THE KINETIC UTOPIA

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In this paper I trace the history of the neo-liberal utopia, or what I call the kinetic utopia, from the classical world of Plato through Hobbes’ social and political theory of early capitalism. Following this trajectory I explore the emergence of pure capitalism in the 1990s and in particular George Bush’s military neo-liberalism, most clearly characterised by the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

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I. The Premature Burial

In this paper I propose to trace the history of the neo-liberal utopia, or what I call the kinetic utopia, from the classical world of Plato through Hobbes’ social and political theory of early capitalism. Following this trajectory I explore the emergence of pure capitalism in the 1990s and in particular George Bush’s military neo-liberalism, most clearly characterised by the invasion and occupation of Iraq (Retort, 2005). Since the tradition of utopia thought, rooted in the works of Plato, More, and Marx, is normally connected to notions of imaginary societies that are similarly closed in terms of their conceptions of both time and space, my theory of a capitalist utopia requires that I establish an alternative tradition of utopian thought that is less spatially and temporally limited and more open to the infinite trajectories of capitalist economies of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972). In the second section of the paper I will explore the history of this alternate tradition of utopia through a consideration of Hobbes’ liberalism and an exploration of the post-modern successor to this ideological form, neo-liberal capitalism. But before I enter into this endeavour I want to show how the failure to recognise the history of the alternate tradition of utopia has led the social and political philosopher John Gray (2007) to declare the death of utopia when in fact the opposite is true of what we might call our contemporary planet utopia. That is to say that I believe that today, under conditions of post-modern globalisation, we are living through an explosion of utopias. Given this view my claim is that the clash of utopias in Iraq, the apocalyptic battle between the neo-liberal and Islamic utopias that are caught up in a strange frozen dialectical relationship in the cradle of human civilization itself, is symptomatic of this explosion of utopian politics.

Consider John Gray’s (2007) recent declaration of the death of utopia. Gray’s basic point is that the Enlightenment utopia, which has for so long acted as a container for the hopes of the intelligentsia and masses alike, finally expired in the rubble of post-Saddam Iraq. In other words, his suggestion is that it is no longer possible to believe in the utopia of complete revolution, which he thinks underpinned America’s original policy in Iraq, in the wake of the horrors of Fallujah (Schwartz, 2007). In light of Gray’s understanding of utopia, which is a fantastic plan for total social, political, economic, and cultural transformation that can never be realised, it is clear that this claim relies on the idea that both the American and insurgent forces have somehow woken up to the true nature of their fantasies in light of the terrible spectacle of the ruins of the home of civilization. However, contra Gray’s view of Iraq as a kind of un-intended situationist experiment, which has finally shocked the true believers in the free market and Islamic utopias, out of their solipsistic dreamworlds, we could offer an alternative interpretation of events in Iraq by showing how the
bloody low intensity urban warfare currently taking place in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities might be understood as a reflection of an ongoing war of utopian ideologies (Mannheim, 1936). My view is that far from weakening the utopian ideologies of the American free marketeers and Globalised Islamists, the hellish nature of what has taken place, and continues to occur, in Iraq’s major cities has strengthened both sides’ belief in their divine mission to overcome their Satanic enemy, the evil other who has transformed their potential paradise into a ghoulish dystopia. But this view raises a number of questions about the nature of the motivations of both the American led occupiers and the so-called insurgent forces bent on the occupiers’ expulsion from Iraq that we must un-pack before we begin to explore the history of the utopian idea. First we must consider the Americans’ motivations for occupation. Is the American occupation of Iraq based on calculated realpolitik, driven by the need to secure access to precious oil fields, or a more profound desire to open the Middle East to the theory and practice of pure capitalism laid out by neo-liberal ideologists, such as Milton Friedman (2002)?

This is not an easy question to answer precisely because the difference between these two capitalist motivations is not really based in qualitative distinctions, since it is possible to interpret the same imperialistic policy as similarly driven by cynical, realisable, policy aims and idealistic, unrealisable, utopian fantasies. As such, the choice between realpolitik and utopian thought is not an either / or problematic, but rather one that requires us to make decisions about how far the motivation for the American occupation contains elements of both political tempers, which fuse to form a kind of hidden polarity or dialectical relation that is more or less masked by the stubborn rationalist tendency to imagine a unitary, self-identical, reality. We must, of course, ask the same kinds of questions about the insurgents. Is it that their terrorism is driven by an unmediated belief in the Islamic fundamentalist utopia, characterised by pre-modern Shari’a law, or more likely that they are simply people disembedded and dispossessed by the strange policies of the American occupiers, especially in the crucial early post-Saddam period when Paul Bremer tried to transform Iraq into a post-modern capitalist utopia (Klein, 2007), who have lost all hope for the future and have reached the conclusion that suicidal resistance is the only alternative to mute acceptance of America’s monstrous neo-liberal experiment? In other words, we must ask whether the Islamic utopia is a historical artefact, a positive utopia, that exists on its own terms, or rather a recent invention, a negative, shadowy, other to the Anglo-American neo-liberal utopia, which has no reality of its own, beyond that of a kind of psycho-political Freudian reaction formation to the horrible realities of brutality, humiliation, and trauma. Again, the line between these two positions is not absolute, but rather conditioned by degrees of identification with the kind of pure rage explored by Frantz Fanon, practical political programmes set on the expulsion of the occupier and reconstruction of the nation similarly considered by early post-
colonial revolutionaries, less realistic utopian ideas ordered by a belief in the necessity of the realisation of a globalised fundamentalist Islam, or faith in Jihad and an other-worldly paradise awaiting martyrs to the cause.

But what is the value of this insistence upon the undecidability of the predominance of either the realistic or utopian temper in the motivations of combatants in the Iraq War? Is the answer to these questions not one that simply resides in the perspective of the commentator? Is this not why Gray is justified in his declaration of the death of utopia, despite the fact that similar assertions have been made at various points in the long history of utopia? The precise reason that it is necessary to insist upon the continued undecidability of the predominance of the realist and utopian tempers in the motivations of the combatants in the Iraq War is because recognition of the condition of uncertainty, which I would insist is not simply an effect of the commentators’ inability to perceive the true motivations of the combatants, but rather an ambivalent condition rooted in the psychologies of the combatants themselves, enables us to understand why Gray is necessarily mistaken in his proclamation of the death of utopia, precisely because the utopian temper is always already mixed with realist objectives and vice versa in the minds of more or less all political actors, appreciate why these kinds of premature insistences on the death of utopia have accompanied the collapse of utopian hopes into nightmarish dystopias since the birth of utopia in 399BC, only for them to be swiftly forgotten upon the emergence of some other utopian fantasy from the rubble of dystopia, and recognise the deep truth of Ernst Bloch’s (1995) association of utopia and humanity, expressed in his massive work, The Principle of Hope. Perhaps some expansion is necessary. The reason why the periodic declarations of the end of utopia always seem to fold into new utopian fantasies is because such declarations of the end, which necessarily close down the possibility of the new, make even realist theories of social change appear utopian. This is why I think Bloch’s work expresses a fundamental truth about utopia, which is that the utopian tendency will survive, and exceed, even the most closed social and political system. Does this mean that utopia is somehow rooted in human species being, to use the term Marx (1988) took from Feuerbach?

The standard criticism of Bloch’s magnum opus suggests otherwise (Aronson, 1991). This view explains that Bloch’s definition of utopia as an impulse, which will always explode whatever construct is set up to contain its futuristic energies, and the vast scope The Principle of Hope, which could be seen as reflective of the history of an impulse defined by its transgressive nature, was in reality an effect of its author’s unconscious attempt to construct his own utopian edifice to hide the impoverished reality of Stalinist East Germany from both its author and his readers. The problem with this criticism is clear. Surely Bloch’s monolithic study of the utopian impulse was less an ideological text, meant to hide the reality of
Stalinism behind a veil of utopian rhetoric, and more a critique of the Stalinist container, which had claimed the utopian impulse as its own for purely cynical ends. No doubt Bloch’s study was driven by unconscious disappointment, but this is not enough to deny his vision of the utopian impulse. If anything surely it performs the opposite function. Is the status of Bloch’s work relative to its Stalinist context not a synecdoche of the nature of the utopian impulse that forms the subject of the work itself?

This point is central because the key to understanding Bloch’s work resides in recognition of the centrality of the idea that no social, political, economic, or cultural structure can contain the fugitive principle of hope for very long. Even the monstrous Stalinist empire was subject to the restlessness of the utopian impulse. Despite his unconscious disappointment, perhaps Bloch knew that eventually even Stalinism would collapse, precisely because the principle of hope always exceeds the containers that provide it with temporary form. But is this not to simply read the history of modernity, and the endlessly disruptive energy of capitalism, through the messianic lens of Bloch, a Jewish writer, who felt compelled, like his colleague Walter Benjamin, to hold onto the belief that the chosen people would eventually find Heaven on Earth (Rabinbach, 1985)? In other words, we must ask whether utopia is modern ideology, generated to drive us into the future? Although it would, of course, be possible to reverse this equation in order to claim that modernity was always simply a less fantastic way to talk about a historical period characterised by its obsession with fantastical utopias, my view is that it is not possible to simply equate modernity and utopia, regardless of how we choose to connect them in terms of their relative dependence and independence, but rather that we must look much further back in history to find the roots of the utopian idea. If it proves possible to establish a relationship between pre-modern thought and utopia we will be able to loosen the traditional connection between modernity and utopia, establish the possibility of some kind of originary utopian impulse rooted in human species being, and make the strange claim that the Ancients and Medievals were in many respects always-already modern.

Herein we encounter a conundrum. The key work of the pre-modern utopians, which we must consider Plato’s Republic (1991), since More’s Utopia (2004) represents a kind of limit case located somewhere between medieval and modern thought, was defined by its closed nature. How, then, is it possible to reconcile the idea of utopia as impulse, which is forever transgressing the boundaries of its formal container, with the notion of the Platonic city as a static ideological form or what Marin (1984) calls a degenerate utopia? In her book Perfection and Progress (1974), Elizabeth Hansot tries to resolve this problem by insisting on the existence of two utopian forms, the first of which is defined by ancient paganism, which means that it was cyclical and closed in nature, while the second modern form is conditioned by ideas of science, technology, evolution,
and progress, and is therefore expansive in terms of its relation to space and historical with regard to its understandings of time. Consideration of utopian texts, such as Plato’s Republic, More’s Utopia, and Wells’ A Modern Utopia (2005), suggests that this is a logical position. However, the problem with Hansot’s thesis in my view is that it neglects to consider the origins of the Republic or reflect upon the ways that Plato’s ideal city functioned relative to the really existing conditions of ancient Athens. The first point to make regards the origins of Plato’s Republic. According to Arendt (2005), Plato was driven to write the Republic after the execution of his teacher Socrates in 399BC for inciting rebellious thought in the minds of Athenian youths. In Arendt’s view Plato could not tolerate the madness of the city, which could not accommodate the philosophical provocations of his teacher, so he abandoned the democratic, cosmopolitan, ethos of the master in favour of a totalitarian vision of the city dominated by philosophical reason. Philosophers would be spared Socrates’ fate in Plato’s city because they would call the shots. The petty politicians who corrupted Plato’s Athens would be relegated to the level of workers in the Republic, since they could not be trusted to rule or fight. Where does this leave us? How does the recognition of the origins of Plato’s text shed light upon the true nature of utopia? Following the logic of Arendt’s view we can argue that the transformation of the really-existing Socrates, who extolled the virtues of the examined self, into the totalitarian Socrates of Plato’s middle and later works, who defended the totalitarian city’s control over the lives of its citizens, is symbolic of the formalisation of the original utopian impulse, characterised by the really-existing Socrates, into what is usually considered the original utopia, Plato’s Socratic fiction, the Republic (Featherstone, 2007).

What this means for our thesis, then, is that it is possible that the utopian impulse, present in Socrates’ commitment to self-examination and democratic discussion, was always prior to the static utopia of Plato’s ideal city, conditioned by philosophical reason and absolute obedience, and that Hansot’s attempt to reconcile the existence of the utopian impulse and the utopian form through the notion of stationary and kinetic utopias rooted in the profound differences between the classical and modern worlds, mis-recognises the way that the two expressions of utopia as tendency and form have always co-existed in a dialectical relationship. It is a similar mis-recognition of the nature of utopia as tendency and form that enables Gray to proclaim the death of utopia in his Black Mass (2007). When he talks about the death of utopia what he really means to refer to is the death of a particular utopian ideology, the neo-liberal experiment in Iraq, rather than the death of utopia as an ahistorical tendency that crystallises into particular historical forms (Mannheim, 1936). In my view the idea that the utopia of neo-liberal Iraq is dead and buried is in itself debatable, since it is still not clear that the current American leadership has given up on ‘Iraq Inc’ (Chatterjee, 2004). Indeed it might be the case that the original utopian plan to erase the socialist infrastructure of Iraq and rebuild
the nation on the basis of the endless innovation of American business left the Bush regime, and its successor, with little room for manoeuvre. Any realist plan for wholesale troop withdrawals from Iraq risks dystopic consequences in the sense that America could lose access to Iraqi oil, fail to gain a foothold in a region of fundamental strategic importance for checking the rise of China as a global hegemon, and suffer a hammer blow to its national prestige on the world stage in the shape of a prime time re-run of the defeat in Vietnam (Retort, 2005). Under these conditions it might be that America is locked into a utopian trajectory in Iraq, regardless of how painful that becomes for liberals, who disprove of what they regard as an unjust war, and realists, who want out of Iraq simply because they feel it is an unwinnable war certain to cost more in than it is ever likely to repay in every sense.

In light of this possibility I think that we would also be mistaken to think that the Islamic utopia is a lifeless corpse. Given the continuing chaos in Iraq's cities most commentators recognise that it is likely that more and more dispossessed people will become radicalised, find the Islamic utopia, and enter the desperate fight to escape from their nightmarish present for the perfect Islamic future, comparable in many respects to the totally ordered Platonic Republic (Davis, 2004). There is, however, a deeper sense in which Gray misunderstands the nature of the America's experimental utopia in Iraq which allows him to think that utopia somehow died in the carnage of Fallujah. Here Gray's mistaken belief in the death of utopia is rooted in his failure to understand the sense in which America was always-already the home of Bloch's principle of hope, long before its author put pen to paper. In what follows I propose to extend the basic history of utopian thought set out in his section to show how America eventually became the home of the homeless tendency of the utopian impulse. This history will take the form of an account of the transitions between the utopias of Plato, More, and Hobbes. In the final section of the paper I consider the emergence of the successor to the liberal utopia, the neoliberal utopia, in the wake of the implosion of the European totalitarianisms, and the slow motion collapse of communism in the late 1980s / early 1990s. In conclusion I return to the besieged cities of Iraq to consider how the kinetic utopia of neo-liberal ideology, which has become the parasitical partner of the originary utopian impulse embodied by Socrates, has transformed our post-modern society into a planetary utopia-dystopia, where realism lapses into utopianism precisely because we now inhabit a post-historical world where means-ends rationality no longer makes sense.
II. The History of the Other Utopia

My claim that we are living in a time of utopias, that our contemporary post-modern global society is characterised by an explosion of utopia, is closely related to my critique of Gray's insistence on the death of utopia. We know that the problem with Gray's claim is that it mis-recognises the way that deep utopian motivations mix with realist objectives in the minds of political actors and that it is therefore difficult to say that either the American neo-liberals or the radical Islamists have lost faith in their utopian ideologies and turned to far more pragmatic realist objectives to try to secure advantage in the everyday war in Iraq. Although I believe that it is difficult to dispute this criticism of Gray's claim about the death of utopia, we might raise two objections. First, surely this criticism would hold for the entire history of utopian thought? How is it possible to untangle utopian ideology, which from Gray's point of view is necessarily unrealisable, although I will attempt to tighten this definition in the passages that follow, from realist thought, which the same author thinks is defined by its clear understanding of the relationship between practical means and achievable ends? The answer to this question is, of course, that it has never been possible to untangle the relationship between utopian and realist thought, since the opposition between unrealisable political fantasies and realisable political projects based in sound assessments of means-ends relationships that Gray sets up is entirely spurious. The problem here resides in Gray's unswerving faith in the ideology of Enlightenment reason. He simply takes it for granted that there is some way to establish a relationship between means and ends in our contemporary post-modern society, behaves as if there is some short-cut to establishing political projects based on instrumental rationality, and as a consequence seems to suggest that the entire tradition of utopian thought was produced by wilful fantasists who swerved means-ends rationality, and the possibility that their projects would ever find realisation, in favour of painting pretty pictures about what an ideal world would look like.

The reality is, of course, more complex. It has never been possible to draw a straight line between utopian and realist thought. This much is evident from the literature on the most famous utopians, Plato, More, and Marx, who have always straddled the line between utopian dreams, satire, legalism, and scientism. The classic Straussian interpretation of Plato's Republic is that the project was never meant to be taken seriously but was rather a satirical critique of utopian thought in line with Aristophanes various comedies about ideal societies (Bloom, 1991). What about More? It is clear that More's (2004) Utopia is a limit case in more than its historical situation somewhere between medieval and modern thought. Consider the numerous examples of irony in the text. Utopia is a place, but it is also a non-place by virtue of the name's etymological root in Ancient Greek. The name of More's traveller, Raphael Hythlodaeus, has a similar Greek root. In this instance Hythlodaeus translates as 'purveyor of non-
sense’. The main river in utopia, Anydrus, means ‘no water’, while Ade- 
mus, the name of utopia’s head magistrates, translates as ‘not people’. Al-
though More’s work seems to offer better evidence for the irony of utopia 
than Plato’s Republic, which Bloom (1991) is able to read as satire on the 
basis of Strauss’s claim about esoteric writing and the post-Socratic phi-
losopher’s political prudence, we cannot ignore the fact that Plato’s u-to-
pianism was caught up with realist thought in other more direct ways. For 
example, the standard interpretation of Plato’s later works, such as Laws, 
is that they were attempts to implement the plan set out in the Republic in 
the name of the creation of the good enough city (Featherstone, 2007).

Similar tensions between utopianism and realism are clear in Marx’s 
work. Following the utopianism of his early works, such as Estranged La-
bour (1988) and The German Ideology (1998), Marx turned to the realistic 
empiricism of Capital (1991). It was, of course, left to Marx’s writing part-
ner, Engels, to complete the transition from utopianism to realism in his 
Anti-Duhring (Walicki, 1997). The projection of this utopia / realist bind 
through Soviet Communism, which was in many respects destroyed by its 
inability to live up to its utopian ideals, has been documented by histor-
ians and theorists such as Martin Malia (1992) and Andrzej Walicki 
(1997). Given that none of this work on the relationship between the ut-
opians and realism is particularly esoteric it is difficult to understand why 
Gray feels able to insist upon a sharp distinction between utopian 
thought, which is unrealisable, and realist thought, which is rooted in ac-
curate assessments about what is possible in a particular context.

What Gray’s insistence on the death of utopia, and rise of instrumental 
rationalism, suggests is a blindness to conditions of modernity, which was 
always about the tension between possibility, impossibility, and over-
reaching, not to mention a failure to recognise the impact of post-modern 
thought on our understandings of the way that the relationship between 
means and ends implicit in rational thought has begun to break down in 
the face of a high speed globalised society where prudence requires us to 
make decisions on the basis of intuition, rather than carefully reasoned 
thought (Scheuerman, 2004). How are we to understand Gray’s sharp di-
vision between utopianism and realism, then, which enables him to claim 
that utopia expired in Iraq? Is it simply that he has chosen to follow the 
Frankfurters, in their insistence upon the reality of a totally administered 
world of instrumental rationality, because he has decided that a dull 
world of mechanical predictability is preferable to the profound uncer-
tainty of planet utopia? Is it simply that he has mis-understood that the 
distinction between utopian unrealisability and realist realisability is one 
that can only ever really be made in hindsight and that his desire to 
screen out the chaos of planet utopia has led him to project the certainty 
of the past, which allows us to pass judgement on the identity of utopians 
and realists, into the present where decisions are made about the likely 
means necessary to produce particular results in the future? In other 
words, is it possible to say that Gray is an anti-utopian utopian who,
driven by his desire to see an end to the utopian chaos in Iraq has warped reason and repressed what everybody knows about the uncertainty of the relationship between present and future, in order to make a case for the end of utopia?

I think that this view has some merit because it helps to explain the strange experience of reading Gray’s *Black Mass* (2007). Throughout the book Gray comes off as a liberal, determined to fight for the right of the individual to make their own way in the world, who is deeply conservative about the prospect of social, political, economic, and cultural change rooted in utopian projects. Of course, the critical reader may respond that classical liberals, such as Hobbes and Locke, have always argued for freedom within limits, and this is indeed true (Manent, 1994). However, there is more to the problem of closure in Gray’s case, which reflects back upon his move to project the relative certainty of the past into the relationship between the present and the future in order to write utopia out of our current global condition. That is to say that I think that Gray’s problem is less one based on the relative tendencies towards liberalism and conservatism in his thought and more about the way that he manages the post-modern, post-historical, situation we inhabit today. What does this mean? I do not think that the careful reader can help but compare Gray’s *Black Mass*, with its declaration of the end of utopia, to the other recent proclamation of the end, Frances Fukuyama’s epochal *End of History* (1993). While Fukuyama, who popularised the neo-conservative-neo-liberal concept that liberal capitalism is the only game in town in the wake of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, set the tone for political conduct of the neo-liberal holy trinity, Clinton-Blair-Bush, Gray proclaims the end of Fukuyama’s game in the urban wastelands of Iraq. Unfortunately, however, it is clear that Gray remains caught up in the wider logic of Fukuyama’s proclamation of the end. Herein lies the key point that we need to unpack.

Despite the Fukuyama’s worries about the threats of fundamentalism and boredom, he was more or less joyless about the prospect of the new realisation of the end of history first announced by Hegel and later taught to the French post-modernists by Kojève. But if the end of history, the collapse of the Soviet Empire, and the rise of the new liberal utopia, was a happy event for Fukuyama, it is clear that Gray is set on the proclamation of the end of the end of history. In his view the utopias of the end of historical time have expired. In this respect I think Gray is mistaken to such an extent that he could be seen to conform to the core characteristics of the other symbol of 19th century German thought that Fukuyama wrote about in his famous book, Nietzsche’s last man. But what is he mistaken about? The answer is that even if the utopias of the American free marketeers and radical Islamists cave in under pressure of conditions of reality, which I think is highly unlikely since the resistance of reality is only likely to strengthen the utopians commitment to their fantasy spaces, I believe that we are still operating under conditions of the end of history.
for reasons similar to those expressed by Baudrillard in his *The Illusion of the End* (1994). In this respect I believe that the post-historical period that we currently inhabit has less in common with the view expressed by Fukuyama, which reflects upon the end of ideological struggle and the sense of liberal capitalist superiority, than it does with Baudrillard’s radical post-modern position which generalises the idea of the end by reflecting upon what it really means to talk about the end of history in its precise sense.

In Baudrillard’s works what we are talking about when we talk about the end of history is the failure of the human ability to link cause and effect, and as a consequence present and future, in any kind of predictable way before a post-modern, global, society that is simultaneously too fast, to enable humans to make meaningful connections between events, too connected, to enable us to fathom the relationships between events across different time zones, and too enamoured with spectacle, which has never obeyed the commandments of reason, but rather occupies a kind of transcendent sphere that functions on the basis of the kind of tautology that once secured religious belief in the masses. Following Baudrillard’s work, then, the collapse of history, the rise of the fetish of the market, and the mass obsession with consumerism, should not be taken lightly, but rather need to be understood in their full historical and philosophical significance in order to appreciate how they impact upon our world. In Baudrillard’s view the end of history signals the end of the period of time conditioned by the thought of Herodotus and Thucydides who first began to produce historical narratives and link particular events to particular geographical locations. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Herodotus has been called both the father of history and the founder of geography, since he was the writer who first established relationships between time and space in order to situate particular events in linear narratives. It is clear that in many ways utopians have always opposed Herodotus’ idea, history. Indeed, Plato, should be considered the first utopian precisely because he understood history in reverse, as a time of decay rather than as a time of progress and growth as has become normal for moderns, and built his utopian edifice, the Republic, severed from both time, by its unchanging constitution, and space, by its imposing walls, in order to imagine Athens’ escape from Herodotus’ innovation (Popper, 1992).

Fast-forward 2000 years to the historical period we call modernity. Is not modernity usually considered the time of utopias? We already know that the basic connection between modernity and utopia resides in the relationship between the human tendency to transgress and the equally human desire for stability and security (Bauman, 2000). How, then, should we understand the relationship between modernity, modern thought, and the idea of utopia? The classic writer on the relationship between the Ancients and the Moderns, Leo Strauss (1984), suggests that Hobbes was the first modern philosopher because he understood that it was no longer
possible to base theories of human behaviour on utopian values judgements about how people should behave. Instead, Strauss’ claim is that Hobbes sought to root his political philosophy in a long range historical view of how people behave in reality. Strauss explains that on the basis of this assessment Hobbes concluded that people are vicious creatures who can be called human, and differentiated from animals, only on the basis of their insatiable lust for power over other people who they meet over the course of their lives. We are told that in the state of nature, the thought experiment Hobbes developed to consider human interaction in its naked form, humans would engage in the kind of brutal master-slave battles that Hegel would later consider the motor of history. That the master-slave struggles in the state of nature would include everybody led Hobbes to talk about a ‘war of all against all’ and conclude that the only solution to the problem of the inherent wickedness of man was the creation of an artificial law, powerful enough to control people.

Hobbes concluded that since people could never achieve their natural objective, absolute power over all other people, they would have to be contained by a law giver, the Leviathan, who would erect rules of behaviour to govern conduct and lift people out of the state of nature. The value of the new civilized terrain, which we should call political society since Hobbes society was founded on political struggle, was not simply that it took people out of the endless war of all, but rather that it projected this natural war onto a new level. As a result people could continue to live through their passions, since Hobbes thought that it was impossible to reform human nature, but in the new civilized environment these passions would no longer mean that they would necessarily lead lives that were ‘nasty, brutish, and short’. What new form did Hobbes’ sublimation of the state of nature take? In C. B. Macpherson’s (1962) view, the early modern economy was the model for Hobbes’s new liberal society where people were free to follow their passions, so long as they obeyed the general laws of the land as set out by the Leviathan. But how is it possible to consider Hobbes, the founder of modern realpolitik, the classic commentator on Thucydides, a utopian theorist? How is it possible to root the kinetic utopia of hyper-active neo-liberal capitalism in the work of the thinker who produced the Leviathan (2007) on the basis that he thought that people were by nature wicked and that they could not be reformed, but only ever controlled?

Although I think that there are clearly utopian elements to Hobbes’ thought that have been largely ignored by political realists who have claimed him for themselves, the answer to this question resides largely in the ways in which Hobbes’ thought was received by his successors. Clearly the Anglo-American followers of Hobbes, such as John Locke and Adam Smith, thought that the monster of Malmesbury was onto something in his political science, because they provided an explicit utopian gloss to his theory of legalised motion and competition that still animates
liberal and more forcefully neo-liberal thought today. Even though the various commentators on Hobbes have speculated on the way that the English Civil War impacted upon his work, his utopian good place of streamed motions and legalised competition was always a no place rooted in an appreciation of the possibilities of totally abstract Euclidean space (Spragens, 1973, Strauss, 1984). In other words, Hobbes never found the real site of his utopia. This task was left to Hobbes’ follower John Locke who took the theory of the Leviathan rooted in Euclidean space, transplanted it to the new world, which has been called the real subject of More’s Utopia, and then proceeded to read the real landscape of America as if it was Euclidean space realised. This equation of America and empty abstract space was made possible by Locke’s Protestantism, which formed the backdrop to his famous statement that linked the new world to God’s country - ‘in the beginning the whole world was America’ (1980: 29) - and allowed him to speculate that land that was not put to good use and improved for the glory of God was virgin territory ready to be colonised by true believers who would transform it into a productive enterprise. In this way Locke simultaneously legitimised the privatisation of land and a new wave of enclosures, on the basis that land should be put to productive use, justified the eradication of the native American population, on the grounds that they were part of the natural landscape that needed to be civilized, rooted Protestantism in the American psyche and, in my view, set the tone for American social and political thought from the 18th century to the present day.

Clearly Hobbes’ Euclidean utopia would never have found its home in America if it had not have been for the way Locke warped his original social contract theory by providing the people with a natural right to rebel against a tyrannical sovereign. The effect of this theoretical move, which wiped out Hobbes’ view of the divine authority of the sovereign, was to enable the emergence of American Republicanism, provide theoretical justification for the American Revolution, and set the scene for the evolution of the American ideology surrounding freedom, democracy, and individualism. However, beyond the fact that Locke effectively fused the ideas of utopia and America together to create a peculiarly American utopia, which I propose to call the kinetic utopia, I think that there was always a natural affinity between the new world and Hobbes’ early modern political science. In Locke’s work America became Hobbes’ Euclidean space. In his eyes it was the state of nature, awaiting its Leviathan. It was the space of natural freedom, the tabula rasa, ready for its Godly utopia. But what is clear is that this resolution would not have been possible without the basic materials provided by More who first linked utopia to the new world in the early modern imagination and Hobbes who made use of the innovations of the new abstract science and his own reflections on early modern capitalism to conceptualise a social and political theory that I think we should call utopian simply because of the way it escaped the confines of real space for the no place of Euclidean geometry.
Given this complex formulation of the liberal utopia, which had passed through transitions rooted in More’s nascent or perhaps unconscious modernity, Hobbes’ Euclidean theory of early capitalism, and Locke’s equation of utopia, private property, capitalism, and America, it was left to Adam Smith (1998) to provide the finishing touches to the classical theory of laissez faire capitalism that would later become neo-liberalism with his idea of the invisible hand that suggested that the economy did not require regulation, indeed that it would work better if it was not regulated, because competition between capitalists trying to maximize profits and workers struggling to survive would result in a market able to balance itself. The strange idea of the invisible hand was essentially a re-run of Hobbes’ theory of sovereign power, which was introduced to balance competing interests in economic struggle, and reflected the effect of Newton’s discovery of the law of gravity upon social, political, and economic thought. If Galileo’s law of inertia had put paid to the ancient-medieval idea of an orderly universe, then Newton’s theory of gravity provided a new principle of order to organise the various trajectories Galileo’s thesis put in motion. Following Locke, who was happy to dispense with the services of Hobbes’ Earthly God in favour of a return to a belief in the power of God in Heaven, Smith’s theory of the invisible hand, which made sure that the market worked for the benefit of all, put the fate of men back in the hands of the Protestant God. Either way, whether the Earthly God or God Himself secured rule of law, the point of sovereign power remained the same: to make sure that the smooth, Euclidean space, of the market was able to function effectively without external interference.

III. Apocalypse Now

In Edward Luttwak’s (1998) view the savagery of neo-liberal capitalism is possible because of the way that the desire for self-realisation locked into American thought mixes with a deeply rooted Calvinist ideology able to justify the fate of winners and losers on the basis of whether God is on their side. Why should we care about the fate of capitalism’s losers if even God has abandoned them? On the basis of this brutal theology, which seems to have infected everybody who buys into the American ideology of freedom, democracy, and individualism, people who speak about human solidarity are considered to be utopian fools. What so-called realists understand is that the rich have no time to worry about the poor, since they are caught up in their own economic metabolism which, because of the debt economy and the monetarist demands for super-consumption, is always over-heating and on the point of breaking down. Apart from the fact that the super-consumers always live beyond their limits, so that it is a mistake to say that they are ever comfortable, since they spend their lives panicking about sustaining over-blown lifestyles on the back of totally insecure employment, they also have to worry about the poor, who invariably turn to crime in societies determined by an economic ideology.
where the line between legality and criminality is necessarily more or less flexible. But perhaps I have painted an overly bleak picture of the terrible social effects of this super-efficient economic regime because I have not considered the possibility of political change? In response to this question I would say that we should not put our faith in motivated political change. The classical writer on American society, Alexis de Tocqueville (2002), understood that American politics is economics. Today that model has been generalised to more or less the entire world through the machinations of American led institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, so I would not expect politics to trump economics in the contemporary world situation.

Where should we look for hope, then, in our post-historical age of utopias? Does the answer to our situation reside in the fact that today the kinetic utopia might be reaching its limit in terms of its relation to its temporal and spatial situation? What does this mean? As the Hobbesian-Lockean theoretical model of kinetic utopia outlined in the second part of this paper suggests, and the history of American interventions in other parts of the world tends to confirm, the kinetic utopia has always had more in common with the brutally imperialistic totalitarians that most commentators have felt able to admit, simply because the violence of the American utopia had for so long been offset by Keynesianism and the positive ideology of self-realisation. As it stands, however, the kinetic utopia, which under neo-liberalism has become de-coupled from its traditional American space-time location to the extent that Hardt and Negri (2000) felt it necessary to invent the term Empire to describe its key features, may have run out of space and time ripe for expansion. On the basis that both space and time have been more or less colonised by Empire, Paul Virilio’s (2006) work suggests that the kinetic utopia has nowhere else to go. In the past we might have imagined that the globalisation of America would have resulted in the emergence of a cosmopolitan world of freedom, democracy, and individualism, but most commentators agree that this is not what the neo-liberal dreamworld has delivered. Instead Virilio (2005) shows that the total expansion of the kinetic model into every space and every time has resulted in the emergence of a panicky claustropolis, a new form of limited civilization where we are always on edge, waiting for the next global shock to impact upon our lives (De Cauter, 2004).

Given this state of paranoia, Virilio explains that the claustropolis is always too small, since we cannot tolerate contacts with others who will more than likely turn out to be enemies. Even the slim possibility that we might be proven wrong, the possibility that the other might out to be a friendly, is not enough to change our overall view of them, because if they are not our enemy today, it is more than likely that they will turn out to be an enemy tomorrow or the day after that. Herein resides the origins of the globalisation of endless low intensity or dirty war in the contemporary
kinetic utopia which has resulted in the equation of super-criminalised mega-cities, such as Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro, and real urban war zones, such as Baghdad and Fallujah. The dividing line between these two forms of ultra violent space is, of course, difficult to draw. How are we to decide whether the battle between militarised police and drug gangs in Rio’s de Janeiro’s German Complex is constitutive of a struggle between law enforcers and outlaws in a society where corruption is the norm? Similarly, what are we to say about the war between the free market utopians and radical Islamists in Baghdad when the former military neo-liberals are engaged in the barely hidden practice of primitive accumulation and the latter criminalised Puritans have turned to kidnapping anybody with a dollar value in order to make a fast buck (Klein, 2007). The student of the early 20th century urbanists might point out that this conjunction of the city and low intensity warfare is nothing new and that it was suggested by the work of thinkers such as Georg Simmel (1997), but what is new about Virilio’s claustropolis is the sheer scale of the violence occurring between the haves and the have-nots in the world of the kinetic utopia. The key point is that it is possible to stretch Simmel’s theory of estranged social relations to suggest that the evolution of urban life could result in the recreation of the Hobbesian state of nature, whereas Virilio’s notion of the claustropolis is if anything an understated commentary on what is taking place in many of today’s Dante-esque cities.

In his recent book on the accident Virilio (2006) suggests that the philosophical big bang that occurred with Hobbes’ transition to modernity has reached its limit in post-modern globalisation. The expansionism, which was characteristic of More, Hobbes, Locke, the totalitarians, and remains the key feature of the kinetic utopians, has now shifted into reserve gear. In the wake of the long historical expansion from cities to nations, empire, and eventually cosmopolitan internationalism, we have set out on the return route through globalisation, empire, nationalism, back towards an ancient concentration on urban space. However, the difference between the long historical evolution from the original human settlements to globalisation and the back slide from globalisation to the focus on urban space is that the former took place through history, whereas the latter is occurring in a post-historical universe, so that it is not that the global sphere is breaking down before the nation and that eventually we will return to live in neo-medieval city states, but rather that the macroscopic global scale is now telescoping into the concentration on the microscopic hot spots, particular urban spaces, which embody the savagery of the immaterial processes of post-modern globalisation. It is this strange process, whereby the global and local have been telescoped into each other under the influence of the post-modern kinetic utopia, that has resulted in the creation of what I would call black hole cities, ultra violent urban spaces where the only law is the law of self preservation and the only workable politics the politics of the Hobbesian Leviathan. The irony of this translation of urban space from safe haven, which was originally meant to deliver the original
pre-historic nomads from the violence of the state of nature, into war zone, where the human ability to tell stories about the world, which is definitive of both history and culture, has been resolved into a truly stupid war for survival, should not be lost on us. It is written into the very name of the city of Baghdad, originally called Madinat-al-Salam, City of Peace, by Caliph Al Mansur who founded the city in 762AD. This is a name that I think we should remember simply because if we think that the conditions of contemporary mega-cities such as Los Angeles and Sao Paulo are bad, then we should realise that they are nothing compared to what has taken place in Iraq, the home of human civilization that we must now regard as the home of human barbarism, because of the military neo-liberals’ efforts to realise a degenerate kinetic utopia in the Middle East (Parenti, 2004).

In order to finish I want to return to Gray’s (2007) statement about the death of utopia. Did utopia finally expire in the ruins of Fallujah? Is utopia dying little by little every day in Baghdad? Again, I think that we must answer this question with an emphatic ‘no!’, since neo-liberal thinkers such as Hernando De Soto (2002) probably believe that the kinds of lengths that the people of Iraq have been driven to in order to simply survive should be understood as kind of ideal type model of capitalist behaviour, slum entrepreneurialism born out of recognition of the truth of Victor Hugo’s statement that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’. Given the existence of these kinds of views, we must conclude that however powerful Hardt and Negri’s (2000) theory of Empire is in its exploration of the emergence of the kinetic utopia cut loose from its spatial-temporal connections to America, their idea of the multitude is way off the mark. I do not believe that the perma-war that is characteristic of life in the kinetic utopia will destroy neo-liberal capitalism because as Klein (2007) has shown in her essential book on disaster capitalism, there is big money to be made from endless warfare. In light of this conclusion, which suggests that the kinetic utopia is more than likely to survive and indeed profit from the end of the world, in terms of the way that Arendt (1973) uses the term world to designate a space of culture and civilization, I think that we can say that what probably has ended in the war torn cities of Iraq is the reality of the urban as the classic space of culture, civilization, and sociability. Is it possible to think of the city in these terms when the contemporary reality of urban space is best exemplified by the exception that proves the rule, post-Saddam Baghdad?

However wrong Gray is about the end of utopia, I think he is dead right in his view of the identity of the best commentator for understanding the reality of our violent kinetic utopia. Despite popular reference to Locke, Smith, Hayek, and Friedman, the writer who best understood the kinetic utopia, shorn of all its ideological trimmings, was the originator of the idea, Thomas Hobbes (Gray, 2002). However, even Hobbes, our best hope for understanding our current situation, might be found wanting in to-
day’s kinetic utopia simply because he was writing in a historical universe, where men could make rational decisions on the basis of their bodies, their God-given pain-pleasure calculators. Our pain-pleasure calculators might still work today, but it is impossible for us to act upon their advice because we can no longer connect cause to effect in a post-historical world that is simultaneously too fast and too connected to enable us to make rational choices on the basis of proper understandings of the origins and probable effects of events. What is more is that we can no longer even be sure whether this problem is simply about the way that our world has evolved beyond sensory capabilities, since the central hypothesis of Niels Bohr, the quantum theorist who undercut the Newtonian-Einsteinian project designed to produce the complete understanding of the universe, was that it is not that wave-particle complementarity is simply an effect of the observer’s inability to make an accurate calculation, but rather that complementarity is itself an effect of the schizophrenic nature of the wave-particle basis of our reality (Plotnitsky, 1994).

What are we to make of the relation of this thesis to our contemporary social, political, economic, and cultural situation? Does this mean that even technological augmentation of our senses would not enable us to return to the historical universe, where it was possible to make informed choices on the basis of realistic assessments of the probable effects of particular actions, and if this is indeed the case how can we escape the endless violence of the kinetic utopia? I think that what this thesis means for us, the inhabitants of the kinetic utopia, is that we need to understand our situation in the world at the end of history, where all action is utopian action, since there is no way to predict how means will impact upon ends, forget about the idea that realist attempts to reform the kinetic utopia will somehow curb its worst excesses, and embrace the fact that we are living through an age of utopias. It is clear that the two current market leaders in utopian politics, the neo-liberal kinetic utopia and the Islamist utopia, are bankrupt insofar as their ability to imagine a more humane society is concerned, but likely that they will continue to fight it out until one of them simply collapses from exhaustion. While this battle rages I think that what we have to do is put our faith in Bloch’s (1995) principle of hope and try to imagine other, new, utopian solutions to the really-existing dystopia caused by the kinetic utopia. At the same time we should probably pray that the kind of secular miracle that Hobbes’ (2007) evoked to deliver people from the Hellish conditions of the state of nature into the relative security of political society re-occurs, but that this time it produces a more humane society than the neo-liberal kinetic utopia, the miracle baby born of his original state of nature.
Bibliography


