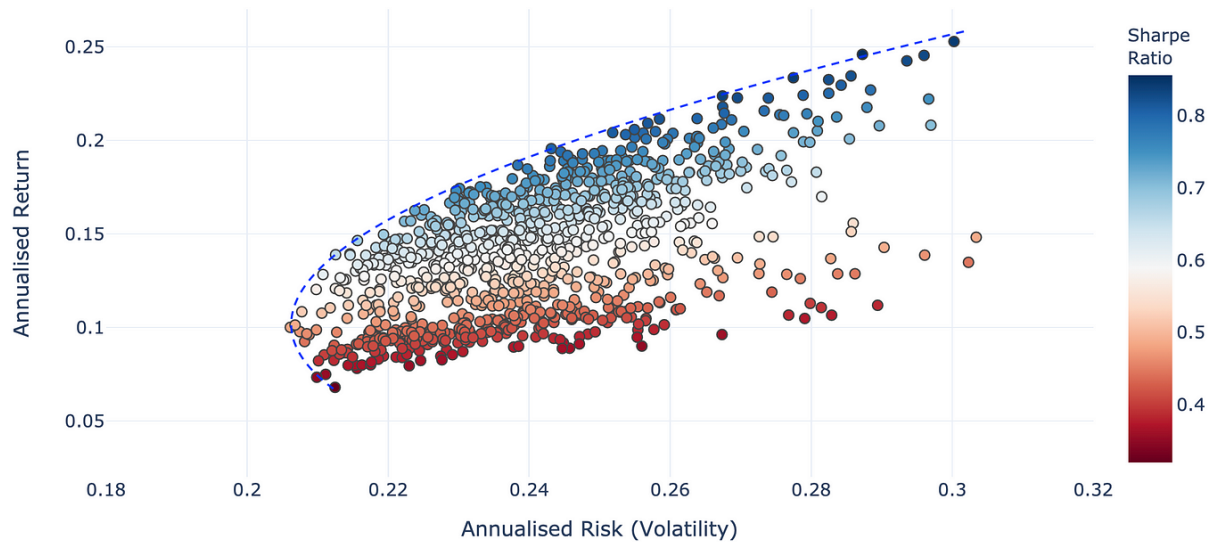
¹⁹ See Peter Trawny, *Irrnisfuge. Heideggers An-archie* (2014); in English as *Freedom to Fail: Heidegger's Anarchy* (tr. Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner 2015).

²⁰ Or 'the *Silo* plan' after the TV show.

²¹ John H. Holland, "Genetic Algorithms," 267 *Scientific American* 66, 69 (1992).

terms as search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation. Exploitation includes such things as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution.”²²

For one class of phenomena the problem of engineering a suitable mix was solved by Harry M. Markowitz.²³ The application of Markowitz (or Modern) Portfolio Theory results in this picture (public domain, from Google images for ‘efficient frontier’):



Each circle represents a portfolio of market assets weighted (mixed) to have the return-for-risk characteristic as plotted. Any portfolio below the efficient frontier (the dotted line) is inefficient in the sense that more return can be had for the same risk by moving vertically to a portfolio on the frontier, or the same return for less risk by moving horizontally to a portfolio on the frontier. The portfolio on the frontier at (0.213, 0.1) is the least-risk solution, or the minimax—it minimizes maximum risk and accepts the expected low return. The portfolio on the frontier at (0.284, 0.249) is the most-return solution, or the maximin—it maximizes minimum expected return and accepts the associated higher risk that expectation will fail. Between these two points all portfolios on the frontier are efficient choices for satisfying the spectrum of return/risk preferences.²⁴

²² James G. March, *A Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen* (1994) 237.

²³ <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/markowitz-lecture.pdf>.

²⁴ Cf. Heidegger’s claim that many mixed forms lie between the two poles of *Fürsorge*: “Everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude—that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates. It brings numerous mixed forms [*mannigfache Mischformen*] to maturity; to describe these and classify them would take us beyond the limits of this investigation.” *Being and Time* 159. *Sein und Zeit* 122.

Assembling and maintaining a portfolio of reaction norms weighted to achieve least risk—"human flourishing for ordinary people," "the most instinctively *conservative* element" who "seek stability, predictability, and order"—would no doubt present to the common-good elite empirical difficulties far beyond those of asset-management. Moreover, as noted above in Putnam's discussion of Kant, some thinkers have doubted the possibility of an optimal answer to the question of "how far the existence of a worthwhile life for some people [ordinary people living for the common good] involves the imposition of suffering on others [those living in derogation of the common good, a group to be specified and dealt with by the new elite in their channeling of the CG]." ²⁵ Isaiah Berlin, for example:

"The notion that there must exist final objective answers to normative questions, truths that can be demonstrated or directly intuited, that it is in principle possible to discover a harmonious pattern in which all values are reconciled, and that it is towards this unique goal that we must make; that we can uncover some single central principle that shapes this vision, a principle which, once found, will govern our lives—this ancient and almost universal belief, on which so much traditional thought and action and philosophical doctrine rests, seems to me invalid, and at times to have led (and still to lead) to absurdities in theory and barbarous consequences in practice." ²⁶

Barbarous consequences?

"One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals—justice or progress or the happiness of future generations, or the sacred mission or emancipation of a nation or race or class, or even liberty itself, which demands the sacrifice of individuals for the freedom of society. This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution." ²⁷

In other words this inveterate and near-universal belief has always been *ein bisschen nazimaßig*. So let's try another, in Putnam's phrase (he got it from Dieter Henrich), moral image of the world; this time keying off Deneen's nostalgia for lost boundaries and Sheehan's figure of "existential wiggle-room." ²⁸ The image that comes to mind is

²⁵ *Shame and Necessity* 125.

²⁶ Isaiah Berlin, Introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty* (1969) lvi.

²⁷ "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Four Essays on Liberty* 167.

²⁸ "Our essence is to be the existential wiggle-room required for existentiell acts of taking-as." Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (2015) 127.

“a common situation, first generalized by Stanley in his seminal article on reinterpreting Cope’s rule.²⁹ Suppose that the founding species of a clade originates near one boundary of its potential range (near the lower limit of potential size, or simply near shore for a marine *Bauplan*), and that the number of descendant species within the clade then increases steadily and substantially. Suppose that the modal class never changes—that is, the most common size or geographic position of later species remains at the value of the clade’s founding member. Yet the location of the founder at an edge of the potential range virtually guarantees that new species will be differentially added in the direction of greater available space—larger body sizes, or deeper water in our examples above. Stanley both recognized this principle as a generality and empirically documented the right-skewed nature of histograms for body size within clades.”³⁰

Insofar as Deneen sees progressivism as a (deplorable) trend we may be able to make sense of it as a change in variance. The variable of interest is again the ontological reaction norm. We can take as founder-population the sort of *gemütlich Gemeinschaft* imagined by Adam Smith:

“[M]an, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made. All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices.”³¹

For a glimpse at the individuals constituting this sort of population we read in Deneen that

“A recent republication of [Jean] Daniélou’s classic book [*Prayer as a Political Problem*] wisely chose for its cover the painting *The Angelus* by Jean-François Millet. The painting portrays what appear to be a husband and wife reciting the Angelus prayer (a prayer commemorating the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear the Messiah), likely around dusk at 6 p.m. They seem to be simple farmers, but at this moment all the farming implements and potatoes have been dropped and lie scattered at their feet as they pray together. Rising above the horizon in the distance we can discern a church tower, distant but presumably near enough that the couple can hear its bells. It is a picture of simple but profound piety, and it captures a culture that

²⁹ Steven M. Stanley, “An Explanation for Cope’s Rule,” 27 *Evolution* 1 (1973).

³⁰ Stephen Jay Gould, “Trends as Changes in Variance: A New Slant on Progress and Directionality in Evolution,” 62 *Journal of Paleontology* 319, 320 (1988). Expanded treatment in Gould, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin* (1999).

³¹ Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Part II.Sec. ii.Chap. iii.

points us beyond commerce and individual desire toward a wider and transcendent horizon.”³²

Such a founder-population is quite compact in its range of comportments (flocking, schooling, congregating), operating at the extreme of ‘consolidating and consoling’ in Schürmann’s phrase. Imagining now a histogram with frequency measured on the y-axis and exploratory propensity on the x-axis, this population will form a tall, narrow (small standard deviation) Gaussian distribution located close to the y-axis; that is, near the ‘left’ boundary of its potential range. Within the central range of the distribution there is little existential wiggle-room. Or to change the figure, it is a regime of low Reynolds number, with viscous forces (“authoritative claims of the village”) predominating over inertial forces.

Yet because ontological reaction norms vary between individuals,³³ some in the right tail of the distribution will take ‘bound by bands’ as not at all agreeable, and will wiggle over time down the generations³⁴ even further to the right toward “the wide-open spaces of liberal freedom, a vast and widening playground for the project of self-creation;” a regime of high Reynolds number into which existential wigglers may the more readily diffuse. Over time the distribution will change shape from symmetrical Gaussian to right-skewed with a long tail and concomitantly greater variance.

The central phenomenon of this schematic *Seinsgeschichte* is “an *increase in variance* . . . not an anagenetic march anywhere.”³⁵ In other words no “*project of progress*” is needed to start and keep the ball rolling, only “the asymmetrical distribution of possibilities around a starting point,” such that “the open end of the range provides more space for new items in general.”³⁶

³² *Regime Change* 233.

³³ On reaction norms see Richard Woltereck, *Weitere experimentelle Untersuchungen über Artveränderung, speziell über das Wesen quantitativer. Artunterschiede bei Daphniden* (1909); I. I. Schmalhausen, *Factors of Evolution: The Theory of Stabilizing Selection* ([1947] tr. Isadore Dordick 1949; reissue 1986); Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist* (1985) 114-121; Carl D. Schlichting and Massimo Pigliucci, *Phenotypic Evolution: A Reaction Norm Perspective* (1998); Theunis Piersma and Jan A. van Gils, *The Flexible Phenotype: A body-centered integration of ecology, physiology, and behaviour* (2011).

³⁴ “The total pattern of expression of a character is called the *reaction norm* (Woltereck 1909). Woltereck emphasized that what is actually inherited is the reaction norm.” G. de Jong, “Phenotypic Plasticity as a Product of Selection in a Variable Environment,” 145 *The American Naturalist* 493, 495 (1995). On the 7R variant of the DRD4 gene Sapolsky comments: “Finally there are the descendants of folks who made it all the way to the Amazon basin—the Ticuna, Surui, and Karitiana—with a roughly 70 percent incidence of 7R, the highest in the world. In other words, the descendants of people who, having made it to the future downtown Anchorage, decided to just keep going for another six thousand miles [over generations, of course]. A high incidence of 7R, associated with impulsivity and novelty seeking, is the legacy of humans who made the greatest migrations in human history.” Robert M. Sapolsky, *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst* (2017) 281. Sapolsky is **not** a genetic determinist. The fundamental theme of his book is ‘It’s complicated.’ *Id.* 674.

³⁵ “Trends as Changes in Variance” 320; italics in original.

³⁶ *Id.* 322, 320.

The problem for Deneen and common-good conservatives generally is ‘How ya gonna get ‘em back on the tater farm after they’ve seen Paree?’ And keep them there? The difference between common-good conservatives, on the one hand, and on the other the odd couple Heidegger and Darwin, is the difference between *eidos* and *panvaria*. “The career,” says Schürmann, “more than two millennia long, of normative differences proves that no speaker escapes the mythogenic condition of wanting to say what is.”³⁷ We can say with, I hope, minimal mythogeny that the central phenomenon of this career has been differences, i.e. variants. And so far no saving power has emerged to deliver us from variation everywhere all the time. I suppose that’s a good thing or a bad thing depending on your ontological reaction norm, your proper *Seinkönnen*.

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³⁷ *Broken Hegemonies* 33.