Morality and Political Modernity: The relationship between the political philosophy of Leo Strauss and the cultural politics of neoconservatism

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I hereby declare:

- that this thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University for the appropriate award;

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the political philosophy of Leo Strauss and neoconservative cultural politics. Arguing against claims that Straussian philosophy explicitly informs neoconservatism, I instead suggest that both Strauss and the neoconservatives share a common intellectual lineage that is a response to a pessimistic conception of modernity. Strauss is a neoconservative, but neoconservatives should not necessarily be considered Straussians.

Both Strauss and the neoconservatives became notorious in the aftermath of the US led invasion of Iraq in March, 2003. Contra to the narrative that suggests that Strauss inspired the invasion or that neoconservative foreign policy presents a radical break in US history, I argue that the neoconservative project of the Bush era should be understood as a continuation of US expansionism as an inevitable effect of capitalist growth.

Beyond foreign policy, my research considers the neoconservative understanding of cultural politics in particular relation to the social changes of the post war era. This thesis details the neoconservative attempt to move beyond the contradiction surrounding a distrust of modernity and the embrace of virulently nihilist capitalism. This is read through the Straussian idea that it is essential to practice care when speaking publicly.

This thesis concludes that neoconservatism is an explicitly moral discourse and not a particular set of policies or strategies. Neoconservatism recognises the necessity of moral discourse and the importance of the construction of such discourses for the establishment of the community. It is argued that the neoconservative attempt to re-impose discredited moral orders has led to the exacerbation of America's contradictions and to decline in American power. Beyond this, it is also argued that Strauss does make a contribution to political philosophy in terms of the relationship between city and man; this contribution to political philosophy is used to interpret elements of post-war American history.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction

Philosophy and Empire?

The spring of 2003 witnessed an explosion of interest in the once obscure German/American philosopher, Leo Strauss. Someone who may have been encountered in libraries by students researching the history of philosophy was suddenly being considered in relation to American geopolitics and the national security state (Hersh 2003; Frackon and Vernet, 2003; Lexington, 2003; Leupp, 2003; Madararsz, 2003; Pfaff, 2003). This sudden journalistic interest in Strauss was concerned with what was assumed to be his influence on contemporary politics; specifically his relationship to the neoconservatives who had risen to prominence in the administration of President George W. Bush. What produced this sudden interest and on what grounds was the relationship understood?

The turning point was September 2001 and the Al Qaida attacks on New York and Washington. However, it was not the attacks themselves that raised the interest but the American response to them. In contrast to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre which elicited a legal response, with those responsible being convicted in civilian courts, the response to the 2001 attack, the declaration of the War on Terror and the initial campaign in Afghanistan, was

more far reaching. Crucially though the campaign had international legitimacy in that it was explicitly backed by the United Nations Security Council.

This began to change when the American focus shifted from Afghanistan and Al Qaida to Iraq and Saddam Hussein. This shift revealed to the world at large a new face of American power and its geopolitical dominance. Throughout the twentieth century, and especially after the Second World War, America could reasonably make an argument for its invaluable presence in world affairs. Though never without its critics, particularly during the era of the Vietnam War, the US could always be opposed to the Soviet Union and a legitimate case made in favour of American power.

This all changed with the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003. At this point American power revealed itself to be non-benevolent and instead to be self serving and openly imperialistic (Harvey, 2003: ch. five; Meiksins Wood, 2003: ch. seven; Retort, 2005: ch. 2; Klein, 2007: ch. sixteen). There were no "weapons of mass destruction" and there were no links to Al Qaida. Yes, the regime of Sadam Hussein was particularly brutal, but this has not been a historical precedent for the invasion and occupation of another country, it was too easy to point out brutal regimes that were not going to be invaded and even those, such as Uzbekistan, that had the active support of the American government. Tyranny, it was claimed by the anti-war movement, was not the reason for invasion.

The logic behind the invasion of Iraq was geopolitical strategy and Washington's bid for a global hegemony that would stretch far into the new millennium (PNAC, 1997; Donelly, 2000). The reason for the invasion of Iraq was to increase American dominance of global petroleum resources (Harvey, 2003: ch. one). It was in this context that Strauss's relationship to neoconservatism began to be understood. Strauss was taken as a philosopher who acknowledged the use-value of lying in political discourse and because of Strauss's relationship to neoconservatism, and the dominance of the neoconservatives in the foreign policy of the Bush administration, it was proposed that the use of faulty intelligence in the lead up to the invasion was inspired by Straussian philosophy (Hersh, 2003; Madararsz, 2003; Drury; 2003). The figure of Strauss the bogeyman was given a certain amount of credence by a 1999 essay by two Straussians, Abram Shulsky and Gary Schmitt, called 'Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence: by which we do mean nous'. Both Shulsky and Schmitt had worked for the US government and neoconservative thinks tanks such RAND and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), they say "Strauss's view certainly alerts one to the possibility that political life may be closely linked to deception. Indeed, it suggests that deception is the norm in political life" (Shulsky and Schmitt, 1999). Such a statement, and its appearance in an essay regarding intelligence gathering and intelligence estimates, makes a link to the faulty intelligence surrounding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction an obvious one and offers the appealing notion of a conspiracy.

The invasion of Iraq was, in many ways, a perfectly logical strategy for a global power wishing to insure its position of dominance into the future. Increased control and influence in the Middle East would give the US control over the resource that is the bedrock of the global economy. Control over a resource that is under pressure from both increased demand and dwindling supply would ensure the continuance of American power and in turn bestow influence over rival powers. The attacks of 2001 provided the pretext for such an invasion that the neoconservatives themselves had noted the need for (Donelly, 2000: 51). Ten years on and the gamble for domination has, in all likelihood, failed. Instead of an era of American domination we are instead looking towards a multipolar future in international relations. This thesis is not about the particular details that led to this strategic failure, but its genesis cannot be removed from the playing out of these events.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the long 1990s were a time of relative peace and prosperity in the Western world. Frances Fukuyama announced that the end of the Cold War had ushered in the end of history and the triumph of liberal capitalism (Fukuyama, 1993); the period saw the spread of neoliberalism throughout the world (Harvey, 2005: 90-98). This thesis investigates the contradiction that appears between the post-historical, the post-national/political-enemy and the need of capital to open up new markets and the necessary production of a subject who is willing to sacrifice for the latter given the conditions of the former. Capital desires expansion and this could be seen in the invasion of Iraq; beyond the need for oil, post invasion Iraq was an

open field for the expansion of capital (Klein, 2004); the willing subject, as PNAC required, was created in the aftermath of the attacks of 2001. It is in this context that Strauss's connection to American neoconservatism is here read, as someone who has a particular understanding of modernity and the relationship between the individual and his community. An understanding of this relationship underpins much of the neoconservative thought that will be addressed.

Contemporary Reception of Strauss

The growing list of publications about Strauss owes a debt to the interest in him that developed in the time after the invasion of Iraq, and his name has been indelibly linked to the neoconservatives who were part of the push for war. Given the genesis of the contemporary return to Strauss the debate over his legacy has sometimes been highly political and personal, particularly in the work of Drury, Norton and Minowtiz. With some distance now between us and the febrile debate of the time, this thesis seeks to untangle this web of influences.

Much of the contemporary commentary deals primarily with the philosophic legacy of Strauss. Steven B. Smith's *Reading Leo Strauss* (2006) argues for a form of Straussian liberalism that is opposed to forms of political extremism and that is rooted in the relationship between revelation and political order; Eugene R. Shepherd's *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile* (2006) considers Strauss's thought from his education in Germany to his early period in America and argues for a consistency of political pessimism throughout his writing; Daniel Tanguay's *Leo Strauss: an Intellectual Biography* (2007), similarly seeks to elaborate upon

the genesis of Strauss's thought during the Weimar Republic, the irrefutability of revelation and its implications for the political; David Janssens's *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (2008) reads Strauss as primarily a European thinker focusing again on the early material. Janssens, Tanguay and Smith all focus on Strauss's understanding of the split between reason and revelation, what is called the "Theological-Political problem" and the relationship between religion and political order. These writers seek to deepen the philosophical underpinnings of the contemporary re-discovery of Strauss in an attempt to locate him as a major philosophical figure of twentieth century thought; they all try to sidestep the relationship between Strauss's thought and his political legacy. Harry V. Jaffa's *Crisis of the Strauss Divided* (2012), reviews the various arguments and disputes between the students of Strauss.

Strauss has even been given a mark of academic acceptance that was previously missing with Steven B. Smith's edited volume *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss* (2009). Interest has not solely existed in America, in the UK there has also been Tony Burns and James Connelly's edited volume *The Legacy of Leo Strauss* (2011) and in Germany Heinrich Meier's *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem* (2006), though Meier currently works at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought, Strauss's former school.

Many of these volumes deal with the details of Strauss's interpretation of texts and his intellectual development. Though important, my argument here will not focus on these details. I will instead turn towards the debate surrounding the

political legacy of Strauss. On one side of this debate we have Anne Norton's *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (2004) and Nicholas Xenos's *Cloaked in Virtue* (2008), but most importantly there are the various writings of Shadia Drury. Drury's three books that deal with Strauss were all originally published in the previous century, but they have become crucial to the contemporary debate; *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (1988), re-issued with a new introduction regarding Straussians in the government of George W. Bush in 2005; *Alexandre Kojève: the roots of postmodern politics* (1994); *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (1997); and also some interviews (Drury, 2003; 2005a; 2005b). Also notable is Tim Robbins's play (later released on DVD) *Embedded* (first performed in 2004) and Adam Curtis's BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares* (2004). It is important to mention these latter two because although they lack scholarly rigor, particularly Robbins's play, they are probably the most that many people know about Strauss. Added to these are the many newspaper and magazine features mentioned earlier that focus on the sinister and conspiratorial elements of Strauss and his influence on neoconservatism, particularly regarding the art of lying. In defence of Strauss there is Catherine and Michael Zuckert's *The Truth About Leo Strauss* (2006) and Peter Minowitz's *Straussophobia* (2009). Of these two the former offers a defence of Strauss that does not directly engage with his critics, but the latter does exactly that and is subtitled *Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians against Shadia Drury and other accusers*.

Anne Norton studied at the University of Chicago under Joseph Cropsey, who was himself a student of Strauss. Norton therefore occupies an interesting

position within this debate as someone who was taught by Straussians, but who is not herself a Straussian. Her book constitutes a personal reflection on the practice of Straussians and their relation to practical politics. She is careful to decouple Strauss himself from the Straussians who she thinks have tarnished the reputation of the teacher. Norton offers very little textual commentary or interpretation of Strauss's work, so her book is of little help in finding the links between his thought and neoconservatism. There are however several points that are worth picking up on. One of the anecdotes that she presents is of so-called "Straussian truth squads". These gangs of students interrupted the lectures of other academics, usually behaviourists, on issues of their own values and attacked them for their ethical neutrality. According to Norton, Strauss did not discourage these students and was in fact a willing participant in the partisan politics that dominated the university in the 1960s (Norton, 2006, 44-46). In his otherwise very comprehensive critique of the critics of Strauss in *Straussophobia,* Peter Minowitz fails to mention Norton's claim, suggesting a certain amount of validity. Norton uses examples such as these to build a picture of the Straussians as an overbearing, ill tempered clique more than willing to politicise the university campus. By drawing attention to organisations, such as Daniel Pipes's (son of Richard Pipes) Campus Watch which operates as an overseer of Middle Eastern Studies in American universities and which has published dossiers on academics thought to be anti-Israeli, she invokes a comparison between neoconservative activity during the War on Terror and that of the Straussians 40 years previously. The parallel implies a correlation between Straussian excesses

on campus during the heated atmosphere of the 60s and 70s and the national security paranoia of the Bush era.

Norton places a certain amount of emphasis on Strauss's rediscovery of esoteric writing and the Platonic noble lie. She makes a clear claim to the Straussian nature of neoconservatism and draws a parallel between the Straussian notion of the noble lie and the faulty and perhaps fabricated evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. This suggests that without Strauss's understanding of the noble lie there would have been no lies preceding the invasion of Iraq.

Drury is not Straussian and nor has she been taught by Straussians and in this regard our approach is similar. In the new introduction to *The Political Philosophy of Leo Strauss* she is explicit in her claims:

> There is a clear link between theory and practice: there is a definite connection between the political ideas of Leo Strauss and the ruinous state of American democracy and its tragic foreign policy. (2005: x)

She cites the locus of this connection in the figures of Paul Wolfowitz, Abram Shulsky and William Kristol, of these Wolfowitz (briefly) and Shulsky studied with Strauss and Kristol studied with Harvey Mansfield, himself a student of Strauss. These three have all worked for Republican administrations, are prominent neoconservatives and were active supporters and planners of the invasion of Iraq; Drury explains Strauss's legacy thus:

...there is no doubt that Strauss has bequeathed to the American

neoconservatives a heady concoction of ideas that explains their penchant

for secrecy, lies, and deception, their confidence in the almost limitless

manipulation of public opinion, their aggressive foreign policy, their virulent

nationalism, and their madly theological approach to politics. (2005: xxii)

The noble lie, she claims, is not noble at all but is in fact a mendacious fraud:

The administration of George W. Bush can be understood as a historical

manifestation of the Straussian subversion of liberal democracy with secrecy

and lies... Bush used lies to manipulate public opinion in order to justify a

costly and needless war. (2005: xxii)

Drury ties the Straussian use of the lie to the general collapse in meaning that is

found in the postmodern, particularly regarding the end of religion and other

systems of belief. This is something that she goes into at length in *Alexandre

Kojève: the roots of postmodern politics* in relation to Kojève, Martin Heidegger,

Strauss, Allan Bloom, Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault. She states the

"postmodern dilemma" as a question, "Can we live in a world in which reason

and its truths have proven to be the greatest source of tyranny... in which all

horizons have been exploded... in which all belief systems are deemed to be

fictions?" (1994: 203). For Drury, Strauss's answer to these questions is "no", his

noble lie therefore typifies the lack of meaning in the postmodern where truth is

a mere construction. The collapse of grand narratives, in particular those created

by religion, has produced a form of nihilism in Western culture and the Straussian project is to move beyond this. Drury seems to reject this starting point out of hand in the name of the enlightenment and liberalism; she therefore fails to deal with the basis of the argument and the critique of enlightenment (1994: 213-219). In this sense she fails to get beyond the obvious difficulties that are involved in Straussian/neoconservative solutions, the too simple wish to re-impose a religious moral order on post-religious modernity.

Drury's treatment of neoconservative foreign policy is also problematic in that she deals entirely with the contemporary period. It is undoubtedly correct to say that the neoconservatives planned and executed the invasion of Iraq with an eye on American expansion and hegemony. However, this seems to imply a break in the historical curve of American power (2005: xxviii-xxx). Contra to this I argue that American power has always been expansive and that instead of the neoconservatives establishing American empire they are simply the contemporary torch bearers.

By not considering neoconservatism in its historical context Drury gives too much credit to them and presents a change in attitude of American power that is not necessarily the case. A better explanation of the apparent anomaly of the invasion of Iraq is that America, for the first time in its history, simply could. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the US faced no geopolitical rival, but previous to this American power had always been balanced by other competing powers (Kennedy P., 1989: ch. five, six and seven). In the early days of the Republic the

former colonies were militarily weak and were forced to cooperate with each other and the imperial powers. Later, the rising American power was balanced by the British Empire and the other great powers and subsequently by the Soviet Union. Any foreign interventions that America undertook had to be considered in relation to the reactions of the other great powers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union this was no longer the case, there were no serious rivals which had to be taken into consideration when deciding upon foreign policy. What is particular about the neoconservatives is that during the 1990s they recognised this fact and developed plans to take advantage of it (Krauthammer, 1990).

Drury paints a picture of Strauss, particularly in interviews, as a shadowy intellectual figure who inspired a generation of hawkish foreign policy experts. There was a seductive quality to this sort of argument; it offered a useful focal point for those opposed to the war and who were shocked by how it had come about and by the vicious political atmosphere of the time (for an account of the febrile nature of the debate surrounding the build up to the invasion of Iraq see, Lucas, 2004: ch. seven and eight). Strauss provided a useful bogeyman, which allowed a simplified narrative of the war to develop. The legacy of Drury and Norton can be seen in the popular representations of Strauss that are given in Adam Curtis's BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares* and Tim Robbins's play *Embedded*. For Peter Minowitz, these sources, from Drury and Norton to Robbins and Curtis, because of their written eloquence and accessibility, have provided the underpinnings of the paranoid end of this discourse.

At the beginning of the DVD edition of Robbins's play there is a quote, accredited to Irving Kristol:

> There are different kinds of truths for different kinds of people; truths appropriate for children; truths that are appropriate for students; truths that are appropriate for educated adults; truths that are appropriate for highly educated adults, and the notion that there should be one set of truths available to everyone is a modern democratic fallacy. It doesn't work.

Following some footage of the audience entering the theatre the face of Leo Strauss appears on screen with the shot zooming slowly in. The play is set on the eve of an American invasion of the Middle East. The second scene involves a discussion at "The Office of Special Plans", between characters loosely based on Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleeza Rice, et al. At the end of the conversation, when the characters have discussed the need to produce lies to justify the war, they have to make an "incantation" to Strauss. The same picture of Strauss appears projected onto the back of the stage as the character "Rum Rum" speaks to whom they call their "intellectual sovereign". The scene ends with the group repeating in unison, "all hail Leo Strauss". This attack on Strauss and the conflation of his thought with imperial foreign policy, not from a philosophic standpoint but from popular culture contains an irony given Strauss's understanding of Socrates. Socrates was put to death because of the popular understanding of his philosophical life, a life that was pilloried in a comic play by Aristophanes, *The Clouds* (Strauss, 1966: ch. two).

Following the production of Strauss as the shadowy enemy there is another interesting irony. The construction of Strauss as a philosophical villain, controlling a group of Straussians/neoconservatives goes someway towards defining an enemy around which meaning can be constructed. Strauss and the neoconservatives become an ordering principle around which the political, Carl Schmitt's Friend/Enemy distinction, revolved. It is this notion of an ordering principle around which a narrative can be constructed that breaks down in modernity (Strauss, 1964: 1-12). The production of Strauss as the philosophical enemy therefore helped to create an illusion that helped to explain and order the events surrounding the lead up to the invasion of Iraq. The sinister Strauss became a locus for what Richard Hofstadter called "the paranoid style" (Hofstadter, 1964).

Drury and Norton need to be read in this context, because they too became part of the debate that surrounded the invasion of Iraq and the development of the national security state as part of the War on Terror. Drury's more far reaching claims about the influence of Strauss on US foreign policy appear in her 2005 introduction to *The Political Philosophy of Leo Strauss.* Without this introduction the book is an un-explosive critique of Strauss from a liberal standpoint. Strauss is criticised in the conclusion, written in 1988, thus:

What is unfortunate is that Strauss corrupts; and that, more than the power of his intellect, is the source of his attraction. Strauss seduces young men into thinking that they belong to a special and privileged class of individuals that

transcend ordinary humanity and the rules applicable to other people. In

criticizing Strauss, I focus primarily on the vulgar nature of his vision of the

philosopher-superman. (2005: 193)

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Strauss's philosophy is accused here of a pernicious hubris, but there is a big

difference between this and the claims she makes in the 2005 introduction

regarding the "ruinous state of American democracy and its tragic foreign

policy". Drury does not manage to fully explain the relationship beyond this

accusation of hubris; a more detailed explication of relationship between

Strauss, neoconservatism and American foreign policy is an aim of this thesis.

Drury finishes the 1988 text with these lines:

It is impossible for men who harbour Strauss's contempt for morality not to

fall into the most fearful depths of depravity. This is most unfortunate, for it

serves to undermine Strauss's contribution to political philosophy. (2005:

202)

It is clear then that in 1988 Drury did consider Strauss to have something to

offer, to have made a contribution to political philosophy. However, her own

claims regarding Strauss's influence have muddied this contribution and any

admiration that she did have entirely slipped away with the neoconservative

push for war. In an interview with Danny Postel for the web-based magazine

Open Democracy in 2003 she made the claim that "Leo Strauss was a great

believer in the efficacy and usefulness of lies in politics". (2003) However, this

seems to imply that the idea of lying in politics would not have occurred to the Bush administration if it had not been for Strauss.

The added urgency that the War on Terror had given to her work, can be detected when she says:

> I never imagined when I wrote my first book on Strauss that the unscrupulous elite that he elevates would ever come so close to political power, nor that the ominous tyranny of the wise would ever come so close to being realised in the political life of a great nation like the United States. (2003)

Drury is responding to the debate of the time which was urgent, ill tempered and grave on all sides. Drury's reception of Strauss therefore shifts, following the invasion of Iraq, along with the general understanding of the position of America itself in the international order. Her work is symptomatic of the debate of the time.

The Essence of Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism is rooted in a pessimism regarding the outcome of modernity. This pessimism first took hold in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; Gary D. Stark describes it thus:

German neoconservatism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was largely a movement of insecure segments of the middle class, especially the cultivated intelligentsia and various marginal petty-bourgeois strata which felt threatened by the entire process of modernization...

Neoconservatism represented a complete rejection not only of the political, social and economic effects of modernity, but also the liberal values and assumptions which formed its very basis. (Stark, 1981: 6-7)

This pessimism can be seen in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* and in various books by Carl Schmitt of that period. Strauss follows in this tradition and took the pessimism with him to America. This attitude towards modernity and liberalism was shared by the early thinkers of what became American neoconservatism.

The leading American neoconservative Irving Kristol acknowledged a debt to Strauss, but only so far as giving him equal billing to his other great intellectual influence, Lionel Trilling. On the other hand, Norman Podhoretz, the other major neoconservative who I focus on, to my knowledge, gave neither credit to nor even mention of Strauss. However, the same attitude to and reaction against modernity and liberalism are there. It is this attitude that was shared by intellectuals of different backgrounds that shaped neoconservatism and Strauss was just one of these. Strauss was however the most philosophically insightful. Kristol or Podhoretz would not claim to be philosophers, and so it was Strauss

who was capable of giving the most philosophically rigorous and coherent description of the perceived problem of modernity.

However, it should not be forgotten that this pessimism regarding modernity was not limited to figures usually associated with the Right. A similar pessimism, and the same movement from Germany to America is found in the work Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, particularly in work such as *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Though I do not go into it in this thesis, I would like to suggest that it is not surprising that Jurgen Habermas, who took over Horkheimer's position as head of the Frankfurt School after the former's death, in a 1981 essay, 'Modernity: an unfinished project', makes an early realisation as to what is at stake within neoconservatism (Habermas, 1997: 54). This recognition by Habermas is particularly unsurprising given the earlier German manifestation of the neoconservative spirit.

Along with the distrust of modernity Strauss shares with his fellow German émigrés a suspicion and distrust of capitalism. This is something that is shared by Irving Kristol, particularly in his earlier work. Some readers may find a neoconservative suspicion towards capitalism surprising given how closely the neoconservative movement is often associated with neoliberalism. The relationship between neoconservatism and neoliberalism will be the focus of the second part of this thesis.

The contemporary manifestation of neoliberal capitalism is therefore at the heart of this thesis both in terms of how it represents the outcome of modernity and also how this form of capitalist logic drives imperial foreign policy (Harvey, 2003: ch. one; Radice, 2005). Neoliberal capitalism, rooted in the distrust of government interference in the market (Friedman, 1962: ch. one and two), has produced a system where the deregulation of the market has driven employment insecurity and massive income inequality (Palley, 2005). In America this rising inequality, after 1980, has had a correspondent rise in religious fervour and nationalism (Frank, 2004).

The post Hayekian notion of freedom grounds neoliberalism in a particular understanding of democracy (Hayek, 1944: ch. five). This is best summed up in Milton Friedman's idea that we should be "free to choose" (Friedman and Friedman, 1980). On the surface this is an appealing and seductive notion, and is a return to the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century with freedom being premised on the lack of government interference (Clarke, 2005). However, the implication of this is that we should be free to choose in the market place. Such a notion of freedom is predicated on the fact that one has money to express one's freedom in the market. If one is without funds one is excluded and is therefore unable to express that freedom. One may say that one is still free to sell one's labour and therefore regain access, but it is an absurdity to maintain that one is free to choose to engage in more and more degrading forms of employment in order to maintain a roof over one's head.

Freedom, as expressed through the market, is therefore based on the consumer and the consumer society (Munck, 2005). Consumer society is based on the production of desire and creates atomised individuals each expressing their own particular freedom through their choices in the market place. This idea of freedom radically undercuts the idea of community, in that value is now held individually and not communally, it therefore constitutes a form of nihilism. (Bell, 1976; Kristol, 1978)

Consumer choice is a form of freedom based on a choice of how to satiate one's desire and it is through consumerism that neoliberalism encapsulates the logical outcome of modern thought by placing desire over and above moderation. However, for Strauss, it is moderation that is the key to communal living. The essence of the community is that we all accept that we are not at all times and in all situations free to choose, that we all accept a shared set of symbolic constraints. It is the collapse of the virtue of moderation that for Strauss constitutes the essence of modernity.

Neoliberalism affects the nature of democracy itself. The fact that a democratic community exists in a shared symbolic space is governed by the fact that it holds some things in common and then in common decides how these services are used and maintained. In other words, the democratic community exists in the discussion and negotiation of what is shared, this is the essence of political life. Holding that which is shared is exactly what a democratic state is because if nothing is held in common there is nothing to discuss and negotiate the use of.

Democracy therefore implies the existence of an apparatus of state that is held in common. Democracy is expressed through the active engagement in the conversation on how to use that which is commonly held and not through the passive participation of choices that are presented by another.

When considering the relationship between Strauss, American conservatism and neoliberalism it is essential to understand this apparent disconnect. Democracy, based on Hayekian freedom, is for Strauss dangerous because, "the regime that stands or falls by virtue: a democracy is a regime in which all or most adults are men of virtue" (1968: 4), whereas modern democracy is characterised by:

> lack of public spirit... the salt of modern democracy are those citizens who read nothing but the sports page and the comic section. Democracy is then not indeed mass rule, but mass culture. (1968: 5)

Bloom shares this concern with mass culture and consumerism (1987) as does Irving Kristol (1978). The question of how the neoconservative and the neoliberal, the twin pillars of modern conservatism, come together is therefore a crucial one that will be addressed throughout this thesis.

The notion of the good life is not reduced to the simply economic, but is the value of the practice of the good in itself, and for Strauss this is what the philosophical life represents (1997: 122). But life can only be led as a form of practice if it is discovered through an active engagement with that life as a search for the good. For Strauss, the practice of the good life is ultimately only

available to the few; because of this there is a problem that is posed by the many who have to be kept in order. This distinction is made possible because the understanding of the good life is taken as purely intellectual. Because there is natural inequality in intellectual, as there is in all physical forms of, power; it therefore stands that the good life is inaccessible to some. Strauss also presents another more convincing and problematic argument that the good life and the productive life are mutually exclusive. The good life is imagined as wholly parasitic on the community as it is radically without use to others; the good life is useless.

Strauss's notion of the good life rests upon a hierarchical understanding of society and the broadly Platonic structure of the philosophers, the guardians and the workers. The philosophers pursue the good life, the guardians keep the workers in check and the workers work. What is essentially a slave structure is rationalised by saying that only the philosophers have the potentiality to attain the good life because of their natural ability. It is therefore just that the others are kept in check through coercive means. Philosophers can pursue the good life whilst the rest are ruled by a prescribed system of morality that should not be challenged. What is imposed is a political morality, a system of morals that serves a political purpose. In other words, it is a morality which is subsumed by the political.

The neoconservative understanding of modernity perceives these structures of the moral order as under threat, as such their response to the crisis of modernity

is an attempt to re-impose a governing moral order through religion and nationalism. This is also why, despite their suspicions of capitalism, there is not only an acceptance but eventually also a championing of neoliberalism and an attempt to invert capitalistic nihilism into its own transcendent moral order (Gilder, 1981).

Neoliberalism needs this aspect of neoconservatism because, despite its distrust of the state, it still requires the maintenance of social order, a need that is only heightened by the insecurity and inequality that neoliberalism creates (Chronopoulos, 2011: ch. 4). Neoliberalism requires the state to enforce property rights (Harvey, 2005: 64), the neoliberal state therefore requires the police function and moral ordering of society in order to protect the privilege of the elite, capitalist class. Strauss, American neoconservatism and neoliberalism all share a fundamental elitism and it is here, despite the conceptions of the elite splitting between the possession of cultural capital and the possession of wealth, that they are conjoined.

However, the neoconservative re-imposition of morality has, as the history of the beginning of the twenty-first century has shown, led to disaster for the United States. Both financially and strategically the US is a much weaker power now than it was fifteen years ago. This is despite the historically favourable conditions that existed in the 1990s. The great tragedy of neoconservative America is that this post Cold War position of strength was not used for anything of worth except the maintenance of the position of the few over the many through the

processes of somnambulistic consumerism, religion, nationalism and later full-blooded imperialism.

Structure and Methodology

This thesis is separated into two parts, both of two chapters. The first part considers Leo Strauss and the second part the American neoconservatives. One of my aims is to show how difficult it is to maintain that the neoconservatives are following a particularly Straussian programme, this will be most apparent when we look at neoconservative foreign policy. However, I do want to maintain that Strauss should be considered as a neoconservative and that neoconservatism has to be understood, as Irving Kristol makes clear, a "persuasion", a collection of views and opinions stemming from a particular outlook and not a specifically prescribed programme (Kristol, 2011: 190). Strauss produces a detailed philosophical exposition of the problem whereas the American neoconservatives present a more practical political response.

The methodology therefore contains philosophical commentary to unpack elements of Strauss's thought and both intellectual and cultural political history to develop these themes in their appropriate contexts. This interdisciplinary approach is unavoidable if I wish to show continuity in the themes across a broad intellectual persuasion such as neoconservatism. The historicistation of the intellectual arguments, despite its anti-Straussianism (Strauss, 1950: ch. 1 and ch.

2), is necessary to understand the arguments in their proper contexts. The historical setting will also perform the crucial job of contextualising neoconservative foreign policy which is something that much of the current scholarship has failed to do.

Giving the thesis this structure will also allow me to do something more with Strauss's philosophy. I will be able to read the neoconservative discourse through Strauss in order to produce a reading of neoconservative cultural politics using Strauss's political thought. Does this then make me a Straussian? No, not in anyway that the noun is usually understood. Straussians produce commentary on so-called great books in an often esoteric style. Straussianism is therefore best understood as a form of hermeneutics. What I am attempting here is the use of Strauss as a conceptual and interpretive framework for cultural political critique. The Straussian methodology of commentary reads a text in the history of philosophy into its own understanding of the history of philosophy. Straussian philosophic history is predicated on the understanding of the crisis of modernity and the need to return to classical thought. My commentary on Strauss aims to demonstrate how he reads Plato to develop his own form of thought. I do not want to reject this thought, Strauss's political philosophy does develop themes that are important and that should be taken seriously in the same way as, for example, Chantal Mouffe aims to take Carl Schmitt seriously whilst trying to avoid the dangers within that thought (Mouffe, 2005). Strauss's understanding of the importance of myth and belief in society and how these develop through the relationship between the individual and the mythic structure of his community

will be used to inform the reading in the second half of the thesis. Those neoconservatives who are Straussians, such as William Kristol, can then be read in terms of Strauss. But also, those neoconservatives who are not Straussians, such as Norman Podhoretz, can be read using a Straussian, interpretive framework. Such an approach will allow the logic of neoconservatism to be elaborated upon and problematised on its own terms.

Chapter one presents an introduction to Strauss's political philosophy and defines what he calls "the crisis of modernity". The chapter aims to show the continuity of his thought both before and after his emigration to America. I stress Strauss's debt to Carl Schmitt's concept of the political and the importance that he gives to the mythic underpinnings of the social. It is only from this basis that we will be able to understand the nature of Strauss's seemingly nihilistic political philosophy, wherein myth, recognised as the basis of political stability, should be ordered from above. Strauss therefore needs to be seen as a genuinely post-Nietzschean philosopher who is engaged in a project of rebuilding meaning and a sense of moral purpose. Strauss appears as a cynic in that he assumes a natural hierarchy and a will to dominate others. Following from this I will show how the social may be vulnerable to the mythic constructions of the powerful.

Chapter two continues with Strauss and develops a sustained commentary on two Straussian texts. The texts in question are Strauss's own commentaries on Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium*. I have chosen what may seem a peculiar method, a commentary on a commentary, in order to show how Strauss builds

his argument through other texts. This is also one of the reasons I have chosen these two texts, the ubiquity of Plato's texts, particularly the *Republic* will mean that many readers will already have some knowledge of them. These are not commentaries on Plato but on Strauss and so the choice of less well known texts would only serve to muddy the water between the original, the Straussian and my own text. I will not be engaging with the readings of Plato in terms of the study of classics, critiques of Strauss have already been published on these terms (Hall, 1977 and Burnyeat, 1985).

Furthermore, the subject of the *Republic* is political philosophy and is therefore particularly useful to this current project. The *Symposium* is of course not usually considered a book of political philosophy, but for Strauss, it is a sister dialogue of the *Republic* and presents an argument that it is not possible to make in the *Republic.* The argument in the *Symposium* regards love, or eros, and is therefore the non-political, but for Strauss this will be crucial when we consider the political community the particular relationship between it and eros. Strauss's commentary on the *Symposium* is a transcript of a series of classes and was only published in 2001, it was therefore unavailable to Drury when she constructed her books. By focusing on Strauss's argument in this text I hope to give a clearer context within which to understand the explicitly political philosophy. In these commentaries I also engage with Allan Bloom's commentaries on the same two Platonic texts, I do this because I want to show the continuity of thought between teacher and student to build a stronger picture of a school of thought. Bloom has an interesting position within this discourse because of his relative

popularity and public acknowledgement compared to Strauss and other Straussians due to the success of *The Closing of the American Mind*.

By employing the method of commentary I also hope to demonstrate the seductiveness of Strauss. The nature of the commentary allows the author to hide behind the action and allows the reader to become the interpreter of the "great" text. It becomes easy to assert, upon reading the commentary that "Plato thinks...", whereas what one is actually reading is that "Strauss thinks...". The commentator can thereby burrow into the mind of the reader and remain undetected and the commentary acts as a form of persuasion. Such burrowing is why, for Strauss, the commentary is a specifically political writing project.

The challenge is therefore to avoid being esoteric when producing a commentary on an esoteric writer. Such a commentary is not my intention. The esoteric text is alluring because it establishes a hierarchy by firmly placing the writer above the reader. Such a methodology may be necessary in politically illiberal times, such as Athens after the execution of Socrates, but this is not the case in the contemporary era. But with this in mind it must also be acknowledged that it is impossible to produce a commentary that does not, in some sense, tunnel under the original.

Chapter two argues that the individual and the political community have a fraught relationship. The pursuit of the good may come into conflict with the social conventions that bond the community. Strauss's recognition of this

problem is an achievement of his thought because it forces us to consider

particular actions and forms of life in relation to the social whole. This will focus

on the importance of moderation as a virtue that helps to produce political

order. There is also an important stress on the nature of the political regime and

relationship between the character of the regime and the people. The

philosophic framework established through this reading of the Platonic

commentaries will then be used to inform the reading of American

neoconservatism in chapters three and four.

Chapter three follows a more historical methodology, looking at the evolution of

American neoconservatism from the 1950s onwards. The focus of this chapter is

primarily on domestic cultural issues. The aim is to show that neoconservatism is

a far broader movement than Bush era foreign policy neoconservatism would

suggest. The argument focuses on Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol and

shows how early neoconservatism developed in opposition to the radical social

changes, perceived as a form of nihilism, that began to take shape in America

during the 1950s. The argument then moves on from culture to capitalism and

shows how consumer capitalism relies upon counter cultural forms to create its

markets, accelerating the nihilistic processes of modernity that troubled both

German and American neoconservatism, Strauss included. I then go on to show

how, through the work of George Gilder in the early 1980s, this problem of

capitalist nihilism is inverted in an attempt to produce a capitalist theology. It is

through this production of a transcendent meaning for capitalism that

neoconservatism can fully align itself with neoliberalism and thus produce its moral discourse.

The final chapter focuses on the history of American expansion. I argue that it is incorrect to assume a break in US foreign policy in neoconservatism. Instead I show how neoconservatism is a continuation of the earlier expansionist ideologies of exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. What connects neoconservative foreign policy and earlier ideological notions is the sense of morality and divine mission. Neoconservatism is shown, as David Harvey suggests (Harvey, 2005: 50), to be a primarily moral discourse that acts as a response to what it perceives to be the nihilism of modernity that it pessimistically assumes to be in crisis.

This sense of moral crisis and a divinely inspired belief in the expansion of America's capitalist empire produced the hubristic foreign policy that developed during the 1990s and that came to fruition in the time of George W. Bush. Instead of being directly inspired by Strauss this thesis aims to how this expansionism is an expression of capitalist modernity itself and its self assumed moral mission. Strauss's political philosophy, as constructed in chapters one and two, can instead be used to interpret and narrate the movements of American foreign policy through the neoconservative mode of thought.

Chapter One – Modernity as Crisis: an introduction to the political philosophy of Leo Strauss

Crises New and Old

Since 2008 talk of crisis has been ever present, the 2008 financial crisis and its after effects have seemed to expose the systemic flaws of neoliberal capitalism. However, this was not the beginning of the talk of crises pervading the Western world. Since the 1970s the notion that an ecological crisis threatens the very basis of human civilisation has become more and more prominent, and the idea of peak oil implies an energy crisis that would make the particular way of life of Western modernity untenable.

For the German/American philosopher Leo Strauss (1899 – 1973) the "crisis of modernity" predated these contemporary, systemic crises. Strauss understands this crisis as the logical outcome of the form of thought of post enlightenment western modernity. It was therefore a spiritual crisis before it became a systemic one.

In the opening paragraph of the essay 'Three Waves of Modernity' Strauss cites Oswald Spengler's 1918 book *The Decline of the West*:

He predicted then the decline, or setting, of modernity. His book was a powerful document to the crisis of modernity. That such a crisis exists is now obvious to the meanest capacities. To understand the crisis of modernity, we must first understand the character of modernity. (1989: 81)

Due to its popularity at the time, it is reasonable to assume that Strauss was aware of Spengler's text around the time of its publication. The crisis of modernity is therefore something that Strauss perceived during the period of the Weimar Republic and is an expression of German neoconservative pessimism. This pessimistic understanding of modernity is retained by Strauss throughout his life.

Strauss, a Jew, left Germany in 1932. He lived first in Paris and then London, eventually moving to the United States in 1937 where he taught at the New School, New York, between 1938 and 1948, moving to the University of Chicago in 1949. Through the writings of this period it is clear that Strauss perceived American culture to be in a crisis similar to that of the Weimar Republic. The crisis is of modernity in itself and is not localised in a specific political community, *modernity is the crisis*. Strauss's understanding of the German Weimar Republic will therefore help to give an insight into the crisis, his wider thought and the understanding that he may have had of modern America.

The fate of the Weimar Republic and Strauss's reading of its collapse will give a context in which his understanding of post-war America can be placed. In a commentary on Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, published in 1932, Strauss says that Schmitt's analysis is "determined by the fact that liberalism has failed" (1932: 84), and later that "the present situation is characterised by the fact that a process three hundred years old has 'reached its end'" (1932: 93). The political turmoil that was tearing the Weimar Republic apart was the culmination of enlightenment thought and modernity that was encapsulated in liberalism.

The constitution of the Republic allowed factions to develop that were not necessarily dedicated to maintaining stability or the political status quo of the state. The Republic became dominated by a power struggle between the militant Right and Left.

The greatest weakness of the Republic, from Strauss's point of view, is summed up in the clichéd remark that the Weimar period was, "a republic without republicans". It lacked the necessary dedication to the law that the state requires of the citizen. In order for the state to remain strong and viable, the people have to see it as legitimate, they have to be willing to defend it; *they have to believe in it*. In the case of Weimar this did not happen and the constitution allowed political parties to develop that were dedicated to the overthrow of the state (Kneiche and Brockmann, 1994). The Weimar state, in the eyes of Strauss, lacked

legitimacy because "the victorious liberal democracies discredited liberal democracy in the eyes of Germany by the betrayal of their principles through the treaty of Versailles." (Strauss, 1968: 225) The so-called November Criminals, who signed the treaty of Versailles, were seen as selling out the German people, giving the state a fundamental lack of legitimacy. This lack of legitimacy was further compounded at the end of the 1920s by the beginning of the Great Depression.

Strauss calls the Republic weak but, in a text from 1965, he does credit it "a single moment of strength, if not greatness: its strong reaction to the murder of the Jewish Minister of Foreign Affairs Rathenau in 1922." (1968: 224) Strauss does not say any more about this incident so we are left to speculate about his true meaning. The lack of detail about the reaction of the German people is striking because of the context of its publication, in the USA and forty years after the events in question. Most readers could not be expected to know the reference.

Walther Rathenau was murdered on the 24th June 1922 a by member of Organisation Consul, an ultra nationalist group. The group had already murdered Mattias Erzberger, a signatory to the Versailles Treaty, on the 26th August 1921. Both murders were carried out in the hope of producing a Leftist reaction which would then provide an excuse to suppress Left organisations by the paramilitary Right. The assassinations failed to produce an uprising. However, Rathenau's murder did lead to a wave of demonstrations demanding that the government

do something about the anti-Republican activities of the Right. In this instance the people of the Republic took to the streets to defend it against its internal enemies (Diehl, 1977: 107-115). Harry Kessler described the funeral:

Rathenau's funeral took place on Tuesday, June 27th. The coffin lay in state in the Reichstag, draped under an enormous Republican flag where the speaker's chair usually stands... President Ebert delivered the funeral oration. 'The atrocious crime has struck not only at Rathenau the man,' he said, 'but at the whole German people.'

Not since the assassination of Abraham Lincoln has the death of a statesman so shaken a whole nation. The trades unions had decreed a general holiday throughout the Reich from midday Tuesday to Early Wednesday morning. Stupendous processions, such as Germany had never witnessed, marched in order under the Republican flag through all the cities of the land. Over a million took part in Berlin, a hundred thousand in Hamburg, Breslau, Elberfeld and Essen. Never before had a German citizen been so honoured. The response which had been denied to Rathenau's life and thought was now accorded to his death.

...the bullets which killed Rathenau came very close to destroying Bismarcks's life-work, German unity. It was only the German people itself, its stubborn will to live, its patience and thrift, which after a period of frightful suffering

averted the danger and re-conquered the position that had been lost through

Rathenau's assassination. (Kessler, 1930)

These protests culminated in the Law for the Protection of the Republic (21st July

1922) which obliged the government to suppress organisations that were

deemed to be hostile to the Republic. The law was essentially illiberal and

outlawed parties that were opposed to the state, but it might have served to fix

one of the constitutional weaknesses of the Republic, the openness of its politics.

However, the law turned out to be ineffective because its application was in the

hands of the judiciary who were sympathetic towards the political groups that

were the target of the law (Kolb, 1984).

What does this tell us about Straussian politics? Firstly, that a state can only

maintain its power if the people are willing to defend it, they have to believe in it

and its institutions, without this support it will be in danger of collapse. The state

should work on the production of this support, appear legitimate and allow

public manifestations of this support to be seen. In other words, the institutions

of civic religion and the production of belief in the state are paramount.

Secondly, that the state should act illiberally in order to protect itself, those who

seek to undermine it should be suppressed. Strauss continues, "On the whole it

[the Weimar Republic] presented the sorry spectacle of justice without a sword

or of justice unable to use a sword." (1968: 224) Despite the powers that were

taken with the 1922 law the Republic was still incapable of defending itself.

The election of Field Marshall von Hindenburg to the presidency of the

German Reich in 1925 showed everyone who had eyes to see that the

Weimar republic had only a short time to live. (Strauss, 1968: 224)

Strauss's assessment here is a curious one because the second half of the

nineteen twenties was, in some ways, the most successful period of the Republic.

The spirit of "Neue Sachlichkeit" (sober objectivity) prevailed, the putsches and

assassinations that dominated the early twenties had abated and the 1924

Dawes plan had produced a certain amount of economic stability and then

growth. However, pragmatism and usefulness were preferred to noble idealism

and higher cultural and spiritual achievement. The new Weimar was consciously

profit and consumer driven. The USA, as the great economic success story of the

nineteen-twenties was taken as a model. Fordist and Taylorist ideas were

adopted to improve productivity, profit and the lot of the worker. Mass culture

and instant gratification were seen as ways to improve German culture. The new

media of radio, film and magazines took this new culture throughout the

Republic. However, what it did not offer was community; groups were defined

simply through generation or lifestyle choice whilst traditional culture and

morality were cast aside. Ideology had become the field of leisure and

consumerism (Hermand, 1994: 58). German culture in the second half of the

1920s was authentically modern both in terms of its political and cultural

liberalism. For Strauss, this cultural modernism produced a flawed state in that it

abandoned the grand narratives of religion and nation and instead produced the

atomized subject of consumerism.

The legitimacy of the state was left to its ability to sustain an ever-increasing standard of living. Therefore, when financial trouble came in 1929 the Republic was left dangerously exposed. The implication of Strauss's comment about Hindenburg is that this form of cultural and economic liberalism is incapable of sustaining a state through a period of economic crisis.

> What was still lacking then for the destruction of the Weimar Republic was the opportune moment... the man who had by far the strongest will or single mindedness, the greatest ruthlessness, daring, and power over his following... was the leader of the revolution. (Strauss, 1968: 224)

In this situation the Nazis had a clear road laid out for them, the production of a new national mythos and the will to impose it; Hitler took the opportunity to reproduce the political in Germany.

The Influence of Carl Schmitt

Strauss's suspicions of liberalism, considered to be the root of Weimar's troubles, are present in some of his earliest publications, notably the commentary on Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*. Schmitt was an important early mentor of Strauss and as well as Strauss's commentary the two shared a correspondence for several years, Schmitt even recommended Strauss for the Rockefeller scholarship that took him out of Germany in 1932. Schmitt

abruptly ended the correspondence in 1933 after he joined the Nazi party (for a full account see, Meier, 1988).

It is this involvement with National Socialism that has tarred Schmitt's reputation ever since. He initially rose to a position of power within the legal structure of the Third Reich producing legal justifications for the Nazi takeover. However, he narrowly avoided murder at the hands of the SS who, in 1937, were suspicious of his commitment to Nazism. After the war he was put on trial at Nuremberg, but was not convicted (Bendersky, 2007). I have been unable to find references to Schmitt in any of Strauss's later writings and this absence is reciprocated by Schmitt. Yet the early mutual engagement was real and constitutes what Heinrich Meier calls a "hidden dialogue" (Meier, 1988).

Schmitt and Strauss share an understanding of modernity and Schmitt's concept of the political is maintained by Strauss in his later work, particularly in his reading of Plato's *Republic*. There can therefore be read a subterranean influence of Schmitt on the post-war American conservative discourse, which, though unacknowledged is still present (MacCormick, 1997).

Though an undoubtedly conservative writer, Schmitt's work has recently been an influence for writers of the opposed political tradition, most notably Chantal Mouffe. This engagement with Schmitt is used to produce a counter narrative to the universalisation of political thought that took place in the 1990s and the declaration of the End of History by Frances Fukuyama that helped to shape

neoliberal hegemony. For people developing Schmittian political thought, the question of fascism is an ever-present one. Schmitt poses problems.

This fascist spectre that haunts interest in Schmitt also had an undoubted effect on Strauss who, in a letter to Karl Löwith from 1933, tries to reconcile his Jewishness, his agreement with Schmitt and the rise of Nazism.

> Just because the right-wing oriented Germany does not tolerate us, it simply does not follow that the principles of the right are therefore to be rejected. To the contrary, only on the basis of the principles of the right – fascist, authoritarian, imperial – is it possible, in a dignified manner, without the ridiculous and sickening appeal to the 'unwritten rights of man', to protest against the repulsive monster.... There is no reason to crawl to the cross, even to the cross of liberalism, as long as anywhere in the world a spark glimmers of Roman thinking. (Quoted in Shepphard, 2006: 61)

In this revealing and controversial letter (Xenos, 2008: ch. one; Minowitz, 2009: ch. four) Strauss makes a distinction between fascism in general and German Nazism in particular. The "principles of the right", are, he is saying, necessary for the protection of the state against Nazism. When Strauss refers to "glimmers of Roman thinking" it is quite possible that he is referring to Benito Mussolini's fascist Italy. It is important to remember that at the time fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were seen as distinct movements and that anti-Semitism was not part of the national ideology in Italy in the same way that it was in Hitler's Germany.

Indeed, Italy was seen as a place of refuge for Jews fleeing Germany in the mid 1930s and Löwith himself moved to Italy and remained there until Hitler forced Mussolini to adopt the German race laws (Costopoulos, 2009). Italian fascism looked more to the glories of the Roman past as a basis of national unity and the cultural achievements of the classical world than to biological superiority (Gillette, 2002: 39). A form of fascism that looks back to the classical period as a way to escape modernity's liberalism, cultural and not a biological fascism may well have been appealing to Strauss at the time.

It is however difficult to maintain such a split between culture and biology, Nazi Germany did maintain both the biological and cultural superiority of the Aryan race and it is only a small leap to establish the cultural superiority as being a result of the postulated biological superiority. Indeed, this is how Gary D. Stark refers to the German neoconservatism of the time, "a kind of 'cultural fascism' which prepared the way for political fascism and the Third Reich" (1981: 5).In the opening sequence of Leni Reifenstahl's *Olympia* (1938) this link is made, a naked Aryan bestrides the relics of ancient Greece making this exact connection between culture and biology.

What we have is a reiteration of the claim that the state needs to act illiberally so as to avoid collapse. These principles of a strong state are, the inculcation of a national myth that is celebrated by the people, a willingness to attack internal enemies and a desire to dominate others abroad. The formulation here is the uncomfortable claim that a weak form of fascism is needed to defend against a

strong form of fascism; the state therefore appears as necessarily fascistic. Such

a formulation gives us the first indication of the type of intellectual dead end that

Straussian and neoconservative thinking will lead to. Neoconservatism is a

reaction to political modernity that fails to overcome it on its own terms and

instead simply turns its back.

In *The Concept of the Political* Schmitt states that, "The concept of the state

presupposes the concept of the political." (Schmitt, 1932: 19) The political is

defined by the friend/enemy distinction, in Schmitt's view the state is therefore

defined by whom it considers as its friends and enemies. In other words, for the

state to exist it must have an enemy to define itself against. The enemy does not

need to be a personal enemy:

But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his

nature that he is in a specially intense way, existentially something different

and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.

(Schmitt, 1932: 27)

So it is not one but the many who is the enemy, it is a group of people, it is a

'them' that constitutes the other who by definition pose a threat to the

particular way of life of the group.

The political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete

antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the

extreme point, that of the friend/enemy grouping. (Schmitt, 1932: 29)

The enemy is potentially anyone who is not a friend; the other can become the enemy at any particularly intense time. If it is accepted that the enemy is a threat to the particular way of life of the community, friends must be those who are perceived to share a particular way of life that is valued by that community.

Schmitt sees the political as a spectrum of intensity and a simple antagonism can become more intense until the enemy appears. Every participant is able to:

> ...judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict. Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's form of existence. (Schmitt, 1932: 27)

The particulars of the way of life are not important but if the specific way of life is under threat, that which poses the threat intensifies to a point where it becomes the enemy. At this point the enemy has to be negated, it does not matter about personal feeling towards the particular enemy, once the enemy is declared it must be destroyed. However, this does imply an impossibly destructive cycle, once the enemy is destroyed there will, of necessity, need to be another one found; Schmitt's concept of the political demands a constant conflict.

The root of this relationship is in Thomas Hobbes's state of nature, war or the possibility of war and a life that is "nasty, brutish and short" is the basis of this political association. Fear brings people together in a state through collective

protection, but if it were not for this fear there would be no need for the constitutive political action. The state of nature is equitable with Schmitt's concept of the political, it remains an ever present possibility. The natural, default position is one of enmity and competition so for Schmitt, "all genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil" (1932: 62). Man is a dangerous animal and political philosophy needs to begin from this premise. The fear remains once the state is formed, the enemy remains but it is now the other states or other actors who pose a threat. Schmitt sees the international order as the necessary resting place of the political, "the political entity presupposes the real existence of an enemy and therefore coexistence with another political enemy" (1932: 53). The international sphere supports political order by producing these differing groups that have to balance the negative production of the group on the one hand and the avoidance of destructive conflict on the other.

In a letter to Schmitt from 1932 Strauss sums up his reading:

...if I have correctly understood your opinion... it leads precisely to the conclusion that there is a *primary* tendency in human nature to form *exclusive groups*... The ultimate foundation of the Right is the principle of the natural evil of man; because man is by nature evil, he therefore needs *dominion*. But dominion can be established, that is, men can be unified, only in a unity *against* – against other men. Every association of men is *necessarily* a separation from other men. [emphasis in original] (Meier, 1988: 124)

This is a crucial principle for Strauss, man is by nature evil and is predisposed toward violence; this is the pessimistic basis of his political philosophy. Whereas Schmitt claims that this presupposition is the basis of "genuine" political theories Strauss merely claims it as the basis of Right political theory. The understanding of the political as a relationship based on conflict means that liberal political theory, based on cooperation or tolerance, cannot, for Strauss, be a legitimate political theory.

The group is defined negatively against another group and the state is defined against the enemy, and by this logic, without a negative definition, the group would fall apart. So, the accusation that Schmitt and Strauss made against the Weimar Republic is that because of its acceptance of all groups it failed to define one single group, it was therefore not held together by anything. There wasn't a group strong or willing enough to defend the state. Opposed to this was a fascist ideology the basis of which was the construction of group identity based on cultural, linguistic and racial purity. Here again is the fine line that Strauss appears to be walking where a pessimistic conception of the nature of man necessitates the concept of the political as the negative definition of one group against another. Within this fascism is simply the extreme form of the necessary political relationship.

The political can exist in bodies other than the state if the state fails to define itself. The universal state is an illogical construction for Schmitt because within the universal, difference will be found that will reconstitute the political. What

would remain in the universal state would be "culture, civilisation, economics, law, art, entertainment, etc." (Schmitt, 1932: 53) These are the fields where the new political bodies would form. Differences between sub-groups, for example in particular religions, would pose existential threats to each other, within the scale of intensity these differences could become antagonisms which could become full political enmity. Difference in this sense can only have meaning as radically opposed to something else. The state only appears as the essential political construction because all other difference can be subsumed under it, civil war is not an option because the enemy exists externally. Constructing the friend/enemy distinction at the level of the state therefore produces order.

Within this context liberalism represents the negation of the political, Strauss calls it an "anti-political mode of discourse" (Strauss, 1932: 84). In his commentary Strauss cites the above, "politics free weltenschauung, culture, civilisation, economy, morals, law, art, *entertainment*", and calls it "a world without seriousness" (Strauss, 1932: 100). Strauss sees an extra problem to the one of political order, beyond the problem of political anarchy there is one of mass culture which he defines as "a culture which can be appropriated by the meanest capacities without any intellectual and moral effort whatsoever and at a very low monetary price." (Strauss, 1968: 5) In other words, the political produces virtue, a world without the political is a world in the grip of nihilism. The liberal discourse only achieves amnesia about the political; the political is still there, and so "In order to remove the smokescreen over reality that liberalism produces, the political must be made apparent as such and as simply

undeniable." (1968: 84) The political needs to be revealed to the people so as to re-form them as a group and reproduce virtue, this is the political task of the Right within the liberal state.

Belief and the Production of the Political

How is it that groups are formed as friends and enemies? Strauss's earliest work, his 1921 doctoral dissertation *The Problem of Knowledge in the Philosophical Doctrine of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi,* supervised by Ernst Cassirer examined Jacobi's (1742-1819) concepts of "unreasoned belief" and "nihilismus". Anticipating modern criticisms of secularism, Jacobi attacked Spinoza as a liberal rationalist, arguing that this rationalism would lead to relativism and nihilism. Jacobi recommended a return to the unquestioning orthodoxy of religion and maintained that there is a choice between reason (which leads to atheism and nihilism) and faith (which means rejecting reason) (Gunnel, 1991). In the dissertation Strauss identifies in Jacobi "two types of general attitude of mind", these are, "courageously believing" and "timidly doubting" (2002: 54). Believing becomes heroic and the Kantian "dare to know" is inverted, becoming "dare to believe" implying a wilful suspension of disbelief.

Belief, like rationalism, becomes an organising principle for thought. It mediates the subject and experience. The scientific rationalist aims at certainty, he invents hypotheses and tests them, but the general caste of mind is one of doubting

knowledge; the scientist and the philosopher accept that they do not know and that they cannot be certain. However, and this will be the strong claim for Strauss, this isn't the case for the whole of the social. In order for the particular society to function there must be certain things that are not questioned; some things have to be believed by the whole.

Belief seems to be necessary for action because, given that I cannot be certain, I have to believe in the possibility of a positive result in order to take the risk. Within this the scientific rationalist approach would consider, hypothesise, test and then back a belief based on the findings, thus minimising the risk. Someone not following this approach may blindly believe something to be the case without questioning and apply that belief to any decisions.

Of these two types of belief the first would be, in effect, a series of small beliefs that are applied to particular situations. The second would be a single overarching belief, a belief, for example, in an anthropomorphic god which would mediate understanding and inform action. The first type of belief is based in the individual and acknowledges the particular situation and is characterised by scepticism. The second type of belief can be shared by a group over an extended period of time. The first type of belief is of little use as a principle of explanation of the world in general whereas the second, especially if it regards an anthropomorphic god can be used to ascribe an agency to an otherwise meaningless world.

Although some form of belief is common to all and is necessary for the decision, it is the latter form of irrational belief being privileged by Strauss. The difference will be the political one; mass political action will require the second kind of belief because it relies on a mass belief in the same thing. The problem that rationalism and political liberalism cause is that a multitude of conclusions are drawn and respected between a people and so mass political action is made difficult.

The Production of Belief

In a short commentary on Thucydides Strauss presents the Spartan explanation of the Earthquake in of 464 BCE. "Their [the Corinthians] polluting action… [was] responsible for the great earthquake" (Strauss, 1983: 90 and Thucydides, 1954: 128). The Gods were punishing the Spartans and the Spartans held the Corinthians responsible for this. Importantly the Spartan earthquake, as Thucydides presents it, via the argument over who upset the Gods, is one of the causes of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta (Thucydides, 1954: 128). Belief, as Strauss presents it, may be important for the generation of meaning and the production of a sense of purpose, but, as is the case in the Peloponnesian war it also produces affects that are beyond the control of the believers. Belief is beyond rational control.

The gods provide meaning in a meaningless situation. The scientific rationalist may explain an earthquake in terms of the movement of tectonic plates and could observe and conduct experiments in order to reject certain hypotheses, but what about the person who does not conduct experiments but does believe that earthquakes are caused by the movement of tectonic plates and not angry gods? This person simply trusts that the scientist is correct; it is no more than *doxa*. Science does of course try to reduce the level of simple belief in its hypotheses, the peer review process for example, but still, it is uncommon for the non-expert to read the latest scientific papers. This "knowledge" is based on trust and the apparent legitimacy of the source.

Belief is generated culturally, a person brought up in a modern, secular society would most likely believe that earthquakes are in fact caused by the movements of tectonic plates. On the other hand, someone who grew up in fifth century Sparta would, in all likelihood, have believed that earthquakes are caused by angry gods. With both of these positions the individual would be unable to explain to anyone how either tectonic plates or angry gods caused earthquakes. They would be merely repeating the *doxa* of their upbringing. Belief should therefore be considered as mimetic, it is the repetition of that which has been said and it is more likely to be repeated the more often that the repetition is heard. The presence of *doxa* is, for example, why we have such strange pseudo debates around the sciences of climate change or evolution, these revolve around the appearance of legitimacy of the various scientists and publications

involved because the science is simply not done by the vast majority of debate participants.

Within this sketch, belief can be either scientific or transcendent. It is the assumption of knowledge when knowledge should not necessarily be assumed. But, scientific belief is doubtful, it is dubious about itself. Transcendent belief on the other hand presents a "meaning" it explains and it gives an unmovable base upon which action can be based.

In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, the continuity of Strauss's philosophic scepticism can be seen in his project. The average man believes himself to have knowledge of the world but this belief is merely some form of *doxa*. Strauss gives us some sense of what he sees as the structure of this form of belief, adopting a "thing" and "sense data" distinction, he tells us that an empiricist would:

> ...contend that what is perceived or "given" is only sense data; the "thing" emerges by virtue of unconscious or conscious "constructions": the "things" which to common sense presents themselves as 'given' are in truth constructs. Common sense understanding is understanding by means of unconscious construction; scientific understanding is understanding by means of conscious construction. Somewhat more precisely, common sense understanding is understanding in terms of "things possessing qualities"; scientific understanding is understanding in terms of "functional relations between different series of events". (Strauss, 1968: 212)

The scientist consciously constructs, by hypothesising and testing. The "common sense" person unconsciously constructs understanding and it is accepted as given. "The new political science comes into being through an attempted break with common sense" (1968: 212), it is this new political science that will produce modernity. The problem is caused because the "naïveté" of the common sense opinion "cannot be avoided in any way" and in fact "no human thought ... is not in the last analysis dependent on the legitimacy of that naïveté." (Strauss, 1968: 212) Modernity challenges the common sense understanding but once revealed as baseless common sense is not replaced by anything.

Crucially, the "old political science" – pre-modern political philosophy – was not unaware of these imperfections, it knew that political opinion was indeed based on unconscious constructions, "but it did not believe that the remedy lies in the total rejection of common understanding as such." (1968: 213) The claim is not only that these unconscious constructions cannot be escaped from but that the attempt to escape from them is dangerous. The further claim is that these unconscious constructions should be maintained consciously. Of course, the naïve man will not consciously maintain the unconscious constructions, this is what the political person should do. This is advanced further by Strauss, "a political man must at least pretend to "look up" to something to which at least the preponderant part of his society looks up." (Strauss, 1968: 214) The person who thinks politically is aware of "political things", these things are the need for and use of the common opinions of the particular society. Awareness of political things is an awareness of the particular beliefs of the particular society. Scientists

should be aware of the common opinion of the society within which they live and should seek to maintain that opinion even though science may challenge them.

The particular society is a grouping of various individuals:

> ...hence, the key to the understanding of political things must be a theory of groups in general. Groups must have some cohesion, and groups change; we are then in need of a universal theory which tells us why or how groups cohere and why or how they change. (Strauss, 1968: 219)

The key to maintaining groups is an understanding of how groups work and is it unfortunate that Strauss does not openly present his research on this matter. Modern political science is lacking in that it claims that there cannot be "a single objective which is approved by all members of society" (1968: 219). It therefore helps to create a situation in which group based belief is made more difficult, therefore eroding the foundations of the group.

It is no longer possible to talk about values because values are necessarily shared, but man is distinguished from animals "because he posits values" (Strauss, 1968: 221). Man is distinct from animals because he has shared values which constitute a group beyond the family unit. This claim is also present in the commentary on Schmitt, the human is only human because of the political and the political is the basis of the human (Strauss, 1932: 102). Humanity, as a notion is reliant upon the formation of groups, without groups it would make no sense

to talk about the human. In the dissertation on Jacobi Strauss remarks that religion (and therefore belief as well) is "the truly human instinct", it makes no sense to talk about the human without first acknowledging this (2002: 56). Belief becomes necessary for the decision and is vital for the production of the society, Strauss says:

>...every political society that ever has been or ever will be rests on a particular fundamental opinion which cannot be replaced by knowledge and hence is of necessity a particular or particularist society. (Strauss, 1968: x)

There is no politics without myth and without the political it makes little sense to talk about society. Understanding belief and the construction of myth is therefore key to developing an understanding of the state.

Cassirer's Myth of the State

Ernst Cassirer, who was Strauss' teacher, describes myth as pathological; it is emotion turned into image and symbolic expression, in language, art and religion; the emotion here is fear (Cassirer, 1946: 43-47). To see how the religious myth develops I will look at the history that Cassirer gives in his *The Myth of the State*, a book that Strauss described in a review as "diagnosing the illness of our time" (Strauss, 1959: 292), in which we see the movement from religious to political myth. For Cassirer, the modern history of political thought

begins with Machiavelli where religion is subordinated by the state. One aspect

of this is the control of fortuna, by which is meant the incalculable aspect of

nature, and the second is the rationalisation of state power. This meant the end

of religious power and, for Cassirer, the beginning of Western secularisation and

the collapse of the religious myth. The state subordinating myth is the beginning

of the state controlling myth. The history of modernity will be the increasing

ability of men to produce and control new mythic discourses and the breaking of

religious hegemony was the key to this.

Romanticism is presented as a return of a mythic narrative, and myth was

"regarded as the mainspring of human culture" (Cassirer, 1946: 183). This paves

the way for the romanticisation and mythologisation of the state, the nation is

here conceived of as a particularly modern formation. Part of the

mythologisation of the state is concerned with the worshipping of heroes.

Cassirer places the modern understanding of hero worship with the Victorian

essayist Thomas Carlyle where history is nothing but the lives of great men, or,

more accurately, mythic history is the celebration of the lives of great men.

In the Hegelian state "the worship of the state is combined with hero worship"

(Cassirer, 1946: 267). The modern state becomes the nexus of the mythic

discourse, and the state is driven by the desire, passions and ego of the hero. The

hero becomes the person who reorders the state unto their will, in this sense

"Nietzschean immoraliam was no new feature; it was already anticipated in

Hegel's system" (Cassirer, 1946: 268). Hegel expresses the idea that in every

epoch there is a nation that is the embodiment of world spirit and that this nation is destined and has the right to rule over all others. National power is not necessarily physical but is "rather in the indwelling spirit and the history of the nation" (Cassirer, 1946: 275). National power lies in the power of its mythic understanding of itself. The power of the group is in its power to demand absolute commitment whilst destroying the commitment of other groups to resist.

Here can be seen the return of myth in terms of nationalism. During the first half of the twentieth century the forces that produced the modern world broke down and the state itself became vulnerable to collapse:

> This was the natural soil upon which the political myths could grow up and in which they found ample nourishment… In politics we are always living on a volcano… In all critical moments of man's social life the rational forces that resist the rise of the old mythical conceptions are no longer sure of themselves. In these moments the time for myth has come again. For myth has not been really vanquished or subjugated. It is always there, lurking in the dark and waiting for its hour and opportunity. (Cassirer, 1946: 279-280)

The enlightenment served to hide myth but, given the right conditions it will return. Myth, in this understanding, like the political, is the ever present element but it has different intensities and rhythms which the prevailing conditions give opportunities for people to alter.

The leader or the politician becomes the focus of the new political myths, and, more than simply the focus they are also the producer of the myths. The myth therefore is the locus around which the political establishes itself and it is the human propensity for myth that makes the political something that cannot be wholly eliminated.

Cassirer touches upon what he thinks is a modern phenomenon, a "myth made according to plan" (Cassirer, 1946: 282). Echoing Machiavelli's sentiment about subsuming religion under the state we now have the state producing its own mythology. What is particularly modern in political myth is the rational understanding of the processes that produce it; what develops is the use of the rational to feed the irrational. And so, the very dubious question is raised; given that myth is to some extent inescapable, how is it controlled? and given that it is controlled, how *should* it be controlled? In part two, this understanding of myth and its conscious construction will be shown at work in the neoconservative conception of culture, particularly regarding the production of the friend/enemy and the affects of this on morality.

Political myth offers stories of the origin of a nation, gives tales of heroes, tells of renewal and gives a glimpse of the future. They are not sacred in the sense of religious myths, they do not offer notions of an afterlife but they are accepted as fundamentally true (Flood, 1996: 41). They have therefore adapted to modernity, they have incorporated elements of rationalism and can make appeals to science. Modern, political myth serves those who want to mobilise a

group to some form of action, a political myth offers a simple understanding of the world to those without the time or inclination to find out what they can about a given situation. As was shown earlier, knowledge is based on an absolute lack of certainty, finding out everything about everything that is going on is impossible. Reason then, is not capable of making a decisive victory over myth, this is what Strauss refers to in the 1967 essay *Jerusalem and Athens*, (Strauss, 1997: 377-408) he is sceptical regarding the possibility of overcoming the idea of revelation and his political philosophy is built upon this scepticism.

The political myth filters new information and it acts as cognitive schemata that mediate experience. Myth is produced through constant repetition, certain triggers will then produce responses, if A is the experience this means that B, C and D are inferred, this will then produce action E. Myth operates in a narrative form, it tells a story (Boyer, 2001: ch. three). It appears in political speeches, in histories, in cinema, literature and the news. As opposed to the religions of the book, that are trapped to certain sacred texts, political myth is a lot more malleable, political myth can adapt to the times.

This point is made explicitly by the neuroscientist Drew Weston when he links political appeal and emotional and irrational functions of the brain. Weston's focus is on neuroscience and election campaigns and what is revealed is how successful politicians produce a mythic understanding of themselves. Political campaigns have to be emotionally compelling because an appeal to reason will not gain traction which is why the politics of populism is so successful. Victorious

campaigns will produce "emotionally laden networks of association" (Weston, 2008: 84), these networks trigger a set of associations given a particular input. The political trick is to produce the desired network in the public's imagination and then send the correct signs to trigger that network. It is this link between emotion and the political that Strauss will focus on in his reading of Plato's *Republic*, particularly in the figure of Thrasymachus, the rhetorician.

Producing the network of associations takes a long time, Weston cites think-tanks and media networks as producing these but it would be more appropriate to consider the whole of cultural output. It is for this reason that the neoconservatives will have such an interest in popular culture. When axial religion developed there were few books and few readers, in the modern era this is the opposite, mythic discourse can be repeated over a wide spectrum of media. Because of this the process of mythologisation has massively sped up and is in constant flux. This gives the political myth both great strength and great vulnerability.

The mythic grounding of the state was challenged by modern political thought, particularly liberalism, for Strauss this provoked a moral crisis in modernity which helped to produce more unstable forms of myth. But modernity, especially through the development of communications technology allows what Cassirer called myth "according to plan", and the conscious construction of myth. Myth according to plan is what the neoconservatives recognised the need for as a cure for the crisis of modernity, particularly after the 1970s.

In Cassirer's history of the myth of the state it is Machiavelli who is highlighted as an intellectual turning point and, when reviewing Cassirer's book Strauss comments that "A new liberation from myth was achieved by Machiavelli." (1959: 294) For Strauss it is this form of thought and the attempt to escape myth that has produced the crisis of modernity. It is important therefore that the Straussian history of modern political thought is examined, because "to understand the crisis of modernity, we must first understand the character of modernity." (Strauss, 1989: 81) To map out this intellectual history two pieces will be considered, 'Three Waves of Modernity' by Strauss, and a lecture from 1929 entitled 'The Age of Neutralisations and Depoliticisations' by Schmitt (This lecture was often published with *The Concept of the Political* in German editions of that book). For Strauss:

> The crisis of modernity reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern Western man no longer knows what he wants – that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. (1989: 81)

The crisis is one of moral relativism. Relativism is the summation of enlightenment thought and scientific rationalism which considers that "all knowledge which deserves the name is scientific knowledge", but crucially for Strauss, "scientific knowledge cannot validate value judgements." (1989: 82) Science cannot demonstrate the moral validity of a given action, it cannot give a

command, such as "thou shalt...". He rejects a historicist perspective where principles of evaluation are historically given, "hence it is impossible to answer the question of right or wrong or of the best social order in a universally valid manner." (Strauss, 1989: 82) The challenge will be that liberal values are not values at all, he links values to judgements and morality, "modern culture is emphatically rationalistic, believing in the power of reason; surely if such a culture loses its faith in reason's ability to validate its highest aims, it is in crisis." (Strauss, 1989: 82) Liberal values do not make judgments and are concerned with "understanding". This is the root, as Strauss sees it, of modernity's nihilism; the inability to condemn.

"Modernity is secularised biblical faith" (Strauss, 1989, 82), it is "the preservation of thoughts feelings, or habits of biblical origin after the loss or atrophy of biblical faith" (Strauss, 1989: 83). Secular society retains a moral code but this morality is not divinely inspired, the problem for Strauss is that "perhaps this positive project could not have been conceived without the help of biblical faith" (1989: 83), the retention of the moral code in secular modernity was, therefore, only based on a lingering biblical morality.

For Schmitt, Hobbes is seen as the instigator of modernity who began the slow "progress" to the rationalisation of all things. He conceives of the preceding 400 years as four stages of the neutralisation of the Political, "there are four, great, simple, secular stages corresponding to the four centuries and proceeding from the theological to the metaphysical sphere, from there to the humanitarian-

moral and finally to the economic sphere." (Schmitt, 1929: 131) These central

spheres are successively depoliticised and no longer allow the space within which

difference intensifies to the level of the political. Since the great theological wars

of the 16th century Europeans have consistently sought a neutral space where

common agreement negates disputes; this is the process that began with

Hobbes.

In *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936), Strauss had also considered Hobbes

to be the first modern political philosopher, but, as he admits in a new preface

written for the American edition in 1951, he had not realised the importance of

Machiavelli's *Discourses*. In Strauss's reading of Machiavelli in 'Three Waves of

Modernity' there are two thoughts that offer a fundamentally new form of

political philosophy. Firstly, that traditional thinking was mistaken because it

"looked at how men ought to live instead of how men do in fact live. Machiavelli

opposes to the idealism of traditional political philosophy a realistic approach to

political things." (1989: 84) Political society, in other words, should no longer aim

toward the perfection of man, or the practice of virtue. The political regime

should look at the makeup of its people and mould itself to them. Secondly,

Machiavelli considered that "fortuna is a woman who can be controlled by the

use of force" (1989: 84). Classical political thought held that the creation of the

best regime was down to chance and could not be controlled by man, whereas

Machiavelli considered that the "art of the founder" could allow for the

production of the best regime.

There is a contradiction between these two premises. The first is that idealism is not useful and so a more practical approach to the political is necessary and the second implies that a great founder could conquer chance and establish the best regime, an apparent idealism. The notion of the best regime has shifted. In classical political philosophy man is conceived as a slave to chance, the best regime is possible but only by chance and "man cannot overcome the limitations of his nature" (Strauss, 1989: 85). Man should therefore live according to his nature, "virtue is essentially moderation" and "happiness depends decisively on the limitation or our desires" (Strauss, 1989: 86). Strauss points out that there is agreement between classical philosophy and monotheistic religion as both involve submission to a natural order. In both, an "imagined natural order" requires submission, limitation and moderation. The classical goal of the perfection of man has been replaced by the belief that man is not bounded by and can overcome nature.

For Strauss, modern political philosophy states that "One must start from how men do live; one must lower ones sights" and "virtue must not be understood as that for which the commonwealth exists, but virtue exists exclusively for the sake of the commonwealth" (Strauss, 1989: 86). Instead of moderating desire and accepting nature as a limit, nature should be conquered. The political society is not based on an education to virtue but virtue now becomes a tool for the reproduction of political society. This means that "political life proper is not subject to morality" but also that "morality is not possible outside of political society" (Strauss, 1989: 86). Morality is created by the political as a set of shared

understandings between members of a group, but the political is not subject to that morality. The preservation of that morality will entail the rejection of the morality itself. Political order is therefore man made. This is a fundamental break in which political theory moved decisively toward praxis. The founder can remake political society and produce a new morality if s/he has the will to do so.

Man, the constitutive part of the political society comes to be seen as malleable desire. Desire is unlimited and the political task is to direct a multitude of desires, it is therefore a form of political hedonism. In this sense "the political problem becomes a technical problem" (1989: 87). Politics becomes based on the satisfaction of desire, not the moderation of desire, and the role of the state becomes the organisation of this desire.

There are two modes of thought that accompany modernity's first wave. The first is the scientific revolution, this, in its modern form, abandoned final causes as an explanation and placed man above nature. Society became the scientific organisation of desire, so the goal of science becomes "the relief of mans estate" (1989: 88). The second regards law, which after Hobbes, comes to be understood "in terms of the right of self preservation as distinguished from any obligation or duty" (Strauss, 1989: 88).

The right to self preservation and the scientific domination of nature for the satisfaction and organisation of desire become entwined in what Strauss calls "the right to comfortable self preservation" (1989: 89) in John Locke. This entails

an increased emphasis on the economic sphere so that, "eventually we arrive at the view that universal affluence and peace is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect justice" (1989: 89) this is over and above any notion of classical virtue. This is the form of social organisation that broke down, in Strauss's reading, during the Weimar Republic where the legitimacy of the state became based on the production of an ever increasing standard of living and not on any transcendent meaning. The production of legitimacy through the satisfaction of desire dominates all developed capitalist nations.

With Locke there is a further decisive shift, this time toward the notion of property. In *Natural Right and History* Strauss tells us that:

> ...since self-preservation and happiness require property, so much so that the end of civil society can be said to be the preservation of property, the protection of the propertied members of society against the demands of the indignant – or the protection of the industrious and the rational against the lazy and quarrelsome – is essential to public happiness and common good. (1950: 234)

Here we have the establishment of capitalist social relations, a political society in which legitimacy is based on the satisfaction of the desire for comfortable self preservation, based on the protection of private property. Strauss has an ambivalent relationship to capitalism and this is shared by Allan Bloom who goes into detail about the vulgarity of commodity culture in *The Closing of the*

American Mind. The ambivalence is based on the fact that capitalism, as it developed from the liberalism of Hobbes and Locke, is ultimately based on the lowering of standards, and rejects the classical virtue of moderation. In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* Strauss will say that modern liberalism "is in full sympathy with technological society and an international commercial system" (1968: 29). The critique of modernity is therefore intimately linked to a critique of the vulgarity of consumer capitalism. Overcoming this contradiction between the vulgarity of consumerism and an acceptance of neoliberalism will be a key task of neoconservatism. Bloom gives a clue to this overcoming in response to a question about what could be done to reverse modernity's moral decline, he said "not much" and he is also known to have repeatedly stressed the fact that "we are all moderns now" (Stone, 1989: xiv – xv). This ambivalence, rooted in a fundamental pessimism, allows neoconservatism room for the social abdication of neoliberalism.

For Schmitt the epochs following the secularisation of the theological began to conceive of human progress, "The concept of *progress*, i.e., an improvement or completion became dominant in the 18th century, in an age of humanitarian moral belief." (Schmitt, 1929: 135) In an economic age "it is self evident that progress is economic or technical progress" (Schmitt, 1929: 135) in this all problems are those of production and distribution and consequently moral questions become superfluous.

There is another important factor in the technologisation of all things and this is a belief in technological progress that becomes for Schmitt a religion of technical miracles, "The 20th century began as the age not only of technology but of a religious belief in technology" (Schmitt, 1929: 134). The secularisation of the religious belief and eschatological progress manifests itself in technological religion and endless economic rationalisation.

In a 1952 lecture, 'Progress or Return', Strauss reiterates this critique of the modern "belief in progress" due to the "enormous successes of the new science and of the technology which was based on it" (1997: 94). It would be risible to deny the effects of this scientific progress in terms of medicine or technological achievement but, Strauss continues, "we have to note that there is no corresponding increase in wisdom or goodness. Modern man is a giant of whom we do not know whether he is better or worse than earlier man." (1997: 98) Writing in the aftermath of the catastrophe that befell European civilisation during the first half of the twentieth century and under the shadow of potential nuclear catastrophe the point is easy to understand. Strauss cites a 1906 essay, 'The Illusions of Progress', by the French socialist, Bergsonian Georges Sorel who claimed that "Historians have traced back the question of the doctrine of progress to the dispute between ancient and modern writers" (Sorel, 1976: 176). It is this dispute between the ancients and moderns that so animates Strauss's thought (Strauss, 1968). For Sorel the doctrine of progress is the replacement of Christianity and is typified, in the French context, by Cartesian rationalism. Sorel holds that modern scientific writing is, for the general reader, akin to

"mythological stories" and that "readers, after having resolved all cosmological problems, like to consider themselves capable of resolving all daily difficulties. From this state of mind comes the stupid confidence in the resolution of the 'enlightened men'" (Sorel, 1976: 186). In other words, it is not modern scientific understanding per se that is the problem but the popular belief in science. The "religion of technical miracles" produces the hubris of modernity. Popular belief in scientific progress not genuine scientific understanding produces what Strauss calls the "anthropocentric character" (1987: 102) and the privileging of rights over duties in modernity. Sorel's position here is repeated by Strauss in his reading of Rousseau where "scholars of the first rank should find honourable asylum at the courts of princes, in order from there to enlighten the peoples concerning their duties and thus contribute to the people's happiness" (Strauss, 1950: 259). Again, it is the popular faith in scientific progress, which can make no claim to moral value because it lacks a perception of boundedness and not actual scientific progress that is at fault.

This illustrates the Straussian discomfort with and inability to get to grips with science. Strauss tries to use the idea of scientific progress when he says, "If science is susceptible of infinite progress, there cannot be a meaningful end or completion of history" Strauss, (1964: 2). This argument is taken up by Frances Fukuyama in *Our Post Human Future* where he argues against his own thesis of the end of history. The problem is illustrated by Fukuyama's concern over scientific progress and the nature of the human. For Fukuyama, scientific progress is seen as altering what it means to be human. However, this position

doesn't acknowledge that the human is always already a technologically augmented being, what it means to be human has been and continues to be altered. The problem for Fukuyama, and this illustrates the Straussian and neoconservative impasse, is that a changing notion of the human undermines the maintenance of a form of morality and social order. Ancestral legacy cannot guide the contemporary moral order if scientific development has altered the concept of the human. The attempt to maintain a steady notion of the human and a correspondent moral order sits in stark contradiction to the fluid nature of scientifically and technologically infused being. This intellectual impasse is only deepened when we consider Strauss's own discomfort with the idea of the end of history which is, if anything, the establishment of a steady unchanging human subject – the last man. The contradiction is spelled out in this attempt to maintain both an unchanging understanding of a moral order whilst rejecting the unchanging subjectivity of the last man.

Technology, and the religious belief in it, could, for Schmitt, be seen as the ultimate neutral/depoliticised space:

> Here all peoples and nations, all classes and religions, all generations and races appear to be able to agree because all make use of and take for granted the advantages and amenities of technical comforts. (Schmitt, 1929: 138)

All seek comfort through technological progress for the satisfaction of unlimited desire. However, Schmitt is not satisfied because he sees technology as a mere

instrument, "precisely because it serves all, it is not neutral" (1929: 139). If it serves all it is not a new level of neutrality, because it serves all it merely recapitulates previous modes in a new, technologised way. Nothing can be derived from it, in this sense the impression is given that a wholly neutral space is impossible because it will always generate this problem, an outside is needed. The power of technology can be harnessed for whatever reason, planes and cars can be modes of transport or bombs. Asymmetric warfare, exemplified by the super power America's inability to gain decisive victories in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, shows that technology levels down warfare, particularly when the weaker side is on the defensive. Denial of access, swarm strategies and the potential of weapons of mass destruction mean that greater wealth and apparent power are not necessarily the ultimate arbiters of military victory. What remains as the ultimate arbiter of victory is the willingness of the particular states or political movements to accept sacrifice and to die for the cause. Once again this points to the importance of myth in the maintenance of the state because it is the mythic structure of the given society that will determine its ability to sacrifice in conflict.

Technology has a further effect that Strauss illustrates when commenting on Thucydides, "a spindle [meaning an arrow], i.e a woman's tool, would be worth much if it could distinguish between true men and others." (Strauss, 1964: 218) Technologised warfare kills indiscriminately; it is no respecter of honour. Thus, technologisation makes the narrative and the celebration of the hero all but impossible; the same could be said of contemporary drone warfare. In other

words, war, as in all of modernity is not a place for bravery and heroism but is simply a technical exercise.

Technology is therefore "cultural and social nothingness", and is bound up with a mass belief in progress and victory over nature:

> ...the belief in unlimited power and the domination of man over nature, even over human nature; the belief in the unlimited "receding of natural boundaries," in the unlimited possibilities for change and prosperity. (Schmitt, 1929: 141)

The assumption is that man is unbounded, and that scientific and technological progress will inevitably provide solutions to all problems or felt lack. This is opposed to the classical understanding that conceived man as either an equal part of nature or at the mercy of it, or as Strauss puts it in 'Progress or Return':

> ...there are periodic cataclysms which will destroy all earlier civilisations. Hence the eternal recurrence of the same progressive process occurs, followed by decay and destruction.

Modernity is premised on the breaking of this cycle, on the idea of infinite progress and of a being unconstrained by nature:

...the guarantee of an infinite future on earth not interrupted by telluric catastrophes – we find this thought fully developed in the eighteenth century. The human race had a beginning but no end. (Strauss, 1997: 95-96)

An excellent contemporary example of this modern faith was clearly on display in the hubris of the financial sector in the lead up to start of the financial crisis in 2007. It was assumed that capitalism had overcome risk, and negated what John Maynard Keynes would call "animal spirits". This hubris enabled the wild speculation that was the root of the contemporary crisis (Ferguson, 2008: ch. four and five).

The problem, instigated by modernity and rooted in its hubris, is summarised by Strauss when commenting on Max Weber:

> He saw this alternative: either spiritual renewal ("wholly new prophets or a powerful renaissance of old thoughts and ideals") or else "mechanised petrifaction, varnished by a kind of convulsive sense of self-importance" i.e., the extinction of every human possibility but that of "specialists without spirit or vision or voluptuaries without heart". (1950: 42)

The clear assumption is that "mechanised petrifaction" has taken root. The rationalisation of all things has led to cultural nihilism because it does not admit to limits, it does not conceive of itself as in any way bounded.

In Schmitt's earlier *The Necessity of Politics* (1931) he says "The idea is indispensable to the very essence of politics, because without authority politics has no being, and without an ethical support for conviction, there is no authority." (Schmitt, 1931: 53) There is no politics without an idea, the idea gives ethical support for convictions that then produce the decision with the political at the root of the decision. The process of rationalisation needs more and must go beyond the rational, however, modern capitalist economics already does this, "Our economic organisation represents a thoroughly non-rational consumption hand in hand with highly rationalised production." (Schmitt, 1931: 49) The rational and the irrational exist together and group identification is replaced by consumerism.

At the time of writing the most seemingly developed form of economic rationalism, for Schmitt, was that of the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Union was based on the rejection of the authority of the Orthodox Church and did not embrace the consumer society, so where did political authority come from? Schmitt only briefly touches on the idea here but it is revealing. He discusses the Soviet flag which offers something that the simply economic cannot; it represents the authority of the revolution and the idea of politics. Revolutionary/national appeal replaces the religious because the authority of the state (if it is to remain) cannot rely on the simply economic, implying a split between political order and the state where the state disappears but political order is maintained through somnambulistic consumerism. Schmitt comments on the flag:

The machine has no traditions and is so unpicturesque that even the Russian

Soviet found no better emblem for its coat-of-arms than the sickle and the

hammer, which, though symbolical enough of the technique of a thousand

years ago, can hardly be said to express the world of an industrial

proletariat... There is undoubtedly something in this primitive symbolism that

is lacking in the highest forms of mechanical achievement, something human

- in other words, a living speech. (Schmitt, 1931: 62)

The machines that the Soviet Union was being built upon, those that represented

the future and the casting off of the immiseration of the Russian people, were

not a sufficient symbol of this state. The hammer and sickle hark back to the

traditional (but immiserated) life of the people, so even in the highest expression

of modernity the imagination of tradition is what is necessary for a national

project.

This mythic understanding of the state had been developed in *The Crisis of

Parliamentary Democracy* (1923) where Schmitt tried to balance the rational

with the irrational via George Sorel's use of myth. Myth here is a "theory of

direct, active decision" (1923: 68), it produces the political act:

The ability to act, the capacity for heroism and all world-historical activities

reside, according to Sorel, in the power of myth. Examples of such myths are

the Greeks' conception of fame and of a great name, the expectation of the

Last Judgment in ancient Christianity, the belief in *vertu*, in revolutionary

freedom during the French Revolution, and the national enthusiasm of the German war of liberation in 1813. Only in myth can the criterion be found for deciding whether one nation or a social group has a historical mission and has reached its historical moment. Out of the depths of a genuine life instinct, not out of reason or pragmatism, springs the great enthusiasm, the great moral decision and the great myth. In direct intuition the enthusiastic mass creates a mythical image that pushes its energy forward and gives it the strength for martyrdom as well as the courage to use force against others. (Schmitt, 1923: 68)

The myth is needed to produce the group that acts, it is the thing to aim for, the thing that allows one to sacrifice oneself. Action would be impossible without myth because it helps to short circuit endless vacillation. Liberal parliamentarianism is, for Schmitt, an "endless conversation", in its worst form it is merely idle chatter that is not capable of producing the decision. Liberalism lacks an element of the political because it lacks the thing upon which the decision can be made. The relativism that for Strauss characterises modern thought plays out in public as the absence of the political and a lack of sovereignty.

The presence of the decision needs a belief in a future, it needs the myth, in *Reflections on Violence* Sorel says that "men who are participating in great social movements always picture their coming action in the form of images of battle in which their cause is certain to triumph" (1908: 20), it is these images that Sorel

calls myths. These myths are imaginings of the future, a better future in which the dreams of the present are made manifest, this mythic imagining of the future is necessary to inspire action. For Sorel it was the general strike "the myth in which socialism is wholly comprised" (1908: 118) that ordered action.

We can assume that particular mythic forms will produce particular results within that culture, in other words, different myths will allow and disallow the formation of different cultural habits. Within a particular mythic construct certain forms of behaviour will be taboo and some will not, certain possibilities will be opened up and others closed down. Close examination of a community's myths will explain the behaviour of a particular group and why it does and does not do certain things.

The myth serves a further purpose for Sorel by producing a sense of heroism and justice in the action, "socialists must be convinced that the work to which they are devoting themselves is a *serious, formidable and sublime work.*" (1908: 130) The cause for which the action is taken must be believed to be just otherwise the possibility of sacrifice in the name of that cause would be minimal. Power, in the imagination of those who wield it, must always be used for good.

In Sorel's myth the end result (of victory over the capitalist class) is what spurs the decision to produce the general strike in the first place. The myth that the action can be successful is necessary for the action to take place. The political is bound up with the irrational and the rational has no place in it. In terms of

political action the rational becomes synonymous with the cynical, it is cynical to rationally evaluate that which creates the decision; rational cynicism produces the depoliticised position.

Irrationalism produces a difficult problem; when it is acknowledged that myth is necessary to produce the sovereign decision, myth must be cynically deployed. But the person at the top should not be enthralled to the myth or else the political campaign cannot be led strategically. But this implies that the ends of the leader and the rest of the movement are not the same, unless there is a coincidence of the two ends. The myth is deployed to further the ends of the leader who will always assume that his own actions are for the good. The leader needs to publically follow the people's myth and he needs to cynically put a stop to any rational cynicism. Any leader of a political movement must employ a mythic discourse to further the ends of that movement, or to pursue his/her own ends. The myth must also be imagined as reasonable, political actors must proceed "exactly as a modern physicist does who has complete faith in his science" (1908: 142). What is essentially irrational must be perceived as rational, achievable and just and the people partaking in the action have to consider each other heroic; they have to believe in each other as much as in themselves.

The above focuses on the myth of the protest and the general strike but it is clear that Schmitt does not consider this as the most powerful form of myth. "Sorel's other examples of myth also prove that when they occur in the modern period, the stronger myth is national." (Schmitt, 1923: 75) The myths of

nationalism seem to take precedence over the myths of the revolutionary Left.

Schmitt does not dwell on why here, but this can be examined within his own

framework. The myth of the nation is inherently about national glory and the

oneness of the people. On the other hand, the myths of the revolutionary Left,

such as the general strike, are aimed at producing economic justice. The problem

is that the economic lacks a transcendent meaning. Schmitt capitalises on the

great danger in Sorel's work, something that Sorel seems to acknowledge but

does not escape from, and is a reason his work was of particular interest to

Benito Mussolini (Miesel, 1950). Sorel notes that:

> Socialist writers have often pointed out that the poorer classes have more
>
> than once allowed themselves to be massacred to no purpose, save to place
>
> power in the hands of new rulers who, with great astuteness, had managed
>
> to utilize for their own advantage a passing discontent of the people against
>
> the former authorities. (1908: 151)

Once it is accepted that the people are susceptible to a mythic discourse an

outcome favourable to the people is reliant upon the coincidence of the ends of

both the leaders (the producers of the myth) and the people.

"But wherever it comes to an open confrontation of the two myths, such as in

Italy, the national myth has until today always been victorious." (Schmitt, 1923:

75) In Italy the fascists were victorious over the Left and this is not the only

example; Germany and Spain in the 1930s, the USSR under Stalin moved from

being a state vehicle for world revolution to the policy of "socialism in one country", China too, since Deng Xiaoping's reforms, has followed a similar path. Even McCarthyite America produces a similar result. Nationalism seems to overcome the Left on the mythic terrain consistently. But together they both lead to the idea that a non-mythic politics is impossible; the political is the mythical.

Alternative Imaginings of Modernity

A counter narrative developed to this process of rationalisation and what Strauss calls the "second wave of modernity" began with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau spoke in favour "of the genuine non-utilitarian virtue of the classical republics against the degrading and enervating doctrines of his predecessors" (1989: 89). However, he was unable to restore classical virtue, he was instead forced to take Hobbesian thought to its conclusion, he had to radicalise the notion of the state of nature. Man, in the state of nature, is not yet man, he is subhuman, "his humanity or rationality have been acquired in a long process" (Strauss, 1989: 90). Man is actualised as human through history, and this, as has already been noted, is a dangerous idea for Strauss.

By nature man is free but "in a certain stage of his development, man is unable to preserve himself except by establishing civil society" (Strauss, 1989: 90). The result of this is that man would only form civil society in very special

circumstances and then only if it was a certain kind of society, one that would maintain the freedom that he possessed in the state of nature. That society would be one in which all the members "must be equally subject and wholly subject to the laws to the making of which everyone must have been able to contribute" (Strauss, 1989: 90). There should be no higher law or natural law that can be appealed to. General will becomes the foundation of law over any ideal notions of natural law. In Kant and Hegel, who follow this tradition, the general will is actualised in history, "the ideal, is necessarily actualised by the historical process without men's intending to actualise it" (Strauss, 1989: 91). The general will is good because it is rational, the particular subject generalises his own willing which guarantees its goodness, this notion is then formalised in Kant's categorical imperative. In this sense all moral law is removed from nature and replaced with reason.

Strauss points toward a second major thought in Rousseau, "man cannot find his freedom in any society; he can find his freedom only by returning from society, however good and legitimate, to nature" (1989: 93). Society is fundamentally unable to sustain the good life, only nature can do this. Society, being based on the right of self preservation, is concerned with mere life and not the good life, but this concern with mere life "prevents the fundamental enjoyment... Only by returning to the fundamental experience can man become happy" (1989: 93), this is also described as "the beatific sentiment of existence – of union and communion with nature" (Strauss, 1989: 94). Crucially Strauss says that "only a few men are able to achieve this", from this a double meaning should be taken.

Firstly, only a few can achieve this because only a few have the ability or the inclination and this is what Strauss implies here. Secondly, only a few can be sustained in acting this way; if too many sought "fundamental experience" productive labour would cease and the state of nature would return. In other words, it is not possible for the many to have the good life, only the few can, the many must be satisfied with mere life, therefore, "Of the citizen it is required that he does his duty" (Strauss, 1989: 93). The citizen must follow the prescribed moral law.

The idea of the three waves is derived from Plato and it is the third that is the strongest (Bloom, 1968: 460). On this view we may assume that for Strauss it is the final Nietzschean wave of modernity that has the most radical effect. The third wave of modernity is characterised by a tragic understanding of existence in Nietzsche, "the sentiment is the experience of terror and anguish rather than harmony and peace" (Strauss, 1989: 94). But, return from the human to nature, in the way that Rousseau had imagined it, is impossible and so "there is no possibility of genuine happiness" (Strauss, 1989: 95).

Between Rousseau and Nietzsche was Hegel and the discovery of history. In Hegel history appears as a rational process, "according to Hegel there is a peak and an end of history" (Strauss, 1989: 95). The end of history, which Hegel declared following Napoleon's defeat of the Prussian armies at the battle of Jena in 1806, was understood as the completion of the secularisation of Christianity via the declaration of the universal rights of man. Although the idea that history

has ended has been in constant disputation, a belief that history is rational, progressive and has an intrinsic direction has endured.

This returns the argument to the beginning of Strauss's problematic "that modern Western man no longer knows what he wants – that he no longer believes he can know what is good or bad" (1989: 81). All ideals claim to have objective support of some kind, in a god or through reason, yet historically these are shown to have been the result of creative acts which developed within specific cultures and at specific historical moments. For Nietzsche it was "precisely the realisation of the true origin of all ideals – in human creations or projects – makes possible a radically new kind of project, the transvaluation of all values" (Strauss, 1989: 86). Truth is rooted in will to power, or, the particular truth is justified by the strongest will. The post-Hegelian and Nietzschean man will be either the over man or last man. Strauss sets this up as an opposition between man as understood by Nietzsche and man as understood by Marx. The last man is "the lowest and most decayed man, fed, well clothed, well housed, well medicated" whereas the over man "will be able to live in accordance with the transvaluation of all values" (Strauss, 1989: 96-97).

But this is not just an opposition between Nietzsche and Marx, it is also one between Strauss himself and Alexande Kojève. For Kojève the modern world is at the end of history:

…from a certain point of view, the US has already attained the final stage of Marxist "communism" seeing that, practically, all the members of a "classless society" can appropriate for themselves everything that seems good to them without working any more than their heart dictates (Kojeve, 1969: 158).

In a letter to Kojève Strauss sets down his disagreement, "I am not convinced that the end state as you describe it can be either the rational or the merely-factual satisfaction of human beings. For the sake of simplicity I refer you to Nietzsche's last men" (Strauss, 2000: 238). Though he claims in 'Three Waves of Modernity' that history has not ended, here he seems unsure. Kojève was not concerned that history had ended but for Strauss, following Nietzsche, it was a catastrophe.

In *Natural Right and History* Strauss says that historicism makes "human life itself impossible, for it would destroy the protecting atmosphere within which life or culture or action is alone possible" (1950: 26). He is here referring to Nietzsche's 1874 essay 'The Use and Abuse of History'. This text is also important for Werner Dannhauser, a student of Strauss.

Nietzsche presents the reader with a catalogue of calamities resulting from an excess of history. One of these calamities is that men, confronted with a spectacle of history so vast that it becomes meaningless for them, will come to think of themselves as *epigoni,* late arrivals on the scene for whom there is nothing whatever to do. If Hegel were right, if history were finished, modern

men would indeed be *epigoni*. Hegel is wrong, but the belief that he is right makes men act as if they were *epigoni*. Men who have no further task to accomplish or men who believe there is nothing more to be done are bound to degenerate, for what is best in man is his aspiration. (Dannhauser, 1963: 727)

The *epigoni*, confronted by the vastness of history, are cowed. For Kojève the last men at the end of history are put out to pasture with nothing left to do but graze and the triumph of rational teleology leaves man incapable of action. The further claim that Dannhauser makes is that it is merely enough for history to appear *as if* it has ended. In other words, the thought of the end of history, the thought that nothing can be done or needs to be done is like a disease, once it has begun it spreads and makes action appear as if it is impossible; "History as the science of universal becoming is true but deadly." (1963: 727) History may restart if a powerful event produces a shift in what Strauss would call "common opinion".

Dannhauser presents a solution:

If human life can only thrive within a certain horizon which men believe to be the absolute truth, but which in reality is merely one of many possible horizons, then life is in need of illusions, and the truth which exposes the horizon as a *mere* horizon is deadly. There is, then, a conflict between truth and life, or between life and wisdom...

It is, however, impossible to accept the illusions which life demands if they are known to be illusions. Myths are useful only so long as they are mistaken for the truth. A man's horizon is his most comprehensive myth, and it enables him to live because he thinks of it as the truth. (1963: 727)

In order to avoid the calamity of post historical nihilism, myths and illusions are needed to produce meaning and a reason to do something. Strauss reads Nietzsche as willing a return to a Platonic social order, and this should be understood as a return to hierarchical society and an end to liberal notions of equality. For the masses this means a return to a master narrative that will order the social and a moral order necessitated by the political, what was described in the introduction as a "political morality".

The collapse of the moral order began with the discovery of nature, first in space and then in time. The first discovery took place through the realisation of a variety of notions of divine law. The discovery of different forms of divine law raised a question about this difference, how could there be different and contradictory forms of the divine? This implied a split between nature and convention, with the former being a form of truth and the latter being mere opinion. In other words, the discovery of different social forms leads to the realisation that law is relative to the particular place. The discovery of history repeats this process in time. Strauss comments that:

...the discovery of nature is identical with the actualisation of a human possibility, which at least according to its own interpretation, is trans-historical, trans-social, trans-moral and trans-religious (1950: 89).

Nature is the unchanging, so what is good "by nature" is also unchanging. Therefore the right way of life, or the good life is discoverable and can be led. However, the difficulty arises because the social is not natural, the city is not natural. The good life and the city move in different directions, this is what Rousseau noted. But more than this, a quest to discover nature questions the social because it is based on the assumption that the particular manifestation of the social is merely a local convention relative to the particular epoch. Strauss understands philosophy as this search for nature and the good life and it is this way of life that challenges the city and its conventional form of morality.

The crisis of modernity is caused by the attempt to democratise the good life, to do this the good life had to be simplified and this produced nihilistic hedonism through the idea of comfortable self preservation. Reason and technology became tools to satisfy the natural passions and emancipate man. The legitimacy of the social became based on its ability to satisfy the passions and not any form of shared narrative or convention. Strauss holds that the ancient Greeks understood this, that they were dubious about democracy because they mistrusted technological development as a solution to the problems of the social. He tells us that "their implicit prophecy that the emancipation of technology, of the arts, from moral and political control would lead to disaster or

to the dehumanisation of man has not yet been refuted" (Strauss, 1959: 37), this is why "the crisis of modernity is then the crisis of modern political philosophy" (Strauss, 1989: 82). The twin processes of liberalisation and democratisation have produced dehumanisation by removing man from nature and convention.

Authentically human life has two modes, the first is related to the political, Carl Schmitt's understanding of the human based on the friend/enemy distinction. In his commentary on *The Concept of the Political*, Strauss says that "man ceases to be human when he ceases to be political" (Strauss, 1932: 95). Being human is based on a social understanding within a group, this group can only be constituted by the production of an outside, an enemy. The second understanding is the more privileged one, in an essay called 'The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy' he says that "distinctly human life is the life devoted to contemplation as distinguished from the life of action or of production." (Strauss, 1968: 31) In this second sense we have the life that contemplates or attempts to discover nature in the way that Rousseau thought, this is perhaps better understood as the philosophic or scientific life, or better still, as the erotic life. Life that is non-productive is therefore parasitical on the social, hence the tension.

Strauss's relationship to Nietzsche is an obscure one, subterranean in fact. It can be assumed that Strauss takes Nietzsche unfavourably, that he considers his influence in the twentieth century to have been pernicious. This, however, is not necessarily the case. For example Strauss tells us that "the theory of liberal

democracy, as well as of communism, originated in the first and second waves of modernity; the political implication of the third wave proved to be fascism" (1989: 98). On the surface this seems to be uncomplimentary, but this may not be the case, as was shown earlier in his letter to Karl Löwith where he affirms the "principles of the right" as being "fascist, authoritarian, imperial". It is also important that Strauss talks about fascism and not Nazism, there is, for Strauss, an important distinction. His critique of Weimar is that what it lacked were these "principles of the right" and this is what allowed for the rise of Nazism. In another letter to Löwith he writes, "Nietzsche so dominated and charmed me between my 22nd and 30th years that I literally believed everything I understood of him." (Quoted in Lampert, 1996: 5) Strauss's work should be read as a political response to the problems posed in Nietzschean philosophy.

Nietzschean political philosophy is genuinely aristocratic:

> ...for Nietzsche all genuinely human life, every high culture has necessarily a hierarchic or aristocratic character: the highest culture of the future must be in accordance with the natural order of rank among men which Nietzsche, in principle, understands along Platonic lines. (Strauss, 1989: 97)

It is through this elitism that the aspect of neoconservatism that finds modernity vulgar can reconcile itself with neoliberalism because both forms of thought share an ambivalence towards the "mere life" of the many. Forms of life are out of reach to the vast majority who see "the past as authoritative or at least

inescapable", the past is understood as the grounding of the future, "yet since it is no longer for him an undeniable fact, he must will it, or postulate it. This is the meaning of his doctrine of eternal return." Indeed, the willing of a certain understanding of the past is invaluable for group understanding and is the basis of state myth. As was shown through Cassirer's understanding of history, epochal change is willed into existence. But to will what? "Surely the nature of man is will to power and this means on the primary level the will to overpower others... Man derives enjoyment from overpowering others as well as himself." (Strauss, 1989: 97)

This leads on one level to political domination. The shape of this political domination is, for Strauss, beside the point; political domination of one by another is a natural fact and will be described by Strauss as a "political thing", there is political dominion because of the desire for conflict and the prestige that is gained through such activity. However, the second part of this equation - *domination over oneself* - will ultimately entail the philosophic virtue of moderation. What is set up here is the Platonic struggle between Thrasymachus and Socrates, Thymos and Eros, the confrontation that takes place between Plato's dialogues the *Republic* and the *Symposium*.

In summary, chapter one argues that Strauss understands the crisis of modernity as something that is constitutive of modernity and enlightenment rationalism. This understanding, that the spirit of rationalism is destructive of the social order because of its effect on the prevailing mythic structures, developed in Germany

in the early part of the twentieth century and was taken by Strauss to America. Developing Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, Strauss recognises the value of the political myth for the ordering of society because through myth a moral order can be constructed; importantly the enlightenment does not itself escape from the mythic structure though it assumes that it does. Strauss does not reject science and technology entirely; he appreciates the usefulness of this sort of development, but criticizes the faith that modernity has put in them. He sees no correlation between progress in technological know-how and moral progress. Politically this drives Strauss to affirm a form of cultural and moral authoritarianism; though it is unhelpful to label Strauss a fascist, his thought clearly treads a fine line. This should challenge us to examine closely his philosophy and other neoconservatives who share his pessimistic understanding of modernity and the nature of the human. Despite his dim view of modernity and the political life of the many, Strauss does maintain that it is possible to exist above the mythic construction and the set of moral conventions that govern the community. This, however, leads to a complicated relationship between the individual and the political community. It is to this relationship that I will now turn.

Chapter Two – The Straussian Commentary: erotic hiding and the political community

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The Art of Writing

I am becoming more and more "Platonic". One should address the few, not the many. One should speak and write as little as possible. – Extract from a letter written by Alexandre Kojève to Leo Strauss, 30/1/1962 (Strauss, 2000: 308)

At the beginning of *The City and Man* (1964) Strauss announces that we must revisit ancient political thought, not for mere interest, but because "We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time" (1964: 1). To fully understand Straussian political thought it is essential therefore to look closely at his reading of classical philosophy. What is the specific question that classical political philosophy can answer that modern political thought cannot? "The theme of political philosophy is the city and man" (1964: 1). It is the relationship between

the individual and society; it regards how one should act in light of one's being in the city. For Strauss this question has been forgotten in modernity.

This chapter will present a commentary on the Straussian reading of Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium,* it will not be a commentary on Plato but on the Straussian reading of Plato. Along with Strauss's own commentaries on the two texts I shall also be using the commentaries of Allan Bloom. Bloom was the student of Strauss who perhaps did most to politicise his thought and engage it directly with the politics of the day (Bloom, 1987). The Straussian reading is certainly not the conventional one, an accusation levelled at Strauss is that he selectively misreads Plato for his own purposes and ignores the genuine (non-political) philosophical claims in Plato (Burnyeat, 1985). However this criticism simply points out Strauss's particular methodology of commentary.

The form of composition and style of writing has something to do with the political problem of conducting oneself within the city. In *On Plato's Symposium*, originally a series of lectures delivered in 1959, Strauss tells us that "the dialogic character of the Platonic writings has something to do with the particular openness of the Platonic inquiries." (2001: 5) We cannot assume that Socrates is Plato's mouth piece. Writing a dialogue is a choice and it will ultimately have something to do with the political tension of thinking freely and going against convention whilst also protecting one's self and the city. Strauss's own methodology, not writing a system of philosophy but instead producing commentaries on classical texts follows the same political instinct of the Platonic

dialogue. The choice of writing style will have something to do with the political tensions within the particular city. The dialogue lacks an obvious position, for example, we do not know Plato's true opinion because he does not make declarative statements, "we cannot know... what Plato thought" (1964: 7). Plato's voice exists within the relationships and tensions between the characters and the settings. In Strauss's work the commentary similarly hides the voice of the writer behind the subject of the commentary. Through these methodologies the political is thereby avoided or tunnelled under. It is not disturbed but neither does the political come into conflict with the movement of a thought; the mode of writing will keep the political and the erotic separate by hiding the erotic.

In an essay entitled 'How Farabi Read Plato's Laws' Strauss focuses on Al Farabi's retelling the story of the pious ascetic. The pious ascetic one day aroused the hostility of the ruler of his city. Fearing for his life, he decided to flee but, unfortunately for him, the ruler had already ordered his arrest. The pious ascetic obtained some clothes for a disguise; dressed up and with a cymbal in one hand he started singing, pretending to be drunk. At the city gates the guard asked who he was, "I am that pious ascetic you are looking for" he replied. Thinking that he was only making a joke the guard let him through. The ascetic lied to the guard in deed but not in speech, this is an important distinction, speech and deed are not the same. Strauss tells us that "the story shows, among other things, that one can safely tell a very dangerous truth provided one tells it in the proper surroundings." (1959: 136) Farabi is writing a commentary on Plato using the same methodology that Strauss and Bloom employ, "a kind of secretiveness

which is mitigated or enhanced by unexpected and unbelievable frankness." (Strauss, 1959: 137) Farabi, who was writing in the tenth century, "may have written the laws, as it were, with a view to the rise of Islam or of revealed religion generally" and "he may have desired to ascribe his revised version of Plato's teaching to the dead Plato in order to protect that version or the sciences generally." (Strauss, 1959: 144) Strauss thinks that Farabi's Plato is a protected one, he wilfully misread Plato in order to protect the teaching, he told the truth but we have to understand the context; the struggle here was between Platonic and Islamic law. "Not everything Farabi says in characterizing the content of Platonic dialogues is meant to be borne out by the text of Platonic dialogues." (Strauss, 1959: 154) *The method of commentary is used to change the surroundings of a teaching; a commentary can wilfully misread a text to produce a subtly new reading.*

This methodology is part of what Strauss calls a "forgotten kind of writing" or the "art of writing" and is certainly something Irving Kristol was aware of because in 1952 he reviewed Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing* for *Commentary* (Kristol, 2011: 26-32). Philosophy and science, in their quest for truth, tend to undermine the common opinion of the particular society and this produces a need for this art of writing. Strauss's critique of what he calls "modern social science" is that it fails to see the tension between the "requirements of social science... and the requirements of society." (1959: 222) Such an adversarial nature is damaging to society, the protection of which is the root of Straussian

conservatism. The theme of the city and man regards the care that the intellectual should take towards the city.

There is a connection between the radicals of the modern enlightenment and the Athenian enlightenment of the 5th century BC, and also, it should be inferred, the particular context of Strauss's own writing, the social upheavals and radicalism of the 1960s. Socrates, Thucydides, Plato, Xenophon, et al, challenged the conventional opinion of the city, particularly through a challenge to the gods. Socrates, through his Delphic quest, was accused by the city of denying the gods and corrupting the young. Similarly, as Strauss tries to show, Thucydides "engages in a contest with Homer" (1964: 158) at the level of the form of wisdom being presented. This challenge to Homeric wisdom was akin to a challenge to the gods and challenged the conventional mythic discourse of Athens.

The execution of Socrates raises the question of the city and man; by pursuing the love of wisdom Socrates came to be seen as a threat to the city. The community is a bounded group, an extension of the kin group but a group that still sees itself as one. The oneness of the group, as explained in the previous chapter, is due to its shared way of being, its shared cultural practices, beliefs and traditions and its relation to other communities. The particular culture of the city produces the habits of its people, it constructs the horizon of their possibilities and it holds them back from certain other things; it produces taboos. The shared culture will allow for certain types of political, economic or

intellectual activity and will disallow others. The development of taboos or their removal will, over time, allow for different forms of relationship within the city. What Socrates (and the Athenian enlightenment in general) did was to offer an open challenge to certain cultural practices of the Athenians.

The Platonic response to the death of Socrates is one of wariness towards the city. This care has two sides; firstly, care of the self seeks to avoid the fate of Socrates; secondly, care towards the city involves care of speaking openly because of a fear of the effects it will have on society. This care understands intellectual practices as having wider, but unknown, consequences for the city.

To protect himself and society the philosopher should engage in "political philosophy", and Strauss has a particular meaning here: "the adjective 'political' in the expression 'political philosophy' designates not so much a subject matter as a manner of treatment." (1959: 93) The philosopher must think politically, in the ways mentioned above, to ensure the safety of his teaching the city and himself. The philosopher should be aware of or at least consider the effects of a teaching on the particular society within which it occurs so as to maintain political order.

The *Republic* focuses on the Socratic teaching of justice, however, the crucial thing to bear is mind about Socrates is that he was a man "notorious for his irony" (Strauss, 1964: 50). Irony is dissimulation, "If there is a rank in the order of men it follows that irony consists in speaking differently to different kinds of people." (Strauss, 1964: 51) This fits with the structure of the Platonic dialogue where Socrates will encounter different kinds of people in different places and was intimated in Tim Robbins's play *Embedded* through Irving Kristol and Strauss. The reader must therefore take note of the action of the dialogue as well as what is said, a dialogue should not be read it as a philosophical treatise. The work of Plato is to reveal truth but, given the assumed hierarchy of men, the speech of Socrates and also the writing of Plato will "reveal the truth to some while leading others to salutary opinions" (Strauss, 1964: 54).

Bloom begins by asserting that "The *Republic* is the true apology [of Socrates]" (1968: 307) and that its theme "is the relationship of the philosopher to the political community" (1968: 307). The *Republic* is a defence of philosophy against the accusations of the city, but also shows why Socrates was accused and, for Bloom, tacitly admits the truth of those charges of impiety and corrupting the young. Bloom begins by saying that Socrates "shows the way to the truth about political things and develops the extremely complex relationship of that truth to civil society." (1968: 307) What we have in the Platonic commentaries is therefore the Straussian treatment of the group theory of society that he stated

the need for (see chapter one). Instead of producing such a group theory openly Strauss does it through commentary, Strauss's assumption is that the open production of a group theory would be damaging to the community.

The Republic - Book one: Justice and the taming of anger

The context of the conversation that takes place in the *Republic* is the perceived decline of Athenian power, "Socrates and his chief interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus, prove to be greatly concerned with that decay and to think of the restoration of that political health." (Strauss, 1964: 63) The clear parallel here is what Strauss perceived as the crisis of the West, Strauss conceives of his project as the restoration of the West to political health. The cause of that ill health was political modernity and in particular the American liberalism of the 1960s which Strauss describes in a letter to Willmoore Kendall from September 18th 1963 as making him "sick" (Kendall, 2002: 247).

At the beginning of book one Socrates is compelled by a group to join them for dinner at the Piraeus. The location is significant because it is outside of Athens, whilst away from the city they will be free to talk about the city honestly. There is a threat behind the compelling of Socrates, he is not going to speak out of choice, Bloom comments that "He will only give as much of himself as is required to regain his freedom. This situation is a paradigm of the relation of the philosopher to the city." (Bloom, 1968: 310) In his speech Socrates will be

holding something back and his teaching will not be entirely straightforward. In this situation "wisdom and power reach a compromise, and a miniature community is formed... All political life will be founded on such compromises, more or less satisfactory." (Bloom, 1968: 312) In this community Socrates cannot have it all his own way, he must understand his position within it and act accordingly, and he will have to moderate his speech. It is the act of moderation that is the key to communal being.

What led Socrates and his companion Glaucon to the Piraeus in the first place (beyond being compelled) was "idle curiosity" (Bloom, 1968: 311) and the promise of dinner. Both have time to spare, Glaucon is the son of an aristocratic family and Plato's brother, he does not have to work for a living and he does not have a trade to speak of. Socrates, though not of an aristocratic family also lacks a trade and it is unclear what he does for money; he practices philosophy as a way of life and so lacks the money-making art. However, as Strauss points out, this dinner is "completely forgotten" (1964: 64) due to the conversation that idle curiosity leads them to, this introduces an important theme of the Straussian reading of Plato, moderation, particularly the moderation of bodily desire for the development of intellectual desire, implying a hierarchy of desire.

The conversation begins with Socrates questioning the elderly Cephalus on the topic of age. Cephalus enjoys listening to speeches as a way of "spending his old age" (Bloom, 1968: 313). Only now, in his old age, when he is free from eros, "that raging and savage master" (Strauss, 1964: 66), can Cephalus enjoy the

speeches. In his younger days "the passions of youth led him to bodily pleasures" (Bloom, 1968: 313), whereas for Socrates speeches "constitute the highest human activity" (Bloom, 1968: 313). Cephalus would not have been interested in the speeches of Socrates in his youth when he was concerned with other forms of erotic activity.

Cephalus claims that he is contented in his old age because of his character. To this Socrates makes the point that it is in fact his great wealth that has helped his contentment. This leads to the first understanding of justice in the dialogue, paying one's debts; Cephalus can use his great wealth to atone for the sins of youth. Socrates turns this around by pointing out that paying one's debts may not always be the right thing to do, if one owes a weapon to a mad man it is surely not right to return it. Justice now becomes giving what is fitting. This is the introduction of the hierarchical theme to the dialogue, between a mad man and a non-mad man the latter is more capable of dispensing justice, to claim equality here would be absurd.

Cephalus rules at the beginning of the dialogue because of his age, it is easier to teach respect for old age than for wisdom, and it is reverence for old age that binds society together. The conversation cannot begin properly until Cephalus leaves because, "there are certain uncomfortable issues, the raising of which usually indicates an inclination to vice on the part of those who do so." (Bloom, 1968: 312) The ancestor worship that Cephalus represents is the learning from the old stories, it is through a love of the old stories that one can learn to act

correctly. Cephalus therefore is the representative of Athenian religion. Desire for knowledge leads one to question that which binds society together and it leads one to go beyond the commonly held conventions of that society. Socrates will lead the young into vice, hence the need for privacy.

When Cephalus has left to pray, his argument is taken over by his son Polemarchus, who, after initially defending his father's thesis, develops it; justice is doing good to one's friends and harm to one's enemies. Strauss remarks that this is "the only one of the three views discussed in the first book of the *Republic* of which the discussion may be said to begin and end with a Socratic praise of the poets as wise men" (Strauss, 1964: 70). This view of justice will have a privileged position and requires the praising of the poets because it is they who be who can produce friends and enemies. The discussion of friends and enemies continues, "One might say for instance that every human being has friends from the moment of his birth, namely his parents and therewith enemies, namely the enemies of his family" (Strauss, 1964: 70). One inherits friends and enemies from one's own, either one's family or one's city. More than this, Strauss tells us, "To be a human being means to have friends and enemies" (1964: 70). One cannot be friendless and without enemies and also be human, this communal notion of the human is a direct echo of the position that Strauss developed in the 1930s in relation to Schmitt. Justice is therefore seen as public spiritedness:

Justice thus understood consists indeed in helping one's friends, i.e. one's fellow citizens, and in hating one's enemies, i.e. the foreigners. Justice thus

understood cannot be dispensed within any city however just, for even the justest city is a city, a particular or closed or exclusive society. (Strauss, 1964: 73)

Not all humans should be seen as brothers, only those who are of the same city. Socrates thinks that the friend/enemy distinction is ultimately inadequate, but this understanding of justice is still higher than most alternatives. Bloom makes the point that "Every nation has wars and must defend itself; it can only do so if it has the citizens who care for it and are willing to kill the citizens of other nations" (1968: 318), Bloom then goes on "If the distinction between friends and enemies, and the inclination to help the former and harm the latter, were obliterated from the heart and mind of men, political life would be impossible" (1968: 318). It should therefore be assumed that this understanding of the political is retained throughout and remains constitutive of politics and subjectivity.

Polemarchus suggests that a friend is someone whom he believes to be good, but "one may erroneously believe that someone is one's friend" (Strauss, 1964: 71). One could be mistaken about the goodness of someone or, more accurately, one would have to understand what the good is before one could actually know whether the person is a friend or not, therefore potential friends are not usually judged on whether or not they *are* good but on whether or not they *appear* to be good. In effect, they are good because they are friends, not friends because they are good. It is quite possible to be mistaken about friends, they could very

easily be bad. For Bloom this is not a question of laziness on the part of Polemarchus, it is "a product of his attachment to family and city" (1968: 323), he cares for and believes in his own and is therefore unwilling to question them. He believes that his fellow citizens are good because he believes his city to be good. An overriding fixation with the good aspiring to knowledge of the good as opposed to its mere appearance, would actually transcend current friendships by turning friends into enemies and enemies into friends. These new friends and enemies would not necessarily be shared with the rest of the community. This interest in the good would therefore challenge that community; love of the good can therefore be a threat to the city. This is a point where desire for truth collides with civil society, and so "they must attempt to prevent the distinction from even coming to light" (Bloom, 1968: 324). The politically prudent thing to do is moderate the desire for the good. Justice here, as harming one's enemies and helping one's friends, is a political definition, "it produces its specific kind of human nobility expressed in the virtue of the citizen". (Bloom, 1968: 318)

> Polemarchus's definition of justice might be regarded as the rule requisite to the satisfaction of collective selfishness: be loyal to the members of your own group so that you can best take advantage of the outsiders. (Bloom, 1968: 325)

Given that the interest in this dialogue is not justice per se, but those political things, this understanding carries particular weight and is given more significance by the fact that, as Strauss points out:

Polemarchus's opinion properly understood is the only one among the generally known views of justice discussed in the first book of the *Republic* which is entirely preserved in the positive or constructive part of the work. (1964: 73)

But at this point in the dialogue Socrates appears to reject Polemarchus's form of justice, his refutation "culminates in the thesis that justice consists in helping the good men who are one's friends and in not harming anybody." (Strauss, 1964: 72)

The dialogue between Socrates and Polemarchus brings an angry Thrasymachus into the discussion. Strauss and Bloom give two reasons for the anger. Firstly, Socrates's conclusion that justice is not harming anyone contradicts Thrasymachus's own view of justice and, secondly, he does not like the form of the discussion, he does not approve of dialogue:

He sees this as a form of weakness. The participants in a dialogue obey certain rules which, like laws, govern their association; they seek a common agreement instead of trying to win a victory. (Bloom, 1968: 326)

Thrasymachus is a rhetorician, his is the art of winning an argument, it is not necessarily concerned with knowledge of the good and he is willing to sell his art to whoever will pay. The form of the dialogue contradicts his view of justice, "Thrasymachus contends that justice is the advantage of the stronger". (Strauss, 1964: 74)

Strauss contends that Socrates's discussion with Thrasymachus is the centre of the *Republic*. Special attention should be paid to Thrasymachus because he is on a more equal footing with Socrates than the latter's other interlocutors. However, focusing on the fact that it is "political things" that are being taught shows that Thrasymachus represents a fact of political life, something that has to be dealt with but not necessarily as a guide for action. Thrasymachus and his art of rhetoric cannot be ignored. Strauss continues:

> Since the city as city is a society which from time to time must wage war, and war is inseparable from harming innocent people, the unqualified condemnation of harming human beings is tantamount to the condemnation of even the justest city. This objection is indeed not raised by Thrasymachus but it is implied in his thesis. That thesis proves to be only the consequence of an opinion which is not only not manifestly savage but even highly respectable. (1964: 75)

It is simply naïve of Socrates to claim that justice is not harming anyone; pacifism is an absurdity in the context of the city that exists in a world of many cities and a multiplicity of regimes. As well as representing "injustice incarnate, the tyrant" (Strauss, 1964: 74) Thrasymachus is also offering a "definition of justice that is really the same as the city's" (Bloom, 1968: 326). Justice, as the advantage of the stronger, will be dependant upon who that person is:

…he explains that by "stronger" he means those who hold power in a city and constitute its sovereign, whether that sovereign consists of the people, the rich, the well-born, or a single man. The just is whatever the sovereign in its laws says is just. (Bloom, 1968: 326)

This idea of justice "is the thesis of the city itself" (Strauss, 1964: 75). Justice is obeying the law, no regime can accept an authority that is higher than it, and to remain legitimate it must be the sole arbiter of law. The second part of this understanding is that:

…each regime lays down the laws with a view to its own preservation and well being, to its own advantage. From this it follows that obedience to the laws or justice is not necessarily to the advantage of those who do not belong to the regime or of the ruled but may be bad for them. (Strauss, 1964: 76)

The regime will make law that is to its own advantage and this is not necessarily the same as the advantage of the ruled. For the laws to be good for the ruled requires a coincidence of their and the rulers advantage. Crucially though the "laws have their source in the human all too human" (Bloom, 1968: 328), they are willed by the regime. Those outside of the regime are not its concern unless they may be used to the advantage of the regime. The object of the regime is to convince others to act in a way that is disadvantageous to them but advantageous to the regime. The balance for the regime will be for it to retain legitimacy whilst working towards its own advantage.

Thrasymachus resembles the city through his art:

> Being a rhetorician, he resembles the sophist, and the sophist *par excellence*
> is the city. Thrasymachus's rhetoric was especially concerned with both
> arousing and appeasing the angry passions of the multitude. (Strauss, 1964:
> 78)

The art of rhetoric involves gaining support for a point of view, Thrasymachus
introduces spiritedness (thymos) in to the dialogue, for him "anger or
spiritedness is not the core of his being but subordinate to his art" (Strauss,
1964: 78). He is not actually angry, he is playing at it for rhetorical effect. His
indignation closes down dialogue by producing a taboo on what can and cannot
be said, such a device can only work in public where the display can produce an
effect on the spectator which can make a reasoned response impossible due to
the now heightened emotional atmosphere. A case in point would be the already
mentioned debates surrounding the lead up to the invasion of Iraq where anger
and indignation helped to close down aspects of the discussion, particularly
those voices which questioned the wisdom of invasion (Lucas, 2004: ch. seven).
Thrasymachus represents the power of the emotive in political discourse and it is
this use of emotion that the neoconservatives have demonstrated an instinctive
appreciation.

Socrates will not be able to discuss things with Thrasymachus in the same way
that he had with Polemarchus, the anger of Thrasymachus must be soothed, he

has to be tamed and put on to the same side as Socrates because later Socrates will need the art of Thrasymachus. Spiritedness is a key term in the *Republic* it is the usual translation of the word thymos of which Bloom says it:

...expresses one of the most important notions in the book. Thymos is the principle or seat of anger or rage. It might well be translated as that pregnant word "heart", which mirrors the complexity of the Greek. (Bloom, 1968: 449)

Thymos is the essence of the political, it is thymotic anger that makes one want to harm one's enemies and it is the art of rhetoric that can stir anger in the people. Power exists in the control of anger and this control lends legitimacy to the rulers who may "need the art of persuasion in order to persuade their subjects that the laws which are framed with exclusive regard to the benefit of the rulers serve the benefit of the subjects." (Strauss, 1964: 80) The rhetorical art is the art that produces the political and will remain crucial in the constructive part of the dialogue, when Socrates needs a class of guardians to watch over the just city; this will also be the case for the neoconservatives.

Thrasymachus is the only character in the *Republic* who practices an art and the proposition is brought forward that ruling is also an art. An artisan does a job that he or she is skilled at; artisans do not practice other arts in which they are unskilled. In the just city each person will practice their art in full dedication to the city "without minding his own advantage, only for the good of others or for the common good." (Strauss, 1964: 79) To this, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates

of being simple minded, artisans do not necessarily practice their art for the common good, Thrasymachus is the perfect example of this. The artisan practices two arts, the particular art and the universal art, "the art of arts, is the art of money-making." (Strauss, 1964: 81) This view is consistent with Thrasymachus's understanding of justice as the benefit of the stronger, the money-making art essentially regards self-interest and subsumes all other arts, these are now only practised as a means to money-making. The art of money-making is the instrumental art par excellence, money, as universal equivalent, is the end towards which one works but is also a means to further ends. The presence of the money-making art is the subsumption of all else to instrumental thought. Bloom expands on this by claiming that money making is a political substitute for philosophy, this will be the argument that Socrates makes in the founding of the just city.

> The intention of philosophy is to understand the nature of the arts and to order them toward the production of human happiness, and to educate men to desire those things which most conduce to happiness. It can claim to rule all the arts for it alone tries to know the whole, the true whole, as opposed to the view of the whole of this time or place and it restores unity to a man's life... Only in philosophy is there an identity of the concern for the proper practice of the art and that for ones own advantage... all other lives are essentially self contradictory. (Bloom, 1968: 334)

Philosophy and money-making being both presented as universal arts offers a hint at how the two are connected. Philosophy and money making are both forms of desire and it is through this that neoconservative thought will try to go beyond the contradictions of capitalism, particularly through the work of George Gilder in the 1980s. Money-making is however contradictory because it is still instrumental and leads to the necessity for endless growth and expansion. Philosophy, on the other hand, is here understood as non-contradictory because it is practiced as an end in itself.

The conflict between Thrasymachus and Socrates is one between means and ends, the former is an intellectual who uses his knowledge to try to gain an advantage over other people and the latter conceives of this knowledge as good in itself. The clear problem for Socrates is that even if it is accepted that the philosophic life is non-contradictory, this life can only be for the few. The philosopher will have to rely on the practitioners of other arts in order to survive. Socrates does not make money and he relies upon the benevolence of his rich friends (Strauss, 1983: ch. two). But whilst relying on the arts of other people he knows that the practitioners of those arts will be leading contradictory lives.

Thrasymachus focuses on the art of shepherding. The shepherd's concern for his flock is entirely self interested, he cares that they have food to eat and are protected from predators but only because he aims to butcher them. In addition, in this situation the shepherd is still reliant on the rulers, the owners of the flock, "only if he is loyal to them, if he does his job for them well, if he keeps his part of

the bargain, if he is just" (Strauss, 1964: 81) will he derive a benefit. In other words, the community must practice justice amongst itself. The community must have legitimacy and must appear to be just to its members. Strauss points out that this moves us back to justice as "helping one's friends and harming one's enemies" and, added to this, he tells us that "the art of arts is not money-making but the art of war" (Strauss, 1964: 82). The art of war being the extreme end of the political, the art of arts is the organisation of anger directed toward the other, this is the locus of the common good and legitimacy in the city. The supreme form of the art of the political is to persuade others to sacrifice themselves for your own, and not their own, benefit. Anger and the orchestration of the political is a theme that will be developed in relation to the neoconservatives in part two, where a state's ability to orchestrate sacrifice will be shown to be crucial to the expansion and fulfilment of capitalist desire.

By the end of book one Socrates has succeeded in "taming" Thrasymachus, the latter is no longer angry and will now listen to Socrates during the rest of the dialogue. However, "Thrasymachus has in no way become convinced by Socrates of the goodness of justice... While his [Thrasymachus] reasoning proves to be poor his principle remains victorious." (Strauss, 1964: 84) Understanding the political as harming one's enemies, helping one's friends and working for one's own advantage hasn't changed.

Book two brings Glaucon and Adeimantus into the dialogue. Plato's brothers are unsatisfied with Socrates's refutation of Thrasymachus and wish to hear him praise justice as a good in and of itself. Both are "excellent young men" who are drawn to politics and would make excellent students for Thrasymachus who:

> ...offers them the means of success, both by the tools of persuasion he can provide and by the liberating insight into the nature of political life on which his teaching is based. In effect Thrasymachus tells them that in their pursuit of glory they need not be hampered by considerations of justice. (Bloom, 1968: 339)

Thrasymachus is in Athens to find students; the brothers of Plato, being of aristocratic birth, would do well for him. The offer is an education in the art of the political, an art that will allow the brothers to pursue wealth and glory. But Socrates is in the way, he will want to turn the brothers towards the philosophic life, hence the need to praise justice as an end in itself.

Glaucon begins by praising injustice. By nature all men are concerned with their own good, this means that by nature they will try to maximise their own good without any regard for the other. This will be an unbearable situation for the weak who therefore agree not to harm each other; this is how justice arose through mutual co-operation. However, the "true man" is not better off under

this form of justice because he has no need to pander to the weak, but he does act justly, why?

> ...the perfectly unjust man whose injustice remains completely concealed, who is therefore reputed to be perfectly just, leads the happiest life, whereas the perfectly just man whose justice remains completely unknown, who has the reputation of being completely unjust, leads the most miserable life.
> (Strauss, 1964: 87)

The most effective strategy to maximise your own self-interest is to pretend to be just whilst doing whatever you want. In this situation justice is the particular set of conventions of the particular community. This is Glaucon's repetition of Thrasymachus's position, it is logically correct if one is seeking to maximise material self-interest. This produces a contradiction at the heart of the polis where the individuals seek their own material interest rather than the good of the whole.

Glaucon wants Socrates to show that the miserable life, lived for the common good, is actually better. He agrees with the others that justice is law but for a different reason, it is against natural inequality. Glaucon is referring to what would become known through Hobbes as the state of nature, but there is a difference:

> The view which Glaucon maintains in common with Thrasymachus implies that there is an insoluble conflict between the good of the individual and the

common good. Hobbes, starting from a similar premise, reached the opposite conclusion because he denied that any good which any individual can possibly enjoy is as great as the evil which threatens him in the absence of society, peace, or the common good. (Strauss, 1964: 88)

Glaucon thinks that the good life is possible in the state of nature, but only for some, those who are strong. Glaucon does not assume, as Hobbes does in the *Leviathan*, that the weak have the same power as the strong. For Hobbes even the weakest can kill the strongest so there is an equality of unhappiness and fear. Socrates cannot argue for the city in the same way and must make his argument from a basis of natural inequality, an inequality of human powers and potentialities. This leads Socrates to attempt to found a city in speech that is by nature, implying that all other cities are against nature (Strauss, 1964: 93). The just city will give to each person what is good for him/her, in line with natural inequality, the question will be whether or not the individual good is equal to the common good, or whether or not there is any actual difference between the city and man (Strauss, 1964: 91).

Glaucon's question to Socrates is simply, why be good? (Bloom, 1968: 341) Nature dictates that the strong take what they can, but for the weak it is better to compromise, the compromise, or contract, is a human construction. But the contract does not overcome nature; nature compels men to break the contract when they can. The strong should follow nature and not justice (the contract), justice is the province of the weak and is for those who cannot help themselves

and need the protection of the group. Socrates has to show that the weak man is actually the happier.

The city is founded in three stages, the healthy city, the purified city and the city of beauty. In the first city, presented by Adeimantus, men join together because alone they cannot provide for all of their needs. This will be common to all of the cities, what will change is the understanding of the needs. In this city "each man chooses an art according to his natural capacities so that nothing in life goes against the grain of the inhabitant's desires or talents." (Bloom, 1968: 344) Each individual works for his/her own advantage but this is the same as the common good, in the healthy city there is a coincidence of private and public good. "The healthy city is a happy city; it knows no poverty no coercion or government, no war and no eating of animals." (Strauss, 1964: 94) The healthy city is just, but the people do not concern themselves with justice, they simply do as they want and this is the same as being just.

However, needs in the healthy city are only bodily, they "are entirely directed to the preservation and comfort of the body" (Bloom, 1968: 345). The suggestion is that these needs, such as food and shelter are simple to satisfy. What is not present in this city are the "desires of the soul… the healthy city may be just in a sense but it surely lacks virtue or excellence" (Strauss, 1964: 95) because it lacks the desire for prestige and "human beings require more than life; they demand unnecessary refinement and pleasure" (Bloom, 1968: 345). Glaucon, an erotic man, is dissatisfied with his brother's city, which he calls the city of pigs. The

anarchic society of the healthy city "would be possible if men could remain innocent… 'self realisation' is not essentially in harmony with sociability" (Strauss, 1964: 95). Glaucon's presence, his feeling of lack, his desire for something more will corrupt the healthy city, "his desires are inchoate expressions of his inclination to a fulfilment of which he is yet unaware." (Bloom, 1968: 345) Glaucon's desire makes him a "dangerous man but also an eminently interesting and educable one." (Bloom, 1968: 345) His desire means that he is opposed to convention, he will challenge the city, he has the potential for good and evil. Glaucon's desire, "if fully developed, would find its satisfaction only in contemplation" (Bloom, 1968: 345) and not through action. This is a glimpse of the possible solution to the political problem of desire; it is moderated only by going beyond it. The healthy city will decay because of people's desire for all manner of "unnecessary things", luxuries and unlimited wealth will compel people to choose work which is not fitted to their nature but that is most profitable. The correspondence between one's own good and the good of the community will break down.

The expansion of desire necessitates the expansion of the city, this expansion will inevitably lead to conflict with other cities and so there will be a need for an army; the city now turns into the "armed camp" – the purified city. This city is a political city; it has enemies, produced by the expansion of desire, who are in the way of the fulfilment of that desire. In order to wage war and expand the city to match the growing desire a new class of citizen is needed, the warriors. These are a class who are devoted to the art of war "and in their souls emerges a new

principle, spiritedness" (Bloom, 1968: 348). Thymos makes men capable of anger and inspires them to defend the city. What characterises thymos is that it overcomes desire, it is not dedicated towards self preservation, it is indifferent to life, "The city may exist for life, but it needs men who are willing to die for it." (Bloom, 1968: 348) Not being concerned with mere life, "spiritedness is beyond the economic system" (Bloom, 1968: 349), it is not concerned with vulgar gain. The link between expanding desire, the need growth and the subsequent necessity for violence has been amply demonstrated in the rise of capitalist empire and will be focused on in chapter four.

The city is split into two classes, one motivated by bodily desire and the other by spiritedness. Bloom notes that a need for a third class is implied because the warriors are described as noble guard dogs, there will have to be a class of rulers to control these warriors. The warriors "will inevitably be the sole possessors of political power" (Strauss, 1964: 97) because they will hold a monopoly of violence. The education of the warriors will therefore become the focus of the dialogue. This is the underlying political premise; power is based on the control of violence, of the thymotic nature. *The key to holding and using political power will be the orchestration of thymos.* The organisation of violence will be needed to help to satisfy and sometimes subdue the complex desire that corrupts Adeimantus's healthy city. At this point it is only the warriors who will need to have this sort of education, it is their violence that needs to be focused:

...the education of the guardians must make sure that they will not practice thievery and the like except perhaps against a foreign enemy... The education which the warriors more than anyone else need is therefore in civic virtue. (Strauss, 1964: 97)

The guardians will have to be able to recognise an enemy of the city, either internally or externally and be willing to remove that threat. They will also need to be just, they cannot use their monopoly of violence for their own interests, and they must work only for the good of the city.

The warrior class will have to have a touch of the fanatic about them, they have to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the city but also, and perhaps more ordinarily, they have to enforce the law within the city. The fanatic, as the most intense form of the thymotic man, cannot stand a taboo to be broken; the fanatic is compelled to enforce nomos. This implies that nomos and thymos are related, law comes from anger because it is anger that inspires one to enforce the taboo and the taboo only stands if breaking it is punishable and there is a will to punish. The fanatic is the person who most zealously enforces civic virtue; the fanatic is the extreme of a simple acknowledgement of some kind of public good. All political communities will exist at some level of intensity on this scale of fanaticism.

The guardian's education will be through poetry, "the poets are taken most seriously as the makers of the horizon which constitutes the limit of men's desire

and aspiration." (Bloom, 1968: 351) Poets tell stories of great people, people who are looked up to and imitated. The type of story will be important and the type of person or god, and the virtues to be imitated will be crucial. The people celebrated by a particular political community, those upon whom the myth will be constructed, will be intimately related to the character of that political community. "As we know, untrue stories are needed not only for little children but also for grown up citizens" (Strauss, 1964: 98) but it is the nature of these untrue stories, the histories, heroes and theologies of the city that will determine the nature of the citizen of that city:

> ...the man who admires Achilles is different from the one who admires Moses or Jesus. The different men see different things in the world and, although they may partake of a common human nature, they develop very different aspects of that nature. (Bloom, 1968: 351)

The education of the rulers, what they aspire to and who they admire will determine their character and subsequently the character of the regime, hence the importance of culture in neoconservatism.

Book Three – Education and the Necessity of the Lie

The discussion of education continues in book three. Socrates discusses Achilles who "compels the souls of Greeks and all men to pursue glory" (Bloom, 1968:

354). Achilles's "Anger is always self-righteous" (Bloom, 1968: 355), this simple observation of the thymotic is the key to power. As with Sorel, moral certainty and righteousness allow people to justify any act and overcome any fear. But this means that anger, the fury of the fanatic is the enemy of reason, it has no time for or interest in thought and it closes down avenues of inquiry. The work of converting this primal rage into civic courage and controlling it will therefore be a precarious one.

The rage of the warriors needs to be controlled by the rulers. The rulers will be selected from amongst the warriors, the problem this raises is the re-establishment of harmony within the city; how will the warriors be reconciled to their rulers? This is where Socrates introduces the "noble lie *par excellence*" (Strauss, 1964: 103), the lie is noble because it is a falsehood that allows the establishment of the good. But, crucially, "the good city is not possible without a fundamental falsehood" (Strauss, 1964: 103). For Strauss, political order is always based on a falsehood, either noble or ignoble; communities are based on beliefs and falsehoods but for Strauss, because of his scepticism regarding knowledge, the community cannot be founded on truth or reason. To think otherwise, Strauss claims, is a dangerous idealism that is liable to lead the breakdown of political order.

Socrates's noble lie takes two parts. The first is designed to form the community, "If the citizens believe the tale they will have a blood tie to the country" (Bloom, 1968: 365), it will be the extension of the love of family to one's fellow citizens.

The second part of the lie explains the fundamental inequality within the city. This inequality is a natural one given by the differences in human talents and potentialities, "In the Socratic view, political justice requires that unequal men receive unequal honours and unequal shares in ruling" (Bloom, 1968: 366). This justice is that of giving each man his due but not giving all men the same. The second part of the lie aims at giving divine sanction to this inequality and is designed to defuse the problem of the inevitable resentment resulting from natural inequality. The overcoming of resentment due to inequality will be a key problem of all political theories and practice.

The lie cements the position of the warrior class, it produces self-belief, and it is the reason for sacrifice of the self and others for nomos. The warrior class, by believing the lie, is transformed into the locus of violent law enforcement. At the most benign level the warrior class will enforce the law through displays of anger, they will shout down any challenge to the law and will try to make it difficult for the questioning of the law to take place. If these initial tactics fail and the warrior class has enough belief in itself, it will turn to violence to enforce the law.

The noble lie, as the locus of myth, should not be investigated rationally. Rationalism is therefore the enemy of political legitimacy, questioning the bonds of the political community weakens those bonds; to seek a rational investigation of them is to announce mistrust of them. This reflects upon the setting of the dialogue that Strauss sees as so important, it is a private dinner away from the

city and any possible angry voices in the market place, "the character of men's desires would make it impossible for a rational teaching to be the public teaching" (Bloom, 1968: 367), the lie is the public teaching.

Book Four – The Erotic Tension

Bloom begins his analysis of book four with some thoughts on foreign policy. Adeimantus asserts that the city will have to be acquisitive if only because it will have to be able to afford to defend itself. The contradiction is that although "sound domestic policy would discourage the acquisition of wealth... priority must be given to foreign policy." (Bloom, 1968: 371) Because the good city will exist in a world in which there are other, possibly hostile cities, it must be able to defend itself or it will face outside domination or destruction. The city will need wealth to fend off its enemies which means that the foreign policy "makes the devotion to the good life within the city impossible" (Bloom, 1968: 371). The need to face outwards will corrupt the good city as its priorities will turn away from the pursuit of the good life in to a cycle of instrumentalism. But this foreign policy will remain subservient to domestic policy, meaning that foreign policy has two aims that may not always be compatible. One aim is to defend the city against outside threat, but the more important task is to defend against the internal other. The Straussian conception of foreign policy, and this is something that neoconservatives such as William Kristol apply (see chapter four), is that it serves the domestic agenda. Foreign policy as well as serving the needs of

expanding desire helps to produce a moral order at home, from this neoconservative standpoint the lack of an external enemy leads to moral malaise at home. An argument begins to be created as to the use-value of foreign policy to serve a domestic and not a strategic agenda.

Bloom points out that it was on this point that Machiavelli rejected classical political philosophy as utopian folly. The Socratic defence on this point states that although the city may pursue justice in its domestic policy it is under no obligation to do so in its foreign policy, the city will help its friends and harm its enemies, "the city is not motivated by considerations of justice but by those of preservation." (Bloom, 1968: 372) There is a clear scepticism here towards any kind of international law, and is something that we can see an echo of in the neoconservative attitude surrounding the invasion of Iraq. This is also a point made by Robert Kagan in *Of Paradise and Power* where he argues that Europe is only interested in international institutions because of its relative weakness (Kagan, 2004: 30). The US does not need to support international law because of its strength. Justice, in other words, is the province of the weak.

Strauss continues with the reintroduction of the theme of eros. Eros, we are told, is the longing for immortality, this can be through offspring, fame or through knowledge of the unchangeable, by which is meant the intellectual pursuits, namely philosophy. This puts into question the notion that spiritedness is of a higher rank than desire because although responsible for base forms of life desire is also responsible for higher forms, "there is a philosophic eros, there is

no philosophic indignation" (Strauss, 1964: 110), thymos is not philosophic, the warriors are not trained in wisdom because it would contradict their patriotism. Eros is capable of producing higher things because eros follows its own path; it is not subject to law. There is therefore, "a tension between eros and the city and hence between eros and justice" (Strauss, 1964: 111), one's lovers (as we saw with one's friends earlier) are not necessarily one's countrymen. Eros must therefore be subjugated in the good city, secluded lovers must be replaced by spirited patriots; the warriors have to impose order on the eros of the rest. Although eros produces the higher things it must be removed from the good city, the higher things may not be compatible with justice. In the political community thymos and not eros will be necessary.

Books Five, Six and Seven – Dystopic Utopias

In book five Socrates spells out the equality of the sexes. It is important to remember that ancient Athens was a place dominated politically and intellectually by men. This leads Bloom to state that the argument in "Book V is preposterous, and Socrates expects it to be ridiculed" (1968: 380), this leads to the assumption that the project of founding a just city is also a joke, Socrates does not assume that it is an entirely serious enterprise but has another intention; the dialogue is a teaching about political things rather than a utopia.

One of Socrates's proposals is for the public nakedness of both men and women. This odd sounding idea is developed by Bloom by a consideration of shame; Socrates's proposal is aimed at stripping away shame and its relation to the erotic. This extends to other forms of eros, such as intellectual or philosophic eros. Shame prevents people from going against conventional opinion; to go against opinion opens one up to mockery, mockery being a basic level of the imposition of law. The implication is that the philosopher, who has no shame and goes where eros leads, will be mocked publicly for his activities. The background of this is the mocking of Socrates by the comic poet Aristophanes in *The Clouds*, the ridicule that Aristophanes opened Socrates up to had an influence on the latter's trial and eventual execution. The erotic person, we learn, must be careful in the city for eros drives him beyond law and convention.

Despite the danger of philosophy we now learn that it is in fact needed in the just city because the philosopher is the only person devoted to knowledge of the whole and it is only through this that the city can be led wisely. Wisdom and political power must therefore become one, but, as Bloom points out, the assumption of modern thought is the opposite, "wisdom can rule" (1968: 391), and political power can become wise through the "dissemination of knowledge" (1968: 391).

Strauss's conclusion is that "the just city is only possible 'in speech'" (1964: 121). The establishment of the city is beset by seemingly insurmountable problems so that the only possibility it has is the "coincidence of political power and

philosophy" (Strauss, 1964: 122). The philosopher, open to mockery, is unlikely to gain legitimacy because "everyone can see that philosophers are useless if not even harmful, in politics" (Strauss, 1964: 123). The best that can be hoped for is a ruler who happens to be wise or who listens to those who are wise. The difficulty of this situation is spelled out in Strauss's commentary on Xenophon in *On Tyranny*. The poet Simonides laboriously goes through the motions of convincing the tyrant Hiero that he should listen to the wise because a tyrant will not automatically be willing to follow a poet's advice.

The other option is that the philosopher employs the art of persuasion, the art of Thrasymachus. After having tamed Thrasymachus earlier in the dialogue Socrates now needs the art of the rhetorician to tame the masses, it is this combination of philosophy and political power that is necessary for the good of the city; the persuasion of Thrasymachus directed by Socrates and the rational orchestrating of emotional irrationalism.

A clearer understanding of the city is reached through the myth of cave, because "the cave is the city" (Bloom, 1964: 404). The question that follows is what does the philosopher do once s/he has left the cave? For Bloom the philosopher "does not bring light to the cave" (Bloom, 1968: 403), the philosopher can guide but ultimately the ascent is something undertaken by one's own self. Again Bloom asserts that this is overturned in the enlightenment when, it was assumed, that the cave could be transformed and that all could reach beyond the shadows. For Bloom, by assuming that light has been brought down to the cave, "the urge to

ascend to the light would be discouraged" (1968: 403). Curiosity regarding the nature of the shadows disappears because of the artificial light of modernity. This produces what Strauss and Bloom call the sub-cave of modernity. The cave is simply the set of beliefs that bind the city and shape opinion; for both Strauss and Bloom escaping the cave is down to the individual.

Less than perfect regimes have to be accepted, the just regime is, realistically, impossible. Bloom thinks this thought is necessary because it "moderates the moral indignation a man might experience at the sight of less-than-perfect regimes. The extreme spirit of reform or revolution loses its ground if its end is questionable" (Bloom, 1968: 409). For Strauss and Bloom the end point of the philosophical activism of the enlightenment is Stalin and Hitler, preceded by Robespierre's terror. "If the infinite longing for justice on earth is merely a dream or a prayer, the shedding of blood in its name turns from idealism into criminality." (Bloom, 1968: 409) To force justice onto a city is an absurd idea, the appearance of the just regime is a coincidence and can only be a coincidence. This anti-idealist argument sits in marked contrast to the general view of neoconservative foreign policy and the spreading of democracy and does imply a split between elements of Strauss's view of foreign policy and that of contemporary neoconservatives, especially those who were champions of the invasion of Iraq.

The most significant discussion in the last part of the dialogue, in relation to this current study, is of the kinds of regime. The character of the regime is related to the character of the people who rule, "As this class varies, so does the way of life of the city" (Bloom, 1968: 414). An understanding of the priorities of the particular regimes will therefore allow an understanding of the motivations of the people within them.

> Socrates suggests that wisdom, honour, money, freedom and love are the ends which men pursue... the dominance of one principle or another brings forth very different dimensions in the lives of men. (Bloom, 1968: 414)

The five types of regime are aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny; all have a different character. Democracy comes about when the ruling class or parts of the ruling class are in need of the people to regain or maintain their power. In the case of Athens the democratic franchise was extended to the oarsmen of the navy after they were needed to defeat the Persian invasion, the reward for their sacrifice was democratic rights. Democratic man has the freedom to do and say what he pleases and "everyone can follow the way of life that pleases him most" (Strauss, 1964: 131). Democratic man is consumed by his desire and has no motivation for virtue, though he may live nobly if that is his wish. Democracy therefore plays to any passionate desire that the people may have, it "abhors every kind of restraint" (Strauss, 1964: 132) as a challenge to its freedom. Strauss describes democratic man as:

...a drone, the fat, soft and prodigal playboy, the Lotus-eater who, assigning a kind of equality to equal and unequal things, lives one day in complete surrender to the lowest desires and the next ascetically" (Strauss, 1964: 133)

Democracy cannot moderate individual desire for the good of the city, and the emphasis on freedom makes it impossible to achieve the sort of public ideal that civic virtue requires because it lacks moderation.

Of all the regimes only democracy allows the practice of philosophy (the others would perceive it as a threat). At this point it becomes apparent that philosophy and political stability are linked, because "for the many, the praise of desire is the praise of bodily desire, and this must be controlled for the sake of both philosophy and politics." (Bloom, 1968: 421) Democratic man needs to be moderated if the city is to remain stable, however, it is constitutively unable to enforce this kind of moderation. Democracy allows philosophy because it allows eros in general, not because it privileges philosophic eros. In a democracy all pursue the good life, but it is only the philosopher who comes close to it by practicing philosophy – a form of life as an end in itself. In a certain sense we can see that the philosopher is needed by the democratic regime, not because he can theorize the revolution and regime to come but because he can be a living example of the good life as moderated desire. The philosopher provides the reason why democratic man should moderate him/herself.

The inferior regimes, democracy and tyranny, are so because they give way to desire. However, "to turn one's back on them is to misunderstand man" (Bloom, 1968: 422), this is what Adeimantus discovers through the founding of the healthy city. Although it must accept desire the city must also reject it, "politics seems to be hostile to any form of extreme eroticism" (Bloom, 1968: 423), which places eros in a peculiar position; the political both needs and rejects desire as democracy seems to both need and reject the philosopher.

The *Republic* does not present a full treatment of desire because it simply postulates it as problem that thymos will have to overcome. What the *Republic* points to is the aporia of the political:

...the *Republic* does not bring to light the best possible regime but rather the nature of political things – the nature of the city... By letting us see that the city constructed in accordance with this requirement [justice] is not possible, he [Socrates] lets us see the essential limits, the nature of the city. (Strauss, 1964: 138)

Once we are sufficiently aware of the limits of the city we can begin to think about the best way to act within it. This is why both Strauss and Bloom see this dialogue as a warning against political idealism, because it is idealism that fails to understand the city as it is. It is only by understanding man, as man, that we will understand the city. Only by understanding man as man in the city and as *only* in the city will man be understood.

In the *Republic* there is tension between eros and the city. In the *Symposium* this is due to a split in the object of love; firstly, as love of one's own and the love of the city, and secondly as intellectual eros or true love. The true experience of love, be that of the philosopher or of the lovers, cannot exist within the narrow confines of the love of one's own; love cannot be bounded.

Unbounded eros is the reason for the execution of Socrates and, for Strauss, is the reason for commentary. *Commentary is not the love of the text. The text is merely the means to practice, to have or be in love.* This is done by means of an erotic hiding where the commentator can hide within the text and between its margins. Hiding allows the commentator to pursue what is his true love without that love or the fruits of that love being seen.

Strauss begins by situating the text within the sphere of political philosophy. For Strauss, the *Symposium* is a text on (or of) political philosophy. Its subject matter is not, strictly speaking, love. The text will be shown to be a Platonic alternative to the forms of modern thought that, for Strauss, constitute the crisis of modernity; an alternative to value free forms of thought.

Strauss states that "Plato knew that men cannot live and think without finality of some sort" (Strauss, 2001: 5). This is *the* political problem for Strauss, the lack of but need for truth. This desire for truth or finality when manifested in the philosophic love of wisdom puts the philosopher in a difficult position regarding

the state. Bloom tells us "Eros is connected with pleasure, and this would account for the philosopher's continuing in his uncompleted quest." (Bloom, 1993: 432) The philosopher's quest is ultimately about his own pleasure and it is not concerned with moral virtue or the polis. "Eros is pure, ranging free, without benefit of law or teleology. It is for its own sake, not for the city or family." (Bloom, 1968: 436)

Philosophy and the Political

Strauss frames his reading as an encounter between philosophy and poetry, in particular between Socrates and Aristophanes. The philosopher, Strauss says, is "blind to the context within which philosophy exists, namely political life" (Strauss, 2001: 6). The philosopher is unable to communicate the philosophic teaching to the non-philosopher. Poetry on the other hand manages to "integrate purely theoretical wisdom into a human context." Poetry has a political understanding that philosophy lacks, which is here defined as ultimately "Men killing men on the largest scale in broad daylight and with the greatest serenity." (Strauss, 2001: 8) Philosophy is unable to produce the political and this is a problem in its relationship with the polis. Poetry, on the other hand, is superior because it can produce the enemy and thus the political community.

Thymos, the political passion, "is essential for constituting the polis and is, in a way, most characteristic of the polis" (Strauss, 2001: 9), eros is the non-political.

It is this distinction that causes the tension. To understand the political an understanding of the non-political must also be developed, this is how the *Symposium* relates to the *Republic*. In some sense the non-political is natural, "there may be something natural which transcends the political in dignity and which gives politics its guidance." (Strauss, 2001: 10) It is un-constrained, a space *beyond* the political.

The *Symposium* is a private dialogue, this is opposed to the relatively public dialogue of the *Republic*, and there is also talk of drinking wine. For Strauss the wine drinking is relevant because alcohol is synonymous with frankness, the discussion will be open and the speakers will be able to take risks, they would not say the same things in public. For Bloom it "helps them leap over the chasm separating nomos and physis [usually translated as nature]" (Bloom, 1993: 441)

The dialogue that we hear is a retelling of speeches that had taken place a few years earlier, reckoned by Strauss to be 415 BC. The events took place on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, at the height of Athenian power; however, the Sicilian expedition was a disaster and led to the demise of that position. The retelling (404 BC) is during Athens period of decline but, Bloom points out, this period is also the period of the birth of philosophic dominance in Athens. "If philosophy did not destroy Athenian culture, it prospered in its demise." (1993: 447) Socrates was executed in 399 BC and Bloom is suggesting that the *Symposium* has something to reveal about the relationship between philosophy (as the highest form of eros) and political power.

The first speech is made by Phaedrus who praises eros because it produces virtue through courage or manliness. This is the virtue of the lover who would willingly make a sacrifice for the beloved. However, the motive here is not courage itself but shame, it is the shame of the lover unwilling to sacrifice, the shame that would make one unworthy of the beloved. This implies that heroic love demands a witness to its sacrifice, there is no private sacrifice. "Eros overcomes the fear of death" (Strauss, 2001: 51), Phaedrus sees a use in this, particularly when it comes to war. "He says that an army composed of lovers and their beloveds would be an unbeatable fighting force" (Bloom, 1993: 456), if channelled correctly the desperation of the lovers to avoid shame would help to constitute a superior fighting force. Love is necessary for sacrifice and the waging of war and it is for this reason that patriotism is so important for neoconservatism. The benefit of this love is for the beloved and not the lover (who could die), the result is that Phaedrus "subject[s] eros to the criterion of gain" (Strauss, 2001: 53) as the benefit of the beloved. Shame, as was intimated earlier, is here emphasised as explicitly communal, a lack of shame is therefore anti-political and it is philosophy that is shameless.

Though flawed as a praise of eros Phaedrus's speech is still of importance for it, and the following speech of Pausanias "represents the practical reality that is later forgotten" (Bloom, 1993: 459). Bloom compares these first two speeches to that of Thrasymachus in the *Republic* when he describes the actual life of the city. There is a further link here to the speeches of the *Republic,* in particular

those referring to the warrior class. Courage is the virtue of the warriors who love not a particular person but who take the city itself as beloved. This tells us several things, in the *Republic* it is thymos and not eros that characterises the warriors but it now seems that these two concepts are more closely linked, with the anger of thymos in fact being inspired by the eros of the warriors for the city. They fight to defend the city and to avoid being shamed in front of the city.

Pausanias gives the second speech and he is concerned with the law. It is a deliberative and therefore political speech and is concerned with bringing about a change in the law, in this case those surrounding the practice of pederasty.

We learnt in the previous speech that "eros has a natural relationship to heroism" (Strauss, 2001: 58) as love of country. This is now slightly modified by consideration of the idea of treason. The act of treason is often committed in the name of the love of country yet it is also punished in that same name, how then can different notions of the same country coexist? "Love of country, then, is in a concrete form a love of country modified and constituted by its polity, and the polity expresses itself in law." (Strauss, 2001: 59) Love of country is love for an essentially abstract, mythical object, however, the actuality of the country is that it formally exists only in law. Yet, love of country is not for the particular set of laws but the abstract notion. It is therefore possible to be both a patriot and a traitor. This reveals something very important, "the final and essential concern of eros is not legality" (Strauss, 2001: 59), it shows us that there will often be a split

between the private realm of eros and the public realm of the political and that the law allows and disallows certain types of erotic practice.

Because the law of Athens was directed towards the noble Pausanias's challenge is to make a case for the nobility of pederasty. To do this he tries to define eros as either base or noble. Base eros "is directed more toward the body than the soul" and it is not "directed toward the good" (Strauss, 2001: 65). For Pausanias noble love is directed at decent character, at the soul and not the body. Through consideration of the love of noble character we are led to the conclusion that instead of character "to be caught by money or political preferment is simply base" (Strauss, 2001: 81). To choose one's lover because of a perceived possibility of financial or political gain is base. However, it is unclear whether or not such a relationship should be considered erotic at all, earlier Strauss told us that "there is a certain contradiction between calculation and eros" (Strauss, 2001: 61). Eros is not calculation and the erotic life is non-instrumental. However, it is neither the same as nor concerned with law, particular erotic practices can be either legal or illegal and this depends upon what is considered (ig)noble. Pausanias's speech, like the previous one, though flawed, shows us the city as it is, though he wants to change the law on pederasty he does not currently practice it, he wants a change in the law so that he can. Pausanias currently moderates eros.

Eryximachus makes the final speech of the first half. The first three speeches all subject eros to something, respectively, gain, moral virtue and finally

Eryximachus subjects it to techne. Techne denotes a skill and a specific knowledge of something. Eryximachus practices the art of medicine.

This order of speakers is brought about by accident. The speakers contribute in the order of sitting, it turns out that Aristophanes was next to Pausanias but as he was about to speak Aristophanes had an attack of the hiccups which resulted in Eryximachus offering to swap places. The new order has the two poets Aristophanes and Agathon with Socrates in the second half and so the better, wiser men are now together. For Strauss it is better that this order was not planned because it demonstrates that "there is a disproportion between wisdom, which requires that they go together, and politeness, or the polis and society" (2001: 96), living socially requires that the "better" three do not make a show of themselves.

The new order also puts the best drinkers together. Strauss remarks on the parallelism between drinking alcohol and eros. The speeches are only being made because those in attendance are too hung-over from the previous day's celebrations, the spoken praise of eros therefore replaces what we must assume to be erotic practice (drinking), but because of this we must also assume that drinking is higher than the mere praise of that act. In the new order, the first three speakers, who are the most un-erotic, are also the worst drinkers. Socrates, who sits last, is both the best drinker and the most erotic. However, Socrates speech will not be the final one because Alcibiades will arrive drunkenly.

For Eryximachus "eros is a cosmic principle" (Strauss, 2001: 97), but it is a principle that he wants to subject to his art. He wants to subject it to his particular form of knowledge, his specialism, and for Bloom "to the extent to which he believes in his science, there is no eros possible" (1993: 473). His scientific account of eros is utterly un-erotic, but as a scientific specialist he is unable to do anything else, his specialism makes it impossible for him to take a view of the whole. Eros, as nature, is presented as disorderly, it can be wild and destructive. While Eryximachus accepts that pleasure is a good thing he also advises that it should be rationed and controlled by science for the sake of a healthy life. Bloom sums up the speech "the doctor is there as the servant of men's unreasonable hope of living forever and not as nature's servant", his is the desire to conquer nature and the account is the opposite of "wild, death defying eros". (Bloom, 1993: 475)

Aristophanes and Agathon – The Cultural Production of the City

Aristophanes and Agathon show the importance of the role of culture in producing the political. The presence of Aristophanes is important because of the comic poet's presentation of Socrates in his play *The Clouds*. Aristophanes attacks the rationalism of Socrates because this destroys belief in the gods and so the basis of the city, and for Strauss:

...the full and ultimate consequence of the change effected or represented by Socrates appear only in the contemporary West: in the belief in universal enlightenment and therewith in the earthly happiness of all within a universal state, in utilitarianism, liberalism, democracy, pacifism and socialism.

(Strauss, 1966: 7)

Aristophanes's attack on Socrates therefore prefigures the attack on Socrates made by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The defect of Socrates is that he is unaware of his own dependence on the city, "He has the defect of the pure theoretician; he lacks phronesis [Usually translated as practical wisdom or prudence]; he has not reflected on the conditions or the context of his own doing; he lacks self knowledge." (Strauss, 1966: 49) Socrates lacks the political art and does not grasp the nature of his relationship to the city.

Aristophanes produces the first erotic account of eros, what eros represents "in its overwhelming and immoderate demands, is the clearest and most powerful inclination toward lost wholeness" (Bloom, 1993: 478). More than just sex it is the longing for a lost other; it is not a part of the natural order but is a compensation for the loss of natural order, Strauss says "it calls the essentials of human life". (2001: 123)

Aristophanes praises the love of one's own and later Socrates will praise the love of the good, Bloom comments that "the social order is wracked with tensions resulting from these two very human kinds of love" (1993: 484). These two

forces come in to conflict as they pull man in opposing directions. A friend should be a friend because he is one's own not because he is good.

For Aristophanes Zeus made men weaker, by making them tame and orderly they lost their loftier thoughts and became civilized, "Civilization is the acquisition of justice and orderliness, accompanied by the loss of lofty thoughts." (Strauss, 2001: 126) Civilization therefore domesticates man, "Men became men, they ceased to be similar to the nonhuman earth" (Strauss, 2001: 126). So what is eros? "The crucial point is this: you cannot understand Eros if you do not see in it the element of rebellion" (Strauss, 2001: 127). Eros is a movement of nature that confronts and challenges law and the erotic life will always exist in opposition to the community.

Eros is now described as "a striving for something unattainable" (Strauss, 2001: 134) and then as giving "no fulfilment" (Strauss, 2001: 135). "It is, therefore, man's present nature – man as we know him – to be unhappy, to be sick." (Strauss, 2001: 134) Man is constituted by a lack, he is unsatisfied, Strauss carries on, "For each human being seeks not simply some other human being, but that individual human being which is by nature its other half." (Strauss, 2001: 135) The essence of eros is the desire to return to original nature – we should note the parallels here to Rousseau's criticism of Hobbesian rationalism – the polis destroys man's highest nature and limits the loftiest thought by moderating eros, "Eros is rebellion against nomos" (Strauss, 2001: 137). Strauss points out that Aristophanes does not see eros as philosophy, he sees it as a union, not as pure

contemplation but what he says will only be bettered by Socrates who is the wisest man. Not all men are like Socrates. For Aristophanes:

> Law is as essential to man as is sexual desire: Eros must be understood in the light of this duality. You cannot disregard nomos and regard it as entirely extraneous. This means, however, that eros must be understood in the light of the antagonism between nature and convention. Eros is at the same time desire for amorous embrace and rebellion of nature against convention, nay, eros is that rebellion rather than sexual desire. (Strauss, 2001: 145)

Eros goes beyond nomos because the latter is the limit which the former negates.

It is in Agathon's name that the dinner is held and the reason why the group are hung-over. On the previous day Agathon had won the poetry prize. Agathon will speak about love of one's own – patriotism – this is lower than the love of the beautiful. For Agathon eros is the love of beautiful things, but it is also love of fame and one's own. Agathon is a tragic poet, and the gods are made by tragic poets, they make the gods because of their love of the beautiful. "They are the true founders of civility... The tragic poet establishes the beautiful delusion, the salutary delusion which the comic poet destroys" (Strauss, 2001: 169). The tragic poet produces the noble lie which gives the city its moral education.

Socrates forces Agathon to admit that he is ashamed before the wise, "But he cannot quite admit publically that the central activity of his life is shameless, a

hypocritical effort to please the incompetent" (Bloom, 1993: 487). Agathon, as a

tragic poet, speaks to the masses through common opinion and does not seek to

communicate with the wise. Following this, Bloom describes his speech as

callous, but it does have the advantage of appealing to the audience and thus

showing an essential problem of political culture; Agathon is a populist. The

problem is that "Poetry is essentially defective in so far as it is not based upon an

appropriate view of things. It can be misleading or corrupting, causing men to

take pleasure in base or useless things." (Bloom, 1955: 175) The effect of culture

can be positive or negative, it is not morally neutral, which is why in the *Republic*

the guardian's education in culture is so radically defined and why the moral

content of culture will be so important for neoconservatism.

The tragic poets produce the illusions of the cave, the shadows "are the visible

gods, created by the artisans. This limits the polis, therefore it also makes

possible the polis and yet, at the same time, keeps the polis from seeing the

truth" (Strauss, 2001: 171). Both tragedy and comedy are "equally necessary and

problematic" (Strauss, 2001: 171). The tragic builds up the myths that moderate

desire and the comedic can, through ridicule, bring those myths and forms of life

down – as happened to Socrates. In the best city the legislator will have a strict

control over poetry, because it is understood that culture produces the political

that allows the polis to exist. But the best regime is an unlikely possibility; the

legislator therefore "has to learn to understand men by studying the poet.

Otherwise he will be a very poor legislator." (Strauss, 2001: 172) The legislator

has to understand the culture that he exists within, by doing so he will

understand the particular people of that state and will understand what can and cannot be done.

Socrates – The Highest Form of Eros and its Taming

Strauss reiterates the political tension between love of one's own and love of the beautiful:

> ...the love of one's own leads to ideology; the love of the beautiful leads to the truth. If the fundamental fact is love of one's own, one absolutizes one's own and one seeks reasons for it. This is ideology... whereas love of truth is not primarily concerned with one's own. (Strauss, 2001: 183)

Socrates does not make a speech himself, instead he retells a speech given to him by Diotima. The subject is changed from the beautiful to the good, Strauss notes that "this implies one crucial thing: that the good is not identical with the beautiful" (2001: 200). Diotima tells Socrates that possession of good things *seems* to make men happy. Happiness seems to be the end of man, this is an example of right opinion, it is not presented as knowledge because of the use of "seems".

Strauss tells us "happiness is a state of contentedness, you want nothing further, and at the same time an enviable state. Because a moron, for example, might be perfectly content but we would no longer say that he is happy." (2001: 200) In

this formulation happiness appears as the happiness of the last men – contentedness – this state is first called enviable and then moronic. The "moron" is enviable because he is content, the non "moron", therefore, will not be content.

"Eros is desire for happiness." (Strauss, 2001: 201) The difficultly here is that, as Strauss says, not all men are lovers because the content person is not erotic. The content moron would not be a lover, however, he is happy, also, "Men who seek their happiness in wealth, or in strength, or in wisdom are not called lovers; but they are lovers because they seek their own happiness." (2001: 201) This problem is solved when considering some forms of happiness as base, for example seeking wealth. Those who aren't content are lovers and Bloom points out a distinction within the objects of love, "external goods, goods of the body and goods of the soul" (1993: 508). Objects, bodily satisfaction and soulful satisfaction can all be desired and even though some may be base, such as capitalist consumption, all will fly beyond law.

But before they loved the good, Bloom continues, men loved their own. He is describing a conflict between the good and one's own, where the good exists beyond the polis. The conflict between the love of the good and the love of one's own is the problem with Socrates, he urges men to break with their own in favour of the good. To pursue the good the citizen would have to give up his city, and this is what Socrates appears to do, "He lives in Athens but is not really of it, he is married and has children but pays little attention to them" (Bloom, 1993:

508). Earlier Bloom had called Socrates a bohemian, and now he says that he must "appear monstrous to the decent people who love their own" (1993: 509). Socrates is here described as the inverse of the pious ascetic; he is honest in deed because he stays in Athens even when his speech causes him trouble. Willingness to abandon one's own is here depicted as a characteristic of philosophy, "Erotic men seem to have some of this willingness too, but only if their eros does not collapse into a defence of their own." (Bloom, 1993: 509) Eros, described as collapsing into thymos, makes the thymotic simply a base form of the erotic. Eros now appears as beyond but also protector of the city. Socrates can tempt men away from their own through their love of the good, but people (including erotic people) also need good cities and laws so that, "Man's divided loyalties lead to intolerable conflict and much mythmaking" (Bloom, 1993: 501). This idea of the love of one's own, an eros for the city is something that Strauss picks up again in his commentary on Thucydides, he says:

> The eros of the Athenian for Sicily [a reference to the ill fated Scililian expedition] is the peak of his eros for his city, and that eros is his full dedication to his city, the willingness to sacrifice, to forget everything private for the sake of the city. (1964: 226)

The definition of eros is moved on to "the sempiternal possession by oneself of the good." (Strauss, 2001: 204) This addition explains the meaning of happiness as including an element of self-love and eternality. Diotima says of eros, "in what manner and in what action would the zeal and intensity of those who pursue it

be called eros?" (Plato, 2008: 206b1-4) There are different intensities of eros and we might assume that this intensity is related to the baseness or not of the happiness.

Child rearing is directed to the possession of the good because the eternality of it relates to the immortality of the self meaning that "eros implies the transcending of death" (Strauss, 2001: 208). Having children is a way to immortality through the love of one's own and the immortality of the species. However, this does not take into account the city:

> ...the political society is, of course, always a closed society. By a closed society
> I mean one which does not include the human race. The universal society
> would be, strictly speaking, the community of all human beings. The polis is
> never that. The polis is always some men's own, even if there are 170 million.
> (Strauss, 2001: 209)

The speech now focuses on desire for immortality, "eros is neither love of one's own... nor is it love of the beautiful." (Strauss, 2001: 217) Procreation is directed toward immortality but these other two elements will remain as manifestations of eros. Directly after this we are told that:

> ...by denying that eros is eros of one's own and that eros is love of the
> beautiful, one is led to the rejection of the gods... The gods are created
> through poets by love of the beautiful on the one hand... and by eros of one's
> own on the other. (Strauss, 2001: 217)

The gods are created by the poets and produce love of one's own, they bind the polis together as polis but are challenged by eros.

Diotima now goes on to the last part of her speech, she considers "the brutes", by which she means non-civilised people, this is a way of avoiding consideration of calculation because "eros, in the case of man, is not based on calculation" (Strauss, 2001: 218); eros lacks any form of utility. The highest form of eros is therefore different from poetry which does seem to have a use in that it produces love of one's own and therefore the polis.

> The calculating man never forgets himself. The madman, mad for good or ill, forgets himself. This self forgetting can merely be low, but it can also be higher than any calculation. In eros, then, there is a complete forgetting of oneself, a complete forgetting of one's own. (Strauss, 2001: 218)

Eros is akin to madness. There can be combinations, different intensities; forgetting of oneself for one's own as in a sacrifice for the city; forgetting of one's own for oneself as in a selfish action where one profits from the city; and forgetting or a rejection of both, which is the higher form of eros.

Added to the above is, "parents are willing to die for their offspring" (Strauss, 2001: 219), the good polis would not abandon its children and would instead care for and educate them, even though this extra care seems to be unnatural. Love of one's own (for offspring) is being given a higher status than it seems to deserve. This difficulty is expanded if we consider it along side love of one's own

156

(for polis), the polis needs the people to be willing to die for it but this is not entirely natural from the point of view of calculation or non-calculating eros. However, it is also clear that self sacrifice for community is common and that it is related to eros. Therefore:

> ...every mortal being honors its own offspring. That means love of immortality, as discussed in this subsection, is love of one's own... Love of one's own, which is in many ways silly, is nevertheless a phenomenon of human nature. (Strauss, 2001: 222)

This last section of Diotima's speech is separated by Strauss into three subsections. The second subsection is about ambition which "is concerned with immortal fame for virtue" (Strauss, 2001: 224). Virtue here is considered as a means to an end, the end of immortal fame. Strauss tells us that the eros here is eros of one's own and self sacrifice for honour, but it also seems that this eros of one's own is acting as a means - *love of own is a means to immortal fame*. So it would be more accurate to talk about merely the appearance of love of own for gaining immortal fame. It is only necessary for others to believe in your sacrifice; what is at stake here is actually self love.

"Love of one's own, self love, inspires indeed all human action" (Strauss, 2001: 225), it is specifically human. The second part of love of immortality regards "prudence and other virtues", and "to this class belong the poets and the

inventor craftsmen" (Strauss, 2001: 225). Ultimately this regards the production

of virtue as:

> ...the production of the most beautiful prudence, namely political prudence,
>
> the prudence of the statesman. This immortality is the preserve above all
>
> else, of the good poets, who are immortal in their works. (Strauss, 2001: 229)

The poets educate the statesmen into political prudence through moderation,

justice and nobility. Bloom adds to this the teacher, who "as opposed to the

lawgiver, can actually propagate himself, and not just a distorted image of

himself. In this way teaching is more erotic than lawgiving or poetry." (1993: 516)

This implies that teachers have a special relationship to the polis because of their

ability to affect the young, and it is this view that informs Bloom's understanding

of the university in *The Closing of the American Mind* and that constitutes the

neoconservative position in the culture wars.

The subject of the final subsection is the highest form of eros. Diotima introduces

the love of the "beautiful sciences" (by which she means maths), these are

higher than the "beautiful pursuits" because they are not necessary, "the

sciences are beautiful in themselves" (Strauss, 2001: 231) because of their order;

they are objects of contemplation. Does this imply a contradiction with the

earlier expressed suspicion of science? Science is here considered as an object of

contemplation and not as a practical application and through technology.

Strauss sees five stages in this final section; love of the body; love of all bodies; love of the beautiful pursuits and laws; love of the beautiful sciences; and finally love of the beautiful in itself. In the final stage the object is lost and becomes the "simply beautiful". Bloom tells us that this last part of Diotima's speech presents a description of the philosophic experience, "the splendid vision she presents is intended to make one believe that the philosophic life is the most erotic life" (1993: 518), this comment relates to something said in his introduction, that the *Symposium* forces the speakers to "give speeches praising the brute acts they perform" (1993: 433). This is Socrates justification of himself; he is defending philosophy and the philosophic life against its accusers.

But, "The beautiful itself is the good" (Strauss, 2001: 238), what does this mean? The good is higher than the beautiful but "in this final presentation the beautiful is substituted for the good" (Strauss, 2001: 238), this substitution is connected with what Strauss says is the poetic presentation of philosophy that Diotima is giving to Socrates. This presentation of philosophy is not a philosophic but a poetic one. Poetry creates the gods and produces political prudence. Diotima is giving a quasi mystical account of the philosophic experience and the philosophic way of life where the object of contemplation is essentially unspeakable.

Eros is eros of the good, including love of the beautiful and love of one's own. So, "eros of the good is love for my well-being, my own perfection" and "If a man loves what is most his own, namely his soul, he loves the truth, the good"

(Strauss, 2001: 242). Eros is again formulated as self-love and as the desire for perfection via the philosophic life.

The political problem is further explained by returning to the poets. The poets love their own immortality not the beautiful itself because the beautiful is, for them, only a means to immortality. "But what is the beautiful? It is moral virtue and, in the highest case, political prudence, ultimately the polis." (Strauss, 2001: 242) Moral virtue and the polis are means to an end for the immortality of poets and statesmen and this is granted by their public (political) role. Those who inhabit the polis are:

...an arbitrary selection from the natural whole... There is no natural inclination comparable to procreation which is directed toward the polis as polis. There is no natural inclination toward moral virtue and the polis. (Strauss, 2001: 242)

Love of the polis, love of one's own (as in one's fellow citizens) has to be created and it is created by poets and statesmen. "Truth", as the highest form of eros of the good, goes beyond moral virtue and therefore the state as well.

The *Symposium* transcends the love of one's own, "Eros is homeless" (Strauss, 2001: 243), it is beyond the polis, but it is clear that although it is beyond the polis it is also reliant upon it; for the non-political to appear there must first be the political. The non-political is parasitic on the political with the political being merely a means for its practice. But because of the threat that it poses to the

political it is prudent that the erotic non-political remains hidden, just as the writer remains hidden in a commentary. Strauss points out that thymos is not mentioned in the *Symposium* because it is absent from eros, in particular it is not present in the highest forms of eros, so, is it present in the lower? Love of own, love of polis and moral virtue rely upon thymos. Love of polis needs the thymotic to produce the anger and distinction that go into the production of the enemy, Strauss will say, in almost a repetition of an earlier statement "all which we call interesting in human beings is in the sphere of thymos" (2001: 244), thymos is the creative element of the polis. In a reversal of the taming of Thrasymachus (thymos incarnate) by Socrates (eros incarnate), *thymos tames eros into the polis through culture*; it is a making productive of the excess. Strauss tells us that philosophy is a form of eros that lacks thymos, "Indignation has no place in philosophy" as it is directed toward the good, but, "In its utterances or in its teaching, this is another matter." (2001: 243) Once again we see the emphasis on the need for the political in the public teaching; the spoken teaching is not the same as the private experience.

Eros is necessarily incomplete, it lacks that which it is eros of; immortality is still the impossible for the philosopher. For Bloom, this is where philosophy can understand the human situation as "mortality longing for immortality" (1993: 523). This pessimistic construction is here presented as philosophy's empty teaching, as the abandonment of eros as a rejection of action. Socrates is dangerous because he cannot produce a teaching on which political action can be based and without the political decision the polis would cease to function,

"Above all, it [eros] provides the energy for flying out beyond nomos." (Bloom, 1991: 524) The highest form of eros is the end of law.

Writing and Hiding

Strauss ends the commentary on Socrates's speech with a discussion of writing. Poetry and philosophy are related in that they both share the same subject, although poetry takes it only as a means. For Socrates "his eros was only directed at the beautiful, not toward immortality" (Strauss, 2001: 246) Socrates had, in a sense, negated death so he had no need to write; the highest form of eros abandons itself. But Plato wrote (as did Strauss), the answer for Strauss is that Socrates could not write, however:

> I must again pay homage to that great man... al-Farabi, who asserted that
> Plato's great achievement beyond Socrates was that he was able to combine
> the way of Socrates, by which you can teach, dialectically, nice people, with the
> way of Thrasymachus, by which you can persuade non-docile people who must
> be frightened and terrified. Socrates did not write because he could not write,
> more precisely, because he could not write on the highest level. (2001: 247)

The highest form of writing combines philosophy and poetry, it speaks to different people at the same time; this work of seduction is Strauss's art of writing. Socrates was guilty of corrupting the young and denying the gods

because he was seen to do so. Strauss goes on to say that he lacked thymos but that Plato did not. Writing and teaching, we can now infer, both need the thymotic element because they are public. Plato, living in Athens after the death of Socrates, chose to hide philosophy (and eros) from the market place both in his academy and in his written dialogues.

The Straussian commentary is a method of writing that allows the author a space behind the text where thought can exist without interference. Love, in its authentic sense, is not love of one's own but the completion and abandonment of one's own self; it rejects the desire for immortality and regains the natural intimacy that is lost in political society. The highest form of eros, as the non-political, both *is* and *is beyond* the natural – it has to go beyond in order to return to itself in its purest form. However, any erotic practice, not simply the practice of philosophy, disregards law and the love of one's own and so eros and patriotism are distinct. Strauss and Bloom's criticism of Socrates, that because of his eros he is subversive of the moral order, is one that will be repeated in terms of the counter culture and also unconstrained capitalism by neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol.

In the Straussian reading of Plato, Socrates's demise was his failure to be political in word, he did not "think politically". Socrates's Delphic quest and the love of wisdom, fundamentally questioned the society he lived in. By not accepting that he was wise Socrates questioned the proclamation of the Delphic oracle

regarding himself as the wisest man in Greece, and so Socrates challenged the legitimacy of the gods and political power in Athens.

Strauss follows the Platonic style in his writing, but whereas Plato hides within a dialogue Strauss hides within commentary. The highest form of eros now appears as the impossible, it is impossible because it cannot be sustained either by the lovers or as the individual lover of wisdom because it necessarily conflicts with political order. In the same way as justice is the appearance of justice, the art of writing is the appearance of conformity. Thought, when unbounded, always tends toward transgression. Political philosophy, as exemplified by Strauss's Plato, is aware of the tension between the un-boundedness of thought and the necessarily bounded nature of political society. With this in mind the political philosopher acts (by writing and hiding) accordingly[1]. The question that part two will revolve around will be the resolution of the contradiction between the expansion of base desire (in capitalist consumption) and the thymotic needs of the community in patriotism.

In summary, chapter two presents Strauss's understanding of the complex relationship between the philosopher and the city. This relationship contains a contradiction between a community governed by a set of conventions and a form of life that challenges those conventions. The philosopher and the erotic, because of the disregard for law, pose a problem to the conventional moral

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[1] For reasons of space I have not discussed the interpretation of the final speech made by Alcibiades. This interpretation mainly regards Socrates' virtues of moderation and endurance and ultimately his hubris.

order of the community. Because the structure of the political, based on the production of the outside and the enemy, is sensitive to challenges to its conventions, the philosopher, as a non-conventional person, should take care. This shows the tension between the good life, the life that is an end in itself and non-calculating, and political and economic life that requires the substitution of the good in itself for an illusory good, such as the satisfaction of base desire (in consumption) or through positing the object of desire as one's own (as in patriotism) . This tension is exacerbated by the uselessness of the good in itself and its consequent reliance upon conventionality to sustain the community. Conventional morality therefore serves a purpose and should be considered a form of political morality. This political morality is produced culturally by those who possess communicative gifts, in Plato's dialogues through the rhetoricians and poets. Culture should therefore not be seen as morally neutral, it is in fact the locus of the conventional morality of the community, popular culture in particular plays a significant role in the production of moral life. The critique of Socrates is that he failed to "think politically" because he was not aware of his relationship with the rest of the community, this same critique will be applied by Irving Kristol to American capitalism in the 1970s. With this understanding in mind the particular cultural politics of neoconservatism, as it appeared in America after World War Two, can be considered and in terms of the relationship between morality, culture, modernity and the individual's interaction with these.

Since the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the figure of the neoconservative has loomed large in popular political discourse. Sinister, conspiratorial and bent on the establishment of Pax Americana, the neoconservatives became a focus of the anti-war movement. The production of the neoconservative myth was completed when it was discovered that some had been taught by Leo Strauss and students of Leo Strauss who was portrayed, by people such as Shadia Drury and following her Tim Robbins, as a puppet master who promoted the art of political lying. The simplistic reduction of a philosopher who spoke about lying and there being lies about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was a perfect fit and no more was needed to explain the actions of American foreign policy. This reduction fails to come to terms with the symptomatic relationship that neoconservatism and Straussian philosophy have to political modernity.

Although there is an aspect of neoconservatism that is concerned with foreign policy, this is not all that there is. Irving Kristol, sometimes called the "godfather" of neoconservative intellectuals, has called neoconservatism a "persuasion" as opposed to a movement that has a well-defined programme. A persuasion, he says, is something that "manifests itself over time, but erratically, and one whose meaning we clearly glimpse only in retrospect" (2011: 190). The neoconservative persuasion is a reaction against the paradigm of political modernity. The claim made here is that instead of simply calling Strauss the philosophical instigator of

neoconservatism, it is better to see Strauss and those first neoconservative intellectuals as reacting against the same aspects of political modernity, the perceived nihilism and moral and spiritual crisis, what Strauss called "the crisis of modernity". Strauss, as a philosopher, was well qualified to set American political modernity in the context of the history of political philosophy; or, in a more Platonic sense, as a philosopher Strauss was concerned with the whole and not, as with more practically minded intellectuals, the particular. The particular is the concern of politician or cultural critic, and this is exactly where the neoconservatives fit in; they are interested in the specifics of political commentary and the political context of American policy. These people were, and are, concerned with the question of what is to be done about the crisis of political modernity that Strauss diagnosed.

What is found when reading neoconservative authors is a constant cross referencing of each other; Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipsett, James Q Wilson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, George Gilder, build on and support each other's arguments and research. It is in this context that Strauss is then cited in high regard as a philosopher; for example, Irving Kristol says "The favourite neoconservative text on foreign affairs, thanks to professor Leo Strauss of Chicago and Donald Kagan [father of Robert Kagan] of Yale, is Thucydides on the Peloponnesian war" (2011: 190); and, "Encountering Strauss's work produced the kind of intellectual shock that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience" (1995, 320); or Seymour Martin-Lipsett "As the major modern theorist of classical liberal politics Leo Strauss noted..." (1997: 31) Within this context Daniel

Bell marks himself off by posing questions to Strauss in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* as opposed to offering unconstrained praise. (1976: 163)

Neoconservative was a name that first came into popular usage in America at the end of the 1960s and was used initially in the pejorative to mock those Democrat intellectuals who had moved significantly to the right and who were, quite literally, new conservatives, with Irving Kristol once famously commenting that the neoconservatives were liberals who had been "mugged by reality". The history of this rightward movement and the shifting of party political allegiances has been well documented (Ehrman, 1996; Abrams, 2010). By the 1980s, following what was perceived to be the malaise of the US during the 1970s, the failure in Vietnam and the perceived failure of President Johnson's "Great Society", the counter culture, the rise of OPEC, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution, and President Carter's inability produce a noticeable change, neoconservatism was firmly allied to the Republican party. Subsequent to their notoriety during the presidency of George W. Bush they are now, at least in the popular imagination, firmly part of the Republican mainstream. This has also been marked by a generational shift in neoconservatism with the second generation now on centre stage. One of the curiosities of neoconservatism is the family nature of this generational shift, with the children of the first generation replacing their parents, even, in the case of the Podhoretz family, taking over the same job as editor of the journal *Commentary*. This second generation is in many ways more dogmatic than the first and less intellectually vigorous.

Neoconservatism is more varied in its interests than the popular narrative often suggests. Neoconservatism is a response to the form of political modernity that Strauss diagnosed as so harmful and is a response to the perceived nihilism of the post-historic world. This response, in all its sincerity, is however fundamentally flawed in that it has failed to escape its initial diagnosis and has deepened that "crisis". Neoconservative thought leads down a blind alley and is intellectually unable to negotiate the contradictions of political modernity. This flaw is most clear in the strategic crisis that has been left to the US by the moment of hubris produced by the neoconservatives' understanding of the "unipolar moment" after the end of the Cold War. This hubris eventually led to the invasion of Iraq and to fiscal incompetency during the Presidency of George W. Bush. The US is now a much diminished power and this has much to do with the failed outlook of neoconservatism. But this is not to say that the initial diagnoses of the problems of political modernity did not detect a genuine problem and that we cannot learn from them when trying to understand the contemporary world.

In a 1976 essay, 'What is a 'Neoconservative'', Kristol spells out what he calls the "vague consensus" (2011: 148) amongst those intellectuals who share the neoconservative persuasion:

Neoconservatism is not at all hostile to the idea of a welfare state, but it is critical of the Great Society version of the welfare state... Neoconservatism has great respect – it is fair to say it has learned great respect – for the power

of the market to respond efficiently to economic realities… Neoconservatism tends to be respectful of traditional values and institutions: religion, the family, and the "high culture" of Western civilisation. If there is any one thing that neoconservatives are unanimous about, it is their dislike of the "counter culture"… Neoconservatism affirms the traditional American idea of equality, but rejects egalitarianism… In foreign policy, neoconservatism believes that American democracy is not likely to survive for long in a world that is overwhelmingly hostile to American values. (2011: 149-150)

For reasons of organisational simplicity part two of this thesis has been split into two sections, the first deals with domestic policy and the second with foreign policy. This is not to say that these two areas are mutually exclusive, indeed, it is my contention that they are closely linked and that what occurs in foreign policy is possible because of domestic cultural politics. The domestic is then more relevant than the foreign and it is with this in mind that the neoconservatives will be read, over-turning the popular reduction of neoconservatism to imperial foreign policy.

Chapter Three – Nihilism and American Culture

Podhoretz on the Beat(s)

The first person to publish Norman Podhoretz was Allan Ginsberg in the *Columbia Poetry Review* (which Ginsberg was then the editor of) in 1946. Later, in 1956 when Podhoretz was becoming known as literary critic, Ginsberg felt confident enough in his tastes to send him a copy of *Howl* for review.

Podhoretz did not review Ginsberg's seminal work but did go on to publish uncomplimentary essays on the Beat generation. One, entitled 'The Know Nothing Bohemians', was published in *Partisan Review* in 1958 and inhabits a key place in the development of Podhoretz's thought. Podhoretz spent the early sixties as a self proclaimed "radical" but this critique of the Beat generation contains many of the themes that will go on to define neoconservative thought in the 1960s and 70s and is therefore worthy of close attention. It is quite possible that Podhoretz took a radical posture in the early sixties as a way of making his voice relevant. Only after *Commentary* had a reasonable readership,

peaking at 60,000 in 1965, did Podhoretz go with his instinct and move to the Right. (Abrams, 2010: 26-43)

Like other soon to be neoconservatives, such as Irving Kristol, Podhoretz drifted around the political spectrum. He initially studied with Lionel Trilling in New York and was then sent to Cambridge (by Trilling) to study under F. R. Leavis. Leavis was impressed with Podhoretz's "puritanical ferocity" and invited him to contribute essays to his journal *Scrutiny*, these caught the attention of Eliot Cohen the then editor of *Commentary* (Abrams, 2010: 11-14). *Commentary* is a non-academic journal, preferring "high-level journalism, the kind of writing that did not necessitate depth of knowledge or solid scholarship, but rather a tone of authority" (Abrams, 2010: 11). In other words, *Commentary* is a journal that focuses on rhetoric and sophistry over any kind of philosophic truth; the journal was always political in its nature. Podhoretz stayed at *Commentary* for the whole of his career, becoming the editor in 1960 and continuing until 1995 when he was succeeded by his son John Podhoretz. During his editorship *Commentary* moved from being a journal of literary criticism to a highly influential policy journal. It reached it height during the late 1970s and early 1980s when contributors such Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Jeane Kirpatrick rose to actual political power and influence on the backs of articles published by Podhoretz.

Podhoretz maintained strict editorial control at *Commentary*, often rewriting contributions, and the journal should be read as an extension of his personal politics. He began the 1960s by supporting the Kennedy administration's

forward-looking agenda, however, this support was not unquestionable. Podhoretz had, in the early 60s, moved *Commentary* to the Left, especially in terms of its view of foreign policy and published articles, such as Staughton Lynd's 'How the Cold War Began', which placed the blame on the US for the onset of hostilities with the Soviet Union. In 1961 Podhoretz became one of the earliest opponents of US intervention in Vietnam (Abrams, 2010: 30-31). By the early 1980s this position had completely switched when Podhoretz published two books, *Why We Were in Vietnam* and *The Present Danger*, the former was a strident and unapologetic defence of US intervention and the latter an attack on the policy of détente. By this time many neoconservatives had moved from the Democratic to the Republican camp and supported Reagan over Carter in the 1980 Presidential election.

In 'The Know Nothing Bohemians', Podhoretz makes a distinction between the earlier bohemianism of the 1920s (Hemmingway and Fitzgerald) and that of the Beats. Kerouac "seems to feel that respectability is a sign not of moral corruption but of spiritual death" (2004: 31). There is no political reason for *On the Road*, whereas earlier bohemianism "represented a repudiation of the provinciality, philistinism and moral hypocrisy of American life" (2004: 31). Kerouac is interested in pure experience as an end in itself, the only possible end, whereas earlier bohemianism "was a movement created in the name of civilisation: its ideals were intelligence, cultivation, spiritual refinement." (2004: 31) The indifference of the Beats to politics seems to be their great crime in Podhoretz's eyes, they reject civilisation and "worship primitivism, instinct, energy, blood. To

the extent that [they have] intellectual interests at all, they run to mystical doctrines [and] irrationalist philosophies." (2004: 32)

The Beats, for Podhoretz, represent moral relativism and a celebration of destructiveness. Podhoretz sees Kerouac as celebrating criminality, primitivism and an anti-intellectualism that "makes the ordinary American's hatred of eggheads seem positively benign." (2004: 35) Kerouac's enthusiastic primitivism is, for Podhoretz, inspired by the same spirit that drives "the young savages in leather jackets who have been running amok in the last few years with their switchblades and zip guns." (2004: 39) Podhoretz sees American moral decline symbolised in the leather-jacketed youths that are celebrated by Kerouac. What is being described are the effects of affluence in the modern world and Podhoretz claims, "I happen to believe that there is a direct connection between the flabbiness of middle class life and the spread of juvenile crime in the 1950s" (2004: 39), the "comfortable self-preservation" that Strauss recognised as the core of modernity is here seen as being morally degenerate.

It is Kerouac's celebration of a life that refuses to engage with society that most disturbs Podhoretz, because, as a writer, Kerouac is a man who can shape the imagination of others. The charge against Kerouac and the Beats is that of the corruption of the young. By rebelling against American culture and rejecting "characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause" (2004: 39) and by celebrating the use of drugs, promiscuity and madness the Beats, and what they represented, posed a problem, just as Strauss's reading

of Socrates did. In 1999 Podhoretz even went so far as suggesting that Ginsberg, in his declaration "that the perverse was infinitely superior to the normal", became "homosexual not out of erotic compulsion but by an act of will and as another way of expressing his contempt for normal life" (2000: 36). It is the open celebration of transgression that horrifies him, on the issue of drugs he says:

Moreover, persuaded by propagandists like Ginsberg… they could try marijuana with impunity, untold numbers of kids were getting hooked on it

and these 'kids':

would soon plunge into the deeper and more dangerous waters of LSD or heroin or cocaine. (2000: 38)

Podhoretz shares the Straussian view that popular culture shapes the moral attitudes of the people and that therefore the writer has a moral responsibility to shape his/her culture.

In a second essay from 1958 called 'The New Nihilism and the Novel', Podhoretz notes:

…the reception accorded Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg, whose work combines an appearance of radicalism with a show of intense spirituality, testifies to the hunger that has grown up on all sides for something extreme, fervent, affirmative and sweeping. (1965: 163)

Citing David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd* Podhoretz holds the Beats as symptomatic of a perceived cultural malaise that developed during the 1950s as a result of ever increasing affluence. Referring to the nihilism of the character Sebastian Dangerfield in J. P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man,* Podhoretz says "he is living the truth of his times" but he is not a rebel:

> ...for there is nothing to rebel against, but he is an example of what becomes of the impulse toward rebellion at a moment in history when the only conventions in existence are anachronistic survivals of a moribund ethos. (1965: 169)

In an indication that Podhoretz does not see this as simply an American problem but one of Western modernity in general he states "it was... Camus who first spotted the significance of this new style of nihilism" (1965: 170).

However, Podhoretz gives Camus too much credit, this writing of the problem of nihilism has a longer history. Shadia Drury, in *Alexandre Kojeve and the roots of postmodern politics,* sees this in the existential *acte gratuite* and the expression it receives in Andre Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican* (Drury, 1994: 60). Gide describes an apparently motiveless murder where a man was pushed out of a moving train. The murderer, Lafcadio, had no interest in the money found in the dead man's pocket. The murder was essentially gratuitous, Lafcadio was simply bored. "His *acte gratuite* was intended to separate him from the herd of humanity. Lafcadio wanted to live like an immortal god in the midst of mortal play things." (1994:

61) What Gide describes is fictional but for Drury, "It is certainly not foreign to those of us who live in a world filled with gratuitous terror and motiveless crimes directed against totally anonymous victims." (1994: 61) These crimes happen in our world and Drury knows the reason why, "the new brand of criminality is motivated by boredom, a desire for adventure, and a quest for 'pure prestige'" (1994: 61)

Georges Bataille, who along with Camus and Strauss attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel, develops a useful concept relating to this problem when he asks a question of Kojève in a letter from the 6th of December 1937, "the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has "nothing more to do" disappears or remains in a state of 'unemployed negativity'" (1997: 296). Bataille is asking about what happens to man at the end of history. Bataille refers to the Hegelian concept of man as pure negativity, he is that which negates and this is where Kojève refers to the process of "grazing"; the simple negation of the given. In the post historical state, where legal recognition is given to all, there is nothing more to do other than satisfy desire. Bataille questions if this is really enough because Hegelian history is driven by more than the simple desire for food, it is ultimately the desire for recognition, it therefore regards thymos. After being granted universal recognition the human, as negativity, becomes unemployed, it has nothing left to do. What happens to this unemployed negativity is the question of the end of history because, although desire is declared to be satisfied, it is not; "it brings into play representations extremely charged with emotive value... these representations intoxicate him." (Bataille, 1997: 298)

Strauss echoes this criticism in a letter in which he engages with Kojève's published lectures:

> What makes human beings into human beings is the striving for recognition. Hence human beings are fully satisfied when and only when they are universally recognized. I see an ambiguity here: a) they should be satisfied, dissatisfaction with universal recognition is irrational; b) they are satisfied. Regarding a) human beings are irrational; they manage to destroy the simply rational communal life (implied on p. 400, paragraph 2). Regarding b) human beings are not satisfied; they want to be happy; their happiness is not identical with their being recognized.

> The recognition, for which great men of action strive, is admiration. That recognition is not necessarily satisfied by the End-State. The fact that great deeds are impossible in the End-State, can lead precisely the best to a nihilistic denial of the End-State.

> .....If I had more time than I have, I could state more fully, and presumably more clearly, why I am not convinced that the End State as you describe it, can be either the rational or the merely-factual satisfaction of human beings. For the sake of simplicity I refer today to Nietzche's "last men". - letter dated 22/8/1948 (2000: 238-239)

The satisfaction given by universal recognition is illusory because the "great men" who Strauss refers to are reduced to nihilism or Bataille's "energetic intoxification".

Kojève acknowledges some of this criticism in the famous note added to the second edition of his lectures. Kojève talks about the development of the tea ceremony in Japan, which for him represents a zone of pure snobbishness where the primal battle for prestige is played out (Kojève, 1969: 160-161). The tea ceremony demonstrates one escape route for thymotic energy, allowing the struggle to play out in a structured environment; prestige can therefore be attained without violent struggle.

It is this unemployed negativity that Podhoretz detected symptoms of in the literature of the 1950s. Ginsberg and Kerouac once invited Podhoretz over to their apartment in New York, and the evening, in Podhoretz's telling, was not a great success. Ginsberg had failed to convince him of the importance of Beat poetry and as Podhoretz left he shouted "We'll get you through your children". This can be taken as a simple threat (and maybe it was) but it can also be seen as prophetic, and Podhoretz follows this line (2000: 48). He speaks not of his own children, but of some of his friends who, born to prosperous families, became drug addicts, spent years in mental hospitals or ran off to Canada to avoid the draft and never managed to "climb out of the hole of failure". Failure here is equated with not being "normal" in a bourgeois sense of having a job, a house and other fruits of general accumulation. "These people had been encouraged by

Ginsberg and his disciples in the counter culture to dig for themselves" a hole

that they could not escape from (2000: 48).

The Beats were the precursors to elements of the counter culture, which

Podhoretz considers to be a "species of nihilism" and a plague that affects the

"vulnerable young". It is this combination of affluence and nihilism that is the

root of the degenerate nature of the people who are documented and

celebrated by the Beats. Podhoretz sees them as being symptomatic of a culture

that sees itself as satisfied, a culture that has nothing more to do, that is

unemployed, or, as Strauss says a society that has lost faith in its purpose (1964:

3). Podhoretz sees counter cultural writings feeding back into this culture,

perpetuating it, encouraging it and ultimately corrupting the young. If the Beats

showed their dissatisfaction through drug taking and madness, the

neoconservatives are the opposite and sought to defend and rebuild the moral

order.

In 'A Letter to the Young (and to their parents)', in 1975, Midge Decter (the wife

of Norman Podhoretz) asks:

Have you been, perhaps, the most indulged generation in history? Yes, but in

many ways you have also been the most abandoned, by the very people who

endlessly professed how much they cared. (1996: 75)

The young are indulged by both parents and the state (it is an implicit attack on

welfare), encouraged to follow their own paths and to do as they feel. Parents

and the state have given up inculcating values into the young and merely want them to be satisfied. The problem for the neoconservatives is how to re-instil values, how to "re-moralise society".

The loss of values in the young makes it more difficult for the society to defend itself in a hostile world because those without values will not sacrifice themselves. Immortality in the sense that Diotima explains to Socrates in the *Symposium* is threatened doubly; through the production of offspring, the children of the state; and existentially through a lack of willingness to defend the state due to a lack of patriotism. The cause of this is nihilism, but this nihilism also has something to do with the higher forms of eros in the abandonment of the desire for immortality. The non-political goes beyond the state and then fundamentally weakens it, the neoconservatives recognised this and cared about it, and they want to protect the culture that exists from disintegration.

Irving Kristol – Counter culture and capitalism

Irving Kristol's writings covered a wide variety of subjects and spanned over 50 years. Like Podhoretz, Kristol began his career as a literary critic who then started to write on other subjects. It is this interest in culture that drives the intellectual project and it is through these eyes and not those of a trained economist that we should read him. Of all the neoconservative intellectuals Kristol admits most readily his debt to Strauss and named Strauss, in 2003, a "neoconservative

intellectual" (2011: 184). Kristol certainly held Strauss in high regard and developed some of the same themes. The focus is on the maintenance of political stability in political modernity, morality and the problem of nihilism. The issue of political stability was particularly pressing during the period when neoconservative thought started to develop and come to prominence, the 1960s. One of the points of conflict with American political modernity, and one of particular importance for Kristol, was the university and the development of the New Left.

The importance of trouble in the university can be understood if considered from the Straussian point of view. University teachers and their students should be, from the Straussian stand point, the intellectual guardians of the system, what Strauss called gentlemen:

...the gentleman is by nature able to be affected by philosophy; Aristotle's political science is an attempt to actualise this potentiality. The gentleman affected by philosophy is in the highest case the enlightened statesman. (1964: 28)

Either consciously or not, the neoconservatives want to perform this role of gentleman statesmen. Infused with the wisdom of classical philosophy they see their role as one of guiding the common citizen, they protect their souls because, they assume they are both morally and intellectually superior. The assumption of the role of gentleman is due to exposure to what Kristol refers to as "high

culture" by which he means the "great books" tradition that Strauss and, in particular, Allan Bloom promote. Teachers should be instilling values and patriotism and not cultural criticism.

That students were in revolt was particularly problematic because these cultured few should be providing moral leadership. The problem is seen as symptomatic of the intellectual/spiritual crisis of the time and the problem of nihilism that Podhoretz detected. The framing of the problem, stemming from the diagnosis of nihilism, is then expanded by Kristol into the economic sphere. Though always a supporter of the capitalist system, Kristol was tentative in his praise and posed questions that many on the Left do. The question is how does a society, geared toward a nihilistic economic system, produce meaning and thereby maintain a stable political order?

In a 1973 essay, 'What's Bugging the Students', Kristol considers the reasons for the student radicalism of the previous years. Though acknowledging issues such as civil rights and the Vietnam war, he rejects these as prime causes. The radicalism of the sixties was, for Kristol, apolitical because the students lacked a political programme; he claims, "there has been no campus meeting to celebrate the passage of the Civil Rights act" (2011: 118). In other words there was a disinterest in the actual political process, in legislation and policy; the desire was merely for the excitement of the protest and the conflict with authority. Kristol's problem is deepened by the specific protests at the University of California, Berkeley over dissatisfaction at that university. Again, the claim is that the

students lacked any actual proposals for the improvement of the university. But despite the vocalisation of problems at the university, Berkeley was having no problems in attracting students because "That is where the action is" (2011: 118), implying that the students were more interested in conflict than education. Kristol's accusation is that the student's rebellion was gratuitous, and simply for its own sake, it was, he says "an *existentialist* revolt" (2011: 119) (emphasis in the original). "They are bored. They see their lives laid out neatly before them... even 'failure' in their careers will represent no harsh punishment." (2011: 120)

America's problem was therefore one of affluence, the students saw ahead of them a comfortable existence, one that held no great danger and offered no opportunity for "great deeds". It is therefore the problem of unemployed negativity and Strauss's crisis of modernity. The comfortable students desired recognition but existed within a system that offered no opportunities heroism. They were exposed to a purposeful political cause through the civil rights movement and wanted more of that feeling of sovereignty.

Bataille's solution to the problem of unemployed negativity lay through the idea of the sovereign, where sovereignty can be found through the act of rebellion, through the transgression. Rebellion as an end in itself was, for Bataille, a perfectly acceptable solution (Bataille, 2001: 129-132). For neoconservatism this solution is not available because of the resulting political instability. Neoconservative politics, following Strauss, will always be rooted in the Platonic notion of moderation; this form of eros has to be moderated in order to exist

within a political community. The crisis of modernity involves the forgetting of moderation, it assumes that desire can be satisfied, gratuitous rebellion is therefore seen as a symptom of this immoderation.

In an essay from 1978, following Lionel Trilling, who Kristol often cites as next to Strauss in terms of his intellectual influence, Kristol calls this phenomenon an "adversary culture" which is something specific to bourgeois capitalist society. The adversary culture develops through education:

> When we send our sons and daughters to college, we may expect that by the time they are graduated they are likely to have a lower opinion of our social and economic order... The more "cultivated" a person is in our society, the more disaffected and malcontent he is likely to be – a disaffection, moreover, directed not only at the actuality of our society but at the ideality... The average "less cultivated" American, of course feels no great uneasiness with either the actual or the ideal. (1995: 106-7)

Such a situation is the reverse of what Culture is supposed to achieve in Kristol's imagination. The adversary intellectual is therefore characterised as the same figure, though pejoratively framed, that some would call the "radical intellectual". The adversary is someone who is framed through education and not their material conditions, the adversary is not opposed to the state because of the merciless exploitation of an economic system that they have experienced but, it is claimed, because they are comfortable and bored. This adversary

culture developed through eighteenth century romanticism "with its celebration of noble savages" (1995: 109), and begins with the work of Rousseau, who for Strauss constituted the "second wave of modernity", the initial counter reaction to rationalist modernity; it is this post-romantic lineage that creates adversary culture.

The accusation against the adversary is that s/he is simply following the:

> ...aristocratic impulse... it is claimed that the market does not truly reflect peoples preferences, which are deformed by the power of advertising. A minority then claims to have paternalist authority to represent "the people" in some more authentic sense. (1995: 112)

Oppression is not obviously felt but has to be revealed and to be revealed the ideology has to first be deconstructed. Indeed, it is not a controversial claim to call radical intellectuals aristocratic in nature. This is certainly true of Theodore Adorno's critique of American mass culture and later that of Jean Baudrillard (Lunn, 1992; Kelner, 1989), though Baudrillard's later work is somewhat ambiguous as to whether it is a celebration or critique of American popular culture. This is not to say that Kristol is here defending mass culture, he is instead attacking the impulse to deconstruct it. The development of the culture wars that dominated the American university throughout the 1980s were an attack on the spread of continental thought after the Second World War. The accusation is not necessarily that these critiques are wrong in their analyses of culture but that

they are dangerous, that they produce un-thoughtful opposition to American society. This education produces students who oppose and who have no faith in the society that they live in, and because of this that society is weakened through cynicism. The problem is that of the philosopher as presented by Strauss, the intellectual has to be careful with his/her questioning.

This theme had previously been developed by Kristol in a 1971 essay called 'Pornography, Obscenity and the Case for Censorship', where he demonstrates his understanding of the role of culture:

> ...if you believe that no-one was ever corrupted by a book, you have also to believe that no one was ever improved by a book (or a play or movie). You have to believe, in other words, that all art morally trivial and that, consequently, all education is morally irrelevant. (1972: 32)

Kristol clearly takes the opposite view that all culture is morally relevant. Kristol's argument for the importance of cultural education is the same as that presented for the education of the guardians in the Strauss's reading of the *Republic.* Drawing on Walter Berns, a student of Leo Strauss, Kristol says, "no society can be utterly indifferent to the ways its citizens publicly entertain themselves" (1972: 33). Popular culture affects the people, for example, cockfighting and bear baiting are bad not because they are cruel to animals, but because "it was felt that they debased and brutalised the citizenry" (1972: 33), for Kristol, this sort of

culture debases the morals of society. Culture should present and promote accepted moral conventions and not corrupt them.

Here is one of the contradictions within neoconservative thought. The academic attack on mass culture is rejected because of its aristocratic tendencies, because it seeks to impose a view of culture on the democratic soul, but this is exactly what Kristol is here seeking to do. Pornography and obscenity are bad culture because they debase, only good culture should be allowed, the rest should be forcefully banned; some mass culture is good whereas other mass culture is bad.

It is this argument that animates the neoconservative attacks of the culture wars. The most well known of these attacks was Allan Bloom's 1987 best selling book, *The Closing of American Mind*. That a prominent student of Strauss would write a book for popular consumption is worthy of some thought; what did Bloom intend with the book? He develops the critique of the university that Kristol and other neoconservatives had been outlining. Bloom describes the universities of the 1980s as dens of post-Nietzschean, postmodern nihilism. Echoing Strauss's argument that the discovery of different systems of law produce relativism Bloom criticises multicultural teachings and he accuses students of being given a better understanding of foreign cultures than of their own. American students, "know much less about American history" (Bloom, 1988: 34), of which they only know its faults. Bloom apparently says this without irony, but it must be remembered that Bloom taught the Classics; European culture, not American culture. Bloom draws a comparison between the US and the Weimar Republic,

implying that the same intellectual and cultural nihilism had been transplanted, the warning is that the same fate awaits America as befell Germany in the 1930s.

Not only following Kristol in attacking the content of American higher education, Bloom also considers obscenity, specifically citing rock music and Mick Jagger in particular. The sexuality of rock music debases the erotic, the arguments of both Bloom and Kristol are that modern sexuality reduces men and women to the simply sexual with no more "elevated" or "human" aspects. For Kristol, "When sex is a public spectacle, a human relationship has been debased into a mere animal connection" (1972: 37). Bloom sees modern popular culture as a crude democratic art that is directed at children with the explicit end of making money, the culmination of human scientific, political and philosophic development has produced a "life... made into a nonstop, commercially pre-packaged masturbational fantasy" (1988: 75).

These lines of argument were later used and repeated by Lynne Cheney, the wife of former American Vice President Dick Cheney. Cheney who, just as Lionel Trilling, wrote her thesis on Matthew Arnold[2] was made Head of National Endowment of Humanities (NEH) by President Reagan in 1986. Five of the six reports released by the NEH during this time concerned the teaching of the humanities in schools and the effects of relativism in American education (Peters, 2008). Cheney, echoing Bloom, attacked the education system for

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[2] When considering the intellectual influences that formed neoconservatism it can be the case that the influence of Strauss is overstated. There is also strong Arnoldianism at stake, primarily through the influence of Lionel Trilling. Unfortunately there is not space to develop this side further in this current work.

"encouraging students to take a benign view of other cultures while being hypercritical of the one in which they live" (Quoted in Peters, 2008).

What then is the alternative to the culture and education of modernity? For the university this means a Straussian "Great Books" education and teaching an established cannon. High school history would have to become the establishment and repetition of national narratives as fact and not critical thought. The difficulty that neoconservatives have with a history that criticises the nation means that the serious study of history becomes all but impossible, but this is not the point. The neoconservative view of education is from a strictly moral perspective and is not a desire for "truth". Education instils a particular set of values in the people, it is not necessarily there to promote a questioning frame of mind, the hope is for "a reinstatement of regard for objective truth" (Peters, 2008), or as Bloom freely admits "I personally tried to teach my students prejudices... Prejudices are visions about the way things are" (1988: 43). Bloom is saying that education should aim for the closing and not the opening of the mind.

The question of popular culture is a little more speculative. An interesting clue comes from a student of Strauss, Alfred Geier, who cites Strauss's obsession with the television series, *Gunsmoke* (Geier, 2006). *Gunsmoke* was a long running series set in Dodge City, Kansas, in the 1870s. The story revolved around the local sheriff who defended the townsfolk against all manner of dangers. The sheriff was both morally and intellectually superior to all of the townsfolk, many of

whom, in particular the deputy sheriff, are portrayed as good but simple creatures in need of the guidance of their betters. The sheriff is careful to not offend the townsfolk by displaying his obvious superiority and will speak in a different register depending on the particular situation and his particular interlocutors. *Gunsmoke,* as popular culture, presents a model of a good society, there are dangers but the dutiful master is there to protect, it asserts a moral order and has a clearly defined hero and model lifestyle that is not critical of the social order.

The modern spirit of nihilism is not limited to the cultural and intellectual spheres, but is also extended to the economic, and this argument drives Kristol into a fascinating dialectic. In a 1973 essay called 'Capitalism, Socialism and Nihilism' he continues his critique of the New Left and the adversary culture. He begins by acknowledging the importance of Chicago School economics and the arguments of Freidrich Hayek and Milton Friedman in attacking the planned economy. For Kristol, the traditional economics of socialism have been discredited but the question remains, "If the traditional economics of socialism have been discredited, why has not the traditional economics of capitalism been vindicated?" (1978: 57) The answer is to be found in the notion of "thinking economically". What marked out the old Left was its serious engagement with economic thinking, for Kristol this is where it lost the argument; on economics the traditional socialist conception of the planned economy failed, but "the identifying mark of the New Left are its refusal to *think economically* and its contempt for bourgeois society precisely because this is a society that does think

economically" (1978: 58). But Kristol then defines economics and thinking economically as the "social science *par excellence* of modernity" that is based upon the "philosophical presuppositions of modernity" (1978: 58) and enlightenment rationalism. The New Left is constituted as a rebellion against these philosophical presuppositions.

Repeating Strauss's argument between the ancients and moderns Kristol cites the impossibility of having "a *priori* knowledge of what constitutes happiness for other people" (1978: 58), but "for all pre-modern thinkers, *a priori* knowledge of what constituted other people's happiness was not only possible, it was fact" (1978: 58). Central economic planning fails for Kristol, not because it assumes knowledge of the good life, but because it assumes the good life is based on material consumption:

If you do not define "happiness" or "satisfaction" in this way, if you refuse to think "economically", then the pre-modern view is more plausible than it is not. (1978: 58)

And in a very revealing statement Kristol goes on:

...if you believe that man's spiritual life is more important than his trivial and transient adventures in the market place, then you may tolerate a free market for practical reasons... but you certainly will have no compunction in overriding it. (1978: 59)

Kristol's sceptical view of capitalism is in stark contrast to his later support of the neoliberal paradigm. Bloom made a similar point in his essay on Plato's *Republic*, saying that by "denying the existence of spiritedness" (1968: 349) the modern economic system denies anything that is beyond the economic. Value is reduced to economic value and the good is limited to that which is good economically. Kristol's position here seems to be that markets are useful because they produce affluence but are not an end in themselves. Kristol is a sceptic regarding capitalism, indeed, one of the titles of his essay collections is *Two Cheers of Capitalism*, a good capitalist society should give itself two, not three, cheers because "it regards the impulse to give three cheers for any social, economic or political system as expressing a dangerous – because it is misplaced – enthusiasm." (1978: ix) Too much enthusiasm assumes that there are no problems and is therefore hubristic and self-defeating.

What then, is his problem with the New Left in its refusal to think economically? Kristol calls the New Left "a shamefaced counter revolution" which is "full of bad faith and paltry sophistry, because it feels compelled to define itself as some kind of progressive extension of modernity" (1978: 60). By rejecting the modern paradigm the New Left rejects the idea of progress because it does not see technological civilisation as the answer to the modern spiritual crisis. The New Left is therefore flawed because it does not recognise itself as an essentially conservative and reactionary movement, but instead sees itself as "progressive" but only because it is opposed to bourgeois civilisation. It is this basic

misunderstanding of itself that, we may assume, produces the seeming nihilism of the counterculture.

Kristol's question then turns to the failings of bourgeois civilisation. This stems from the fact that liberal capitalist society is of necessity also secular; the end of religion and the promise of otherworldly happiness meant that "the demands placed upon liberal society, in the name of temporal "happiness", have become ever more urgent and ever more unreasonable" (1978: 63). In other words, the lack of a promise of a better life after death necessarily turned people toward this worldly satisfaction, which means material satisfaction and the promise of affluence and Strauss's notion of "comfortable self-preservation". It is this settlement that is implicitly rejected by the New Left and counter culture; bourgeois comfort is not spiritually satisfying.

Kristol considers an attitude of philosophical stoicism but concludes that this "has never been found suitable for mass consumption" (1978: 64), though he admits that "Philosophical stoicism has always been an aristocratic prerogative" (1978: 64). So, there should be philosophical stoicism for those few but the masses, incapable of this, are left with collapsing religion or the ultimately unsatisfying consumer culture. The accusation is that the aristocratic killing of God has left the masses abandoned. When they become dissatisfied with affluence there is only nihilism hence the importance of the moral content of culture. Eros is unsatisfied with modernity but for Kristol as with Strauss and Bloom it is not possible that the majority come to terms with this through

contemplation. What these thinkers assume is an inescapable hierarchy in society.

Kristol carries on:

Another, and related, consequence of the disestablishment of religion as a publicly sanctioned mythos has been the inability of liberal society ever to come up with a convincing and generally accepted theory of political obligation. (1978: 64)

It is revealing to see that Kristol considers it a mythos and does not take it as revealed truth himself but considers it politically useful because it can produce political obligations and a codified, transcendentally understood morality. This has bearings on the security of the society because "No merely utilitarian definition of civic loyalty is going to convince anyone that it makes sense for him to die for his country." (1978: 64) Kristol sees the benefits of secular nationalism in filling this gap and admits that it had been useful for the US, but writing in 1973, he thinks that the nationalistic spirit is not necessarily compatible with bourgeois society. However, by 1994 in an essay entitled 'Taking Religious Conservatives Seriously' Kristol asserts that "the three pillars of modern conservatism are religion, nationalism and economic growth" (2011: 293), this shift in attitude towards the use of nationalism can be explained by the shift in American self-confidence that took place in the 1980s.

Nihilism only arose after the modern attitude had been fully developed, what Weber described as the protestant ethic was simply the historic mixing of two world views, pre-modern Christian morality and modern economic rationalism. The latent Christian influence moderated the capitalist spirit by imposing "bourgeois virtues [such] as honesty, sobriety, diligence and thrift" (1978: 65). But as the liberal focus on individualism developed, the hold of religion weakened and a purer form of liberal, capitalist logic developed. This was a logic that had no room for the religious life and instead focused on the post Hobbesian progressive, technological satisfaction of desire. Kristol sums up his position thus, "I think it is becoming increasingly clear that religion, and a moral philosophy associated with religion, is far more important politically than the philosophy of liberal individualism admits." (1978: 66)

Religion therefore, or as Kristol said, a "publically sanctioned mythos" needs to be recreated. This is of course not for the elite who can be satisfied with philosophy and the Arnoldian Culture of "the best that has been thought and said" (Arnold, 1993). The publically sanctioned mythos is necessary for the mass of society and so Kristol is inverting Marx by suggesting that the people need their opium. This is why there is such discomfort with the intellectuals who concern themselves with the debunking of these publically sanctioned myths; the job of the intellectual is, in the neoconservative view, the exact opposite, they should be producing and propagating these myths whilst engaging with Culture in private. In this the role of the Straussian gentlemen and the poets can

be seen, they need to maintain the mythos and avoid nihilism so as to maintain political stability.

This becomes more explicit in later essays, in 'Counter Cultures' in 1994 he says;

> Counter cultures are dangerous phenomena even as they are inevitable. Their destructive power always far exceeds their constructive power. The delicate task that faces our civilisation today is not to reform the secular rationalist orthodoxy, which has passed beyond the point of redemption. Rather, it is to breathe new life into the older, now largely comatose, religious orthodoxies - while resisting the counter culture as best we can, adapting to it and reshaping it where we cannot simply resist. (1995: 146)

This is further elaborated in a 1996 essay called 'The Right Stuff', where Kristol develops the neoconservative view of religion with direct reference to Strauss. He claims that although "Conservative politicians woo the religious conservatives... only neoconservatives can really speak to them." (2011: 185) This is despite his admittance that many neoconservatives are not religiously observant in their private lives, though we may assume from this that they may be publically observant. He acknowledges that such a position attracts accusations of hypocrisy:

> But such accusations miss the point. All political philosophers prior to the twentieth century, regardless of their personal piety, understood the importance of religion in the life of the political community.

Neoconservatives, because of their interest in and attachment to classical

political philosophy, share this understanding. (2011: 185)

Neoconservatives are in a privileged place to cultivate the political support of

American religious conservatives because of their understanding of the political

value of religion. Neoconservatives who see the need for a re-moralisation of

society against secular nihilism "have little choice but to seek a grounding for

such values in a religious tradition." (2011: 185)

It is important to remember that the political importance of the religious right in

America is a relatively new phenomenon. The Republican nomination of Barry

Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election was the first modern political

mobilisation of American Christians; Goldwater was defeated in a landslide to

Lyndon Johnson. It wasn't until 1980 and the election of Ronald Reagan that the

religious Right became a true political force in the US and the subsequent history

of the Republican Party is one of a slow takeover by this part of the coalition.

George W. Bush, whose government has been the most neoconservative in its

world view, owed a particular debt to the religious Right and he himself is a born

again Christian who claimed on several occasions that he had been called by God

to run for President. Bush's speeches were peppered with biblical references and

these drew upon many of the apocalyptic themes of evangelical eschatology

(Phillips, 2006: ch. six).

The religious element continued to drive Republican politics in the 2008 presidential campaign with the nomination of Sarah Palin as John McCain's Vice Presidential running mate. McCain did not have the trust of the religious right and needed to shore up his support base. The relevant point here is that it was William Kristol, the son of Irving and one of the most prominent second generation neoconservatives, who was early and particularly influential in the promotion of Sarah Palin. William Kristol remained an ardent supporter of her after her nomination and the exposure of her frailties as a politician (Mayer, 2008).

This anecdote is important in that it shows the outcome and limits of neoconservatism's pact with religion. "Going back" to religion is wished for, but because they cannot turn back time and reverse secular modernity and cannot hide the progress of science, the religious discourse becomes more and more strained. In this atmosphere the pressures on a religious world view increase, modern science and religious literalism are, quite simply, mutually exclusive and to assert one means to reject the other. One cannot assert both the literal truth of creation as stated in the Bible and modern science, as Strauss put it reason and revelation are incompatible. For the religious this has necessarily led to an ever more intransigent faith in literal interpretations of the Bible that directly oppose secular modernity. Such a faith revels in the conflict of these debates.

Christianity in modern America does not necessarily preach the virtues of thrift and moderation that Kristol sees as so important. In fact, what has developed is a

form of Christianity that is in partnership with business, for example the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. The Christian right has tended to be pro-business and against regulation (Phillips, 2006: 238). It is not against consumption, but is against obscenity, which is defined as anything against certain interpretations of the Bible.

The subsequent importance of Palin in the establishment of the fanatical Tea Party movement, which has dominated the Republican Party since 2009, is the logical conclusion of this neoconservative/Christian pact. It has fundamentally weakened the Republican Party and helped to produce political sclerosis in Washington, this has in turn led to a weakening of American power thus breaking the primary goal of neoconservative foreign policy. This demonstrates the limits of the logic that drives the neoconservative response to political modernity.

By looking toward the economic, the religious and the nationalistic, Kristol is attempting to have both the rational and the irrational. Because he is not willing to escape the irrational he wants to subsume it under the rational, he wants a form of religious nationalism that is in the service of the economic. The result of this attempt to harness the irrational has been, inevitably, the triumph of the irrational forces that we see at play in figures such as Sarah Palin. Kristol failed to move beyond the contradictions of modernity because he was unwilling to accept the modern paradigm, because he failed to engage in any sort of progressive idea. The neoconservative attacks on the "adversary intellectual"

have served only to close their own minds to other forms of thought of the contemporary world. Because postmodern thought is simplified into relativism and then rejected the neoconservatives became trapped in a pact with obscurantist religion, which has, ironically, led to weakening of US power through a lack of strategic control.

Religion is however only one element of the neoconservative project, the protection of capitalism is another, particularly in relation to the problems of nihilism and political stability. For Strauss, modernity is characterised by the replacement of moderation with the attempt to satisfy desire. Because desire is not satiable the economy needs to constantly expand to fit with rising expectations. This is why economic growth is, in Kristol's eyes so important; there will always be a desire for more.

The economy needs to expand to meet the raising of expectations; in 'The Shaking of the Foundations' from 1968 Kristol said:

What is called "the revolution of rising expectations" has reached such grotesque dimensions that men take it as an insult when they are asked to be reasonable in their desires and demands. (1972: 27)

Kristol sees capitalism as being more successful in the modern economic paradigm because it achieves this, it "does work – does promote economic growth and permit the individual to better his condition" but he also demonstrates his discomfort, "there is something joyless, even somnambulistic

about this" (1995: 120). Not only is it joyless, it is pointless because, echoing the desire for the infinite described in Socrates's speech in the *Symposium,* the "demands of material compensation gradually become as infinite as the infinity they have lost" (1978: 64). Once the religious impulse has given way to capitalist desire there is only the impossible fulfilment of infinite desire, yet it is unacknowledged as such.

Kristol's position is here not too unlike, though less worked out, that of Rhonda Lieberman's in the essay 'Shopping Disorders' where the position of the shopper is described as a form of pathologically dissatisfied self hatred which is incapable of attaining any form of the sacred (Lieberman, 1993). Kristol's difficultly is with modernity's attempt to satisfy desire, his reverence for the protestant ethic shows us that what he wants is the return of the bourgeois values of thrift and sobriety and the pre-modern idea of moderation that is so important for Strauss. But, in his later writings Kristol acknowledges the importance of economic growth so, it can be assumed, he gives up on this idea of thrift and affirms the pre-eminence of consumer culture and infinite economic growth. Neoconservative economic thought, unlike its religious thought, does manage to meet modernity.

Kristol sees the collapse in bourgeois morality typified in the rise of the instalment plan; in a 1974 essay, 'Republican Virtue verses Servile Institutions', he remarks that those buying on credit by using an instalment plan were once considered "feckless and irresponsible" (2011: 71). In other words, there was

once a taboo on credit which no longer exists. Daniel Bell, a long time friend of and collaborator with Kristol, noted in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* that this represented a "revolution in the moral habit" (1976: 69). But this was a necessary development for the capitalism of mass production that developed in the first half of the twentieth century. If the people insisted on being thrifty and saving their money until they could afford the consumer goods there would be a problem of over-production in the system. A shift in moral attitudes regarding debt was necessary to speed up capital exchange and open the markets for mass produced goods. Bell argues that this need to produce consumers for the new capitalism fundamentally changed the moral attitudes of the US so that "by the 1950s American culture had become primarily hedonistic, concerned with play, fun, display and pleasure... in a compulsive way" (1976: 70).

Bell indentifies a fundamental problem with Kristol's desire to return the protestant values, "the one thing that would utterly destroy the new capitalism is the serious practice of delayed gratification" (1976: 78). In other words, the return of moderation as a virtue would be unacceptable to a form of capitalism that relies upon the willingness of the people to go into debt in order to consume. If people were to stop using credit, consumer demand would dry up. Such a collapse in demand would have a knock-on effect on production and this would have catastrophic consequences for the capitalist economy. Capitalism's need for consumerism is why the return to religion that neoconservatism desires cannot insist upon thrift as a value. The religious re-moralisation instead focuses on aspects of biblical literalism, the teaching of intelligent design, abortion or gay

rights which then tend towards fundamentalism; these issues do not affect consumption whereas the religious promotion of thrift would. In 2003 in the essay, 'The Neoconservative Persuasion', Kristol's change in attitude to credit is shown when he describes the neoconservative position thus:

> The cost of this emphasis on economic growth has been an attitude toward public finance that is far less risk-averse than is the case among more traditional conservatives. (2011: 191)

This particular essay, first published in the *Weekly Standard* on the 25th August, came after George W. Bush's two tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 and the invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq. The combination of tax cuts and vast military expenditure led to the ballooning of the US debt to over one trillion dollars.

Bell implies a link between the development of a consumer capitalism designed around immediate gratification and the counter culture of the 1960s, "It was an effort, largely a product of the youth movement, to transform a liberal lifestyle into a world of immediate gratification and exhibitionistic display." (1976: 81) The reading of the Beats in Podhoretz, as a symptom of material affluence, is deepened here.

The development of the mode production into mass production necessitated a shift in the moral norms of society, an ideology of thrift was no longer commensurate with production, and liberalisation was needed. Liberalisation in the habits of buying also implied liberalisation in other forms of behaviour and

social attitudes and produced "women's libbers, sexual nonconformists and cultural radicals" (1976: 78). Liberalisation unleashed the nihilism that Podhoretz thought he had diagnosed. Modern capitalism represents the full spirit of modernity, "Its technology and dynamism… the spirit of perpetual innovation and the creation of new 'needs'" (Bell, 1976: 78). To reveal new needs, capitalism had to unleash new behaviours and because of this it could no longer establish a taboo on this behaviour, so "the curious fact is that the 'new capitalism' of abundance has never been able to define its view of these cultural-political issues." (Bell: 78) Capitalism is not able to define its view of these issues because it has no view; changes in the moral attitude merely provide new markets. A perfect example would be the link between women's liberation and the marketing of mass produced cigarettes to women. Symbolically linking the product and the social attitude Great American Tobacco's Lucky Strikes were marketed to women as "torches of freedom". It is important to note the outcry that this behaviour caused at the time; it was taken as a sign of permissiveness and moral decay (Amos and Haglund, 2000).

What is missing in Kristol and Bell's critique of the new capitalism is an acknowledgement of production. The focus is on the change in morality driven by liberalism and the development of consumer culture, what is not written about is the modern mode of production. The modern method of mass production, pioneered in the factories of Henry Ford, asked little of the workers except for the repetition of a single action on a production line. The worker on a production line loses the ability to gain recognition and prestige through work in

the way that a craftsman, artisan or farmer, even if poor, would. The prestige of the artisan is rooted in the development of skills and knowledge that s/he can turn into the money-making art and the recognition of his/her own self in the product of work. The loss of work as an area for prestige will necessarily drive people to seek this recognition in other places.

Under the system of mass production the new zone of prestige is consumption, the implicit deal is that although work may be degrading and dehumanising this is made up for by access to self definition through conspicuous consumption, so with this in mind Henry Ford increased the wages of workers in his factory. Culture is liberalised as a means for consumption to provide the prestige that is lacking through work. What the neoconservatives fail to recognise is that this dialectic drives part of the apparent cultural nihilism that developed. An excellent example of this is the work of the writer Charles Bukowski who consistently links the drudgery of menial work and an aggressive, nihilistic attitude, for example in his novel *Factotum*. Bukowski rejects both degrading work and consumerism and therefore has nowhere else to go except the eros of alcohol and poetry.

For Bell, "in short – the corporate class had abdicated" (1976: 79) from its responsibility to moralise the working class. This is a point of view shared by Kristol, in 'Republican Virtue verses Servile Institutions' he defines republican virtue as "curbing one's passions and moderating one's opinions in order to achieve a large consensus that will ensure domestic tranquillity... a form of self

control, an exercise in self government." (2011: 68) But, as we have just seen for Bell "it was the American businessman who first liberated himself from the idea of 'republican virtue'" (Bell, 1976: 70). Republican virtue is sacrificed for the profit motive and the increase in affluence for the businessman and the rest of society. The modern businessman rejected the connection between his vocation and moral character, his capitalist eros lead to the loss of a sense of shame. Kristol points out that "it was thought to be dishonourable for a businessman to go bankrupt, not because this was a sign of failure but because it meant that he was cheating his creditors who trusted him." (2011: 70) Such behaviour, it is implied, is no longer the case.

The nihilistic attitude of the new capitalism is seen in the apparent support that it gives to the counter culture through the music industry, cinema, clothes and lifestyles. This process has been noted by Left intellectuals as a process of recuperation where capitalism takes something that is organic and potentially threatening, re-packages it and then sells that feeling of kicking against the system back to the potential radical. Kristol mocks the Left for sometimes making this process sound like a grand conspiracy, but his line is in some ways more radical:

Our capitalists promote the ethos of the New Left for only one reason: they cannot think of any reason why they should not. For them it is "business as usual" (1978: 67).

The moral ambivalence of capitalism is given a good example through the marketing of Coca-Cola. In the 1940s the soft drink was marketed as the friend of the patriotic American fighting for his country, this continued during the Vietnam War and in a scene in John Wayne's propagandistic film *The Green Berets* (1968) a pallet was even parachuted into the jungle for the troops. However, by the beginning of the 1970s Coca-Cola's appeal to America had begun to lose its value in a dispirited nation. At this point the soft drink company began to use elements of the counter culture, folk music, hippies and African Americans to represent it in advertising campaigns. In 1971 this appeal to multiculturalism had extended to the 'I'd like to teach the world to sing' advert which included 200 young people from across the world in their respective national dress appealing for cooperation whilst clutching bottles of the drink (Pendergrast, 2000: 286 and 299).

Kristol had noticed the ability that unrestrained capitalism has of turning any situation into a business opportunity, where melting polar ice-caps caused by global warming turn into a great opportunity for hydro-carbon exploitation; civil unrest becomes an opportunity to market security systems; and the destruction of New York's World Trade Centre became an opportunity for enterprising clothes manufacturers to sell revenge t-shirts on site. Modern capitalism, as Kristol points out, is not concerned with any wider issue, it is not thinking about "domestic tranquillity", only the opportunities for a sale and increased profit. Bourgeois virtue has been replaced by individual liberty, this liberty is both economic and social; modernity produces the two symbiotically so it becomes

accurate to say that *capitalism is counterculture.* The new capitalism needs a

counter culture that expands horizons and seeks out new possibilities, it needs

an ideology that is focused on self expression and the development of the self

because any development in the social, the breaking down of any taboo offers

new markets and areas for economic growth and the investment of profit. If

these new markets are not created the capitalist system falls into a crisis of

overproduction.

Kristol attempts to warn the capitalist that his behaviour is damaging to the

social whole, in a 1970 essay, 'When Virtue Loses all her Loveliness', he explains

that a society that places freedom over virtue is "severed from its moral

moorings". The argument here does not regard capitalism's attitude to the moral

sensibilities of the consumer but the behaviour of capitalism in regards to the

people, in other words, capitalist exploitation and income inequality. He asks,

"can men live in a free society if they have no reason to believe it is also a just

society? I do not think so" (1972: 97). So, in an essay from 1974, 'The

Corporation and the Dinosaur', he criticizes corporations for not "thinking

politically". The context of this essay was the 1973 oil crisis, triggered by

American support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent

boycott of oil sales to the US by Arab governments, which caused the price of

crude oil to rise steeply. The increase in prices led to an increase in profit for the

American oil companies despite the fact that "These profits... were directly

connected with the hardship, inconvenience and discomfort then being

experienced by the American people." (1978: 76) The oil companies were

"thinking economically" because they were happy to see the extra profits but this came at the expense of the public's regard:

> Had the oil companies been "thinking politically", they would have realised that they had another and more responsible task – securing the trust and confidence and good will of the public. And this second mission, since it is a precondition of survival, must have priority over the first. (1978: 77)

The actions of the oil companies served to discredit the whole of American corporate culture, it revealed the unconcern that capitalism has for the wellbeing of the whole. Kristol continues this line of argument by highlighting the dubious profits that can be made when companies go public and the use of stock options as part of the general overcompensation of the corporate class. In 'Ethics and the Corporation' he says "One reads with a kind of despair those recurring reports of corporate executives who, having brought their corporations to the brink of ruin, and their stockholders to the brink of desolation 'resign' with huge cash bonuses." (1978: 82) In 1974, Kristol attacks Wall Street investors, pejoratively calling them "speculators", accusing them of being interested only in a short-term increase in the price of the stock and not in the long-term betterment of the company (1978: 114-115). In this spirit Kristol recognises the influence of Freidrich Hayek in modern economics and accuses his writings as being "subversive of the social order" (1978: 97) because of the privileging of freedom over justice. This criticism echoes Strauss who in a letter to Willmore Kendall dismisses Hayek and his followers as "anarchists" (Kendall, 2002: 243).

Kristol's critique is illustrated in his reading of Adam Smith, which he develops from Strauss's student Joseph Cropsey. An emphasis is put on Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* over the later *Wealth of Nations* (Cropsey, 1952). The later, more famous book, emphasises the self-interest of the individual as the root of human action, the market economy is simply the best way of serving this. The *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* on the other hand, tells us that "to feel much for others, and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature" (Quoted in Kristol, 1995: 280), it is therefore based on moderation. The goal is not simply the happiness of the individual but "a more humane and elevated bourgeois community, one with powerful feelings of fraternity and fellowship." (Kristol, 1995: 280) The argument seems to be that to engage in benevolent actions, to consider the wellbeing of the whole, to think and act in accordance with justice *is* to partake in the good life. Kristol's argument to the corporate class is therefore to think and act justly so as to gain a form of non-material satisfaction, or as Strauss puts it in relation to Aristotle in *The City and Man,* "It goes without saying that man's highest end cannot be achieved without actions resembling moral actions proper" (1964: 27); this is the first meaning of "thinking politically".

Smith was not a libertarian but retained an understanding of a need for a transcendent virtue to go through society; the "guiding hand of the market" is not enough. Smith, because he did not see a contradiction in the two works, maintains the classical tradition over simply "thinking economically". "As Cropsey puts it: 'Smith advocated capitalism because it makes freedom possible – not

because it is freedom'" (Kristol, 1995: 281) The market is not human perfection but merely a factor that can help towards it. The economic is one factor in the social not the whole of the social. Kristol's understanding of Smith is that we should not see *The Wealth of Nations* as an "isolated work in economics" but as part of an understanding of the social whole that is grounded in the notion of public spiritedness and civic virtue. Kristol opposes the view of Smith to the mathematical conception of economic man presented by game theory where economic man is reduced to the sum of his desires, which, it is assumed, he rationally follows. Although Kristol does not deny that man does rationally follow his desires, the accuracy of economic modelling attests to this (1995: 295), modern economics reduces man to the purely economic:

...human beings who are also economic men remain recognizably human and therefore remain recognizably social and political and moral beings as well. Economics, for Smith, was not a substitute for moral and political philosophy. (1995: 296)

The efficiency of capital, though financially beneficial for the capitalist lacks any purpose beyond these limited horizons, the rhetoric of rational efficiency is incapable of producing a cohesive social whole, especially in times of crisis; it needs to speak instead in terms of values, mission and justice; cohesion of the social whole has to be based on an ethical life that subsumes the economic.

However, in a sign of how Kristol's thought shifts, in a 1981 essay, 'Ideology and Supply side Economics', written after Ronald Reagan became the US president and began the economic reforms that would establish neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005, ch. one), he highlights *The Wealth of Nations* "as the paradigm for economic reasoning" (Kristol, 1995: 164) and this idea of moral engagement slips away. This shift seems to be the result of the economic discourse of the time; Kristol cites Jude Wanniski's *The Way the World Works* and George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty*, both key texts in the development and popularisation of neoliberal economics, as primarily "elaborations on themes by Adam Smith" (Krsitol, 1995: 164) in *The Wealth of Nations*.

Kristol's essays from the 1960s and 70s, judged by the contemporary standards of a capitalist world, where neoliberalism has become a hegemonic force, make Kristol sound quite radical in his attack on capitalism. However, it would be a mistake to read Kristol in this way, as already noted through some of the later essays, Kristol's position is firmly in support of the free market. Kristol's attack is not on capitalism itself, as a regime, but on individual capitalists who are not considering their relationship to the community and as Strauss would put it the relationship between the "city and man".

In 1974 Kristol published in *The Public Interest* an essay by Jude Wanniski entitled 'The Mundell-Laffer Hypothesis' which did much to popularise what has become known as the Laffer Curve. This sought to explain how lowering tax rates, primarily for the rich, actually increased tax revenues by improving motivation

(Friedman, 2005: 181-183). The key point here is that motivation is the guiding principle and not social obligation, the emphasis is on the desire for prestige and not duty. The problem for Kristol is not one of capitalist exploitation per se, but the public understanding and acknowledgement of this exploitation.

Corporate communication is what he means by "thinking politically" in its second sense. The capitalism of the 1970s was failing because it wasn't doing a good job of selling itself to the people; it was failing to make people believe in it. In the 1976 essay 'On Economic Education' Kristol states the need for better corporate relations to counteract "distorted reporting". Corporations should make firm rebuttals of any accusations through advertising, but "the purpose of such advertising is not to affect public opinion directly, but to influence journalistic performance over the longer run" (1978: 100). Kristol recognises that it is the attitudes of journalists that have to change in order to make capitalism appear as less inhumane. It is the producers of culture who need to be persuaded of the merits of the capitalist system because they will create the new moral framework. This sits very uncomfortably with the earlier calls for re-moralisation and the concern at the loss of virtue that has resulted from modern capitalism. Here Kristol's concern is an entirely rhetorical one regarding how best to convince people that the new capitalism is good for all.

The problem was one of the popular perceptions of capitalism and the fact that the new capitalism had failed to produce a new moral paradigm. Kristol poses the problem in 1974 in an essay entitled 'Horatio Alger and Profits':

> Who wants to live in a society in which selfishness and self seeking are celebrated as primary virtues [?]... So if capitalism is what this indictment claims it is – if it is what so many businessmen today seem to think it is – then it is doomed, and properly. (1978: 85)

Capitalism is doomed because it is perceived as a celebration of selfishness for its own sake. Kristol turns to the work of Horatio Alger, the nineteenth century American novelist famous for fictional representations of the rise, through hard work and thrift, of the poor to middle class respectability. For Kristol, Alger's novels are "the only substantial body of American literature where businessmen are heroes rather than villains" (1978: 86). But, as Kristol explains, these characters are not heroic because they simply pursue the profit motive, "instead one finds a moral conception of business as an honourable vocation for honourable men" (1978: 86).

Business is a good life because it helps to develop honourable traits and the virtues of the protestant ethic. We are also told that in Alger's stories there is no celebration of speculation pure and simple, such activities may provide wealth but speculators do not enrich themselves morally.

The modern businessman is also mistaken because he allows himself to be portrayed in an unflattering manner. The modern businessman, through his moral abdication, is happy to profit from these portrayals; Kristol asks, "how many businessmen walked out indignantly from a movie like *The Graduate* [1967], which displayed them (and their wives) as hollow men and women, worthy of nothing but contempt?" (1978: 88) Indeed, the American cinema of the late 1960s and early 70s does not celebrate the status quo, it is instead symptomatic of a great dissatisfaction with America, for example Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969), Bob Rafelson's *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) or Richard C. Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* (1971). Added to these is the seemingly nihilistic violence of Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) or Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969).

Kristol is however unable to escape this cultural logic. He perceives the collapse of the bourgeois moral paradigm of the nineteenth century that resulted from the expansion of capitalism to a stage of mass consumption. But at this stage he is only able to offer paeans to the dead paradigm of the protestant ethic. Another neoconservative writer, following Kristol, attempted to alter this paradigm.

George Gilder takes Kristol's problematic as his starting point and reiterates the question "Can men live in a free society if they have no reason to believe it is also a just society?" (Gilder, 1981: 6) Capitalism lacks a "transcendent justification" and is wounded by "moral contradictions deriving from its continuing practical

failures" (1981: 4). These practical failures would be the issues that Kristol

identified in the 1970s and the cyclical inevitability of economic contraction.

Capitalism therefore needs to produce a narrative to justify this risk and to

explain away inequality and the spectre of destitution. The lack of moral

justification is compounded by modern capitalism's tendency toward the

nihilistic need for hedonistic consumption and a rationalist/economic ethos that

is not compatible with a religious/value based world view; Gilder calls for a

"neoconservative revival" to counteract these trends.

Gilder reiterates Kristol's criticisms of Hayek and Friedman, accusing them of

being "technical and pragmatic". Freedom is considered good because it makes

people rich and wealth is the only measure of success, but "None of these

writers sees reason to give capitalism a theology or even assign to its results any

assurance of justice." (1981: 6) Gilder's project in the early 1980s was one of

reshaping the capitalist moral paradigm, to produce for it the noble lie by

justifying and explaining inequality so as to produce a stable political order.

"Capitalism begins with giving", Gilder tells us. He sets out to produce a

justification of capitalism on anthropological grounds via the idea of potlatch.

Potlatch, where the primitive economy is based on the gift, is here presented as

the primitive form of capitalism. Borrowing from the work of Melville Herskovits,

Mervin Harris, Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss, Gilder tells us "the

capitalists of primitive society were tribal leaders who vied with one another in

giving great feasts" (1981: 21). One leader would put on a feast and invite

another tribe in the hope of an eventual return. The receiver of the gift, and this is the point emphasised by Mauss, is symbolically obligated to return a gift to the giver, in this instance via another feast, but with one crucial difference, the gift must be returned with interest. To return a lesser gift, or worse, no gift at all, places the initial receiver of the gift in a symbolically less prestigious position to the giver; to not return a gift is shameful.

Potlatch is presented as a successful form of exchange because "these competitions in giving are contests of altruism. A gift will only elicit a greater response if it is based on an understanding of the needs of others." (Gilder, 1981: 22) However, this formulation of the potlatch is at odds with some other interpretations where it is the value of the gift to the giver that gives power to the gift and not the use value to the receiver (Mauss, 1950: ch. one; Bataille, 1967: ch. one; Baudrillard, 1976: 131-143). For Gilder the value of the gift is defined by its use value to the receiver; if the gift is of no use to the receiver it cannot be symbolically more prestigious.

By presenting it in this way Gilder cuts out the aspect of the gift where the prestige of the gift is based on the sacrifice of the giver, with the ultimate gift, one that cannot be returned, being the life of the giver. For Gilder, a gift that is unwanted contains no symbolic power in spite of any value that it may have for the giver. However, the symbolic value of the gift lies in sacrifice, Gilder appears to misread the idea of the gift through the eyes of bourgeois, capitalist exchange. In the way that Gilder misreads the gift, the giver has to consider the needs and

desires of the receiver, he has to anticipate these, so, "the contest of the gifts leads to an expansion of human sympathies" (1981: 22). This supply side version of potlatch implies that the giver makes an investment (the gift), in the hope that he will, in time, receive a return in either material wealth, by being given back a more valuable gift than the one given, or in prestige. For Gilder the gift is entirely instrumental.

These gifts are now known as investments. One invests in a company in the hope of a return at some future date, but this return remains unknown, it is always a risk. If the investor makes a loss he will have to absorb it, but this may lead to a good for some others. For example, if money is invested in an infrastructure project, such as a new bridge, and this project eventually goes over budget and drives the investor into bankruptcy, the bridge will still be there and may be of use to people. The problem with modern capitalist society is that when this material loss is made it is not compensated with a corresponding increase in prestige; for Gilder, entrepreneurs "contribute more to society than they ever recover, and most of them win no riches at all. They are the heroes of economic life" (1981: 245). What Gilder is aiming to achieve in *Wealth and Poverty* is a reversal of this lack, he wants to establish the prestige of business.

Gilder's attempt at the re-moralisation of capitalism is the celebration of the entrepreneur as a hero; they are heroes because they take risks. Gilder celebrates the gift giving of the capitalist investor as the person who, by supplying something, creates demand. The new products and services are the

capitalist's gifts, but the capitalist must be willing to take the risk because a

return is not guaranteed, there may not be any demand. Here can be seen the

absolute neoconservative acceptance of the new capitalist paradigm because the

creation of demand is the same as the creation of desire. Gilder's economics is

based on the expansion of consumer desire and not moderation, but he

attempts to insert a moral paradigm at the exact point where Kristol and Bell

could only see the collapse of one. Gilder's moral order is the nihilism of

modernity.

The risk element also produces the spiritual factor:

> For entrepreneurial experiments are also adventures, with the future
>
> livelihood of the investor at stake. He participates with a heightened
>
> consciousness and passion and an alertness and diligence that greatly
>
> enhance his experience. (1981: 25)

This risk taking produces the excitement that is lacking in post-historical culture;

unemployed negativity finds something dangerous to satisfy itself. Gilder's

economics is that of the master, it is that of the risk-taker, it celebrates those

who take risks as heroes and those too fearful to risk anything are forgotten. At

the end of history entrepreneurialism and investments are where Strauss's

"Great Men" can find an outlet. The primordial battle for pure prestige that

Kojève described in his reading of Hegel is thus re-imagined as a field of

entrepreneurial investment, which also provides a justification for wealth

inequality. What Gilder did in his best selling book, which was a favourite of Ronald Reagan, was to redefine the moral paradigm of capitalism through the gift. Bourgeois virtues are abandoned and a new morality, based on the willingness to engage in risk is established. What Gilder creates is the noble lie. His political morality acts as a justification for explosion of income inequality in the US that took off in the 1980s (Harvey, 2010: 12-15).

Bataille is particularly relevant here considering his later work on what he called General Economics, a form of economic activity concerned with the problem of the excess. The excess is that which is left over after need is satisfied and is an idea that Bataille develops through Marcel Mauss's work on the gift. The giving of the gift is the equivalent of the expenditure of the excess; Bataille presents this in quasi-mystical terms with the emphasis being on the unproductive waste of the excess. In these terms Bataille critiques bourgeois capitalism as the economics of accumulation and the value of thrift. Modernity, for Bataille, lacks the sacred element that animated all previous forms of social existence (Goux, 1998). On these Bataillian terms Gilder is fundamentally wrong in his presentation of the gift because an investment is always instrumental, it is given with the intention of gaining a return and it is not a simple sacrifice. The person who makes an investment is always hoping for a return at some future date, it is never pure expenditure. Gilder's claim to the sacred element through the capitalist gift is therefore flawed.

But this is only the case if read in absolutes, pure expenditure is the highest form of expenditure in the sense of it being useless activity, just as philosophy for Strauss is the highest form of eros for this very reason. If Straussian hierarchies are followed, rather than Bataillian absolutes, lesser forms of expenditure can be given some relevance. With this in mind the apparent, though fundamentally flawed, allure of capitalist eros can begin to be understood. This is also the case with the seduction of consumerist eros that appears as a form of expenditure, though is in fact, quite base. (Lieberman, 1993)

Gilder attempts to produce the heroes of the age by romanticising the investor and businessman. In a certain way Gilder is recapitulating the fictions of Ayn Rand, whom he drew on in *Wealth and Poverty* (Burns, 2009: 279), where self interest and the desire for profit of the capitalist drives their entrepreneurial risk taking. Rand's novels such as *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, which have had prolonged success in the US, describe a form of morality where self interest is the only moral course of action. In Rand's moral universe altruism is a sin. It is this heroic risk taking that is described as beneficial for all, even those too afraid to engage in risk themselves.

The problem of nihilism in the new capitalism is thus solved by redefining that nihilism as virtue, what was problematic for Kristol becomes glorious for Gilder and the presence of extreme wealth becomes a sign of prestige and moral worth.

In the 1980s US popular culture also began to represent this new risk taking capitalist hero and a form of culture, acceptable to neoconservatism, began to emerge. What is produced in 1980s cinema is a representation of the new capitalism in all of its glory. John Landis's *Trading Places* (1983) is, on the surface, a film dealing with racial stereotyping. The heads of a brokerage firm make a bet that they can turn a successful, white commodities trader into violent criminal whilst simultaneously turning a poor, black street hustler into a successful broker. The backdrop of the film is 1980s financialised capitalism. The heads of the firm, Duke and Duke, as the film's villains, represent the excesses of capitalist hubris, but their villainy is not related to their specific work or their excess wealth; wealth is consistently linked to cleverness and bravery throughout the film. The villainy is linked to their hubris and their lack of decency towards others. The film is resolved, and the moral order reasserts itself through speculative capitalism and the trading floor, importantly the heroes risk their own money and that of their friends. What is remarkable about the film's climax is the explanation given by Louis Winthorpe III (the wronged trader) to Billy Ray Valentine (the former street hustler) about the trading floor. Over a barrage of heroic, militaristic music Winthorpe explains how the trading floor works, thus explaining to the viewer the workings of the new capitalism. The floor is compared to the sporting spectacles of the Super Bowl and the World Series; sporting glory, the viewer is informed, is nothing in comparison to the fearless traders about to be seen, "never show any sign of weakness, always go for the throat… fear, that's the other guy's problem" Winthorpe tells Valentine. *Trading Places* uses the new capitalism to set the traditional narrative tropes of

Hollywood cinema and the complicit viewer is left, at the film's end, celebrating the simple fact that the heroes have become rich and therefore happy – the final scene is of them relaxing on a tropical beach being waited upon.

This turnaround is perhaps personified by the character of Gordon Gecko in Oliver Stone's 1987 film *Wall Street*. Though ostensibly presenting itself as a morality tale on the excesses of 1980s corporate culture the character of Gecko is undoubtedly the films romantic hero. His high risk activity provides him with the heightened sense of being that Gilder describes, Gecko is shown leading a life that is charged with the particular form of capitalist eros. The films most memorable scene, Gecko's speech at the Teldar Paper shareholders' meeting, where he proclaims that "greed is good", even provides a moral defence of 1980s capitalism, the exact thing that, for Kristol, had been lacking in earlier popular culture.

This theme is continued in Mike Nichols' *Working Girl* (1988). The film opens with Carly Simon's song *Let the River Run* and shots of New York, from the Statue of Liberty and, accompanied by Simon's lyrics about "the New Jerusalem", we are shown the skyscrapers of Manhattan, focusing on the World Trade Center. This, the viewer is unambiguously informed, is where the American dream now rests. The film, presented as an inspiring tale, follows Tess, a secretary, who has dreams of moving up in the world of mergers and acquisitions. Though she is unacknowledged due to her gender and lack of a degree from a prestigious university (she put herself through night school to earn hers), she is determined

to succeed in the world of the new capitalism. Tess comes up with an idea for a potential acquisition but the idea is stolen by her boss. The boss has an accident whilst skiing and during her absence Tess attempts to put the deal together herself. The drama of the film revolves around the conniving immorality of the boss and Tess's hard work, decency and what an industrialist, Mr Trask, says is her "gumption". These are the values that are needed by capitalism. The film ends with Tess being given her dream job, what the job is we are left unsure but Tess has an office of her own and has therefore, in her mind, made it. In the film's final shot the camera slowly zooms out accompanied by the Carly Simon song and the refrain about the "New Jerusalem", Tess's office is revealed as a simple, anonymous room amongst many in an anonymous skyscraper. Without any irony this is presented as a glorious success.

The normalisation of financialised capitalism is once again present in Gary Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990). The film's male lead, Edward Lewis, is a "corporate raider", what he does and the effect that vulture capitalism has on the lives of working people is not investigated, what the viewer is encouraged to care about is that he has so far failed to find love. The setting of *Pretty Woman* is perhaps most demonstrative of the process that is at stake in these films. Financial capital appears as a simple vehicle for the classic themes of Hollywood cinema. Businessmen, financiers, CEOs are all shown as normal people whom people can relate to and aspire to be. These are the heroes of 1980s cinema. These films set the stage for the populist appeal of investors like Warren Buffet, or entrepreneurs like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, these people are the new heroes

of capitalism. Kristol pointed out that Adam Smith presented the business man as "a scheming, conniving, self-seeking, soulless person" (1995: 283), but not any more, businessmen can now appear as heroic role models, showing the people what to aspire to.

On a policy level this leads Gilder to a rejection of the social democratic welfare model as this merely protects and encourages a slave morality. Investors should be let free and encouraged to take risks, the poor, instead of being animalised by state handouts should be given a legalistic framework that encourages them to become risk taking entrepreneurs. The neoliberal triptych of deregulation, free markets and low taxes is thus given a moral basis. Not only will investors experience the "heightened consciousness" of the risk taking but society should also celebrate those risk takers as its heroes. The slave is re-imagined as the person who is too afraid to start his own business and is pathetically satisfied with working for another. Worse than the company employee is the person who works for the state and at the bottom are those who rely on state for financial support, this is the centre of the Nietzschean slave revolt because, "Socialism is an insurance policy bought by all the members of a national economy to shield them from risk." (Gilder, 1981: 26) The poor are poor because they are afraid of taking risks and being entrepreneurial, and so any ideas of institutional inequality are rejected – the poor are necessarily workshy, feckless cowards. Poverty and wealth become a reflection of one's moral worth.

From this point of view, popularised by Gilder, welfare is a trap because it accepts and encourages this attitude, so in an interview from 1994 Gilder states, "What the poor really need is morals... What they need is Christian teaching." (1994) But Gilder is forced into the same intellectual dead end as Kristol because, faced with brute fact of amoral consumer capitalism he is uncomfortable. In an apparent misunderstanding of his own hypothesis he claims "when the culture becomes corrupt, then the businesses that serve that culture also become corrupt" (Gilder, 1994), but by doing so he reveals his moral order as the fiction it is. Here the claim is that the consumer creates supply and not the gift of the capitalist. Faced with capitalist nihilism Gilder can only turn to the religious Right to impose moral order, but again this moralility is not one of moderation but imposed moralisation.

Capitalism, for Gilder, encourages the risk taking element in human nature, "reason and calculation, for all their appeal, can never suffice" (1981: 27). Government is problematic because it tends toward the minimisation of risk for what is perceived as the benefit of all; anathema here is any thought of "risk free" economics, and so inevitable capitalist crises are here celebrated.

However, there is a rationality of accumulation behind Gilder's celebration of risk, for without risk an economic system (and in Gilder's mind, society as well) will amortise:

...waste and irrationality is the secret of economic growth... a society ruled by risk and freedom rather than by rational calculus, a society open to the future rather than planning it, can call forth an endless stream of invention. (1981: 252)

The irrational, held back by bourgeois morality, needs to be set free:

...in order to take the hill, someone must dare first to charge the enemy bunker. Heroism, willingness to plunge into the unknown, in the hope that others will follow, is indispensible to all great human achievement. (1981: 253)

Human society needs to welcome chance, which "is not the realm of the anarchic and haphazard but the area of freedom and the condition of creativity" (1981: 254). Capitalism, when allowed to operate freely, is able to accommodate chance. What Gilder does here is to both retain and reject elements of modernity; capitalism is retained as high irrationalism whilst rationalism itself is rejected but only for the rational end of efficient accumulation of capital. Thus modernity's attempt to conquer nature and defeat fortuna is rejected. The crisis that exists within secular modernity is, within Gilder's formulation solved, nature is welcomed back and accepted as the master of man's fate. But Gilder's vision of capitalism as a celebration of the anarchy of the market has still not solved the problem of capitalism's inherent nihilism so he still falls back on the religious.

The moral defence of capitalism presented by Gilder has no interest in justice for all, it is emphatically the justice of the stronger, the risk taking master. In these terms neoliberalism can reject the complaints of the poor and weak because, unless they are willing to take risks they are simply not worthy of consideration. What neoliberalism has done is (in its own mind) democratise risk taking. The ideology of market populism encourages each of us to become investors in the markets or entrepreneurs, and to risk our excess rather than simply save and accumulate. For Gilder conspicuous consumption is a sign of the flabbiness of the system, people spend money on luxury because the legal and tax systems do not incentivise investment, hence the need for deregulation and lower taxes.

There are two problems here, firstly this is clearly an argument from the position of maximum efficiency, the irrational is only a means to rational accumulation; secondly, because of capital's need for consumers, it is necessary that not all people become entrepreneurs, if all invest in their own enterprises then none would have anything extra to spend, there would therefore be no markets. Gilder's moral paradigm clearly separates the population between those who hold capital to make investments and those who spend their excess on luxury (and this has now developed into personal indebtedness), consumer capitalism needs both in order to thrive, entrepreneurs and consumers, masters and slaves. Consumption therefore replaces religion and nationalism as the fountain of internal political order.

There is one final question; is the risk that these heroes of capitalism are taking genuine? In Kojève's reading, the primal fight, the original risk taking venture, was undertaken between two consciousnesses. That the I risks itself was important but equally so was the fact that it is a fight between two consciousnesses, or two desires – the I will only risk itself for another I. The point was that the I desires the other to recognise it as something that desires. The I demonstrates its worth to the other by risking its life, but crucially the I has to see that the other is something worthy of recognising it. Recognition has to be mutual and this is why there is a fight between the two desiring things (Kojeve, 1969: ch. two).

The risk of the entrepreneur is not always this sort of risk because it is not necessarily a zero sum game. US bankruptcy law makes it possible to walk away from a failed venture without suffering the consequences; the risk is only an apparent one[3]. The debtor will not face prison nor will s/he suffer a great loss of prestige because the US system works to encourage risk taking, but it does this by removing the risk for the individual. Bank bailouts are just the extreme end of this protection. The charge that modern capitalism socialises risk whilst privatising profit then appears to be correct. The risk still remains but it is given to the general population and not the specific risk taker. Gilder is wrong to describe these people as heroes. However, this does not matter as long as they appear to be so.

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[3] Chapter 7 (liquidation) and Chapter 13 (voluntary reorganisation) of the United States Code of Laws

This lack of personal risk spreads across the whole field of institutional investment. The "risk" undertaken by the investor is not his, at worst the traders and investors could lose their jobs. The bailouts of 2008 and the programmes of quantitative easing demonstrate the lack of risk that financialised capital had, particularly for the individuals involved; large profits in terms of cash bonuses and share options whilst the risk was underwritten by the tax payer. The risk is not heroic when it has been placed in the hands of another. The appearance of heroic, risk taking investors has now been damaged and this has caused a crisis of legitimation for the economic system. The corporate heroes have been shown in the same light as their counterparts that Kristol described in the 1970s, these people are still not "thinking politically".

The systemic problem with Gilder's celebration of capitalism is that it simply amounts to a turbo-charging of the system. It co-opts the counterculture, it consumes what Podhoretz or Kristol would cite as the nihilism of modernity, it downsizes and it celebrates the risk taking investor. However there is still the same nihilistic hole at its centre that Kristol had pointed towards. The investor still has no reason to promote any idea of a social good through his investments, so the turbo-charging of capitalism only amounts to a turbo-charging of the original problems. There is, for example, no reason for capital to be patriotic or to practice any form of civic virtue. The businessman is still concerned only with his own self-interest; capital seeks its own expansion and not the glory or longevity of any particular national polis.

The celebration of capitalism fails to produce a transcendent meaning for the system because it has failed to maintain the appearance of justice. Gilder's narrative did succeed in driving the self-confident capitalism of neoliberalism during the 1980s and 90s (Frank, 2000: ch. one and two). However, even if we acknowledge this success we have only solved the first part of Kristol's problematic, this only makes the economic system legitimate internally by making the people feel more affluent. The second part of the problem of modernity is about producing the citizens who are willing to die for the system, capitalist efficiency or Gilder's entrepreneurs are not capable of doing this, and a further element will be required. The myth of the nation and patriotic self-belief will be needed as a zone of moral production.

In summary, chapter three explored the neoconservative reaction to the cultural shifts that took place in America following the Second World War. For Podhoretz and Kristol, what they perceived as the nihilism of the counter culture was a result of the level of affluence that American society had reached. This comfort was coupled with the liberal outlook of the society and allowed a space in which new forms of behaviour could develop and challenge the conventional moral order. The neoconservative response was an emphasis upon the production of values and a system of morality through the education of the young, focusing on the maintenance of nationalism and the defence of religion. In connection with this cultural crisis was the development of new forms of consumer capitalism. Early neoconservatism was sceptical about capitalism because of its tendencies towards exploitation and moral ambivalence. I argued that consumer capitalism

is reliant upon counter cultural movements to alter the moral framework of a society in order to develop new markets. The project of George Gilder was an attempt to overturn this contradiction and to invert capitalist nihilism so as to produce a capitalist theology. Nationalism, religion, and an obsession with economic growth were thus established as the crux of neoconservative thought. This triptych came to fruition in the twenty-first century during the Bush era when all three elements coalesced around an expansive foreign policy.

Chapter Four: Destiny and Tragedy in Neoconservative Foreign Policy

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The Nature of Growth and the Character of the Regime

Of the books that have been published about the neoconservatives over the past twenty years many have focused on foreign policy and the debates and movements within the US foreign policy establishment (Ehrman, 1996; Dorrien, 2004; Halper and Clarke, 2004). Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 the focus has been on the US and its position as an imperial power, however, these writers can give the impression that there was a radical break in the American position with the rise of neoconservatism and in particular with the election of George W. Bush in 2000. This chapter will frame the recent posture of American foreign policy in relation to two things, firstly, the proper historical context and secondly, the neoconservative understanding of foreign policy in relation to culture and the specific neoconservative problem of nihilism in political modernity. The recent history of American foreign policy will demonstrate the tragic limits of the neoconservative persuasion.

For Strauss, in his reading of Thucydides, "desire for aggrandisement is natural to man as man or at any rate to the city as city" (1964: 168). The political community will always be in a state of either expansion or contraction and it is unlikely that the relative levels of power will remain constant between states; the collective accumulation of energy that is a communal body cannot stay still. Whether a particular political community will be expanding or contracting will be based on factors such as material conditions and relative technological advantages; however, these factors have an effect only up to a point, the psychological structure of the community will also govern its actions. This is the implication behind the three cities in the *Republic*, the first city is of limited desire and it therefore has little need to expand, the expansionary idea would simply not occur to it. The best and final city, led by wisdom is aware of the presence of potentially hostile cities, but its attitude is one of non-interference and is basically defensive; the correct term for this would be isolationalist. But it is the second city, the one that develops Glaucon's erotic yearnings that will tend toward expansion. It will have to expand to satisfy desire that is not moderated, as desire expands so will the extent of the community. In this sense, it is the cultural moderation of eros that will determine the imperial attitude of the political community.

Kenneth R. Weinstein develops an associated point when he considers Strauss's impact on neoconservative foreign policy (2004: 206). The focus is on the regime, in the *Republic* the different types of regime produce different characteristics in the people, and therefore from the type of regime the actions of the state can be

predicted. A change in regime will therefore produce a change in the character of the people and this will determine a particular course of action for the state. In other words a particular type of regime can have a particular mindset that makes it particularly dangerous, or as William Kristol and Steven Lenzner put it, "[George W.] Bush's advocacy of 'regime change' [in Iraq]... is a not altogether unworthy product of Strauss's rehabilitation of the notion of regime" (Kristol and Lenzner, 2003)

This notion of character informs not just the neoconservative view of other nations, but of the American regime as well. The concern with culture and fear of nihilism is based on the effects of a perceived moral degeneracy on America's ability to project force and its relative power in the world. What was the moral attitude that drove the American expansion?

The Exceptional Exceptionalism of the United States

The thesis that the US is and has always been an expansionist, imperial power is one that has been put forward by neoconservatives themselves, notably Robert Kagan and Niall Ferguson. Regarding the destiny of the early republic Kagan says:

  To the generation of the early republic, to Washington, Hamilton, Franklin, and Jefferson, nothing was more certain than that the North American continent would be subdued, American wealth and population would grow,

and the young republic would someday come to dominate the Western Hemisphere and take its place among the world's great powers. Jefferson foresaw the establishment of a vast "empire of liberty". Hamilton believed America would, "erelong, assume an attitude correspondent with its great destinies-:-majestic, efficient, and operative of great things. A noble career lies before it" (Kagan, 2004: 87)

There are two important points here, firstly, that the American founders did foresee the United States becoming a continental and then a hemispheric hegemon and, secondly, that this would be a good thing for not only Americans but for mankind in general. This is consistent with the thesis of American exceptionalism; the neoconservative writer Seymour Martin Lipset describes exceptionalism as stemming from the particular organising principles of the nation as set out in the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution, "These are as Alexis de Tocqueville noted in the 1830s, exceptional, qualitatively different from those of other western nations." (1997: 13) Lipset's account of exceptionalism describes it as "double edged", exceptionalism does not mean that America is better than all other nations, but simply different because of its conscious founding as opposed to, for example, the long, historical development of the European democracies. However, America is not the first nation to consider itself as exceptionally positioned; Napoleonic France and the British Empire both framed the expansion of their power in terms of an exceptional insight (Ignatieff, 2004: 15). The idea of the exceptional nature of the German race was also behind the eugenic thesis of the Nazis.

There is a tendency for great powers to justify their expansion through an idea of exceptionalism, to see themselves as the embodiment of a Hegelian world spirit. These ideas of exceptionalism are important because they provide a moral justification for imperial expansion. This sort of justification is important because expansion usually demands the sacrifice of soldiers through war but the mere accumulation of wealth does not provide a good reason to die. This lack is particularly felt when the wealth acquired through imperial expansion moves upwards towards the ruling classes. All nations are, to some extent, exceptional in that there are no two nations that are organised in the same way through their culture and the particular development of their legal system. The ideology of American exceptionalism should therefore be seen as quite unexceptional. What then are the specific qualities of the American myth?

The Development of the American Empire, Religion and the Myth of Manifest Destiny

One of the particularities of America is, for Lipset, its religion, especially Protestantism. American Protestantism is sectarian, which is reinforced by the emphasis on individualism in American politics and society; there are many interpretations of biblical truth and these are not mediated by the religious bureaucracies of the Church of England or Catholicism. The result of this form of religious activity is that "The American sects assume the perfectibility of human nature and have produced a moralistic people" (Lipset, 1997: 20), there is

therefore a tendency towards moralism in American religion. This moralism has a particular effect on the American view of foreign policy, "To endorse a war and call on people to kill others and die for the country, Americans must define their role in a conflict as being on God's side against Satan – for morality, against evil." (Lipset, 1997: 20)

That there is a sense of adversarial moralism in American politics is something that Richard Hofstadter has called the "Paranoid Style" or what Samuel Huntingdon bases his thesis of "The Clash of Civilisations" on (Hofstadter 1964; Huntingdon, 1996). The necessity of the production of an enemy is of course central to Schmitt's understanding of the political, which was then taken on by Strauss. It is not new therefore, to state that the friend/enemy distinction produces the justification of violence. There is a proclivity to moralism that in the United States is based on the specific context of the development of American religion, this moralism may have provided the US with an efficient ideological structure for an expansionary imperialism.

This religious moralism in American life, as the basis of American exceptionalism, is also signalled in the Declaration of Independence. In his *A Nation Like No Other: Why American Exceptionalism Matters,* the senior Republican politician and neoconservative fellow traveller Newt Gingrich, cites the Declaration:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that

they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that

among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness

For Gingrich:

When someone violates another's rights, he is not merely breaking the law,

he is violating God's grant of protection. (Gingrich, 2011: 21)

This reading of the Declaration says that the American way of life is divinely

given, to live as an American is to follow God's law. The implication of this is that

to be non-American is to be in violation of God's law and therefore sinful.

Conflict with non-Americans is therefore always justifiable. This is only tempered

by the fact that, as Lipset says, "Being American, however, is an ideological

commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are

un-American" (1997: 31). Other nations can therefore be American, or at least

mostly American, this also says that American citizens can become the legitimate

moral enemy of America by rejecting God's law – by being un-American.

This idea of America as a divinely inspired nation developed as an ideology in the

nineteenth century. The idea of a Manifest Destiny was first coined in the 1840s

by John O'Sullivan. The development of the myth was helped by the new

publishing industries such as the Penny Press, which expanded the ability of

writers to reach all levels of American society. O'Sullivan founded and

contributed to the *Democratic Review* and the *Morning Star.* The first was a

literary journal with a strongly polemical line and although small its readership was politically influential; the second was a newspaper of broad appeal; he also edited the *New York Morning News*. Manifest Destiny announced the United States' preordained path to dominance, at the time this regarded the continental landmass of America, as O'Sullivan put it "to overspread the continent allotted by providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying" (Quoted in Hietala, 2003: 255).

The first clause here, regarding providence, gives the mythic, counterintuitive element; the United States is a country like no other because it has been touched by providence. One tenet of Manifest Destiny is that the mission has been given by God; Manifest Destiny plays on religious tradition of a land being given by God to a chosen people. It mirrors the Old Testament narrative of the Jewish people as God's chosen people and Israel being the Promised Land. The idea of Manifest Destiny simulates Old Testament prophecy of the founding of the New Jerusalem, though instead of being located in Israel it is in the United States. This idea of a new Jerusalem was a guiding notion for the early European settlers, in this imagination Europe represented the biblical Egypt and the New World was the promised land of Israel (Bellah, 2005).

O'Sullivan's second clause, regarding the yearly multiplying, gives us a sense of what the myth enables; the people need the land to accommodate their offspring, in other words, the land is needed to accommodate the expanding population. But there is another driving force because what is needed is an area

where the capitalist excess can expand into, what David Harvey would call a "spatial temporal fix" (Harvey, 2003: 87-88). The excess needs to be expended and it needs an ideology to direct expenditure, this is especially the case when there is not an empty space ready for expansion. Manifest Destiny is therefore the justificatory principle by which the United States uses its excess in expansion.

Manifest Destiny is part of America's noble lie; it justifies inequality between Americans themselves and the rest of the world by suggesting that this inequality is due to willingness to partake in capitalist expansion and accumulation. Manifest Destiny was not simply the grant of land upon the people of the United States because it also gave those people the messianic mission of saving those people who had not been chosen by God. As the *New York Morning Post* put it in 1845, to disallow access to peoples wanting freedom would be to "meekly take the badge of dishonour and pin it to our front" (Quoted in Merk, 1995: 26). The cause of humanity and the cause of the United States were presented as one and the same thing, for O'Sullivan this cause was "destined to cease only when every man in the world should be finally and triumphantly redeemed." (Quoted in Stephenson, 1995: 40) Intrinsic to Manifest Destiny was the spreading of the laws and institutions of the American founding and this was given a further Hegelian twist by O'Sullivan when he described democracy as "but Christianity in its Earthly aspect – Christianity made effective among the political relations of men" (Quoted in Stephenson, 1995: 40). This form of thought went beyond political commentators, Senator Daniel S. Dickinson of New York crystallised it in a speech to the senate in 1846,

... Nor have we yet fulfilled the destiny allotted to us. New territory is spread out for us to subdue and fertilise; new races are presented for us to civilise, educate and absorb; new triumphs for us to achieve for the cause of freedom. (Quoted in Merk, 1995: 29)

In that same year John Quincy Adams spoke to Congress on the issue of expansion in to the Oregon country:

We claim that country – for what? To make the blossom as the rose, to establish laws, to increase, to multiply and subdue the earth, which we are commanded to do by the first behest of God Almighty... She [England] claims to keep it open for navigation, for her hunters to hunt wild beasts; and of course she claims for the benefit of wild beasts as well as of the savage nations. There is a difference between our claims. (Quoted in Merk, 1995: 31)

The difference in the claims is however based on the English understanding of empire. In the seventeenth century English colonialism in Ireland was premised on using and developing the land, land could be appropriated if the occupants were considered to be using it unproductively (Meiksins Wood, 2002). This justification of appropriation was then expanded upon by John Locke in the *Second Treatise on Government* as the famous labour mixing argument. Locke, thinking about the American Indian, justified the expropriation of their land on the grounds that property is based on production, efficiency and the creation of value; ownership of land was based on the ability to use it efficiently. This

appropriation was the beginning of what Ellen Meiksins Wood refers to as a particularly capitalist type of empire. Colonialism in America was necessary to absorb the surplus population created by the introduction of commercial agriculture in England through the same principles of efficiency that justified the land appropriations. In Locke:

> ...we can observe imperialism becoming a directly economic relationship, even if that relationship required brutal force to implement and sustain it. That kind of relationship could be justified not by the right to rule, nor even simply the right to appropriate, but by the right, indeed the obligation to produce exchange value. (Meiksins Wodd, 2003: 99)

The ideologues of Manifest Destiny were simply saying that the efficient conquest of nature was a mission, given by God, to the people of the United States for the benefit of the whole of mankind. This points to the marriage of modernity and religion in Manifest Destiny, the rational triumph of man over nature instead of leading to secularism is given as divine mission.

In an essay written in 1971 Irving Kristol refers to John L. O'Sullivan's work as an "endless stream of demagogic-prophetic editorials" and notes that "the public lapped it up" (1972: 133). Kristol contrasts this form of rhetoric with that of the American government at the time, which was "without cant, without demagogy, without bombast" (1972: 133). Though this may not have been entirely the case Kristol nevertheless claims that a change occurred around the beginning of the

twentieth century when the "vernacular utopian-prophetic rhetoric [became] the official rhetoric of American statesmen." (1972: 134) Kristol argues that this turn produced a corruption of American political debate at all levels of society, "The consequence of this public insistence on a utopian vision of man, history, and society is that our public life is shot through with a permanent streak of hysteria." (1972: 148) Such a sentiment, though perfectly sensible, points to the tragic irony of the intellectual development of neoconservatism especially when contrasted to the rhetoric of neoconservatives from the 1980s onwards. For Kristol, a politics that is governed by hysteria necessarily lacks wisdom and cannot be led strategically, but this is exactly where the neoconservatives have led America.

The above statements referred to the territorial expansions of the 1840's into Texas, the Mexican Cession and the Oregon territory. Following the civil war the next wave of expansion culminated in the possessions gained during the Spanish/American war and was spurred by a new set of proselytisers. In 1885 Reverend Josiah Strong published *Our Country*, which sold around 175,000 copies. Strong made explicit the religious element of the Manifest Destiny of the United States "to dispossess the many weaker races, assimilate others and mould the remainder" (Quoted in Stephenson, 1995: 80). This form of civilisational imperialism was further developed by the philosopher John Fiske who imagined the world to come as "English in its language, in its political habits and its traditions" the end of this process would be "a Sabbath of perpetual peace" (quoted in Stephenson, 1995: 81). Fiske's social Darwinism conceived of

empire as part of a civilising mission and followed the model of the second British Empire, colonial tutelage and the remaking of the world in the imperial power's image. Laissez-faire capitalism was imagined as the highest form of human society and so the God given mission had become one of capitalist expansion. Capitalist efficiency was put at the forefront of this argument by Senator Albert J. Beveridge:

> A hundred wildernesses are to be subdued. Unpenetrated regions must be explored. Unviolated valleys must be tilled. Unmastered forests must be felled. Unriven mountains must be torn asunder and their riches of gold and iron and ores of price must be delivered to the world. (Quoted in Stephenson, 1995: 99)

Efficient exploitation by capital is conceived as the best of all possible futures, the God given mission of the United States is to open everything to the market. Those who are not capitalist in their outlook appear as the new barbarians, as non-Americans who are in need of saving by the free market missionaries of Manifest Destiny. This is the authentic Protestantism of the United States, as George Bataille claims:

> Benjamin Franklin... express[es] the spirit of capitalism with an almost classical purity, when he says that "Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again it is seven and three pence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds... He that

murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds."

Protestantism destroyed the sacrificial world and instead created one of total production and accumulation and this was done in terms:

...of a demand for religious purity. (Bataille, 1967: 126-127)

The American mission is explicitly bound up, through these notions of efficiency, with capitalist expansion. To be American is to be capitalist and to be capitalist is to act in accordance with God's law.

American expansion has therefore always been justified through these moral principles. The American way of life is divinely inspired and so what is good for America is at the same time good for the world in general. The expansion of American power is good in itself, as Lipset says "We have always fought the 'evil empire'", when President Reagan spoke of the USSR in this way he was simply following the American tradition, "those who favour American wars have seen them as moralistic crusades". But Lipset also indicates a problem similar to that of Kristol, "if we fight the evil empire, if we fight Satan, then he must not be allowed to survive" (1997: 65). The rhetoric of good and evil reduces the debate to absolutes, no compromise can be given. Such a posture is fine if it is assumed that American power is infinite, but if it is not America can no longer act strategically. Such moralistic posturing may lead inevitably to hubris and

overstretch because any act of compromise is necessarily a contract with the devil and is therefore impossible.

By the end of the nineteenth century Frederick Jackson Turner had declared the continental frontier closed and considered the effects of this upon the American immagination (Turner, 1967). However, the lack of a geographic space for further expansion did not last long and by 1904 the Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe doctrine had been established and declared the right of the United States to intervene anywhere in Latin America, if there was just cause. The corollary allowed the continued development of the United States from a continental to a hemispheric hegemon.

Empire After the World Wars: the problem of excess

Over the course of the next forty years the events of the two World Wars allowed the United States to assume Britain's role as global hegemon. The United States had become the world's dominant economic and cultural power; only militarily, where the USSR had rough parity in conventional arms, was there equivalence. This military parity was aided by an American turn towards isolationism and the demobilisation of the armed forces, something that did not also happen in the USSR following the end of World War Two (Wallerstein, 2006).

In the aftermath of World War Two the global capitalist economy was as much in ruins as the cities of Western Europe. The ruins of the world presented a problem for American capital because, during the course of the war, it had massively expanded its industrial capacity and, due to its geographic isolation, its cities had remained intact. This over capacity would have been exaggerated by the newly demobilised servicemen returning to the workforce. The solution to this problem was Marshall Aid that aimed to rebuild the war damaged economies and thus produced a market for American consumer goods. Marshall Aid had a further geopolitical value in that by helping to rebuild the economies of Western Europe the political and capitalist system of the West was also protected from further communist expansion.

The Marshall plan inverted the laws of capitalism, instead of seeking profit the products of US industry were given away to Europe. The Marshall plan renounced the growth of productive forces in favour of the investment of the excess in the interests of the world in general. Georges Bataille, perhaps naively, commented that through the Marshall plan:

> Mankind will move peacefully toward a general resolution of its problems only if this threat causes the US to assign a large share of the excess – deliberately without return – to raising the global standard of living, economic activity thus giving the surplus energy produced an outlet other than war. (Bataille, 1967: 187)

Marshall Aid represented a radically different use of the excess, and, in the way that Bataille describes it, a radically different form of economy, an internationalised form of Keynesianism that was more akin to a gift economy.

However, it was not to be. In April 1950 the National Security Council (NSC) issued NSC 68; the report outlined a plan for aggressive military expansion and the global emplacement of US military power to actively contain the Soviet Union. NSC 68 sought to justify a permanent garrison economy in the US, based on the inflated communist threat. The report was treated with initial scepticism within the American political elite, but this did not last long, this was in large part due to the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, also a member of the NSC 68 study group, commented that "Korea saved us", meaning that the doctrine put forward by the report was given a space in which it could be implemented (Carrol, 2006: 185-186). The Korean War signalled the beginning of the end for Marshall Aid, allowed for the redirection of the excess back into military expenditure and began the process of the militarisation of American culture. NSC 68 provided for the militerisation of international relations and helped to establish the Pentagon's role in the expansion of capital (Retort, 2005: 87-89). NSC 68 also allowed for the return to the traditional posture of US power, the breaking open of new areas to capitalist accumulation through military intervention. Manifest Destiny had now definitively moved beyond a continental or hemispheric view and towards a global one under the cover of fighting communism.

However, NSC 68 was a classified report and so its influence was limited to elite circles within the US government. Developing a strategy and having the popular legitimacy to deliver it are two separate things. The Korean War ended in stalemate and demonstrated the inability of American power to defeat communism, which was the latest manifestation of evil, it thus sat as symbolic defeat to American power and challenged the thought of the internationalisation of Manifest Destiny. The problem of the appearance of American power was deepened by the moral development of the American people during this period documented in chapter three.

The American Hero

The mythic structure of Manifest Destiny that drove American expansion still had to be enacted by individuals. The prototypical hero of the American mythic imagination is the frontiersman, a character first popularised by James Fenimore Cooper in his *Leatherstocking* novels. The frontiersman is strong, self reliant and a master of nature (Hellman, 1986: 8). However, after World War Two this myth began to break down. Over the course of the 1950s a certain amount of worry began to formulate as to the character of the American people; books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, William Whyte's *The Organisation Man* and John Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, spoke of the corrupting effects of big government and the consumer society. This is the America that Kerouac described as "a system of work-produce-consume-work-produce-consume"

(Kerouac, 1950), the rejection that so perturbed Podhoretz and established the perception of the nihilism of political modernity.

The problem of nationalism was made more explicit by Strauss. In the introduction to *The City and Man* Strauss tells us that we are impelled toward classical thought by the time that we are in, by "the crisis of the west" (1964: 1). Because the West acquired full consciousness of itself; "it is the final culture: the owl of Minerva begins its flight at dusk; the decline of the West is identical with the exhaustion of the very possibility of high culture" (1964: 2). The Hegelian allusion situates the crisis, we are at the end of modernity and are only capable of looking back, there is no longer anything to achieve; the owl of Minerva is only capable of surveying what has been. The West has "become uncertain of its purpose" because it no longer has a clear vision of its future, it no longer knows what to do. Society, like man, needs purpose, but after the end of World War Two this purpose had disappeared from the Western democracies (Strauss, 1964: 3).

In *The Closing of the American Mind* Allan Bloom looked back to the 1960s and questioned the status of the political community, "when there are no shared goals or vision of the public good, is the social contract any longer possible?" (1987: 27) The post-war years had seen an attack on the American political tradition, a tradition (and the celebration of it) that Strauss and Bloom saw as fundamental to the wellbeing of the state, "the unity, grandeur and attendant folklore of the founding was attacked from so many directions... that it gradually

disappeared from daily life" (Bloom, 1987: 53). Things had stopped happening, tradition and belief had been attacked in the name of equality, "but [people] essentially live comfortably within the administrative state that has replaced politics." (Bloom, 1987: 85) Bloom uses Plato's description of democracy from the *Republic*, where he describes a person with time and choice but without anything to do. Bloom thinks that "the young" have nothing to do and nowhere to go, that they are not noble or moral, but merely "nice", their world is essentially meaningless:

> There is, indeed, a certain listlessness about them, an absence of a broad view of the future, but it is as plausible to attribute that to the lack of a frontier to conquer in the American West, or the death of God, as to fear of nuclear war. (Bloom, 1987: 84)

These three examples produce a certain lack of purpose, but it is the first two that alienate the person from the past and from the historical mission that is generated from it. The comparison of two related examples will help to illustrate Bloom's position, the exploration of space, a common project for all imaginations is not seen by Bloom as a meaningful replacement (1987: 86). However, the Soviet Union's Sputnik satellite (launched in 1957):

> ...shocked the nation... There seemed to be no time for that nonsense [post historical grazing and equality]. Survival itself depended on better education for the best people... External necessity injected into the easygoing

educational world the urgency that should always be there... The goal was to produce scientific technicians who would save us from being at the mercy of tyrants. (1987: 49)

The launch of Sputnik provided an impetus, it fulfilled the advice that Republican senator and chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Arthur Vandenberg had given to President Truman regarding the enactment of NSC 68, to "scare the hell out of" the American people (Arrighi, 2005a). Scientific discovery for its own end will not turn around the moral course of the United States. However, an outside threat from someone who is different could galvanise a nation to action enabling it to resume a virtuous path by reproducing the political friend/enemy distinction. The claim is that an outside threat is necessary to provide the motivation for action that produces morality through shared national purpose. This is a consistent theme for neoconservative writers. *Foreign policy posture is essential for the moralisation of people* because without an outside threat the community lacks purpose and slips into the post historical mode.

This example can be further illustrated through Bloom's PhD dissertation, *The Political Philosophy of Isocrates*, submitted in 1955, and supervised by Leo Strauss and the classicist David Grene at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought. Isocrates was a prominent student of Socrates and is best known as a rhetorician. One of the themes of Bloom's research is Isocrates's desire to aid Athens in regaining its past glories (he was most active in the aftermath of the Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian war). In this reading, the

beginning of the decline of Athenian glory is the defeat of the Persian navy at the battle of Salamis in 480 BC, the victory that turned Athens from a city state into an empire. However, in Bloom's reading of Isocrates this naval battle was won at a great cost because it necessitated the extension of Athenian citizenship, and therefore voting rights, to the Navy's oarsmen, as Strauss says in his commentary on Thucydides, "Athens was compelled to become a democracy" (1964: 238).

The extension of the democratic franchise meant the spread of political rights to those who did not also have the "best" education. The newly enfranchised were not educated in the political virtues "for any man who has not been properly trained the boon of freedom is a trap." (Bloom, 1955: 28) Though a "tactically brilliant" move, Salamis caused an internal revolution in Athens. Threats will always occur and will affect the polis, and "woe to the nation which refuses to adjust itself to such needs" (Bloom, 1955: 75), but Bloom does not mean a material threat, "sometimes it loses in its defence that which it set out to defend." (Bloom, 1955: 75) Defence against a physical threat can cause a radical change to the city itself in a moral sense. In Bloom's reading, the legacy of the victory at Salamis was the corruption of the polis produced by the extension of the democratic franchise to the less educated. The Athenian regime contemporary to Isocrates is considered by him a "bad politeia" because of an excess of democracy and choice, "it follows the chance whim of an undisciplined crowd rather than accepts the guidance of the wise" (Bloom, 1955: 22). The undisciplined nature of the crowd produced the need for the empire because "these were the sort of men whose needs required the profits of empire and the

relaxation of civic standards" (Bloom, 1955: 29), the larger citizenry meant that more uncontrollable desire needed to be satisfied and this led ultimately to imperial overstretch.

In the aftermath of the Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian war Isocrates became a champion of Pan-Hellenism, "Isocrates wrote passionately throughout his long life of his ideas for a great new war against the barbarians." (Bloom, 1955: 60) He spent time at the court of Philip of Macedon persuading him of the need for such a war, "his writings are our only written record of a movement in Greece which culminated in the overthrow of the Persian Empire and the Hellenisation of the East" (Bloom, 1955: 61). But Isocrates intentions were for more than the mere treasure of the East, he used the idea of wars against the Barbarians "as lures to the less exciting but more fundamental problem of healthy Greek political life." (Bloom, 1955: 66) The war against the barbarian Persians was a pretext to create Greek union and a fresh moral mission.

The occurrence of war is useful because political order and purpose are seen as rare, precious and something that should be protected, "the ugly word xenophobia finds its justification in civil society... the most important element of any civic constitution is the – singleness of purpose – of all the citizens." (Bloom, 1955: 71) It was an outside threat that was needed, and, in Bloom's eyes, was still needed in order to create and maintain a system of values. In Bloom's reading of Isocrates the conditions need to be created to go back to the old order, because the ancestral, being ancestral is considered better de facto; for

Greece, "Such a pretext could be found in the great traditional enemies of the Greeks, the barbarians." (Bloom, 1955: 77) Man is considered to be in a constant struggle with the barbaric, the uncivilised both inside and outside the polis. Barbarism, whilst acting as an external threat, reminds one of the uncivilised nature of man. To fight the internal barbarism of perceived moral decline, the Greeks should literally fight the external barbarians. Through neoconservative eyes what was true for the Greeks was true for the Americans; the production of the enemy can be used to establish an internal moral order.

Looking back to the period of containment in 1980, Norman Podhoretz noted the effects of confronting communism on the psychology of the American people, "In 'pulling themselves together'… the American people experienced a surge of self confident energy" (1980: 22). For Podhoretz, the American "willingness to pay the price in blood and treasure… to hold the line against a totalitarian system… [that] aimed to extend its barbarous reign" led to further strengthening of American character:

> For this too they were rewarded by an upsurge of pride and self-confidence. It was a nation that believed itself capable of assuming leadership in the cause of defending freedom against the threat of totalitarianism" (1980: 23).

For Podhoretz containment and the Cold War renewed the American purpose that Strauss had noted as lacking since the end of World War Two. This purposive sense of national mission gave the American people a new sense of

moral worth. However, what was set in place was a dangerous dialectic between national purpose through confrontation and the moral life. The antidote to Kerouac's unemployed wanderings is confrontation. This is not to say that the USSR in the period was not a threat and that Joseph Stalin was not a dangerous tyrant – though of course the United States never actually engaged the Soviet Union in an actual war – the point is that there is here an argument for a confrontational foreign policy from the basis of its moral effects on the people.

From a European perspective an argument for confrontation based on the positive moral effects on the population appears as startlingly dangerous. However, there is the idea that America had a "good war" in World War Two. In comparison to other nations involved in the war the United States endured comparatively few casualties and apart from the naval base at Pearl Harbour did not suffer any damage on home soil. The American people did not therefore experience the same kind of danger and horror that the rest of the world felt. Through war-time propaganda and the control of graphic images the actuality of the horrors of total war were kept away from the American people, except those who actually witnessed it at first hand.

World War Two, as witnessed by the majority of Americans, was the one presented by Hollywood. Added to this was the economic benefit of the war for the average American at home. World War Two marked an end to the depression, massive government expenditure on munitions created millions of jobs across the country, a high demand for labour drove wages up allowing a rise

in living standards for the working classes. This was all funded by a high tax

regime on the rich the result of which was the creation of an economically much

more equal society where consumer goods were within reach of the majority.

With this in mind it can now be seen how attitudes towards war diverged

between Europe and America. In the former it was impossible for the people to

escape the disasters of war whereas the latter were, in some ways, unaware.

The fate of post historical American was lamented in the 1958 novel *The Ugly

America* by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer; which portrayed Americans as

fat, ostentatious and stupid. The American hero, left with nothing to do had been

poisoned by prosperity and become base. The protestant ethic and the world of

production had turned into a world of luxury.

Set in Vietnam, the book presented the people of Asia as the American Indian

who had to be saved by the noble American. However, the Americans portrayed

in the novel, when confronted with their new Asian surroundings reject the myth

of the frontier and opt instead for comfort and security – implying an

Europeanisation of these people. This degeneration of the American self can only

be turned around by a renewed sense of purpose and a reinvigoration of the

heroic ideals of the frontier. Americans needed to be willing to sacrifice

themselves and find satisfaction through serving their society (Hellman, 1985:

25).

The ideals that are begged for in *The Ugly American* were embodied in the presidency of John F. Kennedy. In his acceptance speech for the democratic nomination Kennedy invoked the frontier myth to narrate his political program,

> We stand at the edge of a New Frontier - the frontier of unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Beyond that frontier are uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered problems of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.

Exploration through the space program and overseas education through the Peace Corps, accompanied by an expansion of the military Special Forces through the Green Berets marked a change to a more outward looking America. Individual Americans were given the opportunity to leave the decadent cities and find renewed purpose in the wilderness. This lead Podhoretz to say that "if anything [the Kennedy administration was], more zealous in its commitment to containment than the Eisenhower administration" (1980: 25).

The Green Berets in particular were given attention in the popular press; a 1962 article in the Saturday Evening Post portrayed South East Asia as a new frontier where the new American hero was selflessly and heroically pursuing national purpose. Kennedy encouraged Robin Moore to produce a book that celebrated the Special Forces; *The Green Berets* (1965) drew on the earlier articles and continued the mythologisation of Vietnam and the American soldiers there. In 1968, at the behest of President Johnson, the book was produced as a movie

starring John Wayne. Both versions proved to be big hits. This begins to show how politicians tap into the nation's myth, but as John Hellman notes this, "was not a cynical cover but rather an expression of deep cultural impulses, conscious and unconscious." (Hellman, 1985: 50) Hellman quotes Robert Kennedy reporting that his brother felt that America should stay in Vietnam "for psychological and political reasons 'more than anything else.'" (1985: 53) There may be a lack of cynicism here because a given politician is likely to be as drawn to myth as any other member of that culture. But this is a clear danger, if the political leadership of community is as much in awe of the myth as the community itself, that community can no longer be led strategically.

The youth in 1950s and 60s suburbia, alienated from the authentic American life portrayed in Hollywood Westerns and desirous of something more than the banality of the post historical where mythic America had begun to collapse, flocked to Kennedy's New Frontier. However, after the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson did not continue the mythic framing. Hellman points out, "Johnson had attempted to fight a terrible, long war without the tangible elements of myth – a vivid villain, an identifiable grail, a convincing explanation of how unfolding events fit the larger mythic pattern." (Hellman, 1985: 93) As Kennedy's narrative broke down it was replaced with nothing but rational explanations of national interest and statistics.

The inability of the United States to become victorious in Vietnam heralded a new posture in American foreign policy under President Nixon. The policy of

containment became one of détente and, as Podhoretz put it, "a 'structure of

peace' would be built, with cooperation between the two super powers

replacing 'confrontation'" (1980: 33). For Podhoretz this "strategic retreat" was

cultural in its development, "détente was the highest degree of containment

compatible with the post Vietnam political climate" (1982: 34). America's defeat

in Vietnam was, for Podhoretz, a failure of political will, in *Why We Were in*

Vietnam (1982) he says, "For at least the last five years of American involvement

in Vietnam, hardly any voices had been raised in defence of our continued

participation in the war" (1982: 10); this lack of a justification of involvement and

defence against the antiwar movement produced a:

...moral vacuum, and so the war began to seem less and less legitimate in the

eyes of more and more people in three strategically important sectors – the

media, the congress and even within the inner circles of the Johnson

administration itself. (Podhoretz, 1982: 124)

The American ruling class lacked the moral resolve to continue the war and to

justify the continued sacrifice. This lack of resolve, Podhoretz is claiming, led to a

vicious circle of defeatism and moral prevarication, making America doubt its self

image. Antiwar sentiment had been allowed to flourish and began to dominate

the cultural sphere. Podhoretz picks out Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and Kurt

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* as particularly troubling for both their enduring

popularity and for the way in which they "Vietnamised" World War Two:

Not even World War Two, the war against Hitler, was worth fighting, said *Catch 22*, to the acclaim of millions; nor, added Vonnegut in his story of the bombing of Dresden, had we acted any less criminally in that war than we were in Vietnam. (Podhoretz, 1980: 62-63)

The young had begun to think that dying for the nation was not worth anything, "an attitude they might well have learned from Joseph Heller and that Nietzsche once identified as the mark of the slave" (Podhoretz, 1982: 64).

The strategy of détente was then a result of this attitude of the people that had been allowed to develop by the political and cultural elite, "foremost among the things not worth dying for from this point of view is the United States of America" (Podhoretz, 1980: 65). This attitude had led to a belief that America may not be morally good and this lack of moral purpose led to another form of defeatism in the area of consumption, "in the idea that Americans consume more than their 'fair share' or resources" (Podhoretz, 1980: 66). In other words, not having the moral will to wage war led to a questioning of the American will to dominate global trade and consumption and that a more equal distribution of global resources was preferable. We can infer that what Podhoretz means by "The Present Danger" is that the lack of a moral will to wage war will lead to a diminution of American power and is a sign of a moral flabbiness in the population. The end point of this was the Presidency of Jimmy Carter that ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iranian hostage crisis, both signs for Podhoretz that the United States was no longer considered a serious power.

By the end of 1960s and in response to the cultural upheavals of the time American corporate money began to pour into new forms of conservative thought, in particular what was becoming known as neoconservatism as well as the nascent neoliberalism. Foundations like *Scaife* and the *John M. Olin Foundation* began funding conservative think tanks such as the *American Enterprise Institute*, the *Hudson Institute*, the *Hoover Institute* and the *Rand Corporation*. These funding sources were further increased by private companies and manufacturers. Other organisations such as the Madison *Centre for Educational Affairs*, which was established, by among others, Irving Kristol and Allan Bloom, funded PhD students, undergraduate leaders and also student newspapers. *Students for Academic Freedom* and *Accuracy in Academia* both monitored liberal and Left leaning academics and sought to pressurise them and their work (Gonzales and Delgado, 2006: ch. one; Stedman Jones, 2012: ch. four). The work of these organisations filtered down to the journals and periodicals, *The National Interest, The Public Interest, Commentary* and more recently on *Fox News* and in *The Weekly Standard*. What has been recognised is the need to communicate world views to the general public and to dominate the popular political discourse.

Within the realm of foreign policy it was the perception of threat that became a key political issue. In Schmittian terms it is those who can produce the perception of a threat who can produce the political and therefore political action. For example, CIA threat assessments of the Soviet Union were routinely

criticised by Albert Wohlstetter, the University of Chicago professor who supervised Paul Wolfowitz's PhD, in the 1970's as being massive underestimations. Underestimation of the threat meant that the spectre of the USSR began to look less like the enemy and so the construction of the political and the subsequent definition of the US began to dissipate.

Suspicion of cooperation with the USSR in terms of the nuclear arms race is something that Strauss shared. In a letter from the September 18th 1963 to Willmoore Kendall Strauss calls the 1963 nuclear test ban treaty "an idiocy". He also predicted that Kennedy would win re-election because he understood "that the majority of Americans do not wish to hear unpleasant things." In the same letter he wonders "what can one do to prevent the continuation of this administration?" and suggests that they need to reach out to "the younger people, say the college population", his preference is revealing because it involves encouraging William F. Buckley Jr. (a student of Kendall) "with his great power of invective" to write an article "confronting the concept of image", with the particular image that Kennedy had created as the target (Kendall, 2002: 247). The suggestion is that William Buckley, the great conservative rhetorician of the era, should attempt to puncture the liberalism of the Kennedy administration and to introduce an even more antagonistic relationship between the two superpowers. The suggestion to target the young, in their colleges is a perfect encapsulation of the battle that occurs within the *Republic* for the hearts of Adeimantus and Glaucon and is particularly relevant given Buckley's position as a founder of Young Americans For Freedom in 1960.

The political begins with a battle for the young; their heads need to be burrowed into so that when they are older and have power they can be trusted to continue the work of their teachers. Gaining influence through one's students is a neat solution to a problem that Strauss admits to in an earlier letter to Kendall from 10th June 1960, he says, "I have no influence whatsoever in the field of politics, administration and business. The only hope is that I discover an acquaintance who can impress people dedicated to the practical life" (Kendall, 2002: 219). The solution that Strauss found was not to discover these people, but to create them through education. The best anecdote of this sort of influence is presented in Saul Bellow's novel *Ravelstein,* a thinly veiled book about his friend Allan Bloom. In the book Bloom (Professor Revelstein) is depicted receiving phone calls from former students who now work in the State Department and getting gossip and giving advice, the book includes characters that are based on Paul Wolfowitz, Werner Dannhauser and Leo Strauss.

In 1976, and in response to Wohlsetter's criticisms of CIA threat assessments the Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld urged the establishment of the so called Team B. Team B was to produce a separate account of the soviet threat to the National Intelligence Estimate, the routine CIA assessment. The Team B report, which was written by amongst others Paul Wolfowitz, Paul Nitze and led by Richard Pipes, produced a very different assessment, one that confirmed Wohlstetter's opinion of Soviet power and intention. Pipes, an academic who specialized in Russian history, was deeply sceptical about the Russian character; his beliefs about the intentions of the Soviet Union were based on, amongst

other things, this distrust. The belief is that the actions of the state are dependent upon the character of the people. That, as in the *Republic,* the character of the regime determines that of the people and intention can be discerned not from evidence but from an understanding of character. The problem with the assumptions of détente, the calculus of Mutual Assured Destruction, was that it was based on a liberal understanding of character, proponents of détente had made the false assumption that the Russians thought like Americans. Pipes commented that the Russians knew from:

...historical experience that cunning and coercion alone ensured survival: one employed cunning when weak, and cunning coupled with coercion when strong. Not to use force when one had it indicated some inner weakness. (Quoted in Diggins, 2007: 206)

For Pipes the Soviet Union could not be negotiated with, it had to be defeated because of the nature of the regime and the character of the people. This is the same argument that William Kristol and Steven Lenzner make in terms of George W. Bush's insistence of regime change in Iraq, it was the nature of the Iraqi regime that posed the threat and not the presence, or lack of, any hard evidence of WMD. Both the Soviet Union and Saddam Hussein's Iraq were essentially evil because of their very nature. In these terms negotiation or cooperation are impossible, the enemy, taken as evil, must be defeated.

The team B report was initially rejected by the foreign policy establishment but was leaked to the Boston Globe. The result was that the report formed the basis of popular debate on the danger posed by the Soviet Union to the United States and helped to produce, as Pipes noted a few years later, "a remarkable shift in public opinion" (Pipes, 1986) by, as Arthur Vandenberg had put it in the 1950s in relation to NSC 68, "scaring the hell out of" the American people. It thus helped to end the policy of détente and bring about the massive expansion of the US military during the Reagan administration. The report was later found to be a wild over estimate of the military capabilities of the USSR but proved to be crucial in turning the They of the détente era Soviet Union in to an enemy that posed an existential threat to the United States. It was not the actual threat but the perception of a threat that proved to be crucial (Cahn, 1998: 185-196). In *The Present Danger* Podhoretz drew on the Team B research in describing the threat posed by the Soviet Union, the book was an attempt to describe the gravity of the situation and a spur to what he called "the new nationalism". Podhoretz describes the danger:

...the reason Soviet imperialism is a threat to us is not merely that the Soviet Union is a superpower bent on aggrandizing itself, but that it is a Communist state armed... to the teeth, and dedicated to the destructions of the free institutions which are our heritage and the political culture which is our glory. (Podhoretz, 1980: 94)

In the neoconservative narrative it was the ending of the policy of détente and re-engagement in the Cold War, through a more activist foreign policy in the 1980s and increased military expenditure, that the Soviet Union could not keep up with, that led to victory in the Cold War; as Murray Friedman puts it "attempting to meet the Reagan military build up of military power indeed staggered the Soviet economy" (Friedman, 2005, 176). The lesson taken by the neoconservatives was that confrontation wins, however, this claim is not indisputable because of the discomfort with conflict and the preference for dialogue in the Reagan administration (Diggins, 2007: ch. ten).

In *Foreign Affairs* in 1981 the University of Chicago historian William H. McNeill commented on the disrepair of American myth:

> In times such as ours, when inherited myth systems are in disrepair and no great political leader has yet emerged, historians, political scientists and other academics who are paid to educate the young and think about matters of public importance ought to feel a special responsibility for proposing alternatives to accepted ideas. Only so can they hope to trigger a successful reorganisation of public myth. (McNeill, 1982)

He goes on to attack the modern university in the same way that Bloom will do 5 years later in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "Challenging prevailing myths without regard for the costs arising from the disintegration of belief became professor's special calling." (McNeill, 1982) This article, written after a period of

crisis within the US system produced by the failure in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and the Iranian hostage crisis, calls for a re-mythologisation of the United States' own self perception.

This renewal of American myth began to take shape with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Following his election Reagan began to increase American military spending and to escalate the Cold War. In 1983 in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals Reagan began to refer to the USSR in biblical terms and branded it the "Evil Empire". This new period of American foreign policy was based on the production a moral certainty, good verses evil and harked back to earlier mythic imaginings of Manifest Destiny. Foreign policy mirrors of the moralisation of the culture war. In both domestic and foreign policy, relativism and cold political calculation disappear, at least in the public discourse, to be replaced by a black and white morality. What became known as the Reagan Doctrine dictated a policy of support for anti communist activities across the third world and involved various military interventions, notably in Central America and the Caribbean. During this period the neoconservatives were brought back into the administration, notably Richard Perle, Richard Pipes and Jeane Kirkpatrick (Friedman, 2005: ch. eight). Throughout this time moral certainty in politics began to be supported by a new found assuredness in popular culture.

As with the presentation of capitalists in 1980s cinema the period also saw a challenge made to the prevailing myths through the presentation of war, particularly the legacy of Vietnam. What can be seen, as with the films mentioned in chapter three, is a form of culture that is consistent with a neoconservative persuasion. Ted Kotcheff's First Blood (1982) presents the plight of the Vietnam veteran who is rejected by the people he risked his life for. The viewer is shown John Rambo's skill as a soldier, his heroism and, most importantly his love of America. But it is the sequel, First Blood Part Two (1985), directed by George P. Cosmatos, that deals directly with Vietnam. At the beginning of the film Rambo is in prison because of all the damage he caused in the first film. The military invite Rambo to conduct a mission, he is asked to return to Vietnam to gather information on American prisoners of war. Rambo accepts, but at one point asks "Do we get to win this time?" the film enacts America's symbolic return to Vietnam to extract American honour. The film reminds the viewer that the reason for the war was the Soviet threat, so when Rambo is captured Russian soldiers quickly arrive (assumed to be already close by). The Russian soldiers are presented as sadistic thugs who quickly begin to torture Rambo. Rambo is portrayed as the classic American frontiersman, he is a Special Forces soldier who is able to live off the land, he is individualistic and has a keen sense of the moral law which he will not bend, even if it means ignoring his superiors or risking his life. After escaping from and killing all of the Russian soldiers and then rescuing the American prisoners Rambo is asked what he

wants, "I want... what every other guy who came over here and spilt his guts and gave everything he had wants... for our country to love us as much as we love it". Rambo condemns the American people for their rejection of the Vietnam War and states the patriotic duty of the citizen to always support the military.

The thuggish characterisation of the Russians develops in the third part of the series, *Rambo Three* (1988), directed by Peter MacDonald. This time Rambo goes into Afghanistan to rescue his friend who has been captured by the Russians. Once again the Russians are portrayed as barbaric though this time the focus is on their treatment of the local population whom they attack from the air and torture. With American help the Afghans are shown to be a noble people who are willing to fight the Russians and regain control of their country. There is an undoubted irony in the themes of *Rambo Three* when watching it today. Ronald Reagan was a vocal fan of the Rambo movies and did much, despite evidence to the contrary, to expand the myth of American POWs remaining in Vietnam (Pilger, 1986: 271). Irving Kristol noted in 1985, "one even gets the sense, from the immense popularity of a movie like *Rambo,* that they [the American people] wouldn't mind doing it again [going to war]" (1995: 360).

Other films, such as John Milius's *Red Dawn* (1986) deal with the possibility of a Soviet led invasion of the United States. The film opens with paratroopers landing outside of a school in the mid West, upon landing the paratroopers, who turn out to be communists, begin firing indiscriminately in to the school building

and at any of the students that they see[4]. This theme of an occupation by a brutal enemy runs throughout the film, veiwers learn of murders, rapes and visit a concentration camp. Some of the students manage to escape and hide in the mountains and begin a guerrilla campaign against the occupiers which helps lead to eventual victory. This theme of communist invasion was also present in NBC's Emmy award winning World War III (1982) and Joseph Zito's *Invasion USA* (1985) and in the dark imagination of an America after a nuclear war in *The Day After* (1983). A common theme of *World War III* and *The Day After* is the heroism of the elite. *World War III* focuses on the officers, it is their deeds that save America, not those of the ordinary soldiers, in *The Day After* this role is taken by doctors in a hospital. Just as in *Gunsmoke* it is the figures of authority who are presented as the heroes without whom the many would suffer much more.

The theme of the legacy of Vietnam is developed in Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986). The film follows an aging Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant training a group of young recruits. The Sergeant instils the values of the military in the recruits whilst they also learn of his heroic deeds in the Korean and Vietnam wars. The viewer also learns about the Sergeant's bitterness regarding the lack of American victory in either of these wars and the reception that Vietnam veterans received from the public. The impression is left, as with the Rambo movies, that this was due to a political failure and not the quality and honour of the army itself. The recruits are eventually sent into action in a representation of the 1983 US invasion of Grenada. After landing on the island the Marines encounter

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[4] In 2012 *Red Dawn* was remade by Dan Bradley. In this version it is North Korea, backed by Russia, who invade the US.

resistance, though not from Grenadian forces, but from Cubans – showing who the real enemy is. After a swift victory and some heroic fighting the Marines return home and upon there arrival they are greeted with full honours, marching bands and jubilant crowds. This patriotic spectacle, the viewer learns, was something that did not happen after Vietnam. *Heartbreak Ridge* announces the arrival of a new, self-confident, professionalised military clear of the ghosts of earlier conflicts and that is able to defeat the enemy. In the final shot, as the Gunnery Sergeant walks into the distance as the camera lingers on the American flag.

Probably the biggest film of the period to deal with the military and the Soviet threat was Tony Scott's *Top Gun* (1986). The film is notable for the complicity in production between the studio and the US military, which, in return for a feature length advertisement of the skill of US pilots and the brilliance of its technology, gave unparalleled access to the equipment (Suid, 2002: 494-502). At around the same time the US army was providing full assistance to the producers of *Hamburger Hill* (1987) and the CBS television series *Tour of Duty* (1987 -1990). These latter two representations did contain the by now common criticisms of the war in Vietnam that were seen in films such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979) or *Platoon* (1986), but as Lawrence H. Suid says in his long study of Hollywood's relationship with the US military:

...the Pentagon-assisted productions tempered the horrors of combat and the negative portrayals of the officers and men with scenes of soldiers

attempting to do their jobs in a professional manner and even with a

modicum of battlefield humour. (Suid, 2002: 504)

After the extensive media coverage of the war it would have been impossible to

make a film in the manner of John Wayne's *Green Berets.* Indeed, this is why

Wayne's film looks so absurd to the modern eye. In return for access to

equipment and military knowledge the Pentagon was given editorial control, this

was used not to produce crass propaganda but an entirely more polished

spectacle where some of the mistakes were admitted and the jingoism

presented more subtly. But this mythic construction of an enemy and the

subsequent moral purpose that it gave to America could not last into the 1990s.

The End of the Cold War and the End of History

In 1993 after the Soviet Union had collapsed and the Cold War had ended Francis

Fukuyama, who was a student of Allan Bloom at Cornell University, published the

best selling book *The End of History and the Last Man.* The book announced that

given the international collapse of communism, liberal democracy had no serious

ideological rival and so, history, in the Hegelian/Kojèvian sense, had ended.

During the 1990s there was nothing left to do, the state had granted recognition

to all and there was no longer a viable threat to the system, for Fukuyama the

great political dramas were over as were opportunities for "great deeds".

Americans were left with nothing except for "idle chatter" and consumption. In

277

terms of popular culture the stand out items were the long running television comedies, *Seinfeld, Frasier* and most notably *Friends.* What links these three programmes is the comfort of the worlds that the characters live in. Episodes revolve around the characters drinking coffee whilst discussing their feelings and anxieties, they have no serious issues.

Fukuyama's thesis does however contain a doubt about this post-historical world. He says:

> It is precisely the moral primacy accorded self-preservation or comfortable self-preservation in the thought of Hobbes or Locke that leaves us unsatisfied. Beyond establishing rules for mutual self-preservation, liberal societies do not attempt to define any positive goals for their citizens or promote a particular way of life as superior or desirable... Is recognition not somehow related to the entire moral side of man's nature, the part of man that finds satisfaction in the sacrifice of the narrow concerns of the body for an objective principle that lies beyond the body. (Fukuyama, 1993: 160-161)

Fukuyama goes on to define this feeling as the Platonic notion of thymos and notes how this will remain unsatisfied within liberal post-history. Though popularly read as a celebration of the end of history Fukuyama reveals a deep Straussian pessimism as to the fate of the last men which is akin to Bataille's post Kojèvian concept of unemployed negativity. However, Fukuyama does note the presence of a not yet post-historical world, because although history has ended

not all parts of the world have made it – by which he means the non-liberal capitalist world. In this world there are still opportunities for the thymos to find satisfaction.

In the post-political world there is no ideological conflict, Paul A. Cantor in a 1999 article in William Kristol's *The Weekly Standard* illustrates this via American professional wrestling. In homage to Kojève's example of the tea ceremony as a symbol of the end of history, Cantor cites pro-wrestling as the image of the American post-political self. With the end of the Cold War came the end of an era of nationalist politics in pro-wrestling, the simple political binary of the Cold War had given pro-wrestling a steady supply of villains. But in the post Cold War world there are no more outside villains for wrestling to use and so wrestling (read America) with no enemy turned in on itself.

After the Cold War the simple morality that the binary enemy offers disappeared and was replaced by a Jerry Springer like life drama. Instead of an existential threat the stories presented were more likely to be about dark domestic secrets. The story and Kane and his brother the Undertaker is used to illustrate the argument. Kane seeks revenge against his older brother, the Undertaker, who killed their parents when they were children in a fire which also caused horrific burns to Kane. The nihilistic violence that Kane produces is now psychologised, we understand his problems and we can see their root in his dysfunctional childhood. Kane is not simply evil in the way that the Soviet wrestlers were, we understand and therefore negate his evil, "he stands as the poster boy for the

'90's – the victimised wrongdoer, the malefactor who would not be evil *if only someone loved him as child.*" (emphasis in original) Cantor sees this development in Wrestling as a symptom of the decline "of the country's moral fibre and America's growing incapacity to offer functional models of heroism." (Cantor, 1999: 421-423)

Wrestling is an apt example, the violence still remains when the enemy has gone, but with the lack of an actual enemy an explanation is sought. Slavoj Zizek explains what he calls "postmodern racism" in this way (Zizek, 1999). This violence emerges in the post-ideological post-political world where the Cold War has ended along with any meaning of the political distinction between Left and Right.

> One should link this problematic to the notion of excessive, non-functional cruelty as a feature of contemporary life, as proposed by Balibar; a cruelty whose figures range from "fundamentalist" racist and/or religious slaughter to the "senseless" outbursts of violence by adolescents and the homeless in our megalopolises.... A violence not grounded in any utilitarian or ideological causes. (Zizek, 1999: 31)

Violence remains but serves no purpose. It is wholly gratuitous, and is simply the search for the negation of whatever. Zizek gives an example of a skinhead beating up foreigners; he rejects the natural explanation that the skinhead is attacking foreigners because of worries about job security or culture. "The

answer we ultimately obtain from a skinhead is that it makes him feel good to beat up foreigners." (Zizek, 1999: 32) Negation through violence satisfies him in a way that the universal recognition granted by the state does not. Unemployed negativity is bored and fighting the foreigner gives unemployed negativity something to do.

But the excessive violence of the skinhead is again, as we saw with the story of Kane, explained:

> So, in the guise of this cynically reflecting skinhead who, with an ironic smile, explains to the perplexed journalist the roots of his senselessly violent behaviour, the enlightened tolerant multiculturalist bent on "understanding" forms of excessive violence gets his own message. (Zizek, 1999: 34)

It was during this period that the neoconservatives began to look for new spheres in which to find national purpose.

The Neoconservative Response to Post-Historical Malaise

The neoconservatives themselves were also initially lost in the period immediately after the Cold War. In his book *Imperial Designs: neoconservatives and the New Pax Americana* Gary Dorrien comments that "In my interviews with prominent neoconservatives it struck me that most were anxious to find a

substitute for the energising and unifying role that the Cold War played for them." (2004: 1) This was particularly the case for Podhoretz who Dorrien says had "lost his compass" (2004: 13). An initial neoconservative reaction to the end of the Cold War was to begin to assert the birth of what Charles Krauthammer called in 1990 "The unipolar moment" (Krauthammer, 1990). This recognised that the United States had become the world's sole super power and that American posture should be aimed at deterring the development of rivals and the maintenance of US dominance. In a 1992 *Defence Planning Guidance* document, Paul Wolfowitz, with input from Albert Wohlstetter and Richard Perle stated the new strategic priority:

> Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defence strategy and requires that we endeavour to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to gain global power. (Quoted in Dorrien, 2004: 35)

This document proved controversial at the time but, along with Krauthammer's understanding of unipolarity it set the agenda for post Cold War neoconservatism. Others, such as Joshua Muravchik began re-promoting the export of American ideals and a Neo-Manifest Destinarianism:

For our nation, this is the opportunity of a lifetime. Our failure to exert every possible effort to secure [a new world order] would be unforgivable. If we succeed, we will have forged a Pax Americana unlike any previous peace, one of harmony, not of conquest. Then the twenty-first century will be the American century by virtue of the triumph of the humane idea born in the American experiment... An American foreign policy, to be successful must quicken the pulse... American's have a missionary streak and democracy is our mission." (Quoted in Dorrien, 2004: 71-72)

Such democratic evangelism had not always been a common neoconservative position, in an essay, 'Democracy and Double Standards', originally published by Norman Podhoretz in *Commentary* in 1979, Jeane Kirkpatrick argued that the United States may sometimes need to make alliances with unsavoury regimes in order to combat communism. The essay so impressed Ronald Reagan that when he became President he made Kirkpatrick the US ambassador to the United Nations. This sentiment of opposition to unconsidered idealism was shared by Irving Kristol, in 'International Law and International Lies' from 1985 he said:

For the United States to try to conduct its foreign policy according to principles that are visionary rather than sensibly realistic is the kind of suicidal folly future historians will find it well nigh impossible to comprehend. (2011: 216)

Realist sentiment was being played out by President Reagan in the 1980s, especially in his dealing with Central America and the Caribbean. Interventions in support of undemocratic regimes and Reagan's cautious attitude towards the USSR, that actually favoured dialogue over direct conflict, were based on a calculus of power and not idealism. Indeed, despite initial faith in Reagan some neoconservatives, especially Norman Podhoretz, soon became disillusioned by the lack of black and white thinking (Ehrman 1996: 146-149).

Both Kristol and Kirkpatrick maintained these realist views at the end of the Cold War. Though accepting American hegemony and the fact of unipolarity this was not thought to extend to the creation of Pax Americana. Unipolarity did not mean that America should try to remake the world in its own image. This position was more akin to old style realism than the democratic idealism that, after the invasion of Iraq, is now commonly associated with neoconservatism. This split was something that was noted at the time, for Midge Decter:

> The great struggle in the neoconservative movement is going to be between the people who used to be called unilateralists like Irving who are now isolationists and us old interventionists. (Quoted in Dorrien, 2004: 70-71)

With the election of Bill Clinton in 1992 the neoconservatives were effectively frozen out of power. However, the period continued to witness American military interventions across the world, notably in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. These "humanitarian" interventions seem to develop the

democratising zeal that some of the neoconservatives had been arguing for at the end of the Cold War. However, Charles Krauthammer was scathing of these liberal hawks for imposing personal morality on international affairs (Dorrien, 2004: 85-86). Clinton was accused of pursuing an altruistic foreign policy that was putting high mindedness above national interest. This bears witness to the contradiction at the heart of neoconservative foreign policy thinking, it uses the language of idealism but seems to reject the practice of that idealism.

The contradiction between idealism and realism can also be seen in the co-written work of William Kristol and Robert Kagan. In the essay, 'Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy', from 1996 we hear that "The remoralization of America at home requires the remoralization of American foreign policy." This idea is expanded upon in another essay from 2000 'National Interest and Global Responsibility' where they re-introduce the idea of the present danger, "Our present danger is one of declining military strength, flagging will and confusion about our role in the world". But there is an important caveat that Kristol and Kagan make:

Americans and their political leaders have spent the years since 1991 lavishing the gifts of an illusory "peace dividend" upon themselves, and frittering away the opportunity to strengthen and extend an international order uniquely favourable to the United States. (Kristol and Kagan, 2000: 4)

In other words, the goal of US foreign policy should be the development of US national interest and not idealism. But President Clinton is still accused of ducking the moral challenge and a "gradual but steady moral and strategic disarmament" (Kristol and Kagan, 2000: 7). Clinton did not seek to unseat the regimes in Baghdad, Pyongyang or Beijing, "rather than confronting the moral and strategic challenge presented by these evil regimes, the United States tries to do business with them." (Kristol and Kagan, 2000: 7) Clinton is criticised for privileging capitalist interests over national interests. It should also be noted that here is the re-introduction of the specifically moral register for talking about a particular regime. It is the regime itself that is considered evil not any particular act that it undertakes and this, as was seen earlier, is William Kristol's understanding of Strauss.

What develops in 1990s neoconservatism is a moral language for foreign policy that is tempered by the calculation of national interest. Because:

> ...the United States cannot simply wish hostile regimes out of existence. The United States would not dispatch troops to topple every regime we found odious. An American strategy that included regime change as a central component would neither promise nor expect rapid transformations in every rogue state or threatening power. (Kristol and Kagan, 2000: 19)

Kristol and Kagan describe US foreign policy as being "infused with a high degree of morality", the moral basis of US foreign policy is a result of the particularly

noble basis of the American founding, because of the nature of the American regime. The argument is that the US should remember its exceptional place in world history and act according to these values because these are, of necessity, good for the world (Kristol and Kagan, 2000: 22). But, interventionism and regime change are also recognised to be "a strike for American interests, and for what might be called the American spirit" (Kristol and Kagan, 2000: 24). Moralistic foreign policy is good for the soul, or as William J. Bennett put it "American internationalism helps strengthen our national self-definition" (Bennett, 2000: 301), it will help defend against the rise of post-historical apathy. The use of the idealistic register in foreign policy should therefore be seen as a rhetorical tool and not necessarily a statement of purpose.

In a speech in 2004 Charles Krauthammer spelt out the doctrine most clearly, calling it Democratic Realism:

> Where to intervene? Where to bring democracy? Where to nation-build? I propose a single criterion: where it counts. Call it democratic realism. And this is its axiom: *We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure only in places where there is strategic necessity – meaning, places central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a global mortal threat to freedom.* [italics in the original] (Quoted in Fukuyama, 2005: 172)

At the time, in 2004, a reference to an "existential enemy" is easy to understand but in the 1990s such a statement would have seemed silly. The consistency is in the realism that is infused with moral vision. Put bluntly, it states the value of framing any action in the moral register both because of the moralising effects that such a framing has and also because of the willingness of the people to fight and die for it.

After Fukuyama's declaration of the end of history the neoconservatives' concern at the effects of his thesis on the political can be detected, echoing Werner Dannhauser's reading of Nietzsche that the assumption of the end of history *is* the end of history. Once one cannot imagine that there is something more to do there is nothing more to do. Donald Kagan specifically rejects the end of history thesis saying, "These are like the delusions of states throughout history that have reached a secure position and have decided to take a rest." Taking a "strategic pause" allows one's enemies to catch up and take one unawares, appeasement before the Second World War is taken as the defining lesson but Kagan notes, "Deterring such wars requires the will to create and maintain a sufficient military force and the will to use that force when necessary." (Donald Kagan, 2000: 339)

The *Project for the New American Century*, a think tank established in 1997 by William Kristol and Robert Kagan with the goal of promoting American unipolarity, in 2000 produced a strategy document, *Rebuilding America's Defences* (Donnelly, 2000). The document recommended that the United States

take advantage of the "unprecedented strategic opportunity" presented by the geopolitical situation of the 1990s; it recommended four "core missions". US strategy should aim to:

> ...defend the American homeland; fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars; perform the "constabulary" duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions; transform US forces to exploit the "revolution in military affairs". (Donnelly, 2000: iv)

The document, co-authored by Donald Kagan and Gary Schmitt, noted the problem that Kagan had already introduced – the will to use force. Because of the post-historical mindset "the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbour." (Donnelly, 2000: 51) An event was needed to restart the historical struggle and allow an existential threat to be presented.

The 1990s ended not with the dawn of the new millennium, but in September 2001; the Al Qaida attacks presented an opportunity for the strategic rebalancing of American foreign policy. The neoconservatives, who with George W. Bush's election had been brought back into government, were perfectly placed to take advantage of the opportunity. In the world after the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington it became possible once more to imagine an existential threat,

an activist American foreign policy could be justified – at least to the American people – as a generation defining struggle. So in an article for *The Weekly Standard* in 2002 Tod Lindberg can say:

American solidarity wasn't born that day [September 11th 2001]; it was revealed. After a long pause, Americans returned to the public square they had left for their private gardens, and to make sure everyone knew, they draped it in red white and blue. (Lindberg, 2002: 258)

There is a discomforting sense of relief in a piece like Lindberg's, relief at an event that allowed for the production of national purpose. Neoconservative thought is constrained by a discomfort with modernity and nationalism is understood as relief from the perceived nihilism, but to reasonably generate nationalism a legitimate threat must first appear. To paraphrase Acheson's Korean War comment, Al Qaeda saved them. American expansionism needs to make the most of such opportunities because it is fundamentally constrained by its anti-imperial self understanding.

Confronting the Imperial Self

The United States has acquired an empire, but Americans themselves lack the imperial cast of mind. They would rather consume than conquer. They would rather build shopping malls than nations. They crave for themselves

protracted old age and dread, even for other Americans who have volunteered for military service...

Those who wish to perpetuate American full spectrum dominance are, in short, facing the wrong way. For the threat to America's empire does not come from embryonic rival empires to the West or to the East. I regret to say that it may come from the vacuum of power – the absence of a will to power – within. (Ferguson, 2004: 29)

Writing in 2004, this is how the British neoconservative historian Niall Ferguson perceives the problem for the United States; a lack of imperial will to power. It is the lack of a will to be imperialistic on the part of the population at large. During this brief history it has been shown how the notion of Manifest Destiny inspired the continental spread of the Eastern settlers, allowing poor immigrants to move West with dreams of a better life. But since the closing of the frontier American excess has had to find locations beyond the continental landmass. The trouble is how to motivate those who are satisfied with comfortable self-preservation. The problem can be illustrated through Strauss's reading of the difference between Plato's brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon. Adeimantus is satisfied with the simple city, Glaucon, the more erotic of the two wants more. Because Glaucon desires more he will be forced to expand the city and this will lead inexorably to conflict with other cities. If the conflict is fierce Glaucon will need to draw on all of the resources of the city and this means Adeimantus. The question for

Glaucon is how to motivate Adeimantus to fight for the expansion of Glaucon's desire.

The story that develops is what Podhoretz has called the "revised standard version" and involves the process of "doing violence to the truth" (Podhoretz, 1967: 198). This regards the contemporary understanding of history, and means the domination of the national narrative. Podhoretz is acknowledging history as a sphere for the production of the mythic underpinnings of state power. Domination of the historical narrative means domination of the shared understanding of that community and of what is acceptable and unacceptable, worthy and unworthy. Domination of the historical narrative means domination of the political and the character of the regime.

The Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet economy and its legitimacy to rule over most of its empire. The long struggle ended in global hegemony for the United States. But the end of the Cold War was seen as the defeat of the communist ideology and not the victory of one imperial power over another. The great ideological struggle was over and there was nothing left to do, one system had won out and the victor could get on with its post historical grazing. In this sense, maintenance of the American Empire became a low priority because the United States had never considered itself as an empire.

American imperial power is flawed in that it does not admit to itself its own nature. The United States, born out of the ashes of the first British Empire, is still

a fundamentally anti-imperial power in its mythic imagination; it is the non-imperial empire. But if a state cannot go to war to defend its empire (because it cannot admit its possession of one) it will need to produce other reasons beyond the simply imperial. This is the context within which Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation* and Niall Ferguson's *Colossus* should be read; they are attempts to revise the standard version of American history.

Ferguson explicitly states that he supports American Empire because, in his opinion, it is preferable to other empires. His implicit thesis is that there is always empire, that power is imperial by nature, he says "Nation states are a novelty compared with empires, for there have been empires since the beginning of written records" (Ferguson, 2004: 167). A state will tend toward empire as a way of making its own self secure, by defeating an enemy and securing vital resources. This seems to agree with Strauss's understanding when he says that "unless it is kept back by weakness... every city is itself compelled to expand." (Strauss, 1964: 209) Every city needs to expand to satisfy the developing desire.

The state is the combination of the excess of the individuals that are within it, they are bound together through a shared mythic self understanding. The myth of the state produces the justification for war and the willingness of the individuals to sacrifice themselves for it. Depending on what that myth is, war is more or less easily justified, and so different national myths will tend more or less easily to imperial war, by looking at the character of a particular regime we can predict and explain its actions. The problem for state power is when the

myth fails to produce the willingness to sacrifice, but state strategy demands such a sacrifice. This pessimistic conception of world history produces a problem in that it acts as a justification of empire, if empire is a natural state there is no moral problem produced by empire building.

The first step in being able to actively defend an empire is to acknowledge its existence, and so both Ferguson and Kagan argue that the United States has always been an imperial power. Kagan's thesis is that the US is and always has been a "dangerous nation" and that the non-acknowledgement of this is problematic. Speaking of the Spanish/American War he says:

> It was the product of a universalist ideology as articulated in the Declaration of Independence. It reflected American's view of themselves, stretching back to before the nation's founding, as the advance guard of civilisation, leading the way against backward and barbaric nations and empires. (2006: 416)

Understanding America as a dangerous nation, bent on proliferating its world view, is consistent with Irving Kristol's understanding and emphasis on the United States as being a revolutionary state, which as such aims to spread that revolution (1995: 135-152). The revolutionary ideology as understood by Kagan is one of civilisation (in the American sense) verses backwardness (Europe) and barbarism (the rest of the non-Americanised world). What we see in Kagan is therefore the reproduction of the historical understanding of the nineteenth century ideologues of Manifest Destiny.

The acceptance of the imperial thesis in neoconservative thought predates the War on Terror, though it was often hidden behind euphemisms such as "the unipolar moment". However, Thomas Donnelly, the deputy director of *The Project For the New American Century,* told the Washington Post in August 2001, "There's not all that many people who will talk about it [empire] openly. It's discomforting to a lot of Americans. So they use code phrases like 'America is the sole super power.'" (Quoted in Ferguson, 2004: 4) In October 2001, in the *Weekly Standard*, Max Boot sets it out more explicitly in an article entitled, "The Case For American Empire" (Ferguson, 2004: 4) which argued that the most realistic response to the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 was for the US to embrace imperialism.

The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq need to be understood as the continuation of the US imperial project but to justify these they had to be set within the same mythic narrative of all US imperial expansions.

A brief consideration of speeches given by George W. Bush will demonstrate this:

The first is his address to the nation of the 7th of October 2001 upon the commencement of the war in Afghanistan. I have adopted the analysis of this speech from that of Bruce Lincoln in his book *Holy Terrors.* In this speech Bush sets up adversarial categories, he refers to "barbaric criminals", "evil plans" and "terrorists", giving the conflict an existential importance. The invasion is portrayed as necessary in order to defend the future of the United States itself.

He frames the conflict as going beyond simple self-preservation and repeats a trope of the Manifest Destiny myth, the United States as defender of humanity; "We defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear." This theme is reiterated in the name of the military plan, "Operation Enduring Freedom", and by harking back to Fiske's dream of a "perpetual Sabbath", affirming that "Peace and freedom will prevail". The irony in this rhetoric and the contradiction for the neoconservatives is that by fighting a war for "enduring freedom" the goal is set as the post-historical state, which if anything is defined by the lack of existential conflict. This contradiction suggests a disinterest of the neoconservatives in the actual stated goal of democracy.

Lincoln makes clear that one of the major aims of Bush's speech was to avoid framing it in a religious sense as a war between Islam and Christianity. What is presented is a secular form of Manifest Destiny, hence the rhetoric focusing on the notion of democratic freedom but not explicitly citing this form of capitalist freedom as being divinely inspired. However, Lincoln, a religious scholar, detects a subtle subtext in the speech. Firstly, Bush does not end the speech with the conventional affix, "God bless America", instead he says, "May God continue to bless America". Lincoln suggests that such a "linguistically marked" phrase would have been given careful consideration by the speech writers, especially given the importance of the speech. While easily missed the phrase refers to the divine mission imagined in the idea of Manifest Destiny. Instead of simply asking that God bless America in the future it asserts that the United States *has* been

blessed by God already and that this particular episode in United States history should be seen within the context of the divine mission (Lincoln, 2003: 30).

Lincoln also detects specific biblical allusions in the text of the speech, so, "the terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places" is an allusion to the final scenes of the book of Revelation 6:15-17 and also to Isaiah 2:1-11 which refers to the unfaithful. The proclamation that those who side with Bin Laden "will take that lonely path at their own peril" alludes to Job 8:13 and Isaiah 59:5-8 contrasting the path of the righteous to the path of perdition (Lincoln, 2003, 31). Such allusions frame Bush's speech in the language of biblical prophecy.

The importance of biblical prophecy in the US should not be underestimated, the immense popularity of Tim La Haye and Jerry B. Jenkins' series of books, *Left Behind*, attests to this. The original series of books have sold over 60 million copies in the US alone and there have also been the usual spin offs, movies, graphic novels, children's stories and computer games. The series constitutes an American cultural phenomenon far beyond anything else in the last twenty five years but is one that has been given remarkably little serious attention particularly when compared to the amount of academic time that has been spent on series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Harry Potter*.

Left Behind is set in a world after the rapture, the event where God takes all of the true Christians straight to heaven, the rest of humanity is literally "left

behind". Those who remain must face the tribulation, the biblical period after the antichrist has come to earth and established a world government, in these novels this takes shape through the UN. In a fascinating coincidence the capital of the "New World Order" in the *Left Behind* series is established in the city of "New Babylon", Babylon of course being the ancient capital of Mesopotamia (Milch, 2006).

In the 2004 State of the Union speech Bush asserted that "America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country." He emphasises what has become known as the Bush Doctrine of pre-emptive war that was set out in the 2002 National Security Strategy. The doctrine states that war is justified and necessary if there is a threat to the US homeland.

He later says:

> So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. We will challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror and expect a higher standard from our friends.

He specifies the locality of the threat and what is needed to confront it, but it is reform that is stated and not military force. Reform indicates a need for a presence in these places (in this instance Afghanistan and Iraq) but also a change in character through regime; the people of these countries need to become American. And so:

America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace, a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman.

Here the contradiction is spelled out. The United States has a mission and that mission is to remake the world in American terms "our most basic beliefs", what is good for America is here considered as a good in itself.

Moral certainty was again reiterated in the second inaugural address, which William Kristol tells us was "Informed by Strauss" (2005: 328)[5]. Kristol, who was taught by Strauss's student Harvey Mansfield, refers to the Straussian need to produce moral certainties. This points to why foreign affairs is a useful ground for neoconservatives, because the foreign is outside of the immediate environment its meaning can be constructed much more easily; the moral register fits well when describing the unknown. The production of such certainties is not always the case for the domestic sphere, for example, an attempt to demonise sections of society is more difficult to maintain because one is more likely to encounter the internal other and see them as they are. For Kristol, Bush's aim was to rid the world of tyranny though this was also tempered by Krauthammer's Democratic Realism. For Bush, "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one", but these vital interests, oil in the case of Iraq, are still playing a secondary role in Bush's public statements to the emphasis on

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[5] The chief speech writer at the time was Michael Gerson.

"outlaw regimes" and the need to "protect this nation and this people against further attacks and emerging threats".

Krauthammer, in his 2004 essay "In Defence of Democratic Realism", rejects realism because it "offers no vision beyond power. It is all means and no ends" (Krauthammer, 2005: 188). Naked national self-interest cannot be deployed as a justification of military action so Krauthammer needs to play up the existential threat, which he defines as, "a struggle over existence and identity… Existential struggle is a fight to the end – extermination or, even better, conversion." (2005: 189) This plays on what we saw earlier with Seymour Martin Lipset, the idea that being American is an ideological commitment, one can convert to Americanism and this is what the American imperial project takes as a mission.

American empire contrasts with the British empire which could reasonably debate empire in terms of the economic benefits that it provided. J. S. Mill, for example, developed the classical liberal position of opposition to empire on economic grounds to one in support of empire for that very reason (Sullivan, 1983). But American empire has to find other reasons; for Max Boot, writing in 2003, "The reason should be obvious to anyone without a Ph.D.: America isn't like the empires of old." (Quoted in Dorrien, 2004: 210) As Robert Kagan said "the principles and ideals upon which it was founded were unquestionably superior" (Kagan, 2004: 87), American Empire is here presented as a specifically moral mission.

The two justifications of empire, existential threat and the distinct moral mission, imply a never-ending cycle of military expenditure and war. In this sense it neatly provides an escape for the excess into the military industrial complex, solves the neoconservative moral problems and answers the conundrum noted by Madeleine Albright, Bill Clinton's Secretary of State, "What's the point of having this superb military for... if we can't use it?" (Albright, 2003: 182) But this moral mission of American empire exists only as a justification, what is really at stake is the expansion of capital.

Capitalist Empire and Endless War

Endless war should be seen as a side effect of capitalist empire. According to Ellen Meiksins Wood the post World War era sees the development of a genuinely capitalist empire, one that is not characterised by primitive accumulation. American empire is not run through direct rule, it is best described as "informal empire", but with its five global military commands and 750 bases in 130 countries (Dorrien, 2004: 203), global economic dominance and the pervasiveness of its culture and industries, US presence is almost universal.

The new imperialism is governed by economic imperatives. The paradoxical element of this empire in the period of globalisation is that "this economic empire would be sustained by political and military hegemony over a complex state system" (Meiksins Wood, 2003: 129). Capitalism requires endless

accumulation and this entails geographic growth as well. Capitalism would seem to have no interest in the state system but it in fact needs it, "At the same time, capital's economic power cannot exist without the support of extra-economic force; and extra-economic force is today, as before, primarily supplied by the state." (Meiksins Wood, 2003: 5)

The state has several functions. Capital requires a certain amount of uneven development which can then be exploited, an example of this would be income differentials or control of labour movements. The state is required to administer capital at a local level, to provide infrastructure and to deliver the correct form of labour to the required location. The state also conducts the crucial job of policing labour. Capitalism has detached economic from extra-economic activity because it does not use force directly. Force is the role of the state, capital thus remains neutral in terms of state violence and the state acts as a barrier between the exploiters and exploited. Therefore:

...the state in both imperial and subordinate economies, still provides the indispensible conditions of accumulation for global capital... and it is in the final analysis, the state that has created the conditions enabling global capital to survive and navigate the world. (Meiksins Wood, 2003: 139)

The state organises the group and the nation, it organises the myth and meaning that provide the cover for capital to accumulate the surplus. This is particularly apparent in the police function of the imperial power. Capital requires that new

markets are opened and that old markets are organised in the correct way, military intervention is therefore needed. The state organises the people of the imperial power for this intervention, it organises their sacrifice for capital.

"An endless empire which has no boundaries, even no territory, requires war without end. An invisible empire requires infinite war" (Mieksins Wood, 2002). Domination of the global economy requires military domination but because the US military, even at its most dominant, cannot be everywhere at once it requires frequent spectacular displays of force. In this sense war on terror provides the perfect cover. By having no specific goal, apart from ridding the world of evil-doers, the imperial power is given a narrative that is boundless and allows the United States to avoid the strategic impasse of the 1990s.

Endless war relates back to the beginnings of this particular part of the narrative in the Korean War. Korea "saved" America from spending the excess on the living standards of people in Europe, but it did not save America from spending the excess on the American people. In fact, with President Johnson's "Great Society" programme use of the excess on the living standards of the American people increased dramatically. Massive military spending changes this calculus. During the 1980s the build up of the United States' military, organised by Reagan, was funded by deficit spending, this model was then repeated by George W. Bush. These deficits then allowed the state to cite poverty when it came to domestic spending. Domestic spending can be cut and private companies brought in to run government services, thus achieving a reduction in state domestic spending, an

increase of private spending on those formally state funded activities and the opening new domestic markets for capital (Retort, 2005: 104).

Neoliberalism now comes to resemble, ironically given the wars of the last decade, Bataille's description of early Islam, the society of conquest. The excess is entirely devoted to accumulation and this means conquest, though instead of spreading a religious doctrine, capital opens markets. Wealth is not consumed through luxurious wastefulness but invested in further conquests that add to ever more accumulation (Bataille, 1967: ch. three). But the point about the society of conquest is that it will eventually lead to collapse. This is the thesis of Paul Kennedy in *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, imperial overstretch is inevitable. The costs of the maintenance of the empire become too much for the imperial power to bear and it begins to break under its own weight of contradictions.

This moment of overstretch may have possibly happened in 2003. The imperial narrative of the neoconservatives led to a moment of hubris where they tragically miscalculated the cost of invasion. The failure to invest enough men to keep the peace led to an inexorable slide into violence and mayhem, which in turn led to spiralling costs. There are possibly two reasons for this miscalculation, firstly, the legacy of Vietnam made American politicians unwilling to deploy and risk too many soldiers, and so despite all of the talk of existential threats it seems that Americans were still unwilling to make large sacrifices. This was compounded by the second reason, the belief that they would be treated as

liberators. Because of the belief in the moral superiority of America it seemed clear to the invading forces that they would be welcomed and so there would be few security problems. In their minds this was not an occupation and so plans were not made to keep the peace. The hubris of the moral mission overtook the strategic calculation of empire.

Overstretch has been compounded by the funding of the war. The two World Wars were profitable endeavours for the United States, firstly through the lending of money to allies and secondly through the relative increase in American power due to the American economy's avoidance of any damage. The First Gulf War was funded through America's imperial protectorates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Germany. The United States avoided the costs of the war and in return managed to demonstrate its military superiority and extend its bases into the heart of the Middle East. The invasion of Iraq was different, like the Vietnam War there was a lack of outside funders for the invasion. The imperial power was left to foot the bill itself, however, it did not even do this. Due to the tax cutting of the Bush administration the funds for the war had to be loaned, massively increasing United States' debt. It is important to note that it was not until the Second World War that the British Empire became a debtor nation, before that it had been the world's largest creditor (Arrighi, 2005b).

The question in the long term will be whether enough capital can be extracted from Iraq to cover the costs of the occupation. The Iraqi state now has the same relationship to the United States arms industry that other protectorates, such as

Saudi Arabia, have. The profits from oil revenues are soaked up through the sale of military technologies, such as the purchase of American F16 planes. The reliance on American arms also serves the purpose of keeping the protectorate in a subservient position in relation to the imperial power. The Iraqi relationship to the United States is made even more favourable because of the newly imposed government oil contracts which are dominated by the American oil industry. These companies gain a further advantage through the low export taxes of the new Iraq (Cafruny and Lehmann, 2012).

However, repayment through these measures depends upon the US government's ability to collect taxes from the favoured corporations. Given neoliberalism's opposition to taxes and the acceptance of widespread tax avoidance this seems unlikely. If this remains the case the invasion of Iraq simply represents a massive subsidy to both the arms and oil industries at the expense of American civilians. Added to this was the loss of faith in American power that the invasion caused, making the ability of the imperial power to project soft power collapse.

The invasion of Iraq allowed a space to be opened up for capital to expand into and was given justification through the religious nationalism of the Bush administration. Irving Kristol's principles of the Right, "religion, nationalism and economic growth" came to a head at this moment. But the irony of the invasion of Iraq, from the neoconservative point of view, is that it represents a massive transfer of power from the state to capital. This reveals the neoconservative

blind spot regarding the transnational nature of capital. There is a suspicion of transnational organisations, George F. Will characterises the contemporary situation as an "assault on the nation-state" (Will, 2004: 127) but he is here referring to post Wilsonian global institutions, namely the United Nations and the European Union. But this suspicion is not recognised in capital, or at least not fully worked out. Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell began to recognise it but simply fell back on religion and nationalism as ideological adjuncts to capitalism thus exacerbating the contradiction. Capital only needs the state to organise police functions, it has no intrinsic emotional attachment to any particular nation. This can be seen through the outsourcing of jobs or corporate tax avoidance, which are logical strategies for an economic form that does not have an emotional attachment to a particular location or people, but not one that has an interest in the well-being of the social whole, this behaviour is the moral abdication that Bell and Kristal detected in the 1970s.

The redundant structure of the state is furthered by the current revolution happening in military robotics (Singer, 2009). The police action of the state is now being transferred to unmanned technology, this enables the state to continue to project force, but without risking any of its citizens. This removes the need to produce a willingness in the people to sacrifice themselves and extends the ability to wage war. This is particularly the case in low intensity urban conflict zones, exactly the sort of area where the police actions of capital are most in demand. These conflict areas will continue to expand as capital further erodes the functions of the state and urban populations become increasingly more

restive (Graham, 2011: ch. two). But it is even feasible that the state removes itself even from police action through the rise of private security companies.

The Revolution in Military Affairs has produced a situation where the final resting place of the state, its police function and locus of nationalist sentiment, has itself become redundant. Capital can now look to a future where it controls the police function, but only for profit. The role of the people in this calculus is to fund, through taxation, the police function that has now been outsourced. Taxes pay for private companies to open markets for private companies. As this happens the paranoiac hysteria of George W. Bush becomes more and more unnecessary because demons are no longer needed. The social, governed entirely through the imperatives of capital no longer has to produce those willing to fight and die. Neoconservative nationalism, by focusing on moral character for the defence of capital has aided in the production of its own anachronism. Because of its refusal to think through the logic of modernity and challenge it in a meaningful way, it has merely speeded up its own contradictions.

In summary, chapter four has argued that neoconservative foreign policy should not be seen as a radical break with American historical expansion. Through the ideological underpinnings of Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny the US expanded to become a continental empire; this developed into hemispheric and latterly global domination. Expansion was based on the capitalist imperative to growth and American and therefore capitalist expansion was taken as being God's work. What was good for America was perceived as being good for

humanity and it was therefore not considered an empire in its own imagination.

The expansion of capital required the forceful opening of markets and this

required that citizens risk their lives in conflict and this needed people willing to

risk themselves. This willingness to risk oneself was perceived to have broken

down in the 1960s and the neoconservatives understood this unwillingness to be

related to the apparent cultural malaise of the modern era. From the point of

view of the neoconservative persuasion the culture of the 1960s and 70s

displayed symptoms of the crisis of modernity, in the 1980s this began to change

with the development of a form of culture that was acceptable to the

neoconservative mode of thought. Cinema began to celebrate both the capitalist

and the military and more recently religion, in the form of the *Left Behind* series,

has been taken seriously as a setting for story telling. Modernity had created a

consumer culture where comfortable self preservation was above heroic

sacrifice, but beyond the need for capital to expand, the neoconservatives

recognised the value of conflict in the production of a moral order; the

perception of a threat creates the political and thus the community. The end of

the Cold War and the dawning of a post-historical era collapsed that particular

narrative and thus ended a cover for aggressive expansion of capital, an impasse

that was ended in September 2001.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, neoconservative foreign policy has been discredited and since the election of Barack Obama neoconservatives have once again been sidelined from the US government. However, it is unlikely that this "persuasion" has disappeared; Robert Kagan, William Kristol and Charles Krauthammer remain influential both within Washington politics and in the media. It is highly likely that when the Republicans return to the White House the neoconservatives will return with them. Kagan advised candidates John McCain and Mitt Romney in their presidential runs. Both Kristol and Krauthammer have taken the so-called Arab Spring as a vindication of the Neoconservative vision of the Bush era. (William Kristol, 2011; Krauthammer, 2011)

However, what has been seen since Obama took over from George W. Bush is the continuation of American military interventionism though now through the hushed tones of drone and cyber warfare. Obama has found a way to maintain the US police presence throughout the Middle East and Africa without risking the lives of soldiers. US imperialism continues although the neoconservative hubris and the rhetoric of unipolarity, along with the patriotic fervour of the Bush era, have become quieter. As was argued in chapter four, US imperialism is not a specifically neoconservative trajectory.

Barack Obama has reached back to the rhetoric of Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. During the final Presidential debate of 2012, the subject of which was foreign policy, Obama stated that "America remains the one indispensable nation. And the world needs a strong America", statements such as these demonstrate his basic need to repeat the conventional trope. Obama perfectly sums up the need for America to justify itself in these terms and cannot therefore be seen as an historic shift in US foreign policy.

The contradictions of political modernity are genuine but what has become apparent is that the neoconservative response is a dead end. Economically, the neoliberal experiment has failed for the people and, more importantly, it has failed to establish a legitimate mode of justice. Since the beginning of the financial crisis the system has lacked legitimacy and has subsequently turned towards violence to maintain order. Slavoj Zizek has argued that violent neoliberalism is a more advanced form of capital accumulation and that increased authoritarianism will become the norm now that neoliberal inequalities have been exposed (Zizek, 2007). This point is emphasised by Pankaj Mishra, who is worth quoting at length:

> ...what China proves (though this is left unsaid) is that an authoritarian
> system helps rather than hinders economic growth on the neoliberal model,
> by ensuring that labour laws, trade unions, the legislature, the judiciary and
> the fear of environmental destruction do not impede the privatisation of
> state assets, the appropriation of agricultural land, the provision of subsidies

and tax cuts to businessmen, or the concentration of wealth in fewer hands.

(Mishra, 2006)

This was well demonstrated in the neoliberal structural adjustment of New York City. Having exacerbated existing social problems through the neoliberal fix, city policy makers turned towards neoconservative order-maintenance policing strategies that built upon James Q. Wilson's "broken windows" thesis. In reality this strategy led to a more and more violent police approach to economic and ethnic out-groups (Wilson and Kelling, 1996; Chronopoulos, 2011: ch. 4 and 7). Whether mercenary violence is a long term solution to instability is at present unknown, but the failure to produce any meaningful change to neoliberal economic orthodoxy in the years following the onset of the present financial crisis is telling. As the prevailing moral order of the noble lie collapses and political stability breaks down, violence is the only option left to the state. This violence is justified through the production of the enemy via the internal other.

In the United States the neoconservatives promoted both religion and nationalism as superstructural fixes to the contradictions of political modernity. These two strands, fusing together during the Presidency of George W. Bush, further exacerbated the economic contradictions of neoliberalism and led to the shocking human and economic waste of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Whilst offering a useful fix to the contradictions of the redistribution of income from the bottom and middle to the top, religion and nationalism, backed up with police violence, have taken on a life of their own with disastrous consequences.

From Germany in the early twentieth century to America after the Second World War neoconservatism has been characterised by a fundamental pessimism in several regards. Firstly, there is pessimism towards the outcome of modernity and particularly its manifestation in liberalism. Secondly, and this related to the first point, this pessimism regards the ability of the people to overcome the contradictions of the modern world, particularly when it comes to post religious forms of moral and ethical life. Thirdly, relating to both of the previous points, there is pessimism towards the assumed inability, due to a basic unwillingness, of the people to defend their particular way of life. Finally, encompassing all of the above is a pessimism surrounding the nature of power and the assumption that power, as encapsulated in a group, will always seek domination over the other. For Strauss this pessimism was rooted in his fundamental philosophic scepticism regarding knowledge, summed up in what he called the struggle between Athens and Jerusalem, and the inability of reason to refute revelation.

A pessimistic understanding of both the international and domestic spheres, produced in Strauss's case by his basic philosophic scepticism and assumption that man is evil, has fed a paranoid sensibility. Fear of the other, based on the pessimistic understanding of power assumes that all political groups will seek to dominate others and implies that imperial expansion is natural for the political community. This assumes the presence of an existential threat and necessitates the need to respond; in this situation the Bush Doctrine, the notion of pre-emptive war, becomes eminently logical. Furthermore, this pessimism leads to an ambivalent acquiescence with empire and the domination of the other. This

logic implies that as empires are natural what we should be concerned with is whether an empire is good or bad, this assumes the need for "our" empire because we are, of necessity, morally superior to the other.

In this situation the pessimistic understanding of the modern, liberal individual becomes problematic. Perceived weakening of the moral will leads to a desire to re-impose a strong moral order and the neoconservatives have sought to do this through religion and nationalism. Ironically, the perceived moral laxity implied the need to rely upon the perception of an outside threat in order to re-impose the lacking moral order. This has produced a paranoid feedback loop where the fear of the outside is reinforced to produce a moral order, which then strengthens the assumption that the world is fundamentally hostile. This leads to further pessimism regarding the domestic moral will, and the cycle, becoming evermore hyperbolic and incoherent, repeats.

The pessimism of neoconservatism is matched by the pessimism of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism assumes self-interest to be the only motivating factor, this basically nihilistic assumption necessitates the need for a form of moral discourse that is imposed because it cannot imagine a form of life not based on self-interest. The imperatives of consumer capitalism demand constant work, consumption and expansion, the exploration of other forms of life therefore become anathema, in particular any moral order based on the moderation of desire. Ironically then, considering the original coolness towards capitalism, neoconservatism's paranoid pessimism and its desire to establish

moral forms based on religion and nationalism produce the needed moral foil for neoliberalism. By both deflecting concerns over capitalist exploitation at home towards the outside and by establishing the imperial will, neoconservatism produces for capital a passive population in the heartland and opportunities for expansion in the periphery.

The neat fit between neoliberalism and neoconservatism through the shared pessimism and elitist response to modernity is given further support through Strauss's conception of the political community. For Strauss the crisis of modernity is predicated on the forgetting of the complexity of the relationship between the city and man as presented in his reading of Plato. The basic premise is that the good life is not open to all, both through ability and through scarcity. This leads to a need to maintain a moral order for the many that allows the few to conduct the good life. This moral order is created culturally through the threat of the other and religion. Though unimpressed by consumer culture his political philosophy displays unconcern with such a state of affairs. The emphasis was on the maintenance of order and the protection of a space for the few, but this further enabled the freeing of space for continued neoliberal expansion. The problems therefore arise when this structure begins to be openly questioned. The Straussian conception of the good, as philosophic eros and the moderation of vulgar desire, that would be destructive of consumer capitalism, are, in Strauss's political philosophy, retained for a select group.

Strauss's act of hubris regarding the philosophic life, producing an equivalence between it and the good life, as the only form of good life, demands the cloistering of intellectual life and a prescriptive, but fundamentally disinterested view of the lives of the rest. This attitude of Straussian philosophy, though not necessarily being followed by Straussian neoconservatives is nonetheless indicative of the attitude of the ruling elites that are removed from the world. The problem was identified by Kojève in his correspondence with Strauss:

...one is brought back to the case of the isolated philosopher who is utterly uninterested in other people's opinion of him... We will therefore not know anything about him; we will not even know whether he exists, and hence whether he is a philosopher or simply a madman. What is more, in my opinion he will not even know it himself since he will be deprived of every social control, which is the only way to weed out "pathological" cases. In any event, his "solipsist" attitude, excluding as it does all "discussion," would be fundamentally anti-Socratic." (Strauss, 2000: 158-159)

For Kojève, the inability to communicate away from the cloister is damaging because without interaction with others, one is no longer able to tell where one stands. In the worst situation the cloistered person is nothing but a grossly arrogant delusional. Like political lying, Strauss is not responsible for the hubris of leaders, but what his political philosophy does is to enact a rationalisation of that hubris. Strauss's rationalisation is rooted in his basic neoconservative

pessimism and reaction to modernity, an attitude that was shaped in the cultural disruption and subsequent disasters of the first half of the twentieth century.

However, the philosopher does have a peculiar relationship to the community because his philosophic form of life necessarily sets him apart from the rest. The questioning mode of interaction and the experimental form of life troubles the community that is necessarily based on a specifically codified form of thought and life. The philosopher therefore appears as strange, is outside of, but also reliant upon, the community. The philosopher can only exist as part of the community for s/he needs not only food and shelter but also a community with whom to philosophize with. The identification of this interesting problem by Strauss is an important contribution to political thought.

The hubris that lead to the downfall of Socrates is related here as well. He did not recognise the political. Socrates presented a challenge to the Athenian community to which it had to respond. The Athenian enlightenment presented heterogeneous forms of life, but this heterogeneity threatened the homogenous culture of the city. The establishment of heterogeneous forms were perceived as an existential threat to the city, it therefore produced a backlash that sought to disestablish that heterogeneity. This is why the Straussian reading of the idealised philosophic life should be read in a wider context and why the effects of forms of life that challenge conventional morality must be considered.

With this in mind the cultural upheavals of 1950s and 60s America can be understood. By openly opposing and challenging the bourgeois order the Beats and then the counter culture demanded a response. They established the political by framing themselves as the constitutive outside; as its name implied the counter culture produced a threat to conventional bourgeois morality. This challenge necessitated the backlash at play within neoconservatism. The tragedy of this backlash is that it produced a rejection of the heterogeneous forms of being that could produce an escape from somnambulistic consumerism and the nihilism of modernity. The attempted enforcement of a homogenous moral order by the neoconservative backlash has driven the political dialectic that came to its peak during the presidency of George W. Bush. In other words, the drive for heterogeneity failed because it hubristically forgot the political and therefore produced a backlash which developed its own destructive logic. The counter culture failed to take into consideration the nature of the political and the conditions of the situation it existed within, it was not aware of the need to be careful within speech.

This is the dilemma of the political, to speak too openly will necessitate a backlash of some kind because the production of new forms of life will appear as an existential threat to traditional forms. However, assumption of the need for care in speech and its practice leads to a cloistering of that thought, cutting it off from the community and potentially leading to hubris. Furthermore, if we accept the need for care in speech we run the risk of an over cautious conservatism.

Sometimes an open challenge is necessary, for example, the American civil rights movement was a case in point.

There is therefore a negotiation that needs to take place between new forms of thought and life and the conditions that they develop in. Strauss's political philosophy can be a guide to this dilemma and the history of neoconservative pessimism a useful yet ultimately tragic case study. The lesson of Strauss is the relationship between the "city and man" and the need for all to act according to the bounded nature of the community. The challenge of Strauss is how to think and act politically without succumbing to pessimism and the hubris of the cloister.

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