

Article

Neoliberalism, Postsecularism, and the End of Religion

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Abstract: This article examines the situation of religion in the context of contemporary neoliberalism. I argue that neoliberalism is a symptom of a fatal crisis in modern liberalism, which is brought about by geophysical planetary limits to growth. The concept of religion is a modern one that emerges from a secularized Christianity, and as liberalism declines, religion as a category is also declining. This phenomenon can be analyzed in terms of what I call postsecularism. Postsecularism indicates the breakdown of the modern divide within liberalism that assigns religion to a private sphere of belief that is separate from political-civil reason. Postsecularism attends to the ways that what we call religion exceed their modern frames and become deprivatized and politicized. In this process, spiritual-political forces are liberated from the modern framework of religion. Recent movements called New Materialism and New Animism can be seen as attempts to conceptualize this development. Finally, as an example, I turn to a recent book by Elizabeth Povinelli called *Geontopower* to show how religion fails to capture a profound entanglement of spiritual and political phenomena in neoliberalism, or what she calls late liberalism.

Keywords: neoliberalism; postsecularisms; modern religion; liberalism; new animism; new materialism; Elizabeth Povinelli



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1. Introduction

In this article, I discuss neoliberalism as a crisis of modern liberalism, as well as religion. In classical etymological terms, religion derives from the Latin *religio*, and the verb *religare*, which means “to bind back” or “rebind.” This definition is often cited today, but religion in practice is more of a modern concept derived from Christianity that serves to discipline spiritual forces and subjugate them to modern secular reason (see Asad 2003). For this reason, religion and secular are not opposites; they work together in European liberal modernity. Modern liberalism begins to break down at the end of the 20th century in light of real limits to resource extraction and economic growth in global terms. Neoliberalism, beginning in the 1970s, involves the financialization of capitalism in a desperate attempt to maintain profitability. Neoliberalism also indicates a breaking down of both modern secularism and religion, which is why it coincides with a trend of postsecularism. The end of modern religion serves to free up some of the political-spiritual energies that were reduced under modernity, and this return is sometimes theorized in terms of new animism, new materialism, and agential realism. As a way to tie some of these strands together, I consider Elizabeth Povinelli’s concept of geontopower as a way to think through much of what is happening in what she calls late liberalism.

Neoliberalism instantiates the death throes of liberalism. Religion and secular are not simply opposed in liberal modernity; they work together to legitimate a certain form of European power. As liberalism breaks down, so does modern religion, and with it the framework of secularism within which it operated. With the dismantling of modern liberalism and the demise of modern religion, new political-spiritual forces are unleashed, a phenomenon for which scholars who are variously named New Materialists, New Animists or New Agentialists are offering conceptual means of articulation. Of course, these animisms are not exactly new, because they are in many ways a return to non-modern

ways of comprehending the world. Yet, set within what we call the Anthropocene in the twilight of liberal modernity they constitute new formations and offer new possibilities for the future, if there is such a thing.

2. What Is (Neo)Liberalism?

Neoliberalism is derivative of modern liberalism, where liberalism names the conflation of a certain liberty of privileged white property-owning males with the liberty of financial markets. What characterizes the transition to neoliberalism is the separation of two phenomena that were previously linked: on the one hand, a nostalgia for classical liberalism combined with the effort to extend such liberties to previously excluded minorities comes to the fore as a moderately leftist political liberalism. On the other hand, economic capitalism becomes progressively unmoored from any social principles and financial profit becomes an end in itself, mainly via the use of debt as a weapon.

Neoliberalism designates the economic transformation of liberal capitalism that takes place in the 1970s. According to [Harvey \(2014\)](#), neoliberalism brings out a situation of multiple contradictions that, taken together, point towards the end of capitalism itself. It's not that capitalism will necessarily self-destruct, but these contradictions, taken together, open the door for an "anti-capitalist political praxis" that can transform our society into a more humanistic one ([Harvey 2014](#), p. 294). Harvey points to the centralization of monopolies and oligopolies of capitalism during the emergence of neoliberalism. He says that "while the neoliberal turn that began in the 1970s opened up new forms of international competition through globalization, the current situation of many sectors of the economy . . . suggests strong tendencies towards oligopoly if not monopoly" ([Harvey 2014](#), p. 136). In many ways, flows of money and capital exceed and transcend nation-state borders, as a result of which these nation-states then attempt to exert ever-greater control over the flow of people.

Another analysis of what is called neoliberalism comes from Christian Marrazi, who indicates the overwhelming financialization of the capitalist economy from the 1970s onwards. This financialization of the global economy "has been a process of recovering capital's profitability after the period of profit margin decreases, an apparatus to enhance capital's profitability *outside* immediately productive processes" ([Marrazi 2011](#), p. 31). The traditional productive processes of capitalism become less and less profitable, forcing firms to transfer their resources more and more into financial investments as a way to recoup these declining levels of profit. In a compatible explanation, Harvey explains that "the liberation of money creation from its money-commodity restraints in the early 1970s happened at a time when profitability prospects in productive activities were particularly low and when capital began to experience the impact of an inflexion point in the trajectory of exponential growth ([Harvey 2014](#), p. 240)." So Harvey's analysis converges with that of Marrazi, as both see a declining profit in traditional productive economic processes, and the need to shift surplus monies to instruments of finance and debt to make up for this loss of profitability. This lending of money and creation of debt generates the centralization that Harvey describes, that tends towards the creation of oligopolies and monopolies of capital. These processes of financialization and debt have occurred both within the US and other first-world countries, as well as between the US and other third-world nations, mediated by global economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

What does the economic phenomenon of neoliberalism have to do with religion? I argue that neoliberalism indicates a profound and terminal crisis in liberalism itself, because liberalism is premised on profit and growth, and as growth of wealth becomes more difficult and expensive, more and more desperate measures are taken to sustain it. As liberalism strains against real geophysical limits to growth, religion in turn unravels, because religion is a social form that developed along with liberalism in the modern world. Modern religion is based upon the split between a private realm that can be deemed religious because it is the arena where faith and belief occurs, and a more public space that is characterized as *secular*. That is, the secular and the religious emerge at the same time and as part of

the same process during the formation of the modern nation-state, the development of joint stock markets, and the colonization of most of the world by Europeans. This is what liberalism means—the emergence of capitalist markets that represent the hidden hand of what was formerly called God or providence. The ‘free’ market accords with the freedom of certain privileged (white European) peoples in what comes to be called representative democracy. Liberalism names both a political philosophy and an economic policy, what used to be called a political economy. Here, religion plays the role of privatizing spiritual forces and removing them from the field of social-political economy, thus neutralizing them. At the same time, this very foundation of liberalism is a secularized Protestant Christianity that hides itself as such, as Talal Asad shows in his work.

The entwinement of the religious and the secular in the formation of liberal European modernity means that religion both names and domesticates certain political-spiritual energies that could be seen as disruptive to modern colonialism and capitalism. In *Formations of the Secular* (Asad 2003). Asad argues that the category of ‘the sacred’ emerges in the wake of things, practices, and words that functioned in non-European societies in ways that were then named by Europeans as ‘fetish’ or ‘taboo.’ These concepts contribute to “the secular concept of ‘superstition’ (a meaningless survival) in the framework of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evolutionary thought” (Asad 2003, p. 35). Western European reason then *profanes* these bad and wrong superstitions and delivers people from their delusive errors. “By successfully unmasking pretended power (profaning it),” Asad declares, “universal reason displays its own status as legitimate power” (Asad 2003, pp. 35–36).

Religion is defined in the terms of universal (European) reason, because true religion (which was originally Christianity and, in some respects, continues to be quintessentially Christian) recognizes the legitimate power of European rationality and its concordant liberalism. Asad concludes that what we call religion “was always involved in the world of power,” but it was involved in very specific ways and for specific reasons, to uphold and legitimate certain forms of power. Here, “the concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion” because they are not opposites; rather they are two sides of the same modern capitalist coin (Asad 2003, p. 200). Religion is deployed to colonize non-European powers and restrict them, along with certain European counterforces, within a contained, neutralized private space, free from secular capitalist reason. That is, what are usually called indigenous or non-Western religions are evaluated in relation to the Western concept of religion and the political-spiritual practices that threaten European colonial capitalism are dismissed as savage or superstitious. This boundary between the secular and the religious was always fluid and unstable, but it functions to sustain liberal modernity up until the point that it breaks down.

3. The Postsecularist Turn

Postsecularism then becomes a corollary to neoliberalism because liberalism is what promotes and sustains secularism. Secularism functions as an ideology of European modernity that relegates religion to a private sphere while reserving the public realm for a non-religious civic discourse. An absolute secularism is impossible in practice, but it was imagined that religion could be restricted to private belief so that civic and political discourse could be deemed rational and universal. In John Locke’s *A Letter on Toleration* (Locke 1968), we can see the paradigmatic example of this separation. Locke says, “I regard it as necessary above all to distinguish between the business of civil government and that of religion, and to mark the true bounds between the church and the commonwealth” (Locke 1968, p. 65). The business of government is the state, whereas the business of religion is the church. The church is the private sphere of voluntary association and activity within the context of a liberal state. In secularism, religion takes the form of private belief, and it is subtracted from public political activity.

In recent decades, scholars have examined the resurgence of non-liberal forms of religion, often under the name of fundamentalism. What is sometimes called the “return of religion” is not really a return, but rather what Casanova (1994) calls a “deprivatization”

of religion. Religion abandons the mask of privacy and emerges on the political scene in non-liberal ways. What philosophers such as [Derrida \(2002\)](#) demonstrate is that the strict opposition between public and private religion, as well as the opposition between the religious and the secular, is untenable—it deconstructs. The breakdown of the separation between public and private religion is what I name postsecularism, but it also entails the end of religion as a modern concept because along with neoliberalism it points to the terminal crisis of modern liberalism.

Postsecularism means an epistemological distance from the premises of secularism. The word “postsecular” has been used frequently since the 1990s and it means a number of different things, including a theological rejection of the secular and a returning to some fully religious—Christian sphere without or beyond the secular (see [Blond 1998](#)).¹ For Jürgen Habermas, postsecular refers to the opening up of liberalism and the liberal state to incorporate religious rationality and discourse (see [Habermas 2002](#)). The term postsecularism has been used far less often, although it is more precise and leaves less room for the dismissal of secular reasons and worldviews (for recent examples, see [Barber 2015](#); [Morris 2021](#)). I argue that postsecularism is a more useful term to help us see beyond the opposition of secular and religious, because they have never really been opposites (see [Crockett 2018](#)). They function together in modern liberalism, as I have shown, and we do not really have one without the other.

In *Formations of the Secular*, [Asad \(2003\)](#) shows the continuity between Protestant Christian conceptions of the secular and Enlightenment ones. In modern secularism, the idea of the secular emerges to mediate between true religion and false religion. Originally, true religion simply meant Christianity as the true religion as opposed to this or that false religion, whether non-Christian or heretically Christian. The modern liberal idea of the secular assumes this epistemological role in distinguishing between true and false religion. Here, true religion is tolerant and able to conform to the demands of rational liberal discourse, while false religion is oppressive and superstitious. Asad points out how “the insistence on a sharp separation between the religious and the secular goes with the paradoxical claim that the latter continually produces the former,” whereas in fact it is a specific version of the former—religion—that produces the appearance of the secular as the grounds of the distinction ([Asad 2003](#), p. 193).

The concept of secularism, as has been asserted, is tied to modern liberalism, and it disciplines what it calls religion to make it serve the interests of capital. Liberalism is the political theory that rationalizes the practice of market capitalism. The real event that generated the modern world and created liberal capitalism was the European “discovery” and conquest of America. Due to the genocidal destruction of the native peoples as well as the abundant resources of the New World, Western Europe was infused with unprecedented wealth. The Spanish and Portuguese did not know how to profit from it except to try to hoard and spend it. It was the Dutch East India Company, formed in 1602, that showed the way. This was the first multinational corporation and the first company to issue stock. The creation of the corporation and the stock market allowed the newfound and new-stolen wealth to function as *capital*. Additionally, the investment of the returns of capital generated the world system of capitalism (see [Braudel 1982](#)).

As modern capitalism emerged, the Dutch replaced the Spanish and Portuguese as the predominant economic and military nation, followed by the English and the French. William Robertson and then more famously Adam Smith began using the term liberalism in a political sense, to indicate a political economy based on the market. Liberalism emerges as a concept to capture the nature and growth of capitalism. Liberal capitalism as an economic practice works based on continuous growth. Liberal politics is concerned with balancing the demand for growth with the need for some level of real or imagined equality. Capitalism concentrates wealth, and occasional crises or revolutions perform a kind of creative destruction that allows for growth to continue in the long term.

However, what happens when it is not possible to grow in economic terms? The enormous destruction of World War II created the conditions for unprecedented economic

growth in what is called the Great Acceleration from 1945–1970. Around 1970, however, capitalism fundamentally changed. Liberalism was always an invidious concept and practice, but it was torn apart in the transformation from “normal” to savage capitalism in the early 1970s. Liberalism bifurcated into a brutal economic neo-liberalism, and a more cultural-political liberal orientation on the other.

Capitalism envisions a state of perpetual growth, but this is impossible given finite resources. Our contemporary material civilization is predicated on the extraction and development of cheap energy sources, mainly fossil fuels (see [Malm 2016](#)). We are not running out of these natural resources, but they are becoming more difficult and expensive to extract. As we strain against these physical limits, global capitalism cannot grow in absolute terms. What we call neo-liberalism is a new form of capitalism that concentrates wealth more and more in fewer and fewer nations, corporations, and people.

In 1970, the United States ran up against a peak in domestic oil production, and was forced to rely more on foreign oil, mostly from Saudi Arabia. In 1971, the US abandoned the gold standard established at the end of World War II, allowing interest rates to float freely. In the 1973, OPEC nations placed an embargo on selling oil to the United States in the wake of its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War. In response, the US reaffirmed its military and political commitment to Saudi Arabia, which priced oil in dollars, and unleashed disaster capitalism under the auspices of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School (see [Klein 2007](#)). The Washington Consensus championed by Paul Volcker raised interest rates to conquer inflation, and then used debt as a weapon to crush weaker economies and force them to adopt austerity policies that favored the US and wealthy international corporations.

As I noted above, David Harvey explains that capital began to experience “an inflexion point in the trajectory of exponential growth” in the 1970s ([Harvey 2014](#), p. 240). There is still a tremendous amount of growth, but the rate of growth begins to slow. As the rate of growth slows down, neo-liberalism ensures that the rich are the ones that benefit from the growth that exists, while the poor suffer from it. This concentration of wealth has continued over the past few decades. If capitalism cannot grow in absolute terms, it can only grow in relative terms, by taking more and more from those who are weak and poor. The global economy was financialized and privatized, extensively reducing most of the welfare state provisions established in first world nations before and after World War II.

The demise of liberalism and the endgame of capitalism reveals an urgent ecological situation that illustrates the precarious nature of our life on the planet. The limits of arable land, fresh water, and other natural resources, as well as the increasing population growth, rate of extinction of species, and the looming apocalypse of anthropogenic climate change are straining human ability to thrive on earth. It was the 1970s that also saw the emergence of an environmental movement that foresaw “The Limits to Growth,” the name of the Club of Rome’s famous 1972 study (see [Meadows et al. 1974](#)). Much of the awareness of our contemporary ecological situation in what has been called the Anthropocene can be traced to the 1970s, even if these warnings were mostly marginalized and ignored until this century.

4. New Materialisms and Animisms

Postsecularism is a symptom of this transition, as well as the opening up to new spiritual forces and gods in the wake of modern religion. Other ways to name this same phenomenon is by what anthropologists are calling the new animism, that attends to the complexities of animistic practices and worldviews that were previously dismissed as indigenous and non-modern superstitions. Here, the work of Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, Phillippe Descola, and Nurit Bird-David can be cited, among others. In philosophy, we can witness new materialisms as articulated by Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, and William Connolly that focus on the dynamism of matter rather than the modern characterization of matter as inert stuff. Finally, we can consider new forms of agentialism or agential realism in the work of Bruno Latour and Karen Barad, for example, that sees agents everywhere in existence rather than solely in the intentional consciousness of rational human beings.

In *We Have Never Been Modern* and later works, Latour argues that Western liberal modernity installs a false separation between the realm of human politics and the realm of non-human nature. This split induces a schizophrenic divide between the scientists who investigate natural laws and politicians who prescribe laws for human societies. In *Politics of Nature* (Latour 2004), Latour states that most of the contemporary discourse on political ecology “merely rehashes the modern Constitution of a *two-house* politics in which one house is called politics, and the other, under the name of nature, renders the first one powerless” (Latour 2004, pp. 18–19). Politics happens at the social level, between and among us speaking humans, whereas nature is mute, subjected to our gaze and our use. The only way to have a genuine political ecology is to eliminate this split.

Our human agential world is usually viewed as the only locus of ethics and value, because such values are denied to non-human objects. For Latour, “political ecology does not speak about nature” because nature refuses the possibility of political ecology (Latour 2004, p. 21). Ecological movements have been constrained by their commitment to a false conception of nature that they wish to protect. This commitment and this conception perpetuates the split that Latour is trying to help us overcome. So long as we see nature as something that lacks agency and moral value, we cannot value and affirm it. We can only exploit it as a natural resource for our use.

In his Gifford Lectures, *Facing Gaia*, Latour (2017) refashions the Gaia hypothesis introduced by James Lovelock and argues that Gaia is “a (finally secular) figure for nature” under the new climate regime. Gaia is not exactly a goddess, but a way to talk about the multiplication of connections and agents across all of our geohistory, which constitutes a true political ecology in the wake of modern liberalism. Gaia insists upon our understanding in a secular but not secularist way, because it forces us to grapple with the animation of all of existence, although that is configured by and through our specific planetary habitat, Earth. A river, an ecosystem, a bacterium, or a global supply network can all be examples of agents here. A postsecularist perspective attuned to the agency of non-human and even non-living systems helps us comprehend what is going on in broadly ecological terms.

Another scholar associated with this new animism is Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, who studies Amazonian Amerindians and claims that their perspectivalism differs from that of European perspectivalism. Europeans who are impressed by the subjectivism of postmodern critiques assert a cultural perspectivalism that is often named as multiculturalism. In *The Relative Native*, however, Vivieros de Castro (2015) states that a better way to describe Amerindian views is as a multinaturalism. Whereas our multicultural relativism “supposes a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each striving to grasp an external and unified nature,” Amerindian thought does the opposite. Here, the non-relativistic unity that is indicated by multinaturalism is a proposed phenomenological or representational unity that constitutes human society. This unity correlates to a “radically objective diversity” that constitutes what we call nature (Vivieros de Castro 2015, p. 356.). Nature itself is intrinsically multiple and perspectival, and it is teeming with agency.

Euromodern people typically think that animism is the invalid attribution of an invisible force or spirit to something in the natural world that is intrinsically inanimate. However, Vivieros de Castro and Déborah Danowski claim in *The Ends of the World* (Danowski and Vivieros de Castro 2016) that animism proceeds from a proto-world multiverse that is essentially anthropomorphic because humanity is the universal substance that animates it, “the active principle at the origin of the proliferation of living forms in a rich, plural world” (Danowski and Vivieros de Castro 2016, p. 67). In the Amerindian world, humans come first and the rest of creation proceeds from them. Nature is generated out of primordial human culture. This is less naïve than it sounds, because it posits a nonhuman humanity that ‘animates’ the production of forms in the world, that are differentiated as ‘nature.’ This is how the multinaturalism of Vivieros de Castro works.

In Amerindian cosmology, “every existing being in the cosmos thus sees itself as human, but does not see other species in the same way” (Danowski and Vivieros de Castro 2016, p. 70). The only way to see oneself as an animating principle is as a human or

more generally as a person. This animating principle is a differentiating and individuating process that generates others in the form of bodies, which is what Vivieros de Castro calls nature. In the beginning, everything was human in a sense, and various forms including the beings who we consider *homo sapiens* were differentiated out of this primordial humanity. Here, the human is “placed as *empirically anterior* in relation to the world,” which means that the world is *subtracted* from the original unification or correlation with the human (Danowski and Vivieros de Castro 2016, p. 63).

Here, what Amerindians designate as human is an animating agential process that produces natural reality in material forms. This primordial animating principle is something we can call *spirit*. My claim is that we (Europeans) can bracket some of the anthropomorphic baggage that comes along with thinking about indigenous animisms and focus on what this animating principle does, which demonstrates and in some cases liberates spiritual forces that exceed the confines of what moderns call religion.

In confronting the overwhelming challenges of resource depletion and global warming, Europeans can easily resort to apocalyptic language, forgetting that for indigenous Amerindians the end of the world has already occurred in connection with European discovery, exploitation, colonization, slavery, and mass death. Furthermore, when we assign indigenous peoples to representing a remnant of the past, whether we do this triumphantly or nostalgically, we err because it is our modern, liberal way of life that is unsustainable and destined to end one way or another. As Danowski and Vivieros de Castro conclude, as “masters of technoprimitivist bricolage and politico-metaphysical metamorphosis, they are one of the possible chances, in fact, of a *subsistence of the future*.”

5. Conclusions: The Rise of Geontopower

As a way of exemplifying many of the strands of what I am pulling together here, I want to consider Elizabeth Povinelli’s conception of ‘geontopower’ In her book *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Povinelli 2016) she argues that geontological power, or geontopower, operates in a partially hidden way beneath what is called biopolitics. Biopolitics, like many of our modern European discourses, relies fundamentally on a distinction between life and death, whereas geontopower “is a set of discourses, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife.” This is not simply a biological distinction, but functions as a way to differentiate between “the lively and the inert” (Povinelli 2016, pp. 4–5).

Povinelli uses the name ‘late liberalism’ as opposed to neo-liberalism, but I think this is a very similar designation for the same phenomenon.² As liberalism transition into its later, most recent, form, it relies more and more on what she geontopower as a mode of governance. Povinelli identifies three figures and three imaginaries of late liberalism: The figure of the Desert along with a Carbon imaginary; the figure of the Animist which brings with it the imaginary of the Indigene; and finally, the figure of the Virus that also harbors a Terrorist imaginary (Povinelli 2016, pp. 16–19). Of course, we have confronted an extremely potent representation of the Virus during the time of COVID-19 and its world-impacting event.

In her book, Povinelli shows how geontopower relies on the distinction between the lively and the inert to control things, including nature, animals, and people in a world of late liberalism. She argues that geontopower has operated throughout liberal modernity, but it has been pushed to the fore more recently. Povinelli analyzes geontopower both theoretically and in more concrete situations in Australia, where it serves to uphold corporate power in ways that both draw on and repress indigenous peoples and perspectives. Here, complex phenomena occur that resist simple characterization and oppositions, including a rock formation that indigenous Australians call Two Women Sitting Down. This geological formation was the subject of a lawsuit that charged a company mining manganese of ‘desecration’ under criminal liability law. The Australian courts attempted to use the modern conception of religion “to restrict the meaning of sacred to ‘devoted to a religious

use rather than a place subject to mythological story, song, or belief,” as a way to buttress late liberalism (Povinelli 2016, p. 32).

Povinelli shows how in many ways, this rock formation Two Women Sitting Down occurs in a complex interactive relationship with the landscape, the people, and its history, demonstrating a kind of agency that challenges both modern and late liberal modes of control. She argues that we need a more complex understanding of existents that is informed by principles of contemporary theory and indigenous dreaming. According to Povinelli (2016, p. 28), we should affirm that:

Things exist through an effort of mutual attention

Things are neither born nor die, thought they can turn away from each other and change states.

In turning away from each other, entities withdraw care for each other. The earth is not dying. But the earth may be turning away from certain forms of existence . . .

We must de-dramatize human life as we squarely take responsibility for what we are doing . . .

Povinelli draws upon indigenous ways of seeing things that challenge late liberal geontopower, although she refuses to reduce these indigenous perspectives to religion. She affirms the need to confront and resist what she calls “this massive neoliberal organization of the Australian governance of Indigenous life, without any housing or jobs, and in the fragile coastal ecosystem of Northwest Australia” (Povinelli 2016, p. 24). This project to comprehend as well as to resist late liberal geontopower exceeds and does away with the concept of religion, even as it draws upon and makes use of indigenous and non-indigenous spiritual-political forces.

Resisting geontopower means that “we need to overcome the division of the lively and the inert,” and instead think about the directionality, orientation, and connections of various existents (Povinelli 2016, p. 116). Geontopower emerges more predominantly as a controlling strategy of late liberalism, or in economic terms, neoliberalism. Either way, its increasing significance is symptomatic of a crisis of liberalism itself, and it offers new challenges for thinking and for living. Povinelli and others make use of both European philosophies and indigenous concepts in as constituting what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call the common plane of immanence for comprehending our ecological, spiritual, and political situation within a tenuous anthrocentric epoch. This is also a postsecularist orientation because it no makes use of the modern idea of religion, and it no longer subscribes to any strict or stable boundary between what is spiritual and what is material. According to Povinelli, analysis of geontopower allows us to better comprehend “late liberalism as the geographical assemblage of a social project,” and at the same time it allows us “to see the glimmers of a multitude of immanent alternative social projects across the variants of late liberalism” (Povinelli 2016, p. 169). What we call religion is an expression of modern liberalism that is becoming increasingly less useful for understanding both the social project of late liberalism and the possibility of alternative social projects. Postsecularism provides us a way to think late liberalism and neoliberalism more critically because we no longer have to view the material and the spiritual elements of agential existents as oppositions or as non-political.

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Notes

- ¹ Blond argues that “the existent secular world has to be revealed as an illusory reality that denies its own possibility,” and with the shift to a postsecular perspective “we break with the idea that there can ever be a secular foundation of reality (23).” The movement of Radical Orthodoxy that Blond represents tries to eliminate secularism and return to a quasi-medieval situation where a type of Platonic Christian theology is viewed as foundational.
- ² Towards the end of the book, Povinelli says that she originally understood neo-liberalism to just refer to the governance of markets, whereas late liberalism was name for the governance of cultural difference, but she later came to “understand both forms of governance as part and parcel of late liberalism” (p. 168).

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