

Elon Musk, post-Liberalism and the Death of Values

by [Brian Patrick Bolger](#) (December 2024)



Heads in a Landscape (Francisco Goya, 1819-23)

One of the main contributions of liberal political theory of

the nineteenth century, based around a 'free trade' model, was that increases in economic cooperation could lead to peace between nations. Although Adam Smith is often linked to a benevolent view on world trade, he was also big on defence, however, noting that increased revenue means increased spending on armaments. Therefore;

the violence and injustice of rulers is an ancient evil for which/...the nature of human affairs can scarce admit of a remedy. [\[1\]](#)

Commentators state that we are at a crossroads of the 'third technological revolution' following on from the agricultural and the industrial. However, the fact is that the paradigm shift to this new mode still has hangovers from the industrial mode. Hence, we still encounter the economic problems of scarcity in fossil fuels, minerals. George Gilder had predicted that 'The key to paradigm shifts is the collapse of formerly pivotal scarcities, the rise of new forms of abundance, and the onset of new scarcities. Successful innovators use these new forms of abundance to redress the emergent shortages.' [\[2\]](#) In this sense therefore we have not left the previous paradigm. The reality is more scarcity, more hunger and more war. The new post-Liberalism will have a significant feature, however. It will be a world without values.

There may be an abundance of 'Information' yet it does not change fundamental ontology (the way of 'being'). It cannot surpass space and time. We are merely shuffling technologies around. The Guttenberg press for computers. There are various theories sought to 'explain' history; this is 'historicism' : i.e., economic (Marx) , ideas (Hegel) and great individuals (Spengler). Now we have a 'Technological' theory of history. It

has the same teleological assumptions as the first two; more technology is good; in fact, it is moving towards an ultimate end game which will benefit mankind. This idea of 'explaining' history has been brought to a close, however, following the myopic predictions of the post 1989 Hegelian historicists; Fukuyama's 'end of history' etc. Likewise, there is a human tendency to think that a new revolution, political or technological, will do away with evil and poverty. The 1990s were big on the end of history thesis; from history, politics to science—everything had been 'solved.' The current crises in Ukraine etc turns this thesis on its head. Yet again we have a new pretender—the 'Tech Reformation.' Elon Musk's technological steps presume the concept of 'Non Zero Sum.'

'Non Zero Sum' hypotheses dominated evolutionary theory. Robert Wright's 'Non Zero: The Logic of Human Destiny'[\[3\]](#)—natural selection is a progressive movement to more cooperation, which is beneficial. This, says Wright, leads to greater intelligence. Traditional 'zero sum' winners and losers are cast aside for a 'Non Zero Sum' thesis that its all a 'win win.' Increased trade, communication is an evolutionary method to Kant's 'Perpetual Peace.' War for Wright, is a means to technological evolution. Elon Musk believes the benefits of technology means a 'Non Zero Sum' destiny of 'the good.' There is also talk of some future global consciousness. However, this is the common fallacy of thinkers since Plato who have posited a type of 'morality' or 'value' at the base of their theory, whereas it is rather a type of Nietzschean blind will to power, competition and nihilism which pushes modernity. There have been increases in speed, technologies etc but these are not a teleological end we are progressing to. I say this now as the era of Keynesian war that we live in has shown the opposite of this prognosis. Steven Pinker sees evolution as merely replication:

global cooperation and moral progress will not increase

toward some theoretical maximum or Teilhardesque Omega Point, but will level off at a point where the pleasures resulting from global cooperation (having more stuff than you had before) are balanced by the pleasures resulting from non-cooperation (having more stuff than your neighbours, or the warm glow of ethnic chauvinism). [\[4\]](#)

The reality therefore is more akin to Einstein's view of technology as a 'Mousetrap' for mankind. We build into it unknowing that we are entombing ourselves in plastic and glass. So, we witness endless irreconcilable wars. Competition over finite resources, technological privacy and nationalism all point to the opposite of mutually beneficial trade. The globalised world meant the nation state became vulnerable to a plethora of intruders, extra national actors, technology. Global institutions such as the UN are powerless to implement policy in the new furnace. This combination of nation state paranoia and governing bodies inertia is a recipe for international disorder. China and Russia have realised the limits of 'nation state chauvinism'. That is, the prevailing attitudes since the nineteenth century when nationalism's renaissance was born, are in abeyance. Super blocs and satellite states are in vogue as authoritarian powers take control. China and Russia seek wider mutually beneficial alliances in BRICS for example and with North Korea. Liberal democratic structures, internally and externally become unstuck. The Empire strikes back and the 'Grossraum' becomes the de facto unit of global governance. The nation state hegemony is weakening.

The US, having had an era of dollar hegemony, now seeks to hegemonise the tech world. With Elon Musk and Trump understanding the political aspect of hegemonic technology. This means the breakdown of the Public-Private divide which was the epitome of modernity's liberal economic consensus. Technology helps to bridge the gaps between Public-Private.

The distinction has been swamped also by powerful economic interests eroding civil society. Technology and social media mean atomised individuals believing they have a participatory democratic voice. The real voice are the tech companies moulding opinion through algorithms. Liberalism's failure (as visible in the UK Starmer govt) is not understanding the new global tech spectre. Whilst Liberalism once sought the invisible hand of market and values, a free speakers corner for everyone, post -Liberalism negates both the Public and Private until they overlap. Now versions of post-Liberalism will abound. What liberalism was supposed to replace, Christian Morality, was exchanged for just another version of 'the good'- liberal rights, human rights rights etc. A one dimensional thinking which replaces, reinvents a type of iconoclastic good, without the religious symbolism, but which at heart was value ridden. Liberalism was itself never a coherent philosophy , once encompassing Adam Smith free markets, then a paternal cancel culture of righteousness. Post- Liberalism takes life away from the liberal pulpit and into a new world 'without values.' It is the consummation of Nietzsche's 'death of god' now becoming the 'death of values.'

The so called 'rules based international order' was a chimera. Liberalism, was never implemented abroad. It was a mythical campaign against another type of 'value,' be it Communism or Islam. But it was clothed in the apparel of the liberal good against evil. Yet they are still playing the same card; now its 'authoritarian' China and Russia. We are all 'authoritarian' now. Lets not fool ourselves. It was so ever since the suspension of the Bretton Woods agreement in 1972. The abolition of the convertibility of gold to dollars, set in motion a 'hegemony' for the US. The world had changed for a few dollars more. The fiat currency of the dollar had replaced gold. Global US dominion sat behind the free, open mantra coming out of Washington post 1989. What the world had become was a 'value free' economic system based on dollar exchange, not on liberal values. Post Liberalism inherits this mantle

and adds to it a technological value neutral sophistication.

What we are witnessing now, through geopolitics, is a battle for hegemony. The Empire of the Orient is fighting back. This is where Trump is now positioned and where Elon Musk attempts to consolidate the US tech supremacy. Behind the chimera of the Free Trade world was the spectre of NATO. The imposition of NATO post 1989 enabled the US to close off European aspirations about an independent Europe, or itself becoming a new form of Empire. The rhetoric from Washington was all about maintaining and expanding reach, ostensibly through economic globalisation. But the carrot was backed up by the stick. The stick was often powerful financial corporations, NGOs, which were used as an ally of military power. Global finance, the World Bank and IMF became 'partisan' in their lending. This fusion of Public-Private, at home and abroad, is key to understanding Post-Liberalism. The neo-Liberal post WW2 era moved to a Post-liberal era after 1989. The technological revolution is another form of supremacy, added on to the economic one. The 'closing' of the world is upon us.

Hence there is no one overarching vision of history. In post-Liberalism it is economic, the state and technology bustling for positions in a new value free world. Public-Private space has been closed. There is a symbiosis between state, economics and technology which plays out a 'Zero Sum' game, as post-a Liberalism respects power blocs and wealth. Liberalism pretended to offer values, as did globalisation. The Zero Sum game means winners and losers. There is now no philosophy, or 'the good'. The Leviathan of the state is upon us in this brave new world of technology. Evolution is not towards some Transhumanist paradise, the 'paragon of animals,' tweaked by tech firms. It is what it has always been—a 'war of all against all' in a wasteland of values.

[1]

ational-relations

[2] Gilder, G. *Over the Paradigm Cliff*. ASAP. 1997.

[3] Robert Wright. *'Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*. 2001


[4] Steven Pinker.

<https://slate.com/culture/2000/02/nonzero-2.html>

[Table of Contents](#)

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