“There is no man who does not want to be a despot when he has an erection,” says Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (134f.). He is, of course, quoting the Marquis de Sade, and his point in doing so is to suggest the ways in which the “biopolitical” “meaning of sexuality and physiological life itself” is anticipated in what he calls ‘sadomasochism.’” The sadist, he thinks, confronts the masochist as “bare life,” and it is the essence of his sadism that he can do with her (or him) anything he likes, unconstrained by law. Sade’s Chateau de Silling is, on this reading, an early incarnation of the Nazi lager, where “power confronts nothing but bare life,” where “human beings” were “so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime” (171). And the Nazis themselves are early examples of that “modern totalitarianism” made possible by the “worldwide deployment” of the state of exception (Agamben 2005: 87). Thus what Agamben characterizes as “the growing importance of sadomasochism in modernity” (1988: 134) is due to the way in which “the totalitarian character of the organization of life in Silling’s castle” has turned out to model the growing threat – from Auschwitz to Guantánamo – of totalitarianism itself. And the moment of sadomasochism is the moment in which the state of exception proves the rule, the moment of “emergency” declared by the sovereign in which the sovereign’s suspension of the laws (now, as in the Chateau de Silling, “anything is possible”) reveals the way in which the law is itself founded on a power that it cannot itself authorize. This is the moment in which the liberal state (and its characteristic appeal to the law) is revealed not as the alternative to totalitarianism but as its condition of possibility.

There is, however, another possible reading of what Agamben perhaps wrongly calls sadomasochism but of what he rightly calls its modernity. If the sadism in sadomasochism comes from Sade, the masochism comes from the Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose masterpiece, *Venus in Furs*, was published in 1869, almost a century after de Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom* was written (and almost a half century before it was published). In *Venus in Furs*, naturally, power matters as much as it does in Sade but it matters differently. And if in one sense this difference is just the reverse face of sadism – what the sadist wants is to be a despot, what the masochist wants is to be, as the hero of *Venus in Furs* declares, a “slave” – in another sense, it undoes rather than fulfills the complementarity of the despot-slave relation. For Sacher-Masoch’s masochist does not just want to be a slave, he wants to be a slave by “contract,” like the contract in which he agrees to become the “property” of his cruel mistress while she, “in exchange,” agrees to “wear fur
as often as practical and especially when she’s being cruel to her slave” (195). And like the several contracts Sacher-Masoch actually entered into with his mistresses. Masochism (as opposed to what Agamben calls sadomasochism) is thus linked from the start not only to compulsion but to choice, and the “cruel mistress” of choice has remained central to its libidinal economy, which identifies freedom with the right to sell not only one’s labor but also, if one chooses, one’s person and which insists on the pleasure associated with the exercise of that right. If, in other words, the appeal of sadism is identified with the deprivation of a right (slavery), the attraction of masochism is as the assertion of a right (volunteer slavery).

Furthermore, inasmuch as the right asserted is the right to contract, to buy and sell, it’s a right that is available only in a market economy and is as alien to the Chateau de Silling as it was to Auschwitz which, like all the death camps, as Agamben points out, sacrificed all “economic considerations” to the assertion of the “sovereign power” over “bare life” (1988: 141f.). The camps, in other words, may represent the utopia of the sadist but – unlinked to economic considerations, indeed “put into effect at all costs” when, as Agamben suggests, by any economic logic, the war effort should have made those costs unacceptable – they are the masochist’s nightmare. Or to put the point more positively, the economistic logic of masochism represents and has since their inception represented not just an alternative to but also a critique of the sadism of the camps. Thus, something like Agamben’s remark about the irrelevance of economic considerations to the lager has been canonical in discussions of the Nazis’ exterminationist racism at least since the trials at Nuremberg when Albert Speer eagerly agreed with the prosecutor, Mr. Justice Jackson, that the “problem of creating armaments to win the war for Germany was made much more difficult” by the “anti-Jewish campaign” being “waged” by Speer’s co-defendants. If the Jews “who were evacuated” to death camps “had been allowed to work for me,” Speer testified in 1946, “it would have been a considerable advantage” for the war effort.

But neither masochism nor neoliberalism can be understood merely as a commitment to the primacy of economic considerations. Rather, they both require a commitment to a specific economic form: for the masochist, to freedom of contract (the cruel mistress of Venus in Furs says that in the ancient world “liberty and slavery went hand in hand” but the idea that choice turns slavery into freedom is oriented more to the future of von Mises and Hayek than to the past); for the Ordo-Liberals (seeking in Foucault’s words, a “fondation légitimante” [2004: 85] for the state that would replace the will of the race-based volk), to the preservation of “economic liberty” and thus to the desirability of protecting competitive markets. So where for Speer the problem with racism was that it was bad for production, for the earliest neoliberals, the problem was that it was bad for capitalism. Thus the critique of racism appears in its decisive neoliberal form not in Speer but in Gary Becker’s The Economics of Discrimination (1957), which argues that racism is harmful not so much to workers as to capitalists. Why? Because the capitalist who will only employ, say, whites, arbitrarily limits the labor force available to him and thus
drives up his labor costs. “There is a remarkable agreement in the literature,” Becker wrote, “on the proposition that capitalists from the dominant group are the major beneficiaries of prejudice and discrimination in a competitive capitalistic economic system.” But, he goes on to say, “If W is considered to represent whites or some other dominant group, the fallacious nature of this proposition becomes clear, since discrimination harms W capitalists and benefits W workers (1971: 21-2). And if this conclusion seemed surprising when it was first announced, today, as the website of the Library of Economics and History puts it, the “idea that discrimination is costly to the discriminator is common sense among economists.”

Thus, for free market economists (for whom all relations are essentially economic), the history of the last half century has represented a repudiation of the camps (where no relations were economic) and, in particular, a repudiation of the racism in which both the inefficient and immoral refusal of the market is embodied. For Agamben, however, the threat of the camps and of racism’s power to, in Judith Butler’s words, make some lives “grievable” and others “ungrievable” (2009: 24) remains central. Indeed, as the state of emergency declared after September 11 ceases to be the “exception” and becomes “the rule” (2005: 22), the Patriot Act, Agamben says, produces “a legally unnameable and unclassifiable being” whose status “can only be compared,” he insists, “to the legal situation of the Jews in the Nazi lager” (4). And no more in Washington than in Weimar does this normalization of the state of exception – the sovereign’s suspension of the law in order to save the state – defend democracy. Rather it “leads inevitably to the establishment of a totalitarian regime” (15).

For Agamben, then, just as the sadism at the Chateau de Silling anticipates that of the camps, the “totalitarian character of the organization of life” (1988: 135) in the chateau prefigures “modern totalitarianism” (2). And although this account of modernity is in certain respects very different from that of the neoliberals – what they see as the alternative to totalitarianism he sees as the gateway to totalitarianism – it is in certain respects very similar – above all, of course, in its sense that the great danger is precisely the danger of the totalitarian. Hence Agamben’s and Butler’s fear of the camps is characteristically shared by people with theoretical positions very different from theirs and with very different politics as well. For example, where Agamben criticizes George W. Bush for paving the way to totalitarianism, the American writer Paul Berman (in his book Terror and Liberalism) praises Bush for responding “to 9/11” by recognizing that the attack on the World Trade Center was “not just about terror” but was more fundamentally the expression of “a new kind of totalitarianism” (191). From this perspective, the war in Iraq counts as a continuation of the struggle against the fascists, the Nazis and the Communists, “totalitarian movements, each and all” (xiii), as Berman puts it. And for Berman (as for Agamben), Hitler and the death camps are the gold standard of totalitarianism. Hence the threat of a new Hitler looms as large in Terror and Liberalism as in State of Exception, with the difference, of course,
that where in Berman (as in Bush’s own rhetoric), it was Saddam Hussein who posed that threat, in Agamben, it was Bush himself. That’s the point of identifying Guantánamo with Auschwitz.

Of course, during the Bush years, quarrels and comparisons like this were frequent. Joseph O’Neill’s recent and widely praised (not just by professional literary critics but by President Obama, who, in an interview with the New York Times, called it “fascinating ... A wonderful book”) Netherland captures their tone perfectly in an argument between a couple living in Manhattan whose marriage falls apart in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the beginning of the war in Iraq. Saddam is “horrible,” the wife acknowledges, but the U.S. “has no moral or legal authority” to wage war against him; after all, we do not think that just because Stalin was a “monster” “we should have supported Hitler in his invasion of Russia” (97). To which the husband responds, “You’re saying Bush is like Hitler.” To which the wife replies, “I’m not comparing Bush to Hitler ... Hitler is just an extreme example” (98). There obviously can be no winner in debates like this and, in fact, their real function has nothing to do with producing a winner. That is, the relevant question is not whether Saddam or Bush is more like Hitler; it’s not about where the true totalitarian threat is coming from; it is instead about what it means to insist – with Agamben and Butler and Bush and Berman – that totalitarianism is the threat.

And in Netherland, the identities – or rather, the job descriptions – of the arguers begin to suggest an answer to this question. The supposedly “conservative” husband, Hans, is an equities analyst, specializing in “large cap oil and gas stocks,” originally from Holland but now working for a bank in New York; the supposedly liberal wife is a “corporate litigator,” “radicalized,” hitherto, “only in the service of her client,” and “with not the slightest bone to pick about money and its doings” (96). When they begin a trial separation (in December 2001), they put the million dollars they make from the sale of their Tribeca loft into “government bonds, a cautious spread of stocks,” and, “operating on a tip” from an economist they trust, into gold. But they put most of their money – another two million dollars – into a joint savings account (“the market was making me nervous,” the narrator husband says) and leave a couple of hundred thousand in “various checking accounts” (30-1). The price of gold went from $280 an ounce in January 2002 to $350 an ounce in December of the same year, so they were right to trust that economist. And the husband was right to be nervous about the market; although at the end of 2001, the Dow recovered briefly from its post-9/11-crash, it was not until 2003 that it began seriously to rise and it was not until 2006 that it exceeded its Clinton-era high of 11,723. And it was not until October 2007 (about six months before Netherland was published) that it reached its all-time high, 14,164. So our equities analyst and corporate litigator did exactly the right thing during the down years and, whatever they ended up feeling about the relative merits of Bush and Saddam, they ended up feeling it in a much higher tax bracket.
Or at least they would have if, at the end of the Bush years, there had still been such a thing as a very high tax bracket.

But, as you can see, income tax rates have been in a general decline since the end of the 1970s, and tax cuts are, of course, only one aspect of the neoliberal agenda that has dominated American politics, in Democratic administrations as in Republican ones, over the last fifty years. Indeed, *Netherland*, as much as it’s a novel of September 11, is also a novel of the economic policies – the commitment to free trade and to the mobility of both capital and labor – that helped make the World Trade Center a target for the attacks in the first place. The mobility of capital part is, of course, suggested by its hero’s job but the mobility of labor – the obsession with immigration – is actually much more central to the novel, insisted upon both by its parallels with and differences from the novel on which it’s modeled, *The Great Gatsby*. Thus in *Netherland*, *Gatsby*’s Dutch sailors become the Dutch equities analyst and the ethnically and professionally vague Jimmy Gatz becomes a Trinidadian entrepreneur with Indian roots, Chuck Ramkisson. And Fitzgerald’s famous list of Gatsby’s guests – “From East Egg, then, came the Chester Beckers” and “from farther out on the Island the Stonewall Jackson Abrams of Georgia” and “from West Egg came the Poles and ... Don C. Schwartz ...” – gets reincarnated in a description of the people Chuck talks to on the phone: “From Bangalore, there came calls from a man named Nandavanam ... From Hillside, Queens, there was George el Faizy, ... and, from a private jet to-ing and fro-ing between Los Angeles and London, there was Faruk Patel ...” (O’Neill 161).

But where *Gatsby* was, to say the least, nervous about the multi-racial American that the immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had produced – the descendants of the Dutch sailors were not expected to be happy about the arrival of the “Stonewall Jackson Abrams of Georgia” on what was once their Long Island – *Netherland* is, also to say the least, enthusiastically celebratory: its Dutch narrator is never happier than
when he’s finding himself “the only white man” in the room or, more frequently, on the cricket field. (Indeed, the repeated appearances of ethnic catalogues like the one cited above are Netherland’s outstanding formal feature.) A straightforward way to put the difference between the two texts would be just to note that Gatsby was published in 1925, in the wake of the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 – the so-called National Origins Act, which if it closed the barn door a little too late on all the Abrams’s and Schwartzes who had already arrived, could at least (basing its quotas on the 1890 census, when many of them had not yet shown up) keep their numbers from growing, and could guarantee that there would be no dark-skinned people of Asian origin looking to play cricket. The immigration quota from India in 1925 was one hundred. In 2002, by contrast (when most of Netherland takes place), there were 66,644 Indian immigrants.

Which is just to say that Netherland is set not in what O’Neill describes as the “autonomous” America of Gatsby – the America the Immigration Act of 1924 sought to preserve – but in what he calls the “post-nationalist” America produced, he says, by “9/11 and the globalization of the economy.” And if we take the globalization of the economy part seriously, we can see that it dates back long before 2001 to the Immigration Act of 1965, which got rid of the racial quotas established in 1924 and (in line with the economic critique of discrimination launched by neoliberals like Becker) explicitly repudiated race as a criterion for admission. The new criteria were primarily economic and they produced a massive increase in immigration, especially from previously restricted areas. In 1970, for example, there were only 51,000 foreign born Americans from India; by 2006, that number was 1.5 million.

Thus Netherland’s version of the American dream – featuring “black and brown and... a few white faces” is no longer as white as Gatsby’s (“‘We’re all white here,’” [137], you will remember Jordan Baker reminding Tom Buchanan). And, perhaps more to the point, it’s no longer as American either. For one thing, other countries have had the dream too. In the last half century, immigration world-wide has almost doubled (Shah 2008). More crucially, it’s not quite as American because it’s not essentially national. Indeed, if what you want is to maximize the efficiency of labor markets, the insistence on the integrity of the nation and even of the state looks and is essentially reactionary. That’s why the current resistance to immigration in the U.S., even if it has economic motives, can only appeal either to a kind of shame-faced racism or to legality, which is to say, the state itself. We have nothing against immigration, the anti-immigration and anti-neoliberal argument goes, we just believe everyone should follow the law. And, of course, neoliberal purists reject this, arguing that illegal immigration is actually preferable to legal immigration because it “responds to market forces in ways that legal immigration does not” (Hanson 5).

In fact, insofar as neoliberal economists express reservations about open immigration, it’s only in the terms derived from Milton Friedman’s famous remark that “It’s just obvious you cannot have free immigration and a welfare state” (Brimelow 1997). His point, of course, was that poor immigrants
are encouraged to come for the welfare rather than the jobs. But inasmuch as the target of the neoliberal critique is really the welfare state, the goal was always to maximize immigration and minimize welfare. And, in fact, since the Clinton welfare reform of the 90s, that’s exactly what has happened. Thus the neoliberal left – its arguments couched in the terms of anti-racism and the benefit to the economy – and the neoliberal right – its arguments couched in terms of respect for individual choice and the benefit to the economy – both fight against closing the borders. And the nativist fantasy of ending immigration serves only as a symptom of the economic reality – the increasing gap between the rich and the poor – that the economic system embodied by the immigrant has produced.

For if increased immigration is a technology for fulfilling the commitment to competitive markets, increased income inequality is a characteristic outcome of that commitment. In 1982, the top 20% of the American population made about 51% of all the money earned in the U.S.; in 2007, the top 20% made a little over 61% of all the money earned. But this kind of inequality represents an opportunity not a problem for a novel like *Netherland*, which enthusiastically registers the cultural differences neoliberalism makes available – that’s the meaning of all its ethnic catalogs; that’s the meaning, more generally, of the celebrations of diversity that characterize almost every institution of the American upper class – while at the same time it redescribes neoliberalism’s inequalities as opportunities for friendship – not just between the one white and the many black and brown faces but between the multi-millionaire equities analyst and the fellow cricketer near the very bottom of the service sector. Thus the “awkwardness” (O’Neill 173) “beneath the slapping of the hands” that Hans experiences when he runs into one of his team-mates working as a gas station attendant on 14th Street is attributed to the fact that they all respected each other’s privacy off the field not to the fact that one of them is a multimillionaire and the other is behind a cash register. What the equities analyst wants above all from his black, brown and broke teammates is their “respect,” and although he wonders why it “matter[s] so much to him,” anyone who’s read Richard Sennett’s encomiastic *Respect in a World of Inequality* or the political theorist William Connolly’s paean to what he calls “deep pluralism” and to transmuting “cultural antagonisms” into “debates marked by agonistic respect between the partisans” (Connolly 47) could give him the answer.

For Connolly, deep pluralism is not just a political but also an epistemological position – an effort to avoid both relativism and universalism – and what’s supposed to be distinctive about it – what makes it deep – is its critique of the idea that the significant differences between, say, religions, should be understood as differences in what he calls “abstract beliefs.” Beliefs should instead be understood as “embedded” – as inseparable “from disciplinary practices, cultural routines, and the education of sensory experience” (58). They should, in effect, be understood as aspects of identity – “faith,” he says, goes along with “sexuality, language, cooking habits and temperament” – and we should thus cultivate an “appreciation of diversity” (168) that goes be-
yond the liberal tolerance of what other people think (their “abstract beliefs”) to a recognition that “thinking mixes affect, feeling, memories and ideas into a qualitative ensemble indissoluble into separate ‘parts’” (165). And once we’ve recognized that, we can commit ourselves to an “ethos of pluralism” that respects not just different ways of believing but different ways of being.

As an epistemology, the weakness of this position is perhaps obvious. It may well be the case that our ideas are inextricably bound up with, say, our affective responses, but they are nonetheless entirely separable with respect to their epistemic claims. My language, my sexuality and my cooking habits make no claim to truth – my ideas do. And when we are confronted not with other people’s sexual desires and food preferences but with their claims to truth, claims that run counter to ours, Connolly’s deep pluralist epistemology just turns into the usual liberal psychology: a “call to tolerance” (33), an exhortation not to have too much “self-confidence” (43). But this utterly anodyne set of recommendations about how to manage difference begins to look both a little more pointed and a little more problematic when the difference in question is economic. The problem is that it’s hard to see (at least from the left) why economic differences – which are just another name for inequality – should call for tolerance rather than intolerance. In this sense, then, there are, as Connolly himself puts it, “tensions between deep pluralism and the reduction of economic inequality.” But, Connolly argues, the tension between pluralism and economic egalitarianism is less important than the connection between them, a connection that is both “definitional” – “an ethos of pluralism,” he says, “extends the issue of economic equality from economic culture to other cultural identities” – and “causal,” since “to make progress in either reducing economic inequality or extending diversity is to improve the prospects for progress on the other front as well.” Thus diversity is “a condition of possibility” (8) for economic equality, and vice versa.

The second of these claims – for the “causal” connection between cultural and economic equality – is remarkable just because it is so obviously contradicted by the evidence of the last thirty years, a period during which, as we have already noted, the progress made in “extending diversity” has not only not been accompanied by progress in reducing economic inequality but, just the opposite, has been accompanied by an extraordinary increase in economic inequality. And this is not only a fact about the actual numbers, it’s also a fact about the theory that has helped to produce those numbers. Pluralists, Connolly thinks, “won’t willingly ... allow” “the gap between the real cost of living in a system and the income-earning ability of most citizens to become large” or “the income hierarchy to become too extreme” (43). But why shouldn’t they? There’s nothing in the commitment to diversity that requires more equal incomes and, in fact, the most characteristic forms of that commitment in American life are explicitly anti-egalitarian. It’s possible, for example, for a feminist to want equality between men and women and also between management and labor but, as the example of everyone who’s ever complained about the glass ceiling shows, it is not necessary or even likely. After all, it’s one thing to worry about the fact that the average CEO
now makes in one day what the average worker makes in one year; it’s a completely different thing to worry about the fact that there are not enough women CEOs.

But pluralism’s most striking contribution to neoliberalism is not its misrecognition of the causal link between diversity and equality; it is instead what Connolly calls its “definitional” extension of “the issue of economic equality from economic culture to other cultural identities” (8). For here, in the notion that one belongs to an “economic culture,” we see an expansion in the range of cultural identity and, in the suggestion that one’s economic status is an identity like “other cultural identities,” we see a transformation in the very idea of economic status. Once, in other words, that people from different classes are regarded as people with different cultural identities, recognition rather than redistribution (to use Nancy Fraser’s terms) becomes what it in fact has been – the lodestone of justice in neoliberalism. Indeed, what Fraser has thought of as the necessity to balance recognition and redistribution (to do both) is rendered both unnecessary and undesirable in the complete subsumption of the one by the other. For if we start thinking of ourselves as having economic identities and if we remember that the point of pluralism is to encourage a diversity of identities, a more equal distribution of wealth (everybody having roughly the same) represents a problem not a solution. Which is just to say, if we take the pluralist commitment to diversity seriously and if we take the pluralist account of economic status as economic identity seriously, pluralism requires us to have the same relation to other classes that we have to other cultures, the same relation to differences in wealth that we have to differences in belief.

And, if this seems far-fetched, we have only to remember the popularity of the neologism “classism”; every time someone worries about classism, he or she is worrying about the failure to respect the cultural identity of poor people. Or, to return to Netherland, we have only to remember the narrator’s asking himself “why the respect” of immigrant laborers (like the cashier at the gas station) matters “so much” to him. One answer might be that when we focus on identity rather than economic status (when we choose culture over class) we can recognize that money or the lack of it is not what matters. Another answer, more profoundly pluralist, would be that if we think of economic status as an element of identity (not choosing class over culture but turning class into culture), then poverty and wealth become equally respectable. Either way, redistribution is rendered irrelevant; either way, the equities analyst wants the respect of the gas station cashier so we can imagine that what the gas station cashier wants is the respect – as opposed to the money – of the equities analyst.

In Netherland, the moment in which Hans begins to feel he’s earned that respect is on an “impossible grass field in America,” a moment in which he describes himself as feeling “naturalized” (176). From the standpoint of the novel, this is a kind of nostalgia. The point of its identification of September 11 with the globalization of the economy is to identify it also as the moment in which the national became the “post-national.” America now is just,
O’Neill says, “a geographic spot like any other for the global economy.” And as the American Dream turns into the neoliberal dream, the fear of (or the hopes for) American exceptionalism – like worries about the state of exception as such – can now also be seen as a kind of nostalgia – like the battle over whether it’s Bush or Saddam who’s most like Hitler. The deepening inequalities of neoliberal life have not been produced by new Hitlers and they are enabled rather than opposed by the feelings of fellowship between white equities analysts and black gas station attendants, and especially by the pluralist redescription of class conflict as “agonistic respect.”

Indeed, Netherland gives us a brilliant emblem of the transformations made available by the ambition to universalize the market in its brief image of the one sexual encounter Hans has in the months after the break-up of his marriage. The event has nothing to do with the plot, and can hardly be said to illuminate much about Hans’s character. Indeed, it’s its sheer formal gratuitousness that is part of its interest, and that highlights the way in which it’s made thematically relevant (indeed, almost indispensable) by the fact that the woman Hans sleeps with is of “Anglo-Jamaican” descent “with pale brown skin” (107) and that what she wants is for him to spank her with his belt. Racism and sadism have no place in a world imagined under the sign of the market but anti-racism and masochism are absolutely central to it. Thus, while the image of a “pale white” man whipping a “pale black” (115) woman might plausibly have come out of an earlier moment in the history of the neoliberal novel (say, the moment of Toni Morrison’s Beloved), here, as in Venus in Furs, that image is transformed by the fact that the slave is a volunteer, and the sex entirely conforms to the consensual erotic logic of anti-racist neoliberalism. Indeed, in a kind of echo of the “word of honor” invoked in Sacher-Masoch’s contracts, Danielle appeals to the fact that Hans is a “gentleman” and therefore she can “trust” him. Contracts outside the law cannot be enforced by the state but, like illegal as opposed to legal immigration, they are that much more responsive to the desires of the market.

Of course, this sexual encounter would be even more gratifying if instead of being a “visual creative” in an advertising agency, Danielle were, say, a cleaning lady in Hans’s office. That would make the assertion of her agency (the primacy of her desire) a perfect storm of race, gender and class, more than a match even for the gas station attendant’s homosocial tribute to choice (which is itself, like all economic immigration, a tribute to the market). Despite this shortcoming, however, it’s fair to say that in the sexual adventure of the equities analyst, Netherland produces a more plausible image both of the self-understanding of neoliberalism and of the reality that self-understanding misunderstands than does Agamben’s fear of liberalism as the way to totalitarianism or Berman’s allegiance to it as the alternative to (Muslim) totalitarianism. And if, in the end, the novel’s own allegiance is to a slightly less earnest version of Connolly’s pluralism, at least, the millionaire’s belt puts some of the agony back into agonistic respect.
More to our point, however, taken together, these texts provide us with an inventory of the technologies deployed today in defense of the neoliberal dream: the critique of discrimination, the critique of the exception, the embrace of immigration, the appeal to a utopia of the plural and to a dystopia of the total. Some of these strategies are, of course, more attractive than others, and some (e.g. the critique of discrimination) represent a positive good while others (the appeal to pluralism) do not. But my goal has not been to assign them grades. It has been instead to suggest the ways in which the currently dominant modes of critical writing constitute what amounts to a left neoliberalism, sometimes as an extension of the ideals demanded by competitive markets, sometimes as an apocalyptic invocation of a world – the lager of Nazism, the umma of Islam – in which there are imagined to be no markets (or, at least, no capitalism) at all. The events of September 11 have only intensified this process; even Connolly begins the first chapter of his *Pluralism* with an account of where he was when the planes hit, and within a paragraph he’s talking about holocausts and within a page about Guantánamo and “bare life.” But these concepts do not represent an alternative to the discourse of neoliberalism, they are its building blocks. They are the terms in which intellectuals today imagine that we are producing a critique of neoliberal theory while in fact we are reciting its catechism.
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