DYSTOPOPHOBIA:

AVERSION TO THE WORST IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF

THOMAS HOBBES, EDMUND BURKE, AND KARL POPPER

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dystopophobia:

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Political theorists generally proceed by proposing ideal principles and utopian visions for society. Against this prevailing trend, this dissertation explores the possibility of political theory oriented around avoiding dystopia. Through an analysis of Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke, and Karl Popper – three Anglophone political theorists whose political theory shares an "aversional" quality – this dissertation asks, what in the moral, social, and political theory of these three thinkers explains and justifies their emphasis upon avoiding bad outcomes and human misery, rather than searching for ideals of justice and utopia? What philosophical and political beliefs, concepts, or strings of argument shared by these thinkers make their theories effectively focused upon avoiding bad outcomes? This dissertation sketches a dystopophobic family resemblance shared between the three. At the core of this resemblance is the identification of an asymmetry between goodness and badness, and a conceptualization of political matters operating at two levels: 1) at level of society and the structures and institutions that organize society to avoid dystopia; and, 2)

the level of the individual within society whose life can go better or worse. This bifurcation

manifests in a tension between the emancipatory urge to improve the condition of the worst

off in society with a conservative eye still firmly fixed on protecting the stabilizing

elements in the polity that protect against dystopian political disintegration.

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Dedication

For Laure, whose love and support has

enriched my life and work beyond measure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

I. Perilous Times; Pressing Questions

Dystopia is a condition, both real and imagined, that haunts humanity. A dystopia is an awful place usually where vast portions of the population endure fear, immiseration, repression, suppression and other unpleasant experiences and feelings. This kind of dystopian condition has been the lived experience and for all too many people in human history, for many people in the contemporary world,[1] and remains a live possibility for many – and perhaps all – of humanity in the future. As dystopia is so wretched, humanity has good reason to avoid such a fate. A reasonable person and well-functioning society may rightly recognize dystopia as a condition to be avoided if at all possible and to consciously work in ways to lift individuals out of dystopian conditions like fear and misery, and also work to ensure that society does not undergo a dystopian collapse. Let us call this form of aversion *dystopophobia*.

There are many examples of this kind of dystopophobia in action within contemporary society. To give one example: on January 26th, 2017, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' Science and Security Board moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock forward by thirty seconds. The time read eleven fifty-seven, and thirty seconds – two minutes thirty seconds to midnight. First released in 1947, in the early years of the nuclear revolution, the Doomsday Clock is a metaphor designed to warn the public "about how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making."

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[1] For example, it is estimated that up to forty million people live in modern-day slavery (ILO 2017). E. Benjamin Skinner gives harrowing insight into the experiences of modern day slavery in his aptly named book, *A Crime So Monstrous* (2008).

(Benedict 2017) The closer to midnight, the closer we are to catastrophic self-destruction. In the seventy years since, the time has been closer to midnight than now, but not by much. In 1953 the United States and Soviet Union "each tested their first thermonuclear weapons within six months of one another" and so the time was moved to two minutes to midnight. Of course, the Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990s, at which point the clock was set back to seventeen minutes to midnight – the earliest it has ever been. And yet, here we are. Between 2002 and today the clock has moved from 7 minutes to midnight to where it stands today, shifting two minutes closer to midnight in the year 2015, alone.

In explaining its most recent change, the scientists – including fifteen Nobel Laureates – that comprise Atomic Scientists' Security Board expressed the concern that,

> "…[the] already-threatening world situation was the backdrop for a rise in strident nationalism worldwide in 2016, including in a US presidential campaign during which the eventual victor, Donald Trump, made disturbing comments about the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons and expressed disbelief in the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change…" (Sinclaire 2017)

Of course, the purpose of this dissertation isn not to take a partisan position on American politics, but there are a couple of important qualities of humankind's dystopophobic predicament that are worth extracting from these comments. Firstly, humankind may go extinct. That humans may go extinct may seem obvious to a contemporary reader, but the mere appreciation that animal species can go extinct is a hard won piece of knowledge that only emerged in the 1850s (Kolbert 2014, 23-46). Furthermore, the realization that humans are not unique in the possibility of going extinct has been a hotly disputed and often begrudgingly accepted corollary of the Darwinian idea of evolution through natural selection. That humans are not a divinely created species endowed by provenance to endure forever is an important quality of the human condition.

Secondly, not only is humankind liable to go extinct, but, importantly, we face the prospect of sudden destruction *by our own making*. This further fact – that humanity may be the author of its own demise – distinguishes us from all other species of animal, but also from previous generations of human beings. Of course, entire societies of peoples throughout history and flourished and vanished, from early settlers in the Fertile Crescent through to Bronze Age proto-city states in the Mediterranean, often growing and then decaying as the climate swung from hospitality to hostility. As technology advanced and humankind became more powerful, purposeful human actions including, war, slavery, and expropriation became a primary cause in the extermination of entire civilizations, for example, in the deaths of the Mayan and Inca civilizations and the massacre of a considerable portion of the Native American population at the hands of European settlers. But even here – as appalling as it is— it is not the entirety of humanity that is at stake in the conflict; instead, it is the lives and way of life of one part of humanity in the hands of another part of humanity. By contrast, today, the entire globe faces existential risks from manmade sources, including climate change, nuclear war, and even hostile artificial intelligences (Bostrom 2014). This precariousness of human society – that some manmade calamity may destroy of irreparably destroy human civilization and immiserate those left alive – is an urgent and exigent issue that demands robust and clear thinking about political society and human relations, which this dissertation begins under the heading of dystopophobia.

Of course, it is not unique to claim that extraordinary developments warrant a probing examination of social and political life. For example, David Rothkopf, the former editor of *Foreign Affairs*, writes in his new book *The Questions of Tomorrow* (2017), that

there are moments in time when social, political, and technological changes prompt us to ask fundamental questions about ourselves and the world. The Industrial Revolution was perhaps the most recent of these periods on which our contemporary social and political norms and expectations were established. But technology and digital interconnectedness are challenging that old order, and so, in our current moment, we will be forced (if we are not already) to interrogate foundational ideas by asking, what is money, a job, or even, what is peace and when are we at war? Almost sixty years before Rothkopf, Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Human Condition* that the discovery of America, the Reformation, and the invention of the telescope were three developments that fundamentally shaped the trajectory of the modern world (Arendt 1998, 248-257). She memorably opened the book with the example of Sputnik circling the Earth as a fourth example of a development that marked a new chapter in the history of humankind, that speaks to her belief that the social world is not shaped merely by abstract philosophical reflection (*Vita Contempliva*), but by the activity of individuals through labor, work, and action (*Vita Activa*) in society to create new things (Arendt 1998, 7-17).

For my part it might be said that by emphasizing the fact that human kind possesses the remarkable power to destroy itself, I merely point to a moment ten years earlier than Arendt as the prompt for reflection. Detonated on July 16th, 1945, Trinity, the first successful nuclear bomb named colloquially as "the gadget," exploded in the New Mexico desert with the power of 22 kilotons of TNT. Reflecting on the moment years later, the nuclear physicist Robert Oppenheimer who led the Manhattan Project that developed the bomb noted that all those present realized that "the world would never be the same again," and that "a few laughed, a few cried, and most were silent." Oppenheimer claimed that he

was led by this terrible explosion to think of the tale in the Bhagavad Gita of Vishnu's chest-pounding bravado by changing into his multi-armed form and declaring "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." It is the secularization of this power of destruction – the lowering of this power to destroy the world from the exclusive domain of the Gods to the hands of fallible human beings – that marks a new moment in the history of humankind that in turn warrants a reexamination of what it is to be human, the obligations we have to one another, and the ends we ought to pursue in social and political life.

II. Dystopophobia

The fact that humankind possesses the power to destroy itself (most evocatively through nuclear explosions) motivates this research. The death of hundreds of millions of humans in a nuclear conflagration, followed for the remaining people by decades of grueling existence perilously close to brink of death through disease, starvation, or murder at the hands of other survivors, until we (along with much animal life on the earth) eventually peter out of existence is amongst the worst ends that can befall humankind. A post-apocalyptic world like that following a catastrophic nuclear war is a dystopia – a very bad or just about the worst place – in which people could conceivably live, and so the desire to avoid such bad outcomes can and has figured in political argumentation and popular imagination.[2]

A post-apocalyptic world is not the only possible type of dystopia. The twentieth century notably contained murderous and incompetent political regimes including Stalinist

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[2] As a handful of examples of post-apocalyptic dystopias consider Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), and the BBC film *Threads* (1984), that tracks the disintegration of the "threads" that bind together modern society in the wake of a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and United States.

Russia and Mao's China during the famines of the Great Leap Forward that left huge swaths of the population perilously close to death through disease and starvation and under the constant fear of arbitrary death at the hands of the state. Here, it is not the entirety of humanity that faces annihilation, as in the case of nuclear war, but the omnipresence of the totalitarian state combined with the threat of death combine to create a dystopian world for those living in it that is similarly harrowing, nonetheless.[3] As will be discussed in chapter two, twentieth century fiction is replete with fictional dystopias that capture some quality of the badness of dystopia, including, for example, the corruption of language in Orwell's *1984* with the use of "doublespeak," and the empty placation of the population through the drug "soma" in Huxley's *Brave New World*.[4]

In light of these remarks about the idea of dystopia, at this early stage we can lay out a handful of forms that can be taken by dystopia – that is, the different forms of very bad or even the worst social and political outcomes. In the first place a dystopia can be *descriptive*: an account of the ways in which the society in which the thinker already lives is evil or cruel. Secondly, dystopia can take a *theoretical* form, as part of a broader theory of how the world functions. An example of this includes Marx's account of capitalism as a dystopia that immiserates the people and in so doing digs its own grave (Marx & Engels 1978, 483). Thirdly, dystopia can be *projective*: a projection of how society will continue to degrade over time often from utopia or reasonably good circumstances into dystopia. One sees this in the three panels of Hieronymus Bosh's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, and in

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[3] The nineteenth century was little better for many people. Until the 1860s four million people were enslaved in America and forced to work under constant threat of mutilation, rape, family separation, and murder (Hahn 2003; 2016, 43-78). And in the United Kingdom, the process of urbanization during the Industrial Revolution had produced cities like Manchester in which hundreds of thousands lived in squalor (Engels 2005).

[4] For a comprehensive account of dystopian literature from this period one might consult Clayes (2017, 447-461).

Rousseau's account of the creation of society in *The Second Discourse* (1997). Finally, a dystopia could be *hypothetical*: a mental construction independent of the way the world actually is or is likely to function designed to reveal qualities of human life. E.g. Thomas Hobbes' account of the state of nature in Chapter 13 of *Leviathan*.

In addition to this, an account of dystopia can play several different roles or functions within a political theory. Invoking dystopia is often a *rhetorical* strategy designed to solicit support from others. In political theory one can look to the "history of repeated injuries and usurpations" listed in the Declaration of Independence as a rhetorical device to discredit the British monarchy and thereby engender support for revolution. In addition to this, the use of a dystopia can be *educative*, by giving an account of the passions and vices that animate individuals and cause them to act in harmful ways. It can also give an account of the specific distribution of evils in society, and raise the consciousness of the reader by making them aware of the particularly dire plight of specific subsections of society. Finally, an account of dystopia can be *analytical*: a claim that acts as a premise within a broader set of argumentation. On this point, Judith Shklar's claim in *Ordinary Vices* (1984) that a cruel society is the worst that one can experience acts as a premise that can then be employed as part of a larger theory or argument, as she puts forward in *Liberalism of Fear* (1989). Here dystopia can do several things including, lend credibility to an argument about an end to avoid, to criticize existing society, or to justify existing norms and laws.

This text elevates a handful of political ideals and human self-conceptions that warrant attention, if one is to think and act politically with one eye firmly focused on avoiding bad outcomes, such as the destruction of humanity, totalitarian dystopias, and

lives of immiseration and suffering in society. One of these concepts has already been mentioned: *power*. Humanity is a powerful species with the remarkable ability to profoundly influence the well-being and the survival of individuals, nations, and even entire species (our own and otherwise). A second important concept of consideration is *responsibility*. In the first place, humans have a considerable *causal responsibility* for the outcomes in the world. To be sure, we are not omnipotent. However, whether the world is a better or worse place – and, indeed, whether life on Earth exists at all – is within our collective power to a degree never before seen in history. In the second place, there is an important *moral responsibility* that follows from the fact that humanity has the power that it does. If, through its political apparatuses, humanity possesses the power to influence outcomes (for better or worse), and, if humans possess some form of moral dignity or moral equality that ought to count in our practical reasoning about how to deploy these political apparatuses, there is a moral responsibility to ensure that this power is not misused in ways that contravene this moral quality of human beings. This is to say that humanity cannot abuse its power with abandon and remain in good moral standing. We therefore have reason to think hard about how we act politically, and, as I claim in this text, we have especial reason to think hard about the ways in which our political actions and structures may likely harm others.

This is a work of political theory and as such the object of discussion is *political*: the terms of social cooperation and the use of political tools, such as public policy, the judicial system, taxation and spending.[5] In spite of the fact that it is not a work of moral or

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[5] It is worth also noting that although the object of discussion is political, as a work of political theory the text remains theoretical. It does not contain, in the most part, particular prescriptions about how specific elements of society ought to be organized or comparative discussions of the empirical virtues of different forms of government and society. Instead the purpose of this text is to prompt the reader to reconsider the way they

ethical theory designed to identify principles of *individual* moral action, the individual nonetheless remains an object of intense concern in this text. Thus far, emphasis has been placed upon the existential risk to all of humanity *collectively* and gestures have been made towards the actions by governments (rather than individuals) that have influenced the existential risk that humanity collectively confronts, e.g. by denying climate change and developing nuclear weapons. It is important to make clear, however, that as a work of modern political theory it is taken as axiomatic here that it is the individual that is the locus of moral consideration. Indeed, the fact that a polity may collapse does not matter on this view *because* polities (like, say, Germany, Thailand, or Chile) have intrinsic value that gives independent reason to be protected. Instead, we have reason to concern ourselves with how these polities do (whether they collapse in a dystopian conflagration, for example) because the individuals within those countries, who *are* the objects of moral concern, will be affected by such a collapse.

In light of the methodological individualism[6] at the core of this text (and as will become apparent in especially later chapters), this dissertation engages in thinking about

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think about the political, independently of how they may choose to implement the new or refined ways of thinking they develop (or, indeed, do not develop) by reading this text.

[6] There is debate over the precise meaning and features of methodological individualism and so it is worthwhile to distinguish the way in which I am using the term as a morally loaded methodology from the sociological function it plays in much of the literature. The term first emerged as a feature of good *explanatory method* in social science in Max Weber's *Economy and Society* (1968), where he makes the case that social phenomena are and should be interpreted as the product of actions by individuals. (For more on this history see Heath, 2015.) Hobbes is a clear progenitor of this method in his description of the state of nature as the product of fear experienced by individuals without the protection of government, and in his account the formation of the the state by the contract between those same people. Karl Popper also endorses the sociological view of methodological individualism with his assertion in Book II of *The Open Society* that, "all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and . . . we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives'" (2013, 309). This is the account of methodological individualism that Steven Lukes takes from Popper in his important article on this subject (1968, 120), and Lukes is right that here Popper presents an account of methodological individualism as a tool of explanation in sociology. This is not, however, the methodological individualism that this dissertation exercises. Instead, the focus upon the individual in *this* text draws far more from Popper's account of the

avoiding bad outcomes in politics at two levels. The first is the level of the *polity*: that, as in the example above, we should concern ourselves with whether a country like the USA is, for example, stable because (at a fairly high level of abstraction) a well-functioning state protects (to greater or lesser degrees) the individual citizens within that polity from bad outcomes. To put the point the other way around: a malfunctioning polity – through, for example, civil war, bloody revolution, or cooption by nefarious powerful interests within society – is a clear and pressing threat to the well-being of citizens. At this first level, then, concern with the individual is indirect; concern falls upon the general properties of the polity as they in turn impact the well-being of citizens. The second is concern with avoiding bad outcomes at the level of the *individual directly*. Assuming the polity is minimally well-functioning, it is then possible to ask, what policies or political choices will make the lives of citizens within the polity go better or worse? This is a text about avoiding bad outcomes rather than (in the first place) achieving good outcomes, and so, at this second level, it is

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importance of individualism in Book I of *The Open Society*, and in particular its counter-position against collectivism. On Popper's reading, Plato's collectivist view of society in *The Republic* identified justice with the harmonious functioning of the polity – in particular, each of the three groups in society minding its own business in order that the polis as a whole is stable, unified, and healthy. This account of justice as the harmonious functioning of society misunderstands justice and moral thinking as a problem of the relationship between and actions of groups within the polity, rather than more accurately as about a "certain way of treating individuals" (Popper 2013, 97). Disputes over justice and moral and value disagreements in the political sphere are, on the individualist account, problems that involve "the impartial weighing of the contesting claims of individuals," rather than the claims of groups or the functioning of the whole (2013, 101). It is the individual and not the state or any aggregation of persons that is the primary source of moral concern – that is to say, the repository of moral value like dignity and moral equality. As it is individuals that possess these properties like dignity that deserve respect and generate duties, it is with final reference the individual that all political thinking must be justified. As an example of this form of morally loaded methodological individualism done well in a non-human context, I commend Martha Nussbaum's research on the moral obligations humans have towards non-human animals (2004, 357-366) in which she sets out human duties to animals not as a set of duties to protect and preserve animal *species*, but instead as a duty to individual animals within each species that, in turn, has the effect of protecting different animal species. It is worth noting Nussbaum's stress upon individuals rather than higher level groups in regards to animals is itself a product of the feminist objection that other forms of groups (like the family) often contain oppressive hierarchies that are incompatible with justice and would be uncritically preserved and internal criticism wrongly disregarded if the family were taken as the primary unit of social organization, rather than the individual (Okin 1989, 89-109; Nussbaum 1999, 118-29).

possible to search for possible ways to protect the individual from experiencing bad things

or to liberate them bad things they already are experiencing.[7]

By working through these ideas and concepts that are relevant to the fact that

humanity has the power to destroy and immiserate itself (at the level of the polity and the

individual), and by placing them in a theoretical framework, this dissertation takes an

important step towards the production of a political theory oriented around avoiding bad

outcomes. I have entitled this way of thinking "dystopophobia." This term is, of course, a

portmanteau of "dystopia" and "phobia" each of which captures some component of the

framework I put forward at the end of this text. (The term "dystopophobia" is also a play

on term "utopophobia" that David Estlund introduces in his defense of ideal theory as a

methodological approach in political thought, which has bearing upon the methodological

approach adopted in this text.[8])

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[7] In spite of what was said already, a skeptical reader may skill balk at the focus on the individual here. This section of the chapter opened by discussing dystopia as a place or form of society that affects many different people within that society. By talking about the harm one can cause to others and whether one person does better or worse, though, there is a much more individualist focus on the outcomes for individuals within society (perhaps, irrespective of whether that society is a dystopia). One might object, then, that by talking about the individual in this way, this text is departing from the initial focus upon dystopia and, in particular, aversion to dystopia. Accordingly, they might say, it is a malapropism to use term "dystopophobia" as a catch all term that includes any kind of aversion bad outcomes for a handful of individuals in an otherwise non-dystopian society. If one is so inclined, I certainly encourage any such reader to pursue a more tightly-focused line of research focused only on bad societies (as a single unit of analysis) as the thing to be avoided, rather than including bad outcomes for individuals. That being said, I will here insist that focus on the condition of only one individual is not sufficient to detach the analysis from questions of dystopia. To see this, consider the example given in Ursula Le Guin's short story, *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, where the prosperity of the city of Omelas is contingent on the perpetual misery of one child who is kept locked in a basement within the city (2015, 254-63). Here, all persons but one have high levels of well being, so to worry about the misery of the people in society is necessarily individualist as only one person suffers. However, a society founded upon a social contract that demands the sacrifice of one child by condemning it to a life of perpetual misery is dystopian in at least one fundamental way; indeed, perhaps in a way that corrupts the entire society making the entire edifice upon which it is built dystopian.

[8] In his book *Democratic Authority* (2008), Estlund advances an account of democracy as an epistemic procedure constrained by democratic principles in which democracy's value comes in large measure from its ability to produce good decisions. His is an aspirational ideal of democracy that requires individuals participate politically without merely advancing their own self-interest and so Estlund confronts the objection that his theory is too idealistic, or too utopian to ever be applicable in practice. People are just too selfish and to expect more, as he does, is Pollyannish. In response to this, Estlund notes (2008, 258-75) that normative theories, if they are to do more than just sanction the *status quo*, exist on some scale of likely to be realized

Taking the two components of "dystopophobia" in order: following the standard OED definition a dystopia is a usually imagined place in which everything is very bad and undesirable. Although imagination is an important component of political thinking, the concern in this text is far more concrete: the ways in which the world *has* gone wrong; the ways in which humanity *has* been immiserated by its own actions; and, the fact that humanity *may yet* leads to its own demise. Consequently, to the extent that dystopias are imagined places rather than real, the word dystopia is infelicitous. Moreover, to the extent that dystopias are largely conceived of as places in which *everything* is bad for everyone (often aside from a sliver of the population in the ruling class) it does not quite capture thinking at the second level given above, in which society is minimally well-functioning and the political question to be answered is how to reduce the immiseration of some portion of individuals within that otherwise well-functioning society. That being said, foregrounding the word "dystopia" correctly orients the political thinking in this text as the attempt to avoid bad outcomes, with dystopia as a familiar concept that readers recognize as something to be avoided.

A "phobia" is a strong aversion, often seen as an *irrational* fear, like arachnophobia: the irrational fear of spiders. If dystopophobia were irrational or hysterical – constantly

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to unlikely to be realized in practice. Although a theory like his may fall on the latter end of the scale, as long as it is not impossible, this does not detract from the normative necessity of true theories. As he says, ought implies can; "it is not the case that ought implies reasonably likely" (2008, 265). To be sure, there are reasons to want to avoid producing a theory that is unreasonably demanding and very unlikely to be actualized, but, he claims, many cases in which normative theories are criticized as excessively utopian do not fall into that category. In these cases, the criticism of these theories as utopian reflects not a deficiency in the theory but instead a deficiency in the critic. These critics are expressing a "complacent realism in order to avoid utopianism [that] would suggest an irrational utopophobia, or exaggerated fear of utopianism" (2008, 259). By inverting Estlund's concept of utopophobia, this dissertation approaches normative theorizing from the opposite direction. The aim in not to advance an ideal that may be realized in practice, but instead make the case for a fairly realist framework of political thinking that identifies bad outcomes that are likely to occur during the normal function of society and actions of individuals that government is warranted in preventing from materializing.

warning of impending disasters that never materialized – then it would be similarly irrational to divert time and resources to combat the dystopophobic warnings. But, some threats are real and if we, as a society, actually listened to our Cassandra-like figures then it may be possible to avoid great calamities and dystopia – see Clarke & Eddy (2017) for an example of this kind of approach. Similarly, if individuals actually are living dystopian lives characterized by great misery and hardship then we have real reason to listen to them, and work in ways to help them. Consequently, dystopophobia should be thought of as a rational phobia to a very bad possible situation that can befall a person or a society: dystopia.

The idea at the heart of this dystopophobic framework of political thinking is a simple one: there are some things that are bad – such as the end of the species or debilitating disease – and we therefore ought to avoid these bad things. In the most general terms this text advances the loose principle that: *a primary aim of government is to intervene to minimize likelihood of dystopia and to assist those whose lives are dystopian*. There is, of course, much ambiguity in this statement. I say *a* primary aim – not the only or main end – of government is to avoid bad outcomes, so it is necessary to place avoiding bad outcomes in a hierarchy with other plural values (like ensuring legitimate government or achieving good outcomes).[9] It is not clear at the outset exactly who or what government is, and this term remains fairly vague in order to keep it capacious – the expected function of government has grown over the generations to encompass more areas of what had

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[9] We can also ask: how aggressive should we be in avoiding bad outcomes? Does this entail protecting people from the negative consequences of *all of their actions*? Or would such interventionism be an affront to the integrity of individuals' lives or their conceptions of themselves as self-authors? On the idea of integrity as a moral concept with independent value see Hampshire (1971, 232-251) and Williams (2008, 108-118); on the idea of self-authorship see Tomasi (2012, 87-99).

previously been considered private life, and it may continue to do so in the future, and so, in light of this, I do not want to foreclose at this early stage the possibilities of application for the dystopophobic concern to avoid bad things. Further, there are questions about whether *avoiding* bad outcomes is more important than *rescuing* those people who are *already in* bad situations. Also, what is a bad outcome? Can we expect agreement in these value claims about goodness and badness? Do things like the fact of reasonable pluralism in modern societies (Rawls 1996, 24 n.27) preclude agreement on these matters, or circumscribe the attempt to minimize bad outcomes only to the most extreme matters of life and death? And, even if there is agreement about the bad ends to avoid, should we expect agreement over the means to accomplish the agreed upon goal of avoiding those ends?

These are important questions that will be responded to and elaborated upon – to a greater or lesser degree – over the course of this text. Before this, let me briefly reject a possible dismissive skeptic who might say that avoiding bad outcomes is not merely a simple thesis, but it is a tautologous and fatuous one; after all, it is an intrinsic quality of bad things that they ought to be avoided, so to elevate that to a central principle to organize the terms of social cooperation belies a certain immaturity in one's thinking. In response, consider the example of Jeremy Bentham, who claims in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), that "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure," and the actions of individuals and government ought to follow a principle of utility to raise pleasure and happiness, and diminish pain and suffering (1789, 14-15). In defense of these claims Bentham says that never has there been a "human creature… breathing, however stupid or perverse, who has

not on many, perhaps on most occasions of his life, deferred to it," thereby conceding the obviousness and even the triviality of the principle of utility (1789, 16). So, his premise is obvious and simple, such that no human creature no matter how stupid has not deferred to it. Nonetheless, in attaching to government the obligation to raise utility, Bentham ushered in a radical reconceptualization of government and its role in the life of its citizens. In just 50 years, utilitarian reformers would use his ideas to inform British policymaking in ways that reverberate to today. For example, Sir Edwin Chadwick, who in his younger years acted as Bentham's research assistant, was a principal agent in the drafting of the 1834 Poor Law Reform Act, which removed the parish from the provision of poor relief, and instead directed relief through the system of workhouses so terrible that only the most desperate would use them. A decade later Chadwick was also instrumental in drafting the Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, which was foundational to the 1848 public health act that created a series of public works projects to improve public sanitation, especially in cities, in order to curb the spread of infectious diseases like cholera and typhus. This was the first time the British government accepted responsibility for the health of its citizens (Flinn 1965, 8), which is an obvious prerequisite for the creation, one hundred years later, of the National Health Service that now cares for over sixty million Britons. Here, then, is a prominent example of the way in which persistent analysis of an apparently obvious and trivial fact can produce profound social and political outcomes. The succeeding chapters of this dissertation give some further reason to be optimistic that similar (and, in the case of the workhouse, hopefully better) impacts upon social and political life may occur if dystopophobia were given a similar treatment.

III. Methodology

Although I have put forward the broad principle that a primary aim of government should be to minimize bad outcomes, what follows is not a work of political theory aimed at producing a single set of political principles that ought to order all (or a portion of) society. John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* is the preeminent point of reference for this comprehensive ordering approach. He opens the book with the claim that, "A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust," (2008, 3) and he sets out two principles of justice that society must be reformed to correspond with (2008, 302-3). While there is much to applaud in Rawls' methodology, one will not find in this text a single set of principles or a governing theory that orders all our normative thinking in politics.

A second possible approach is labeled by G. A. Cohen as the "Oxford approach" to political theory (in contradistinction to Rawls' Harvard approach), according to which, "we determine the principles we are willing to endorse through an investigation of our individual normative judgments on particular cases, and while we allow that principles that are extensively supported by a wide range of individual judgments can override outlier judgments that contradict those principles, individual judgments retain a certain sovereignty" (Cohen 2008, 4). On this second view, a single ordering of all of one's normative judgments will forever be elusive as those judgments comprise normative bedrock, and it is quite possible that in many cases it is impossible to fulfil the demands of each of these normative judgments concurrently – radical pluralism is our fate. With Cohen, this text does not advance nor expect to find a single political theory comprised of

a handful of principles aimed at avoiding bad outcomes that ought to be used to permanently order political life.

Even if it were possible to produce a clear, robust, and ostensibly bedrock set of normative principles pertaining to avoiding bad outcomes, and even if these principles rightly ought to order some portion of political life, aversion to bad outcomes does not exhaust political and individual virtues. As avoiding bad outcomes is only one end that society can and ought to pursue, these principles pertaining to avoiding bad outcomes must play only a part (even if it is a large part) in our political organization. This is to say that it would be an impoverished society that set as its only end the avoidance of bad outcomes at the expense of other values including, legitimacy, human rights, equality, fairness, democracy, productivity, creativity, integrity, and compassion. Indeed, such a society would be rather dystopian.[10] So, then, the purpose of this text is to elevate considerations, normative judgments, political principles that address the end of avoiding bad outcomes, but not to the exclusion of other political values like equality, fairness, or compassion. That being said, the end of avoiding bad outcomes does not exist in some hermetic vacuum independently of these other values. Indeed, attention to the importance of avoiding bad outcomes can produce new insights into these other political values.[11] In this text, extended

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[10] As an example of this kind of dystopia consider the movie Equilibrium (2002), in which conflict between people and nations is prevented by requiring all persons take a drug that keeps them in a state of emotional placidity that, along with violent tendencies, leads to a diminution in positive emotions like love and precludes appreciation of creative beauty like art and music.

[11] Consider, for example, Jeremy Bentham's prompt about the moral standing of animals in a footnote to Chapter 17 of his *Principles of Morals and Legislation*. He asks, "The question is not Can they reason? or Can they talk? but Can they suffer?," and by answering in the affirmative that animals can indeed suffer, Bentham raises the moral standing of animals in his utilitarian calculus to a par with humans. Here, then, Bentham elevates of the importance of suffering and avoiding harm in ethical thinking and rearranges the moral and conceptual framework around this idea by bringing animals into *a* level of moral quality with humans, by inviting readers to extend qualities like compassion to animals when they may not have otherwise, and by threatening to displace otherwise predominant ideas about the relationship between humans

focus upon this idea of avoiding bad outcomes raises several interesting reconsiderations of, and suggests possible revisions to, other political values including stability.

So, this text shares some methodological affinity with Cohen's account of the Oxford approach to political theory, in particular the use of one's normative judgments on particular cases to produce new normative political insights, including political principles. There is, however, a minor divergence between Cohen's methodology and that used in this this text when it comes to the selection of cases through which to probe one's normative thinking. For his part Cohen is deeply philosophical in his willingness to engage in abstract thought experiments and hypothetical counterfactuals in order to prime his normative thinking. Though this text does not shy away from philosophical thinking in this way, such cases are not relied upon as the primary source of material for normative thinking. Instead, this text takes a hybrid historical-theoretical approach to the question of dystopophobia. The primary source of insight and the main prompt for thinking about avoiding dystopia and bad outcomes are the theories of Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke, and Karl Popper. The approach is historical to the extent that each of these thinkers were selected as figures who lived through a periods of political turmoil including civil war, revolution, the rise of fascism and then world war. For each of these thinkers, the possibility of society's collapse and descent into dystopia is a real one, and it informs their respective philosophies.

There is excellent work that is primarily *historical* by tracking precisely how contemporary events including civil war have influenced the theories of important political thinkers. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, Alison McQueen's recent book *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (2018) commendably demonstrates the impact of

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and animals, such as the religious view in Genesis 1:26 that humans ought to have dominion over the animals of the land and sea.

contemporary apocalyptic fervor upon the tone and content of Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Hans Morgenthau's political thought. Here, though, the approach is slightly different to her primarily *historical* approach. Hobbes, Burke, and Popper are selected as three thinkers from different centuries who wrote political works in response to and in an attempt to prevent the collapse of civilization as they knew it.[12] However, rather than dwell on the historical circumstances, as McQueen does, this text approaches the *theories* of the respective thinkers as the primary object of concern. It is assumed that the theories of these thinkers were intended to be internally coherent, cogent, and to a greater or lesser degree produced with the purpose of organizing society in order to avoid bad outcomes. In light of this status of the theories, they are treated as a fair object of analysis in their own right, in order to get a sense of how aversion to bad outcomes fits into political thinking. Starting with the theories of these thinkers, this dissertation then reads back from these theories insights into how these thinkers viewed society, the threat of dystopia, and the reasons how and why such bad outcomes ought to be avoided. I ask, what in the moral, social, and political theory of these three thinkers explains and justifies their emphasis upon avoiding bad outcomes and human misery, rather than searching for ideals of justice and utopia? What philosophical and political beliefs, concepts, or strings of argument shared by these thinkers make their theories effectively focused upon avoiding bad outcomes? I ask these questions with the intention to tease out several shared features in the philosophy of the three that sit at the heart of what I dub a dystopophobic political approach.

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[12] Thomas Hobbes says in *De Cive* that he writes in the hope that the text will cause the reader to "patiently put up with some inconveniences in your private affairs… rather than disturb the state of the country," and "think it better to enjoy your present state (though it may not be the best) rather than go to war" (2011, 13-4). Karl Popper describes the writing of *The Open Society* as part of his "war effort" (2010, 115).

This methodology is not without concerns. One might worry that that because of the limits of space, a treatment of the theories of these canonical and thoroughly researched thinkers risks repeating fairly established summaries that does not break new ground. I am deeply sensitive to this concern and accept that at times this approach does often rehash familiar interpretations. That being said there is something original to the act of foregrounding the concern with dystopia and the possibility of social regression or collapse in the thinking of these philosophers. This foregrounding influences the emphasis placed upon certain portions of the texts of the respective thinkers, the identification and stress upon particular themes and ideas in these thinkers and, finally, by treating these thinkers together – by identifying overlaps in the thinking of each of them as it pertains to dystopophobia – the text is not merely repeating established interpretations.

To give more detail: McQueen's focus on the religious idea of apocalypse causes her to dedicate considerable attention to the final book of Leviathan, in which theological issues are addressed in detail. By contrast, as the account of dystopia of concern in this text is broadly secular – that is to say, it is concerned with how human beings can influence one another, rather than, say, the observance of the particular tenets of different religions – the first two books of *Leviathan*, the entirety of *De Cive*, and *Behemoth* produce the most useful material to prompt thinking. In regards to Burke, for example, even though his writings on representation and the development of his particularist philosophy are original and profound, I deemphasize his writings from the middle-period of his life on the topic of British policy regarding India and America in which these are refined in favor of his early writings on the limits of philosophy as a methodology, and his later writings on the French Revolution and after. Finally, Popper's *Open Society and its Enemies* is rightly (and

unoriginally) placed at the center of this interpretation of his political work as a repudiation of totalitarianism and defense of liberal societies as a bulwark against dystopia. However, this is supplemented with reference to the entire corpus of his writings, including, importantly, only recently compiled volumes of his otherwise unpublished writings and speeches up until his death, almost 50 years after writing the *Open Society*. All this goes to show that the focus upon dystopia in particular portends to some original insights by shifting the focus of attention within the writings of the respective authors.

As a final response to the originality concern, even if the *individual analysis* in the independent chapters is fairly pedestrian and fails to break new ground, *this work taken as a whole*, and the connection of the different thinkers and identification of shared points of concern and interest between them weaves the thinkers together in a particular and probing way that tells a new story about the aversional thinking that is held in common between them. It is in this way, the approach promises to be original and insightful and so I leave the proof of the pudding to be found in the eating.

IV. Outline of the Text

In order to better understand the role that aversion to bad outcomes can play and has played in political thinking, the text is organized as follows. The next chapter, chapter two, is a literature review that covers research into an aversional orientation in political thought. This chapter two does several things. It starts with an overview of contemporary theorizing about dystopia as as a concept in its own right, and I summarize several examples of places in which the idea of avoiding bad outcomes has played a role in non-political academic research. The chapter then turns to the work of handful of political theorists who, in their

own ways, have made important intellectual contributions to the idea that a primary goal of government should be to avoid bad outcomes rather than achieve good ones. Jonathan Allen's application of "negative morality" to political theory is an important example of a theorist engaging with the same ideas explicated in this text (2001). Further, Judith Shklar's "Liberalism of Fear," (1991) – along with her other work on injustice and her research stemming from *Ordinary Vices* (1984) – play a central role as a touchstone for political theorizing in this way and influence the project undertaken here. I then return to Alison McQueen's recent book, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (2018), where I distinguish her research from mine by emphasizing the difference in methodology and in subject matter. Finally, Michael Goodhart's new book, *Injustice: Political Theory for the Real World* (2018), is discussed in relation to this project. Goodhart's contribution is to criticize ideal moral theorizing as the aspiration towards justice or an ideal of society, rather than (as Shklar notes in her own work) treating injustice as concept with qualities that are independent of justice and therefore warrant independent research (1990). Goodhardt also proposes an alternative democratic system of thinking about injustice, which makes his book a helpful guide and frame for thinking about dystopia and the things worthy of avoiding in politics that I return to at times throughout this dissertation. Between these thinkers, it is worth taking away the insight that the line of research exploring an aversional form of political thinking pursued in this dissertation is timely as it engages with a lively and diverse area of discussion, and offers to this debate something new and welcome.

Hobbes, Burke, and Popper are, of course, thoroughly modern thinkers, and so, by dedicating most of this text to an analysis of their work, this is a thoroughly modern piece of political thought. That being said, ancient societies faced catastrophes and political

arguments and ideas were often addressed in aversional terms – as bad ends to avoid rather than good ends to achieve – and so it is worthwhile as an act of contextualization to get a sense of these terms of thought. The third chapter briefly charts relevant moments and political disputes from the ancient period, including the collapse of Agean civilization at the end of the Bronze Age, the plague that spread through Athens during the Peloponnesian War, and examples of arguments couched in terms of avoiding bad outcomes in the writings of Socrates, Plato, Cicero, and Augustine.

Chapters four, five and six comprise the main body of this text. Here I engage with the work of Hobbes, Burke, and Popper in close detail in order to tease out from them insights and to prompt thinking about the virtues of organizing the polity around avoiding bad outcomes. Chapter four argues that Hobbes's account of the state of nature is interesting not merely because of the specific qualities of anarchy in producing lives that are nasty, brutish, and short. In addition to this, the state of nature is an insightful construct by presenting the reader with what I have coined as *the circumstances of dystopia*: a second order account of the circumstances that tend towards dystopia by making social cooperation very difficult and dangerous, to the mutual disadvantage of the people within these circumstances. Much of the chapter is dedicated to a reinterpretation of Terence Ball's account of the "communicative basis of political order" in Hobbes' writing (Ball 1995, 90). It does this in order to demonstrate that a focus upon the idea of dystopia furnishes new insights, in this case, by showing how concepts can flip their valences from positive to negative in the move from normal to dystopian circumstances, which helps explain how the communicative basis of political order becomes fractured as societies become dystopian.

Chapter five makes the case that Burke pitches his *Reflections* as a rearguard defense against the spread of revolutionary ideas to Britain and he does so in large part because he is acutely sensitive to the remarkable advantages that modern society brings to the people within it. That being said, he is also worried about the abuse of power by factions within society (especially those influenced by the newest trends in philosophy) who would threaten the advantages produced by society in their attempt to remake it. Furthermore, I identify in Burke's thinking a deference to society as a miracle of human ingenuity that is so complicated that it is beyond is beyond the capacity of a single person or philosophy to fully capture. He contributes to dystopophobic thinking by identifying an important asymmetry in between the ease of destroying that which is good with society against the difficulty of replacing that with something superior.

The sixth chapter analyzes Popper's principles of humanist ethics: Tolerance, No Tyranny, and Minimize Suffering. The first two of these fit within his liberal political thinking – his commitment to freedom, equality, and the like. Out of the three, the last – minimize suffering, rather than maximize happiness – stands apart as the most explicit expression of Popper's dystopophobic thinking. I explore his justification of this over the utilitarian aim to increase happiness, on the grounds that there is an asymmetry between the badness of suffering and the goodness of wellbeing and that suffering engenders moral demands to help. I explain Popper's dystopophobia as a product of his: anti-utopianism; concern with the unintended consequences of actions; his optimism about social and economic progress; and, finally, his commitment to anti-violence and endorsement of an ethos of reasonableness. The chapter ends with a defense of Popper's negative utilitarian

principle to minimize suffering from the powerful criticisms that leads to absurd conclusions.

Chapter seven briefly summarizes the conclusions about the form and function of dystopia in Hobbes, Burke, and Popper sketches a dystopophobic family resemblance shared between the three. At the core of this resemblance is the identification of an asymmetry between goodness and badness, and a conceptualization of political matters operating at two levels: 1) at level of society and the structures and institutions that organize society and avoid dystopia; and, 2) the level of the individual within society whose life can go better or worse. The chapter then presents a framework of dystopophobia serves the end of avoiding dystopian outcomes and is intended to act as a point of departure for further and more rigorous thinking on these matters. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on the relationship between conservatism and progressive improvement on this dystopophobic framework.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

I. Introduction

Dystopia is so closely intertwined with the concept of utopia that a review of the literature on the former necessarily involves some reflection upon its counterpart. Accordingly, section two of this chapter outlines a handful of commonly distilled insights from the idea of utopia and describes the recurring concern that utopia can degrade into dystopia. This is followed by a typology of dystopia that will be used to sort the different dystopian theories put forward by Hobbes, Burke, and Popper. Section three gives a brief account of aversional thinking in other disciplines before section four turns to political theory and the aversional thinking in the work of Judith Shklar, Allison McQueen, and Jonathan Allen, Michael Goodhart, Tommie Shelby, and the new Political Realism, including Bernard Williams. Section five integrates dystopophobia into the contemporary methodological debate in political theory over ideal vs. non-ideal theory. It is argued that although dystopophobia can have an idealizing quality to it (and does to varying degrees in the work of Hobbes, Burke, and Popper), dystopophobia actually turns the methodological critiques levelled against ideal theory into strengths that reinforce dystopophobia as a coherent and useful methodological approach in political theory with value for political practice. The chapter ends with a conclusion in section six.

II. Utopia and Dystopia

Utopianism in political theory in one form goes back to Plato's *Republic* where he constructed a city in speech, free from injustice and led by philosopher kings who, with

knowledge of the Idea of the Good, can steer the ship of state in that direction. In the centuries since utopian cities of all different forms and ends have been put forward, but, "[a]bove all," says Barbara Goodwin, "'utopia' denotes an elaborate vision of 'the good life' in a perfect society which is viewed as an integrated totality" (Goodwin & Taylor 1983, 16). The word "utopia" as Thomas More coined it is a play on the Greek word "eutopia," meaning the "good place," morphed into "utopia," meaning the "no place" (Clayes 2011, 59) and, because of this abstract and unreal quality, utopia served, for the longest time, a twin role as a means of criticism and justification. Utopia could be used to justify the present terms of social cooperation by reference to the past or reference to a hypothetical present; utopia could also be invoked as a means to constructively criticize the present via an ideal alternative (Goodwin & Taylor 1983, 24-7).[13]

This constrained role of utopia as a tool for justification and criticism changed with the French Revolution, however. The lesson learned by utopians was that the march of history was not inevitable, but instead could be directed and ideals of utopia realized in practice (Goodwin & Taylor 1983, 15). In this new world utopia became invested with an *aspirational* quality to be manifest in the world where possible, rather than an abstract ideal detached from reality. Importantly, the belief that utopia can be realized in the world presupposes a handful of general views about the nature of human social organization and the human ability to shape social cooperation. If utopia in political theory is to have a normative and "constructive" end, then this presupposes,

> "1) a conception of society as an artefact (unlike Nature), capable of being purposefully altered by man himself;

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[13] Goodwin also notes (1983, 27) that the present can be justified by reference to a worse future (dystopia), as in Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (2001) . Part of the purpose of this work is to refine and extend Goodwin's account of the use of dystopia given here.

2) the conviction that progress, *qua* improvement, is possible;
3) an analysis of socio-political life which is free from fatalism… the attitude which negates from the outset human attempts at change" (Goodwin & Taylor 1983, 23-4).[14]

These presuppositions share overlaps with the conception of dystopia and its importance in political theory that have already been made. In particular, the views that 1) society is capable of being altered by "man himself," and that 3) humankind ought not to be fatalist about its condition as change is possible overlap with parts of dystopian thinking outlined in the previous chapter. However, the second presupposition that progress is possible does not quite track perfectly. As an approach oriented around avoiding bad outcomes, there is little room in dystopophobia for an account of progress as an ideal good end to pursue. However, by inverting the second point from progress as improvement towards some good, a dystopophobic perspective is compatible with a view that regress towards some worse state of affairs is possible. Moreover, because this regress is often the product of human action, the dystopophobic equivalent of progress – by minimizing suffering and cases of dystopia in the world – can be made by training our attention upon these harmful actions, choices, and institutions and changing them in ways that mitigate the harms they cause.

From Utopia to Dystopia

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[14] In his book *From Utopia to Nightmare*, Chad Walsh gives a more comprehensive account of the presuppositions of the utopian political worldview (1962, 70-72). His account of the utopian worldview is relevant to this work as some of his presuppositions echo arguments made by Karl Popper. For example, the presupposition, "5. that the future holds a finite number of possibilities, which can be sufficiently foreseen for practical purposes" (1962, 71) is vigorously disputed by Popper in his arguments against historicism (2012, 7-9). For what it is worth, though, Goodwin's account is more concise as it omits some presuppositions that are not clearly necessary to the utopian worldview, such as the presupposition that "man is basically good" and that "man is a rational being and can become more so" (1962, 70-1). I therefore focus my treatment only on Goodwin's account.

For all the purported virtues of utopian thinking as a tool of criticism, justification, and of practical value as an end to be realized, it is a recurring criticism that utopian ideals often become corrupted and misapplied in practice, and therefore lead to dystopia in the real world (Babaee et. al. 2015). There are several ways by which utopian ideals can lead to dystopian practice.

Firstly, if we accept that a utopia is an "an elaborate vision of 'the good life' in a perfect society" (Goodwin & Taylor 1983, 16), then accounts of utopia can turn dystopian by being incomplete. These utopian visions may capture *some* qualities of the ideal society, say, respect for the moral equality of all persons, but fail to consider *all* that makes life valuable. So, for example, it is a recurring theme from Plato to More that a utopian society will do away with most forms of property ownership. As grossly unequal distributions of wealth can corrupt society and produce unfair and degrading asymmetrical power dynamics, one might be sympathetic to this end. But, despite the problems private property can engender, one may reasonably worry that abolition of all property may be undesirable because it would preclude enjoyment of the virtues of property in things like self-expression. On the most skeptical view, all utopian theories will always be incomplete because the essentially plural and incommensurable nature of human values entails that no single theory could ever simultaneously capture all that is good and valuable about life; there will always be trade offs and these inevitably have to be made on an *ad hoc* basis (Berlin 1991, 12). The worry in this case is that utopian theories elevate a handful of good values and ideals to general organizing principles for society that risks excluding and oppressing those who do not share those same values, or place them differently in the hierarchy of valuable ends.

Utopia can also lead to dystopia, secondly, by failing to adequately respond to the particulars of the real world. By assuming that the theory is correct, utopians can ignore data that contradicts the the utopian theory. A famous example of the detached utopian is the character of Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*, who obstinately believed that he lived in the best of all possible worlds even after being shown a litany of crimes and horrors from across the globe (2008). In the text Dr. Pangloss reads as delusional and foolish, but otherwise largely harmless. However, in the worst cases, these delusional utopians can act in harmful ways whilst believing they are doing good. In their pursuit of utopia these people may act wrongly on the grounds that it is impossible to make an omelette without breaking some eggs, whilst remaining blind to the quip that it is possible to break a lot of eggs without making an omelette (Arendt 1994, 275-6). The most damning analysis of this criticism maintains that there is something intrinsic to the idea of utopia itself that disposes utopian practitioners to adopt an attitude of blindness to the harms they are causing. As Aurel Kolani puts the point in *The Utopian Mind*, the end of utopia acts as a "spiritual shield and justification for the [utopian] programme and the tyrannical practices devoted to the aim of realizing it" (1995, 4; for a similar argument see also Popper 2002, 482).

In a way that follows from the point above, thirdly, utopia can turn into dystopia if it fails to adequately consider one specific fact: human nature. If a proposed utopia is designed for angels or would require considerable changes in human actions and motivations to work properly, then, when applied in practice, the utopian scheme will very likely fail and perhaps cause harm to the people within it. As an example of the demands of human nature consider Thomas Nagel's claim that although from an impartial perspective some ends, like eradicating economic inequality are desirable, it is a permanent

feature of the human condition that people have "powerful personal motives… [and that t]he maintenance of such a [utopian] system in the face of these motives seems to require pervasive governmental control of individual life…" (1991, 28-9). The upshot of this insight is that it is necessary to match utopia to reasonable expectations about human nature and what it is possible for human beings (rather than angels) to live under. A failure to reckon with the facts of human nature risks descending into repression and dystopia.

Moving on, in a point that will have relevance in the discussion of Hobbes in chapter four of this text, fourthly, the pursuit of utopia can turn into dystopia when good and desired things switch their axiological valence from good to bad. For example, the modern age has been lauded as a fantastic human achievement because of the use of rationality and technology to do many great things that improved the world, from modern communications, to consumer goods like the washing machine, through to Ford's production line process that made things like automobiles affordable. However, the twentieth century showed that these good things – rationality and technology – can be coopted and misapplied for evil ends, including the mobilization of the modern economy for total war that led to the deaths of tens of millions of people in World War Two, through to the meticulous rational planning of the Nazi Final Solution; Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* offers a literary example of this misapplication technology including surveillance to control the population for totalitarian political ends.

In addition to Orwell, Huxley's *Brave New World* is a really interesting example of the use of technology as in this latter text it is not clear that technology is being *mis*applied as a tool of control for the benefit of a sliver of society. Instead, technology including the drug Soma that produces feelings of euphoria in people were created as good things

intended to solve the human problem of pain and suffering. However, through their use, new problems emerge, in particular the failure of people to find authentic and spiritual belief, and so, with the use of Soma, life becomes vacuous and meaningless for citizens (for a recent overview of the interpretive literature on Huxley's *Brave New World* see Babee et. al. 2015, 66-8). Here something that was good – Soma – switches its valence from good to bad even without being misapplied by some central political body. This shows that consistent critical reflection is needed to ensure the ends pursued by utopians do not go awry and become self-defeating.

These insights into the limits of utopia and the way in which utopian thinking can lapse into dystopia has several consequences for a political theory oriented around avoiding dystopia. In the first place, a healthy skepticism of utopianism is warranted. One ought not to be too skeptical of utopia and descend only into a technocratic managing of pain and suffering or one risks – as in the case of Huxley's *Brave New World* – evacuating the world of aspirational ideals and the like that provide meaning and direction to life (Shklar makes a similar argument in *After Utopia*, 1957). That being said, it is imperative that the desire to remake the world – even in the quite circumscribed way of avoiding dystopia and suffering – not produce further harms as the utopian approach has. In addition to this, dystopian thinkers need to pay close attention to human nature – the general and potentially changing needs and qualities of humans – and human experience in order to ensure their efforts are adequately sensitive to the needs and ends of human life in the real world.

A Typology of Dystopia – Form & Function

At this early stage, then, let me distinguish between four forms of dystopia, each of which can play a helpful role in political theorizing, and can be combined with other forms and functions of dystopia in original and insightful ways.

Descriptive Dystopia: Firstly, dystopia can be a descriptive account of the already existing ghastly world. An example of this can be found in Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean Civil War, where he describes the depravity of humanity and the suffering experienced by people in these circumstances. This descriptive quality of dystopia is important as part of what makes dystopia so troubling is that it is close to us, as human history is marred by murderous regimes that brought great suffering upon their people and others. Unlike utopia, which is a no place, dystopia is a real place in human history, and for many people a lived daily experience, and this descriptive, real, and material quality of dystopia has methodological consequences for those who focus on it, rather than the abstract and hypothetical ideal of utopia.

Theoretical Dystopia: In addition to this, secondly, dystopia can take a *theoretical* form, as part of a broader theory of how the world functions. An example of this includes Marx's account of capitalism as a dystopia that immiserates the people and in so doing digs its own grave (Marx & Engels 1978, 483). This theoretical role of dystopia shares close affinities with descriptive accounts of dystopia above, but is slightly abstracted from the recounting of the facts to form a synthesis of those facts that explains their cause. By being abstracted in this way, theories of dystopia and those who propound them must be vigilant and remain sensitive to facts that bring into question the conclusions of the theory or else risk causing further harm by structuring society in response to these incorrect (or incomplete) theories.

Projective Dystopia: Thirdly, dystopia can be projective. In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, for example, contemporary norms and achievements like technological progress are extrapolated into an undesirable future. This projective character emerges in political thinkers, including Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* contains warnings about what would happen if Britain were to adopt the same rationalist framework of the French revolutionaries (1993).

Hypothetical Dystopia: Finally, dystopia can be hypothetical. For example, Hobbes' state of nature describes a counterfactual world that does not exist, but, because of its credibility as an account of how society (or anarchy) would function, reveals something about humanity and the kinds of duties and obligations individuals have. It is possible for accounts of dystopia to straddle several of these forms, as, for example, the best projections of dystopia start with some credible description of the contemporary world from which they extrapolate.

In addition to these four forms, dystopia can be invoked in several ways and serve several different functions.

Rhetorical Function: Firstly, dystopia can function as part of a rhetorical strategy to inflame the passions and win allegiance to one's political vision. This rhetorical quality to dystopia is analyzed by Allison McQueen through her meticulous contextualist research on apocalypse in political thought (2018), as discussed below.

Educative Function: As will be discussed below in relation to Johnathan Allen's "Negative Morality" (2001), dystopia can play an educative function. Accounts of dystopia can educate the reader by giving an account of the passions and vices that animate

individuals and cause them to act in harmful ways. It can also give an account of the specific distribution of evils in society, and raise the consciousness of the reader by making them aware of the particularly dire plight of specific subsections of society, such as, for example, the incarcerated. In addition to this, dystopian thinking can elevate victims as sources of knowledge about the dystopian qualities of the world by revealing to the reader the nature of the harms they have suffered and the impact these experiences have had on their lives.

Analytical Function: Finally, dystopia can function analytically as a fundamental premise in an argument – like Judith Shklar's assertion that cruelty is the worst thing that can happen to a person and that society must be organized to ensure it does not occur. Following Barbara Goodwin's account of the use of utopia, this last use of dystopia as an analytical tool can be refined into three parts.

- Dystopia can play a *justificatory* role. So, for example, Hobbes' dystopian account of the state of nature as a world without order established by an all-powerful sovereign is a means to justify duties of obligation and deference to the sovereign in England. This is to say that if one does not want to live in the dystopia of anarchy, then one ought to support the political system that prevents anarchy from emerging.

- Dystopia can play a *critical* role. By describing some of the worst qualities of dystopia critics can condemn the polity as a failure when it allows some of its citizens to live in precisely these conditions. As Tommie Shelby makes the case in *The Dark Ghetto* (2016) – and as is discussed below – the United States is an unjust political system as it permits an unfavored class of overwhelmingly black

citizens to live in ghettos characterized by a paucity of opportunity. Shelby criticizes the terms of social cooperation and institutions of the state present in the United States on the grounds that they create and perpetuate a kind of dystopia.

- Dystopia can play an *aversional* role. Recall that following the French Revolution, and the establishment of the belief that human history could be directed by human efforts, utopia came to be seen as an aspirational goal to be realized in practice. By contrast, as there is nothing desirable about dystopia, instead dystopia can serve an aversional function, as something to be avoided in politics.

Dystopian Societies; Dystopian Lives

In the literature, both utopia and dystopia often have an all-encompassing quality – an "integrated totality" in Goodwin's words (1983, 16). Utopias have solved all political disputes or made them irrelevant through material abundance, so all live together with great comity and happiness. On the other side, the most terrifying dystopias are those whose tentacles of control reach into every facet of life. This is made express in totalitarian political ideology, according to which the state intrudes upon both public and private life in order to direct individuals to the political ends of the state. So, on Gregory Claeys' estimation, for example, the German and Soviet systems were totalitarian by "erasing distinctions between ordinary and political crime," and by using a "network of informants to report dissent and instil paranoia… [and] in both systems, outcomes [of trials] were often predetermined after accusations were made, and individual rights were virtually non-

existent" (Claeys 2018, 238). And, while it is true that these systems of oppression spread through all of society, the harms of it were not evenly distributed. As Milton Mayer describes in the first decade after WWII, the slow habituation of Germans to the Nazi regime, led many ordinary Germans – that is to say, non-Communist, non-Jewish, etc. – to "think they were free" (Mayer, 1966). It is this often uneven quality of dystopia that I want to end this section by stressing.

The worst possible dystopia might be awful, stable, and enduring for all uniformly and inevitably, into perpetuity. But, of course, not all dystopias are like this. Sometimes dystopia can be localized and short-lived.[15] For example, the Peloponnesian War was a long war – lasting over 25 years – and it is the cause of the early death of hundreds of thousands of people. In it, though, there were discrete pockets of time for particular people in specific places that were dystopian to a degree matched by few others. The Corcyrean Revolution, for example – in which "there was death in every shape and form… [as] people went to every extreme and beyond it" – was a hell that was memorialized by Thucydides (1972, 241), translated by Thomas Hobbes and likely influenced his account of the state of nature 2000 years later.

In addition to the fact that dystopian societies can emerge and pass, it is worth noting that even within dystopian societies the harms experienced are not evenly distributed among the population. Some disfavored individuals and groups are often subject to disproportionate immiseration, either through purposeful actions or neglect.

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[15] As the character Elizabeth Holmes says in Emily St. John Mandel's post-apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven*, "I've been taking art history classes on and off for years… [there] you see catastrophe after catastrophe, terrible things, all these moments when everyone must have thought the world was ending, but all those moments, they were all temporary. It always passes" (St. John Mandel 2014, 248).

Because actual people experience misery and suffering within societies, it is important that what Judith Shklar calls the "irreducibly subjective quality" of suffering does not get washed out (Shklar 1990, 37). Rather than analyze concepts of good and bad on their intrinsic properties through thought experiments and reflection upon one's intuitions, real hard knowledge of who is suffering, why they say they are suffering, and asking how that specific suffering can be mediated is likely to be effective and worthwhile. Victims are real people, and their victimhood and experiences ought to be considered and taken seriously if one is to understand what is bad about dystopia, cruelty, and the bad ends that society ought to avoid for its citizens.

Dystopia, then, can operate at several different levels. Dystopia can afflict an entire society (and perhaps in post-apocalyptic circumstances the entire globe) and mete out cruelty and suffering to all its members, most of them, or just a disfavored subset of its members. Also, dystopia can overtake a small portion of society as Tommie Shelby describes the experiences of those who live in the ghettos of the US and therefore experience prejudice, fear for their own safety, and terribly diminished life chances (see below). Finally, suffering has an irreducibly subjective character and afflicts people on the individual level; it is possible to live in one's own private hell – perhaps, a hopeless drug addition that amongst other things has been described in the US as a causal factor in the spike in suicides that have been grouped together as deaths of despair (Case & Deaton 2017, 398). A dystopophobic theory must work at each of these levels.

III. Aversional Thinking Beyond Political Theory

Utopia and dystopia can be seen as two ends of a spectrum ranging from desirable to undesirable worlds in which people could conceivably live. So, too, is there a spectrum between aversion and attraction as it manifests in other areas of human thought and action. According to rational choice theory, for example, if one is to be rational one ought to deliberate and act in ways that maximize one's expected utility. There are numerous reasons for this focus on expected utility, including the argument that maximizing utility (rather than minimizing disutility) produces good outcomes in the long run (overview given by Briggs, 2014). In reality, however, people are not perfectly rational and, instead of attempting to maximize utility, humans are loss averse, so they and attempt to minimize their losses in many circumstances. There are many attempted explanations for this loss aversion, ranging from psychological conditioning (Coon & Mitterer 2010, 239), evolutionary selection (Okasha 2007, 223-9), to the development of decision heuristics (Tverski & Kahneman 1986; Kahneman 2011, 300-10). Irrespective of the precise reason for this general human tendency to avoid bad outcomes rather than maximize the good, this general tendency provides at least some superficial reason to think that dystopophobia (as an aversional political theory) is not hopelessly (and potentially dangerously) divorced from human nature.

Aversional thinking also emerges in the fairly new field of research covering the threat of existential risks to humanity. From one perspective, by invoking the specter of nuclear war in the introduction, this text treats the end of the world as we know it, and especially its replacement by a world filled with desperate scavengers trying to eke out bare subsistence (as in, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), for example) as a clear bad

state of affairs that, because it is bad, we have strong reason to avoid if we can. This suggests that in the case of the end of the world the balance should be struck to minimize possible suffering by falling into this post-apocalyptic dystopia. This is not the only way to think about the end of the world, though. From a different perspective, Nick Bostrom, whose work largely inaugurated existential risk as a field of contemporary study, makes the following contrary case. If one wants to maximize well-being (and in this way strike the balance decisively in favor of attraction to the good rather than aversion to the bad), then one should consider that with future advanced technology, potentially many trillions of happy lives could be sustained across the universe through a process of space colonization. A specious conclusion one could draw from this is that we therefore ought to develop these technologies as soon as possible in order not to suffer opportunity costs by delays in colonization. Bostrom, however, reaches another conclusion,

> "If what we are concerned with is (something like) maximizing the expected number of worthwhile lives… we have to take into account the risk of failure to colonize at all. We might fall victim to an existential risk, one where an adverse outcome would either annihilate Earth-originating intelligent life or permanently and drastically curtail its potential… For standard utilitarians, priority number one, two, three and four should consequently be to reduce existential risk. The utilitarian imperative 'Maximize expected aggregate utility!' can be simplified to the maxim 'Minimize existential risk!'" (Bostrom 2003, 310).

Here, the threat that future colonization may not occur at all entails that, as the potential utility payoffs are so large for space colonization, that the even the utilitarian maximizing utility ought to be loss averse by dedicating considerable resources to prevent an existential calamity and the suffering a post-apocalyptic outcome would entail. How much of our time and resources ought to be dedicated to avoiding existential risks is a point of debate, but because both dystopophobia and existential risk research share a primary and self-conscious commitment to avoiding the end of humanity, there are lessons a dystopophobic

approach can learn from the existential risk literature, that will be discussed in the conclusion to this dissertation.

Finally, aversion to disutility has had a marginal and often maligned role in moral philosophy and value theory. Standard aggregationist utilitarian frameworks operate on the same mode as rational choice theory with the premise that maximizing utility is more rational than minimizing disutility. The most stark argument in favor of this position comes in the form of R. N. Smart's critique of Popper's "negative utilitarianism" that sets as its goal minimizing suffering rather than maximizing pleasure. Smart remarks that one way to minimize suffering is to explode the world so there are no more suffering people, which is of course an absurdity (1958, 542). Smart's critique has had an enduring influence in moral philosophy, which is why chapter six of this dissertation is particularly important as it defends Popper against this line of attack.

Moving on to axiology, Simon Beard notes in a recent article that there has been deep skepticism of placing greater weight on the disvalue of pain than the value of pleasure at least since Parfit claimed in *Reasons and Persons* that such weighting leads to the "ridiculous" conclusion that people can have a worse life than others because of some suffering, even though as a whole their lives are of a much higher quality (Beard 2019; Parfit 1984, 407). In a similar skeptical vein Toby Ord, a research fellow at the Future of Humanity Institute argues that any form of value asymmetry between goodness and badness leads to incoherent conclusions. Ord works through asymmetrical accounts of the disvalue of suffering – from a strict lexical view that no amount of happiness can outweigh even the smallest harm, through to a weak practical position that in most cases alleviating suffering is more effective (Ord 2013). In response Simon Knuttson, a researcher at the

Foundational Research Institute – an organization dedicated to identifying cooperative and effective strategies to reduce involuntary suffering – takes the time to push back against each of Ord's claims (2018). Given the contentiousness of these axiological debates this dissertation operates from the assumption that these disagreements will not be resolved in any meaningful way in the near future, and so it is worthwhile to pursue a somewhat more political tact. Following Thomas Nagel's methodological remark in *Mortal Questions* that it is better to trust problems than solutions,[16] I work from the conviction that suffering and dystopia is a particular evil and that a primary aim of government ought to intervene to minimize likelihood of dystopia and to assist those whose lives are dystopian. Some philosophical arguments in favor of this position emerge later, especially in the Popper chapter. More than this philosophical conviction, though, the Hobbes, Burke, and Popper chapters each give some reasons why politically (rather than morally or ethically) minimizing the likelihood of dystopia and assisting those who live dystopian lives is a sound political end because of the qualities of political life (rather than philosophical truth).

IV. Aversional Thinking in Political Theory

There are numerous examples of political thinkers referring to and making suggestive comments indicating that the avoidance of great evil, dystopia, or terrible outcomes is at least relevant to their philosophy, even if not fundamental or overwhelming concerns. To take two examples given by Ege Tufan in his recent work: a primary aim in Arendt's *The Human Condition* is to prevent relapse into social terror by protecting public space in which

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[16] "If arguments or systematic theoretical considerations lead to results that seem intuitively not to make sense, or if a neat solution to a problem does not remove the conviction that the problem is still there… then something is wrong with the argument and more work needs to be done" (Nagel 1979, xi).

people can act publically, and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* includes the new imperative that political life be organized so that "Auschwitz would not repeat itself, [that] nothing similar would happen" (Adorno cited in Tufan 2017, 70). In light of this, one way to proceed might be to survey the history of political thought for snippets of such claims in the work of these thinkers and then attempt to stitch them together into some more-or-less coherent patchwork of aversional thinking. For my part, I doubt that such an approach would yield much insight. Instead the following sections focus on a handful of political thinkers who invoke aversion to bad outcomes as a *central* platform of their political thinking and try, in their own ways, to elaborate upon the methodological commitments of such an approach, the implications of such an approach for political theory as a discipline, and the substantive conclusions of such an approach.

Judith Shklar's *Liberalism of Fear*

When thinking about a political theory preoccupied – at least in the first place – with avoiding bad outcomes, Judith Shklar's work is an essential touchstone. As William Galston describes her position, Shklar endorses "anti-utopian skepticism and claim[s] that we should orient ourselves toward fear of the worst case rather than hope for the best" (Galston 2010, 386). Her most famous articulation of this position occurs in her slim article *Liberalism of Fear*, in which she asserts that her version of liberalism "…does not, to be sure, offer a *summum bonum* toward which all political agents should strive, but it certainly does begin with a *summum malum*, which all of us know and would avoid if we could" (1991, 29). Here, Shklar is determinate in her claim that the evil we ought to avoid is "cruelty and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself." (1991, 29). Shklar is at

pains to make clear that the account of cruelty she advances is not a moralistic or metaphysical notion of cruelty; this is not a moral philosophy to be applied to politics. Instead, Shklar surveys the history of humankind and notes, as an historical fact, that cruelty is a recurring and terrible feature of the human experience and that it is governments that are most egregiously cruel. She says, her theory is historical and political "because the fear and favor that have always inhibited freedom are overwhelmingly generated by governments, both formal and informal" (1991, 21), and so, if we are to liberate people from cruel and abusive government, we need to "prevent [the fear] which is created by arbitrary, unexpected, unnecessary, and unlicensed acts of force and by habitual and pervasive acts of cruelty and torture performed by military, paramilitary, and police agents in any regime" (1991, 29).[17]

Substantively, Shklar endorses a form of liberal politics that includes "a strong defense of equal rights and their legal protection" as the most effective bulwark against government abuse (1991, 37). A liberal order ought to contain "institutions of pluralist order with multiple centers of power and institutionalized rights," along with "institutions of representative democracy and an accessible, fair, and independent judiciary open to

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[17] Shklar's emphasis upon cruelty in *Liberalism of Fear* can be traced back to her earlier book *Ordinary Vices*, where she "ramble[s] through" (1984, 6) the vices of cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, betrayal, and misanthropy that have characterized the relationships between people since time immemorial. While humans may have a tendency to view themselves as good and just, the historical record demonstrates our simultaneous ability to mistreat others in devastating ways and in this way Shklar's text plays an educative role by demonstrating how human vices have functioned harmfully in the past. Out of all the forms of mistreatment, Shklar ultimately singles out cruelty as the most especially worst harm one can commit upon another human being and concludes that we ought to put cruelty first in our normative thinking. "To put cruelty first," she says, "is not the same thing as just objecting to it intensely. When one puts it first one responds as Montaigne did, to the acknowledgment that one fears nothing more than fear. The fear of fear does not require any further justification, because it is irreducible. It can be both the beginning and an end of political institutions such as rights" (1984, 237). Although she ends up selecting cruelty as the vice one ought to put first, her overview of all the vices through which individuals can harm others suggests a promising way to expand her aversional thinking.

appeals" that empowers citizens to "protect and assert one's rights" (1991, 37). Here, Shklar's object of concern and her proposed solution are highly circumscribed: it is the state that is the greatest threat to citizens and it is the power of the state that needs to be constrained through liberal institutions in order to prevent abuse. However, even if the state were the largest source of cruelty, there are voluminous literatures in the feminist scholarship dissecting the ways in which the family is all-too-often a site of cruelty and oppression that has an appreciable and persistent effect upon especially women across their entire lives (Okin 1989, 25-41). Further scholars influenced by Marxist philosophy effectively identify the cruel and degrading asymmetries in power between employers and employees. To focus only upon the state, then, risks being unduly narrow in one's focus. Further to this, one may question, as some have done, whether a preoccupation with cruelty to be avoided will ever be sufficient to produce a sound and attractive polity without further elevating ideals of justice, dignity, integrity, or a flourishing life (Walzer 1996, 17-25). Taken on its own, then, *Liberalism of Fear* is incomplete and needs to be supplemented by further arguments and ideas.

The book *Faces of Injustice* (Shklar 1990) also contains many valuable insights relevant to an aversional political theory. There Shklar's object of concern is injustice, rather than the *summum malum* of cruelty, but because injustice and an unjust society are bad outcomes and potentially dystopian places that one has reason to avoid, her insights here demand consideration. She makes the case there that the 'normal model' of political theory focuses on the idea of justice as "every volume of moral philosophy contains at least one chapter about justice…" (1990, 15). However, in all of these books and theorizing, the idea of injustice is not considered, which therefore misses a great deal about the human

political condition. One misses, she says, "the sense of injustice, and the many ways in which we all learn to live with each other's injustices tend to be ignored, as is the relation of private injustice to the public order" (1990, 15). She convincingly objects that a focus on justice and the rules and institutions of a just society is not an "adequate way of recognizing victims of injustice" (1990, 37). "Victimhood," she continues, "has an irreducibly subjective component that the normal model of justice cannot easily absorb," and in chapter three she elaborates upon the sense of injustice that all feel when unjustly treated and can act as an important data point in political thinking. This inversion of political thinking through a shift in perspective from the basic structure to victims is important: it is a fairly novel innovation that is shared by other emancipatory thinkers (see Goodhart, below); it forms a plank of her *Liberalism of Fear*, in her claim that "the most reliable test for what cruelties are to be endured… is to ask the likeliest victims" (1991, 35); and is independently identified by other aversional thinkers, including Karl Popper, who, as I discuss in chapter six, promotes a politics that consults citizens to find "where the shoe pinches" (2002, 178).

Further to this, Shklar makes an important and blurred distinction between misfortune and injustice (see esp. 1990, Ch 2.). Misfortune is a common feature of the human experience as bad things happen to otherwise good and blameless people, as when an earthquake hits an unsuspecting town, causing considerable damage and loss of life. At one level, an earthquake is a natural disaster, and not an injustice, but, she insists, even here the line between injustice and misfortune is not clear and precise. Injustice frequently involves "our willingness and our capacity to act or not act on behalf of victims, to blame or absolve, to help, mitigate, and compensate, or just turn away" (1990, 2). A system of

corruption that allowed unsafe buildings to be erected, or a cavalier and callous government that failed to plan in advance and act decisively in the event of an earthquake can turn otherwise natural disasters into examples of injustice. As society and technology advances, more and more things come within our power, which entails that "some misfortunes of the past, however, are now injustices, such as infant mortality and famines, which are caused mainly by public corruption and indifference." (1990, 5). Shklar concludes that the line between injustice and misfortune is often a political choice and this soft distinction between misfortune and injustice influences the arguments adopted in this text. This distinction emerges in a discussion of slavery in ancient Athens in the next chapter, and it is a motivating idea behind the claim in the preceding chapter that we have a responsibility to alleviate great suffering.

Shklar's work on injustice and the idea of putting cruelty first are rich ideas that can be fruitfully applied beyond the horizons that she places them in. As two examples, Jacob Levy starts from the Shklarian premise that liberal societies ought to prevent cruelty, and goes on to argue that because of this, liberal societies must attend to the issues that multiculturalism raises as, "ethnic and nationalist conflicts are among the most important sources of those evils" (2000, 16). He uses these ideas to argue that even if cultural diversity is a public and private good, "Imperialism, injustice, cruelty, and hypocrisy are all evils, and they occur often and easily in situations of cross-cultural contact" (2000, 108). Here, Shklar's account of the *summum malum* acts as a baseline of unacceptable activity that establishes a hard limit upon political activity by communities that come into contact with one another.

More recently, Ege Tufan's *A Theory of Dystopian Liberalism* "puts the avoidance of the worst as the fundamental aim of politics," and then goes on to argue that the best way to express this aim is by merging Shklar's *Liberalism of Fear* with Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (PhD Dissertation, Oxford, 2017, 1). Tufan makes the novel and probing case that if avoiding cruelty ought to take priority (2017, 103), then one reason we might make this case is because persons subject to cruelty are incapable of "forming mental content," (2017, 128) – that is, of forming a conception of the good and of acting rationally: "If a person cannot want and cannot form a belief or an intention to act, then she cannot at all create a plan which best organizes her activities…these mental states are necessary components of what it is to be rational" (Tufan 2017, 129). In these circumstances, liberty – defined according to Rawls' first principle of justice as "an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all" (2008, 302) – is of no utility. Because of this, Tufan contends that a "no cruelty" principle ought to have lexical priority over Rawls' first principle of justice. Impressively, in chapter six of the text (2017, 215-49) Tufan pushes his argument further than Rawls and Shklar by extending the no cruelty principle beyond applying merely to the basic structure (Rawls) and as a tool to limit state power (Shklar) by arguing that the "informal structure" of society is often a site of cruelty that must also be reckoned with if we are to protect and uphold freedom. Tufan concludes that "social norms can deter cruel actions in ways that the coercive structure cannot," (2017, 213) and so norms against things like sexual harassment and in favor of equality in the family are essential (2017, 251-61).

Tufan's work is tightly argued and he draws valid conclusions from its premises. In light of this, I level my objections at the premises of the work itself. Of course, I agree

with him that avoiding the worst is a good end for politics, but I disagree that this is best achieved and understood within an ideal theory framework that proceeds by setting out the principles to organize a realistic utopia. Tufan describes his work as a theory that "adds up to a "liberalism from below"" in that the emphasis is placed on relieving the plight of the weak and vulnerable" (2017, 18). While his emphasis is upon the plight of the weak and vulnerable, by placing cruelty as a principle of justice to organize the basic structure of society that is supplemented with social norms that mediate the amount of cruelty in society, such an approach paves over some of Shklar's best insights and those in the aversional literature more broadly.

Firstly, because victimhood has an "irreducibly subjective component" it is the case that (as Shklar says of similar approaches) Tufan's approach of "matching their [victim's] situation against the rules [to organize society]… is inadequate as a way of recognizing victims" (Shklar 1990, 37). This is not to say that Tufan silences victims. Indeed, at the very end of the text (2017, 261-64) he makes the case that a democratic informal structure is needed so citizens can speak about and be heard speaking about their suffering in order that this suffering can be remediated. But this argument is made at the end of the text, and functions as something of an afterthought. It is not foundational and primary. In addition to this, by putting "no cruelty" forward in the context of a realistic utopia the approach misses the fact that undergirds many of the claims and insights from Hobbes, Burke, and Popper, that society is always at risk of lapse into dystopia. Consequently, his ideal approach is inappropriately sanguine about humankind's political prospects, *especially* if the end to be pursued is avoiding the worst, including dystopia. Instead of a set of principles to order a realistic utopia, if *avoiding dystopia* and reducing suffering is the aim we wish

to pursue, what is needed is a real reckoning with the political fact of social instability in addition to a strong attunement, in the first place, to the claims of the weak and vulnerable.

Allison McQueen's Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times (2018)

In her new book Allison McQueen selects Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Hans Morgenthau as three thinkers who lived through apocalyptic times and therefore have something insightful to say about the political goal of avoiding the apocalypse. In her selection of the three thinkers and in her consideration of the ends of political theory, McQueen's text shares many affinities with this one. In particular McQueen describes her purpose as threefold. By "attending to the apocalyptic circumstances" of these three thinkers she hopes to: 1) consider parts of the texts written by these three that are otherwise neglected; 2) see the familiar writings of these authors in a new light, and 3) to "consider the rhetorical and normative challenges of responding to catastrophes today" (2018, 9-10).

It is important to note that the title of McQueen's text is telling it is as the apocalyptic *time* in which these thinkers wrote that is essential for her. Methodologically, she closely analyses the context in which these three wrote; the particular and contingent circumstances they confronted; the conceptual frameworks within which they understood the world; and, the interlocutors with which they were talking (2018, 15-17). That being said, each thinker is not treated only within their own hermeneutic horizon. She stresses that the three thinkers have overlaps and share insights as they are all individuals who lived through apocalyptic times and are part of a realist tradition of political theory. Although political realism is a long and established line of political thinking that is diverse, McQueen points to four main themes within this literature: 1) the autonomy of politics as a sphere of

action and thought not reducible to other areas of research; 2) a view of politics as essentially agonistic and conflictual; 3) a prioritization of order and stability over the demands of justice, and 4) a rejection of theories that deny points 1 and 2 on the grounds that such theories are utopian (2018, 10-11).

In the first part of her two-part conclusion she asserts that especially Machiavelli's *Prince* and Morgenthau's early writings reject apocalypticism in favor of a *tragic worldview*, according to which, any easy solution to political disagreement will always remain elusive, but one ought to act politically nonetheless with full knowledge that well-meaning efforts to bring about a better world can end in disaster. In the second of her conclusions she claims that Hobbes' and Morgenthau's later writings adopt a different approach of *redirection* that "fight[s] apocalypse with apocalypse" (2018, 195); in Hobbes' case, with a mortal God capable of reversing the disintegrating effects of radicals on the polity.

There is much to applaud in McQueen's work. The care with which she reconstructs the intellectual and historical environment in which the three individuals wrote is a testament to her meticulous research. And this research pays off in her analysis. But her analysis is importantly distinct from that pursued here and therefore should be treated as a distinct line of resaerch. Firstly, her subject of analysis is different. It is the *apocalypse* that concerns McQueen, which is loaded with religious imagery and theological meaning in ways (especially) Machiavelli and Hobbes were particularly attuned to. This differs from the far more secularized and more capacious view of dystopia discussed in this text. This difference produces shifts in the respective focuses and analysis between McQueen's text and this one. For example, McQueen's focus on the religious idea of apocalypse causes her

to dedicate considerable attention to the final book of *Leviathan*, in which theological issues are addressed in detail (2018, 119-32). By contrast, as the account of dystopia of concern in this text is broadly secular – that is to say, it is concerned with how human beings can influence one another, rather than, say, the compatibility of political theory with of the particular tenets of different religions and the rhetorical invocation of religious ideas to move a devout audience – the first two books of *Leviathan*, *De Cive*, and *Behemoth* produce the most useful material to prompt dystopophobic thinking.

Over all, then, there are some overlaps between McQueen's work and this one, as we both, for example, take Hobbes as a theorist at the center of our analysis. In addition to this, McQueen describes a tenet of realist thinking as the belief that "order [is] a fragile accomplishment… [and that] order and stability are always vulnerable" (2018, 11). This is a view shared in the account of dystopophobia, with the threat of the fall into dystopia as a live possibility. In spite of these similarities, McQueen's work and this one should be seen as two different projects with their own distinct virtues and vulnerabilities.

Jonathan Allen's "Negative Morality" (2001)

Recall Shklar's objection in her book *Faces of Injustice*, that all volumes of political theory contain disucssions of justice, but very few attend to the particulars of injustice as a specific and distinct concept worthy of analysis (1990, 15). In his 2001 paper, "The Place of Negative Morality in Political Theory," Jonathan Allen generalizes this insight beyond injustice to press political theorists to engage in far more comprehensive analysis of negative moral values "such as domination, power, and violence" (2001, 340). He makes the case that a negative morality can serve two functions in political theory. Firstly, when

combined with other positive moral values, negative morality can play a *justificatory role* in our political thinking and help to explain why some forms of political organization (liberalism in Shklar's view, for example) are superior to other forms of political organization. Secondly, and more promisingly on Allen's view, negative morality and the sensitive attention to negative values and experiences in society can play an important *educative function*, which he breaks down into three parts.

Negative morality is educative, firstly, by producing a comprehensive account of the passions possessed by and the goals pursued by individuals in order to avoid negative things like humiliation, fear, and cruelty. "An anatomy of vices," he says, "provides us with information concerning human dispositions and motivations… that may erupt into politics" (2001, 346). Allen's focus here is with the expression of these vices in real and present political structures like, he suggests, the French Revolution and the Terror. We need not only circumscribe the role of these vices to political life as it is manifest, though. In this text I extend Allen's insight here in the analysis of Hobbes to show how these vices (like fear) and others like vainglory can act in a scheme of argumentation that is divorced from the specifics of political life in practice.[18]

Secondly, negative political theory through attention to negative values, permits one to produce an insightful account of the *distribution of evils in society* that can work as a point for criticism of the structures and norms in society that produce this evil distribution.

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[18] I suspect that here Allen would object that what I am describing is an example of negative justification of the superiority of some political regimes over others, rather than an example of political education. For my part, though, I am not convinced that the two can be so neatly divided. After all, if one finds the justificatory arguments put forward by different thinkers on negative grounds compelling, then that too plays an educative function by acting as a point for reflection upon the negative values that do normative work for us. Another way to put this is to say that recognition of the motivating role of negative values in argumentation is a means of appreciating how such negative values can play a motivating role in political action.

As an example Allen selects Adi Ophir's account of the modern prison system that distributes a variety of evils to inmates, including "enforced isolation, regimentation, a particular kind of living space and facilities, a particular experience of "time," and so forth" that is more complicated and specific than merely saying that inmates experience a "deprivation of freedom" (Allen 2001, 348). This insight about the distribution of evils is important and has been employed effectively by a number of political thinkers in different ways. Below I will discuss Tommie Shelby's account of the "Dark Ghetto" as a site in which its (overwhelmingly black) denizens experience the kinds of negative values Allen identifies. Shatema Threadcraft offers even greater specificity in the distrtibution of evils within this Dark Ghetto by singling out the distinct vulnerability of women who suffer their own particular forms of negative values that she puts under the umbrella of "intimate injustice" (2016, esp. 113-33). Further to this, Shatema Threadcraft and Lisa Miller have taken these insights about the particular vulnerabilities experienced disproportionately by women and read them back as an indictment of the modern prison system and the carceral state that reproduces the prison system and the risk of violence (2017).

Finally, negative morality plays an educative role by elevating the perspective of the victim as essential to understanding the social evils people experience. Allen puts forward an important caveat here when he notes that the claims made by putative victims are not always legitimate and morally justified. Claims of victimhood can be the product of "resentment or sheer misunderstanding… [and] might also be cynically self-interested strategies" (2001, 348). This caveat is an important rebuke to some insufficiently critical epistemological views that stem from an irrationalist and unfalsifiable strand of standpoint theory that treats victims and the subaltern as infallible sources of superior moral

knowledge.[19] Nonetheless, accounts of suffering are important to understand society and the distribution of evils within it.

In his account of negative morality as an independent and legitimate form of political inquiry Allen offers readers a number of valuable insights that are relevant to and emerge in this work's account of dystopophobia. For example, even if one should not uncritically accept the claims of putative victims, a negative approach has some epistemological superiority to a positive morality. Whereas the data in the latter is largely hypothetical, speculative, and rooted in moral intuitions about what is right, good, and just, a negative approach has access to real, concrete, and determinate data in the form of people's reported experiences of cruelty, injustice, harm, and the rest (2001, 350). Further a negative approach captures a reasonable intuition about the relative importance of negative vs. positive values. Positive values are, by definition, good things worthy of pursuit. However, it is reasonable to assert that there is an asymmetry between these good and bad things. As Allen puts it, "where evils are clearly evident, their removal or minimization has priority over the pursuit of goods" (2001, 351). There might be several reasons for this asymmetry, several of which will be discussed in especially the chapters on Burke and Popper. For example, Popper claims that because harms are real and concrete (per the previous point on the data of negative values), these harms produce immediate demands for redress on individuals, unlike desires for good things that are more distant and

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[19] On standpoint theory see Hartsock (1983). As an example of the unfalsifiable and irrationalist epistemology I have in mind here Audrey Lorde's assertion in "*Poetry is Not a Luxury*" that rationalist philosophical inquiry of ideas is a male and "european" mode of thought and that, in order to be free women must make contact with their "incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling," and that it is possible to make this contact through disciplined attention to the "it feels right to me" (2007, 36-7). While there is something compelling to Lorde's words, the position that, as she says, "…there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt…" threatens to leave us in a state of only feeling and re-feeling, rather than critically examining those feelings themselves.

uncertain. Burke, by contrast, identifies an asymmetry between the difficulty of producing good things (like functioning government) versus the ease with which good government can be destroyed and replaced by bad government, which, on his view necessitates a concerted effort to prevent evils from destroying society rather than producing and improving the good society that (in Burke's estimation) we already have. These insights emerge when a negative morality is added as a supplement to political theory, which lends crediblility to Allen's endeavor and the virtue of this work.

Allen reaches several other conclusions, including the belief that a negative political theory ought to be anti-utopian and attend to the consequences and limitations of normative political theory, and political interventions to realize positive ideals (2001, 356; 353). In particular, though, I want to stress Allen's conclusion that a negative approach does not form a robust political theory with clear principles to reorganize society, but instead forms a *political sensibility* amongst its practitioners. He says,

> "…the educative tasks performed by negative morality do not add up to a moral system or decision procedure like utilitarianism or deontology or a political doctrine like liberalism and socialism. They are better interpreted as supportive of a moral and political *sensibility*… It is a sensibility that tells us what to think *about* rather than what to think." (Allen 2001, 349).

This is not to say that a negative morality is entirely inert, as Allen stresses that through such a negative approach "moral priorities are identified, judgments made, and courses of action proposed" (2001, 350). One might think that the identification of moral priorities, the formation of judgments, and the proposal of courses of action can add up to at least some minimal moral system, and this text ends in the concluding chapter with some proposals about how society might be reorganized to better attend to the kinds of negative considerations that Allen raises. That being said, this text shares with Allen the general

thrust of belief that such a negative morality or dystopophobic project is in large part an exercise in self-understanding, self-reflection, and refinement of sensibility rather than attempt to articulate fundamental moral principles with which society ought to perfectly correspond. Some might find such a nebulous undertaking frustrating and unsatisfying and instead desire the kind of final determination that the kinds of principles of justice put forward by Ege Tufan offer readers. However, to want to satisfy such a desire is evidence of a failure on the part of the reader to appreciate to the precariousness of the human condition, the possibility of dystopia, the unlikelihood of any final political resolution, and the persistence of misery, cruelty, and dystopia.

Michael Goodhart's *Injustice* (2018)

As with the other thinkers discussed in this chapter, Michael Goodhart's primary concern in his new book is not the ideal or the good, but, as the title suggests, is injustice. Motivationally, Goodhart was drawn to the problem of injustice on a global scale having come to appreciate the "tremendous inequality and staggering poverty that characterize the world today" (2018, 7). As a political theorist, Goodhart's work holds the mirror up to the profession by putting forward a unrelenting indictment of the political theorists as enabling and perpetuating these injustices through their misguided and self-serving methodological approaches. In particular, he singles out ideal theory (more on this below), which he calls Ideal Moral Theory (IMT) as a primary source of the perpetuation of injustice by fetishization of justice at the expense of real thinking about the harms and injustices people actually suffer in the world.

Goodhart's critique of IMT falls along several different lines. First of all, he objects that IMT theorists assume that injustice is the same as the absence of justice (2018, 24; 151), which leaves injustice under theorized. Rather than spend time and resources to understand the real world and the manifestations of injustice, IMT theorists dedicate their time to arguments over ideal justice that fail to equip the the poor and vulnerable with the conceptual tools to understand and articulate their condition. Secondly, Goodhart claims that although ideal theory is designed and intended to provide guidance to action in the real world, in practice it often does not. This is a form of the Guidance Critique of IMT, and Goodhart makes a contribution by emphasizing that IMT usually fails to guide practice as it instead produces a "theoretical paralysis" according to which, disagreement about justice is taken as evidence of an incomplete understanding of justice that can only be remediated by "more thinking (by us), leading seemingly to endless debate" (2018, 31-2). A third pathology of IMT is the subordination of politics to morality, according to which the primary problems of social organization are hashed out in political theory, rather than left as points of political contest and disagreement, that, "manifests in atrophied democratic institutions and practices in the ideally just society" (2018, 33). Finally, fourthly, IMT produces distortional thinking in its practitioners because of its reliance upon abstraction and idealization, which can practically render some forms of injustice invisible and conceives of injustice as aberrational. On the latter point, it is of course true that many people experience injustice on a daily basis – it is a more consistent experience for them than justice, and as evidence of this, Goodhart cites Tommie Shelby's accounting of the experiences of black Americans in the "Dark Ghetto" (Goodhart 2018, 42). Goodhart's primary concern here is not merely that IMT is distorting, and is to this extent inaccurate

and unhelpful. More than this, he worries that through these distortions and its inefficaciousness, IMT functions ideologically by "reflecting (and protecting) the interests and privileges of those whose experience most closely approximates the ideals and who benefit most from their maintenance" (2018, 44).

In making these claims about the tendentious self-service of IMT in favor of its practitioners Goodhart makes a powerful call for a thorough interrogation of political theory and the complicity of theorists in perpetuating injustice. As a replacement for this delinquent approach, Goodhart endorses a reinvigorated form of democratic theory. We should, he says, recognize the ideological role that the idea of justice plays in setting out bounds of accepted disagreement by channeling argument through the terms of debate set by detached political theorists and self-serving political actors. As justice is a "contentious partisan concept" (2018, 108), what is needed is a more capacious democratic theory that both expunges ideological assumptions from the abstract academic debates about justice and permits the particular and otherwise dispossessed and disempowered to contribute to these political fights over justice (2018, 160-1). Our aim, he says, is to produce a contentious "counterhegemoic politics" that challenges the "dominant meanings and interpretations [of justice] that naturalizes and normalizes… injustices" (2018, 180). This counterhegemonic politics can be realized through 1) the introduction of new concepts of justice that dispute and displace established ideals accepted in the current IMT paradigm, and 2) the sensitive consideration and acceptance of what Gramsci called people's "good sense," that is, people's "knowledge and understanding based in their lived experience" (2018, 180). The expectation is that political movements can mobilize around these new

ideas and thereby empower otherwise excluded vulnerable people to participate in politics and ameliorate their condition of life in injustice.

Goodhart's argument is arresting, and I imagine that his proposals to expand the role of political theory would be salutary on the international stage as a part of global political theory, which is his primary focus in the book. What about Goodhart's approach functions as a counter to the arguments about dystopophobia as a political approach analyzed and explored in this text, though? Here it is worth noting that (unsurprisingly for such a comprehensive book) Goodhart puts forward Shklar's *Liberalism of Fear* and the writings of a few others as an example of what he calls an "obvious injustice" approach to political theory that, he believes, shows some promise (2018, 98-106). "It is," he says, "tempting – and not all together wrong – to think that a great deal could be gained simply by training our attention on these [obvious] injustices and finding ways to avert or ameliorate them…" (2018, 92). Ultimately, though, he rejects this approach for a few reasons. Firstly, Goodhart worries that the "obvious injustice" approach often settles into a conservative politics that, by and large, ends up merely endorsing liberalism (2018, 92-3). There is certainly something to this criticism, as "obvious injustice" theorists like Judith Shklar, Bernard Williams, and Stuart Hampshire (2000) do come to settle on liberalism as the right response to the problem of injustice. Indeed, as will become clear after the discussion of Karl Popper in this text, there is much in his text that is attractive to the dystopophobic (obvious injustice) thinker, and he, too endorses broadly liberal ideals.

My response to this is threefold. Firstly, if liberal political structures are guilty of perpetuating injustice on especially the global scale then the retreat to liberalism by obvious injustice thinkers is a short-falling on their part that, on the international level may need

supplementation and improvement. Secondly, the fact that "obvious injustice" thinkers often settle on liberalism does warrant examination and perhaps a greater amount of creative thinking on the part of political theorists to depart from and improve the liberal paradigm. That being said, thirdly, the fact that many of these dystopophobic thinkers settle on liberalism is important data that warrants consideration. There is something about obvious injustices that liberalism responds to – on the estimation of these theorists, at least. I believe that at least one of the things that liberalism responds to is reflected in the fact that in this text I have chosen the word "dystopophobia," rather than "obvious injustice" to characterize these thinkers that Goodhart is describing. Not only is obvious injustice as it is *actually manifest* a concern for this broad range of thinkers, but there is, also, a concern for collapse and *hypothetical and possible* regression into dystopia and injustice for not just those already suffering injustice, but for many, many more people as well. Stable, effective, and sound political structures are hard won successes that can be lost, and have been lost. Liberalism is a political theory (ideology, on Goodhart's telling) that on the view of (at least some of) these thinkers acts as an effective bulwark against this possibility. This is why the dystopophobic approach can be conservative to the extent that it endorses liberalism, but this is not an artifact in the theory, it is a sound conclusion. Now, if it is true that a liberal international order and that liberal polities in Europe, the US and elsewhere are stable and produce justice for many of their denizens at the expense of justice for people in other nations, then there is reason to revise or replace the liberal democratic international order. A dystopophobic theory cannot be satisfied in the final analysis with a beggar thy neighbor system of politics that wins justice for some only by condemning others – this is because at the level of abstract analysis there is no principled reason to care only about the

dystopia experienced by some rather than others. If this is true of liberalism, then I too condemn liberalism in this way, and in this circumstance, then, more creative political thinking is required. As it stands, though, Goodhart's arguments against an obvious injustice approach fail to discredit the this fairly closely aligned account of dystopophobia.

A more probing criticism that Goodhart makes of an "obvious injustice" approach is that it is a mirror opposite of IMT that reproduces the flaws of IMT by fetishizing injustice rather than justice. He says, "Realism is less an alternative to IMT than its alter ego, a mirror image reflecting many of the same assumptions about the ideal, moral nature of claims about justice, but reversing the conclusions it draws from them" (2018, 106).[20] This is a characterization of the approach in this text that should be vigorously opposed (and is discussed in some detail in the next section). Firstly, it might be true that IMT assumes that injustice is merely the absence of justice, but it is not true that a dystopophobic view necessarily assumes the mirror view of IMT that justice is the absence of injustice. One can be entirely agnostic about the ideal ends one ought to pursue to achieve justice, and, this text ultimately endorses a pluralistic approach in which the pursuit of an ideal of justice or goodness is taken concurrently with a focus upon ameliorating the worst degradations people suffer in society. Secondly, whereas IMT is criticized by Goodhart as ignoring the non-academic views of those who are excluded from the theoretical debate about justice, it is not true that a dystopophobic approach is guilty of the same oversight. Whereas justice is an abstract ideal and utopia is a "noplace" that has not been reached,

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[20] It's not entirely clear who Goodhart's target is here under the banner of "realism". He points to Bernard Williams as an example of the realist political approach, but he also describes Williams as someone takes up Shklar's concern with injustice in Liberalism of Fear and includes him in the discussion of obvious injustice thinkers (2018, 94-98). I take it that he intends this comment to apply to obvious injustice thinkers, as well as those realist thinkers who employ some of these obvious injustice ideas in their realist philosophy.

dystopia is all too material and real. What makes dystopia so terrifying is that it is too much of a live possibility, so dystopia is, on this point, not the mirror of IMT's account of justice. This has important consequences. Whereas the primary data in IMT is moral intuition, by contrast an important source of primary data in dystopophobia is the real and reported experiences of those who are suffering. Accordingly, an "obvious injustice" approach is far more political and attuned to the "lived experience" that Goodhart encourages us to consider in our political deliberations (Goodhart 2018, 180). There is, then, reason to be optimistic that a dystopophobic approach will not be racked by the kinds of theoretical paralysis that produces in IMT the perpetual need for more theorizing (2018, 31-3). Instead, a consideration of the political condition of people and an openness to hear, as Karl Popper puts it, "where the shoe pinches" keeps dystopophobic thinking rooted in the real world and constantly committed to real improvements in the real world than internecine disputes within the literature.

Goodhart's book is an incredibly valuable contribution to the literature, and his proposal for a reinvigorated democratic political theory that departs from the IMT paradigm is often attractive. That being said, he does not provide convincing reasons not to pursue a dystopophobic – or "obvious injustice" – approach. Indeed, a dystopophobic approach, by working in a way outside of the IMT paradigm, is attractive for many of the same reasons why Goodhart's own proposed approach is attractive.

Tommie Shelby's *The Dark Ghetto* (2016)

In his recent work, Tommie Shelby grapples with the moral and political obligations shared between people in the "Dark Ghetto" – "metropolitan neighborhoods visibly marked by

racial segregation and multiple forms of disadvantage" (2016, 38) – and those in the rest of society. These ghettos are characterized by a number of regrettable (and rightly angering) qualities including,

> "…low birth weight [of its members], abnormally low life expectancy, enduring physical and mental illnesses, disability, alcohol and drug addiction, homelessness and inadequate shelter, low educational attainment, dysfunctional family life, social isolation and unhealthy ties of affiliation, lack of self-esteem, unemployment and underemployment, chronic fatigue, inability to participate fully in public life, and high incarceration and felony-conviction rates" (Shelby 2016, 40)

In this accounting of the Dark Ghetto, this is a place in which many of the worst features of society exist. Any person committed to ameliorating the worst features of the social world would do well to look here as a site to correct; indeed, the Dark Ghetto is a rather dystopian place that one might rightly desire to improve and replace with a less dystopian alternative. For his part, Shelby recognizes that, yes, the ghetto is a bad place, and there is indeed a tradition of research in sociology and public policy that is oriented around finding ways to understand and then correct these conditions in the ghetto. However, his contribution is to say that, more than this, the ghetto is a particular form of bad place – it is the product of racial discrimination and that, by denying opportunities to and by discriminating against its denizens, the ghetto is a site of injustice. The fact that the ghetto is an injustice entails, on Shelby's telling, that correcting the ghetto requires a justice-oriented approach in order to ensure that the basic structure of the ghetto is corrected by making it just.

Through his focus upon the ways in which the ghetto falls short of justice and needs to be corrected to make it just, Shelby's work is an important contribution to non-ideal theory. Over the course of the book he explains precisely how and why the ghetto is unjust along several axes, including the family, work, and the criminal justice system. This

enduring system of injustice causes Shelby to ask "whether the policies that have been proposed and created to alleviate the burdens on the ghetto poor are appropriately rooted in justice," and, further, ask "whether the ghetto poor have responded in morally legitimate ways to their plight" (2016, 47-8). There is, he concludes, some level of injustice and immorality on both sides – by those who live in the ghetto and sometimes act immorally and those whose choices and political policies perpetuate the unjust ghetto – and so, because injustice is the primary quality of these conditions, Shelby proposes that remedies to these injustice fall within four different sets:

> (1) Principles of *reform and revolution* are standards that should guide efforts to transform an unjust institutional arrangement into a more just one.
> (2) Principles of *rectification* should guide attempts to remedy or make amends for the injuries and losses victims have suffered as a result of ongoing or past injustice.
> (3) Principles of *crime control* should guide the policies a society relies on when attempting to minimize and deter individual noncompliance with what justice requires.
> (4) *Political ethics* are the principles and values that should guide individuals as they respond to social injustices and that serve as the basis for criticizing the failure of individuals to promote just circumstances and to avoid complicity with injustice. (Shelby 2016, 12).

Shelby's project is a worthwhile one, and so the divergence of his conceptual and methodological approach from mine warrants a response. Whereas this project tends to concern itself with bad conditions, by contrast, Shelby asserts that his initial normative concern is not with similar things, like "absolute poverty (lacking access to basic necessities for long enough that it becomes health- or life-threatening)". Instead, his concern is "unjust disadvantage" (2016, 35-6). He continues,

> "As I have stressed, though, one of my main tasks is to persuade readers that, when thinking about ghettos, we should move away from a technocratic "social problem" framework [i.e. alleviate poverty] to a justice framework. This shift won't occur if "antipoverty" remains the sole focus. Our fundamental goal should not be merely to reduce poverty but also to bring about a just basic structure. This objective won't be secured unless substantive equal opportunity is realized." (Shelby 2016, 36)

The first thing to say is that I agree, and someone who concerns herself with things like absolute poverty or other dystopian concerns can remain agnostic at the early stage about the appropriate response to these concerns as they are manifest in the Dark Ghetto. Shelby advocates for a justice-based approach that is influenced by John Rawls, and that might be the most effective way to correct for both the injustices and absolutely bad conditions in the ghetto. And, perhaps other groups of disadvantaged individuals (outside of the ghetto) may benefit from a different or pluralistic approach to ameliorate their condition. The three thinkers read closely in this text each have their own views on how best to respond to the absolutely deprived conditions of people in society (and possibility that society may collapse or become dystopian), and Shelby's is a valuable further contribution.

Secondly, one might accept that Shelby is right that justice should be our goal. On the Rawlsian view, anti-poverty is not the same as justice, which is a more demanding standard that requires (especially in Shelby's reconstruction) substantive equality of opportunity. If this is the case, then one cannot focus *only* on anti-poverty to achieve justice – we also need equality of opportunity. Therefore, to follow Shelby's argument through, it is necessary to radically reform the basic structure of society in the ghetto in order to bring about equality of opportunity and not just transfer money to the ghetto poor without addressing inequality of opportunity that causes poverty in the first place. Here Shelby is right that equality of opportunity matters as Rawls' second principle of justice requires that economic inequalities must be "attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" (2008, 302). Even though this is true, and equality of opportunity is essential, it is also true that, on Rawls' view of justice, so too is the condition of the worst off also relevant to justice. After all, point 1 of the difference

principle requires that inequalities be "to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged" (2008, 302). This fact that *both* equality of opportunity *and* the condition of the worst off are central justice considerations reinforces the point above that one can be pluralistic, and that the pursuit of one end (anti-dystopia) may be fully compatible with another overlapping approach (like Shelby's justice approach to the ghetto). We're both scaling the same mountain, just on different sides.

Shelby's work is valuable and a supplement to this work by prioritizing the ghetto as a distinct site of injustice, and, indeed, dystopia. Through careful focus upon the particulars of the ghetto and the injustices and immorality done by parties both within and without the ghetto, Shelby talks authoritatively and offers real solutions within a non-ideal framework of justice, according to the four principles detailed above. It is the specifics that elevate his work here. That being said, there is also some virtue to going in the other direction, too, by thinking about dystopia and the worst off at a more abstract level as part of an educative, justificatory, and ameliorative program.

Political Realism

Before closing out this section, let me make a few comments on the relationship between this work and the resurgent idea of political realism as advanced by thinkers including Bernard Williams and Raymond Geuss. There is a tendency in the literature to talk of political realism in the same discussion as the ideal/non-ideal theory debate.[21] Now, it is

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[21] As an example of this, William Galston in his very useful overview of realist political theory (2010) treats political realism as another avenue of political thought that, with non-ideal theory, sets itself apart from the "high liberalism" in Rawlsian philosophizing. Similarly, Stemplowska and Swift seamlessly integrate Williams and Geuss into their survey of ideal and non-ideal theory in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (2012).

certainly true that Geuss and Williams object to the Rawlsian ideal theory methodology. Bernard Williams, for example, describes Rawls' approach as a form of applied moral philosophy that he dubs "political moralism," that fails to appreciate the particular problems that confront political, rather than merely moral, thinking (Williams 2002, 2).[22] In criticizing Rawls' methodology, this new political realism obviously has affinities with the non-ideal theory criticisms of Rawls (more below). However, it is the particular focus on what is unique to politics – i.e. in the focus upon what makes political thinking distinct from moral philosophizing – that makes this new political realism a different and insightful contribution to political thought and ought not to be reduced too quickly to merely a form of non-ideal theory.

In especially Bernard Williams' work, it is the idea of *legitimacy* that is distinct to the political.[23] Securing the "order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation" is the *first political question*, in that it is necessary to establish these things before further questions in politics can be asked. In light of this, he continues, all persons and groups can place a basic legitimation demand upon the polity to justify its use of power and coercion in order to establish (at the least) these minimal conditions of cooperation (Williams 2002, 3-6). Because of this particular emphasis upon the idea of legitimacy, I put aside much of this literature on political realism as largely independent from the area

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[22] Memorably, Raymond Geuss waves away the Rawlsian "ethics first" approach in a reproach to Robert Nozick's confident assertion in the opening line to *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* that "individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)" (1974, ix). Nozick, Geuss observes, "allows that bald statement to lie flapping and gasping for breath like a large, moribund fish on the deck of a trawler, with no further analysis or discussion, and proceeds to draw consequences from it" (2008: 64).

[23] For greater detail on the idea of legitimacy in realist thought see Matthew Sleat's *Liberal Realism* (2013). In particular, for a very compelling account of legitimacy that traces it roots from Kant through to contemporary research see pages 21-44.

of research being conducted here, which instead is oriented around the desire to avoid bad outcomes conceived of in a far more general way than the absence of legitimacy.

Although I distinguish realism from this project, it is worth ending with one observation. It is a recurring theme in realist political thought that the mere achievement of a *modus vivendi* is a remarkable success that needs to be respected and protected. Without minimal terms of social cooperation life would likely be, as Hobbes described it, nasty, brutish, and short, and we should thank our lucky stars that we can expect more from life than this war of all against all. As Matt Sleat puts the point, "The provision of order and stability is always, according to realism, a magnificent achievement" (2013, 52).[24] To be sure, one may reasonably engage in political theory about the *ideal* terms of social cooperation without excessively troubling oneself with the fact that the establishment of minimal terms of social cooperation is a miracle of human achievement. Such an endeavor would, however, be insensitive to an important quality of the human condition that ought not to be taken lightly. This is to say that once political ideals have been identified, one should not pursue them with all the zeal of a recent convert. One must be mindful of the possibility one is wrong in her conception of the ideal society, and that the pursuit of the ideal is a destabilizing enterprise that raises the likelihood of great suffering and hardship.

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[24] In their contribution to the collected volume *Political Philosophy vs. History?*, Marc Stears and Bonnie Honig take as a defining feature of Williams' work a "tension between… open-ended, agonistic politics… [and] the dangers of expressive (dis)orderly action, and the insistence on a more cautious, safety-seeking, pessimistic pursuit of stability and order" (2011). For his part, John Gray is even more pessimistic than Williams. In *Two Faces of Liberalism*, he argues that a system of *modus vivendi* is the product of the 16th century search for peaceful coexistence. "The aim of political philosophy," he says, "is to return to practice with fewer illusions. For us, this means shedding the illusion that theories of justice and rights [i.e. Rawlsian philosophy] can deliver us from the ironies and tragedies of politics… *Modus Vivendi* continues the liberal search for peaceful coexistence; but it does so by giving up the belief that one way of life, or a single type of regime, could be best for all" (2002, 139). Here, then, not only is stability a miracle of human achievement, but it is the last political miracle we should expect.

V. Dystopophobia and Political Theory Methodology

As noted in the previous chapter, this research project got its name as a consequence of David Estlund's account of the idea of "utopophobia," which he derisively describes as an "exaggerated fear of utopianism" (2008, 259). Estlund's invocation of utopophobia here is part of a response to those political philosophers who reject his idealizing about perfect just and democratic political systems as inappropriately divorced from the imperfect reality in which humans actually live. In the real world, they say, humans may never (indeed, are likely never to) reach the lofty heights of ideal justice, and so any attempt to articulate these ideals as something to aspire towards are, at best, a waste of time. What is at stake here is a methodological disagreement in political theory over whether it is helpful or necessary to engage in political theorizing about the ideally just or perfectly utopian society that humans would realize, if they could. Or, whether political theory should start with (and, its detractors say, end with) the imperfect world and non-ideal circumstances in which humans live. As we have already seen in the discussion of Michael Goodhart's work, this ideal/non-ideal theory debate produces some insights and issues relevant to the discussion of dystopophobia explored in this text, and so the following section makes the case that in spite of the idealizing tendencies a dystopophobic approach can manifest, this approach is not subject to the same critiques of idealizing about justice.

Ideal Theorizing and Dystopophobia

As is so often the case in contemporary political theory, Rawls is an important first point of contact to understand the genesis of the ideal/non-ideal theory debate. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls sets out to determine the principles of justice for "well-ordered societies"

(2008, 8). This approach is, as he puts it at other times, "realistically utopian," as it "ask[s] in effect what a perfectly just, or nearly just, constitutional regime might be like" (2001, 13). As Samuel Freeman summarized it, "From the outset Rawls' work has been guided by the question, "What is the most appropriate moral conception of justice for a democratic society?" (Freeman 2003, 1). By limiting his principles to ideal democratic societies Rawls is an ideal theorist. Beyond limiting his focus to ideal societies, Rawls engages in idealizations by assuming qualities of citizens and the polity that rarely obtain in the real world. He takes as an assumption that all citizens are reasonable (2008, 95; 156),[25] free and equal, rational (2008, 142-150), that they strictly comply with the principles of justice and that each has a sense of justice (2008, 145; 17-22). Of course, though, few people in reality are perfectly reasonable, rational, and never waver in their sense of justice. There are two types of idealization at play, then: firstly, the end product is an ideal of justice that is very different from non-utopian and unjust reality; secondly, there is an idealization about citizens that is used to reach conclusions about the ideal of justice.

Theorizing about dystopia can also manifest some of these idealizing qualities. As we shall see in more detail in the following chapters, Hobbes puts forward an account of human motivation and psychology that at times is convincing and realistic. However, at other times – as in his claim that the desire for glory causes people to bristle at any slight or criticism, which makes peaceful cooperation between people almost impossible – is so far beyond the experiences of most people that it is best seen as an idealization that exaggerates one part of human nature that sometimes tends towards violence and dystopia.

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[25] In *Political Liberalism* Rawls expands the notion of reasonableness to include the ability and willingness to accept a political conception of justice that other reasonable persons would similarly accept (1996: 48-66, see also Scanlon 2006, 163-6).

In this case, Hobbes idealizes about humans in a way analogous to Rawls' view of people as rational and reasonable. As a second example, Burke's account of the French Revolution was famously derided by his contemporaries as inaccurate. By writing *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, without strict concern for historical accuracy Burke idealizes the purported dystopia across the channel in order to draw attention to his assessment of the worst qualities of dystopia. So, then, dystopophobia shares some idealizing qualities, and so it is worthwhile to ask whether it is subject to the same criticisms leveled at ideal theorists about justice.

Three Critiques of Ideal Theory

There is a vast and growing literature that covers the ideal/non-ideal theory debate.[26] Laura Valentini (2012) distinguishes between three interpretations of the ideal/non-ideal theory debate. There is, she says: 1) the question of full vs. partial compliance; 2) utopianism vs realism; and, 3) the distinction between end-state and transitional theory. As discussions of point 2 are the most directly relevant to this text, these will be the focus of discussion. Within this area there are three critiques of ideal theory: the Guidance Critique; the Feasibility Critique; and the Redundancy Critique.

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[26] For more detail and a defense of Rawls' particular account of realistic utopianism see Collin Anthony's dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, "The Idea Of A Realistic Utopia" (2017). In addition to this, John Tomasi also has a sound discussion of Rawls' realistic utopianism nestled in his book *Free Market Fairness* (2012, 203-15). There he usefully describes utopian requirements like full compliance in realistic utopianism as "modelling assumptions" (2012, 205) that one can relax or tighten depending upon the questions one is asking and the answers one seeks. In addition, Valentini's contribution to the collected volume *Political Utopias* (2017, 11-34) offers a valuable outline of the debates. Finally, in their chapter within *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (2017) Zofia Stemplowaska and Adam Swift give a compelling overview that follows the debate from its foundation in Rawls, through to questions of how action-guiding ideal theory should be in practice.

The Guidance Critique of Ideal Theory: Ideal theory is justified on the grounds that it is only by understanding the ideal that it then becomes possible to make informed decisions about how to act in the real world. Thinking about ideal and well-ordered societies in which people live in conditions beyond hopeless scarcity and comply with the law is "the only basis for the systematic grasp of the more pressing problems" (Rawls 2008, 8-9), and so it is only by *first* rigorously articulating, theorizing, and systematizing one's intuitions of justice and the principles in ideal conditions of strict compliance and the like, that one is *then* able to gain accurate insight (rather than *mere* intuition) into one's obligations under less favorable conditions.[27] One does not have to take the strong view that it is *only* by first articulating about the worst dystopia that it is then understand what one ought to do to avoid that outcome. That being said, at times the three primary thinkers in this dissertation certainly do invoke concepts of dystopia at varying levels of idealization in order to think clearly about obligations and political ends. So, in these cases dystopophobia operates analogously to idealizing about justice in this guidance capacity.

The guidance critique disputes the ideal theory guidance claim on two grounds: firstly, that ideal theory does not give political practitioners much specific useful guidance to help in the choice between political options; and secondly, that ideal theories do not motivate people to choose to the most just, rather than most expedient political option

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[27] As an example of the insights in the ideal context applied to non-ideal circumstance see Rawls' discussion of civil disobedience (2008, 363-91). There he says (§§55-59), knowledge of the importance of stability to a just political system, in turn leads one to understand that citizens have an obligation not to reflexively engage in civil disobedience at any political and social slight, but, in order to preserve stability instead ought to restrict civil disobedience to "serious infringements of the first principle of justice… and to blatant violations of… the principle of fair equality of opportunity" (2008: 372). Adam Swift is a staunch defender of the guidance role of ideal theory, arguing that "whatever the demerits of "ideal theory," we need fundamental, context-independent, normative philosophical claims to guide political action even in nonideal circumstances" (2008, 363).

(Farrelly, 2007; Miller 2013, 16-40; Erman and Möller 2013, 27-36; Robeyns, 2008). Dystopophobia is not weak to these arguments because of the fact that, even though there is idealization, dystopia is a far closer possible universe than the ideal of justice. To take the critiques in order, idealization about dystopia can yield clear and specific guidance to help in the choice between political options. Hobbes is clear: the state of nature is so awful that the best and only political choice is to arrogate all power to an individual sovereign and have them decide on all political matters. Whatever problem one confronts, that is the right response.[28] One may dispute the virtue of the guidance Hobbes gives, but his prescriptions are forthcoming and clear, nonetheless. In response to the second critique, recall that the third section of this chapter discussed the way in which loss aversion rather than rational maximizing is the norm of human deliberation. As individuals tend to be motivated by avoiding bad outcomes rather than achieving a greater good, there is reason to think the aversional focus of dystopophobia motivates individuals more than the pursuit of the good. And, once again, as dystopia has been a real lived experience for many, the greater likelihood of dystopia occurring and the apparent ease with which societies can descend into conflict and dystopia places greater immediacy and exigency upon avoiding this bad outcome that the more distant and more vague goal of achieving justice. One is led to conclude from these considerations that a virtue of dystopophobia is that the way in which abstraction and idealization about dystopia can occur, while retaining its power to

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[28] Writing in the late 1700s, Burke makes the case that England stands at a crossroads between reordering society according to rationalist ideals like the Rights of Man, or maintaining the extant institutions of British government as they have been received for generations. He insists that his fellow parliamentarians should choose the latter. And Karl Popper idealizes the closed society as a dystopia and endorses instead an open society with a tradition of social criticism. As part of this social criticism he encourages government to listen to the worst off in society who suffer most, and to prioritize things like education and healthcare to assist these people.

guide action because of the realism of dystopia as an actual and historical phenomenon, rather than a hypothetical and unrealized ideal.

The Feasibility Critique of Ideal Theory: In "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus" Rawls claims that his principles are virtuous because they are both desirable and *feasible* (Rawls 1987, 24 for more on this see Raikka, 1998). Against this idea that feasibility is desirable in a theory of justice some, like G. A. Cohen, have argued that Rawls *isn't idealistic enough*. Cohen says, "the question for political philosophy is not what we should do but what we should think, even when what we should think makes no practical difference" (2008, 268). By adulterating our philosophy with feasibility considerations we depart from the true demands of justice and therefore fail to fully appreciate the nature of justice and our unimpeded relationship with justice. To distinguish himself from Rawls on this point, Cohen describes himself as searching for true justice, where as Rawls only seeks "Rules of Regulation" to tell us what to do in our contemporary circumstances, bounded by continent issues of feasibility (2008, 274-344).

When shifted on to the issue of dystopia and aversion to bad outcomes, however, feasibility is not something that adulterates our beliefs about injustice, dystopia, and the bad things that we want to avoid, but is instead something that *compounds* our fears and worries. Thinking about feasibility does not contaminate thinking about dystopia and injustice, but makes it more prominent and worrying; a dystopia near to us in the universe of alternative worlds warrants greater attention *because* it is near to us. To be sure, there is reason to also want, as Cohen does, to know what we ideally should think, rather than what we should do in our non-ideal circumstances – this is why it has been stated several times that dystopophobia should be considered as part of a pluralist vision of politics that should

be balanced against other worthwhile ends. That being said, if it is accepted that avoiding bad outcomes ought to be *an* end to be pursued, then dystopophobia is not made less compelling by the fact that it is realistic and that it is feasible to implement dystopophobic policies in practice; how people report their lives and the real suffering and harm they experience are the north star that lets us know we are on the right track by reducing and minimize it as best we can.

The Redundancy Critique of Ideal Theory: A third prominent critique of ideal theory is put forward by Amartya Sen first in "What Do We Want From A Theory of Justice?" (2006) and then expanded further in his 2009 book *The Idea of Justice*. There Sen uses his considerable experience in social choice theory (1982) to argue that one does not need an ideal account of justice in order to *make progress* towards a more just world. Sen endorses a *Realization-Focused Comparison* approach that, instead of asking what a perfect arrangement of social institutions is, asks "how can justice be advanced?" Or, "What structural or political changes can be made in order to make society more rather than less just?" In order to make society more just Sen proposes an essentially comparative social choice approach, according to which one ranks pairs of possible social outcomes and chooses to realize the more rather than less just one. So, on Sen's telling, if one wants to improve society and achieve justice, one does not need an independent account of the ideally just society. Instead, through a process of pairwise comparison, one can move towards a better society without knowing in advance what the ideal society looks like.

Although the dystopophobia given by Hobbes, Burke, and Popper does include some idealization, there is a notable difference between it and the idealization about justice in Rawls' case. Whereas Rawlsian ideal theory uses intuitions about justice exercised in

the hypothetical context of the Original Position as its primary data to construct an ideal theory of justice, the dystopophobic ideal tracks much closer to reality. Actual cases of dystopian societies offer insight into the functioning of dystopia, and actual examples of reported suffering and hardship can rightly act as primary data for thinking about how to avoid dystopia – these are the bad things that we want to minimize in the movement from the abstract to the concrete. It is this close connection between the ideal and the real that allows Hobbes to prove the credibility of his account of dystopia with the words "Nosce Teipsum" – know theyself, and your motivations and experiences, and you will agree with my characterization of dystopia. Accordingly, a process of incremental improvement on a dystopophobic approach can be achieved by systematically correcting these reported harms and hardships. The upshot of these considerations is that the attempt to avoid dystopia quite naturally lends itself some kind of realization-focused comparison in Sen's sense, so, even though idealization about dystopia can be useful, there no clear tension between Sen's method of realization-focused comparison and the dystopophobic aversional view explored in this text.

The guidance, feasibility and redundancy critiques of ideal theory have some relevance to dystopophobia, and, the precise amount of purchase they have upon a dystopophobic political approach is likely to be determined by the extent to which one relies upon hypothetical idealizations of dystopia. Contrary to ideal theorizing about justice, though, dystopophobia is far better able to provide guidance and engage in iterative improvement, and is unconstrained by the feasibility critique. Because dystopia is a closer possible world than a ideal of justice it is more motivating and provides more concrete data to both enrich

the idealized accounts of dystopia given and to inform political decision-making in the move from the abstract and idealized to political practice.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter laid out a typology of the form and function of dystopia. Conceptualizations of dystopia can manifest in a descriptive, theoretical, projective, and hypothetical form. Functionally, dystopia can be invoked as part of a rhetorical strategy, program of education, or analytically to justify or critique society, and affirm a dystopian end we should be averse to. A close reading of political thinkers working on projects similarly oriented around avoiding bad outcomes reinforced some earlier claims, including the importance of the power of human beings to harm and help each other, and the importance of listening to victims (Shklar). It also introduced new ideas, including the educative function of dystopia and negative morality (Allen). This chapter also described how dystopophobia is distinct from these other areas of research (especially McQueen and Tufan), and defended the approach against Goodhart's criticisms of the closely aligned "obvious injustice" approach, and from overlaps with ideal theory. The next chapter moves on to examples of aversion to dystopia and bad outcomes in ancient political thought.

Chapter Three: Dystopophobia in the Ancient World

I. Introduction

So fundamental is the desire for good and aversion to bad that, as Bentham says, that there is no "human creature… breathing, however stupid or perverse, who has not on many, perhaps on most occasions of his life, deferred to [it]" (1789, 16). The imperative to avoid pain and other bad things, aversional thinking, and the justification of actions and ends by reference to the bad things they avoid is a recurrent theme in political thought. This chapter reconstructs dystopian and aversional thinking with an account of dystopia as a descriptive and lived experience at the level of society, first in the Mediterranean at the end of the Bronze Age (c. 1200BCE), and then at peak of Athenian power (c. 500BCE). These accounts are valuable as through the examples of war and invasion, and the life of slaves captured in war, an account of dystopia operating on the social level, and then at the individual level emerges. The text identifies a certain level of resolution to or reconciliation with this dystopian condition at the time – what might be thought of dystopia without the phobia. This conclusion is important as it reinforces the claim from preceding chapters about the necessity of human power to ameliorate the human condition in any account of dystopophobia. These considerations about dystopia in Greek life are followed by an overview of the dystopophobic thinking Socrates expresses. This section then moves on to Plato where it is argued that the invocation of dystopophobic arguments at the start and the end of the book are evidence of the failure of the text to convince the audience of the intrinsic virtue of the positive ideal of *The Republic* put forward in the center of the book.

Section three of this text moves to the case of Rome. First a brief account of Roman life in the waning years of the Republic is given by way of an introduction to Cicero and the context in which he advances his dystopophobic arguments about the need to avoid social disintegration caused by powerful individuals fighting amongst one another for political power. The section then moves on to Augustine's fairly dystopian view of the Roman Empire and the meagre hope that some of the worst qualities of the human condition can be mitigated, but without hope for a final utopian improvement in Roman life.

II. Dystopia and Dystopophobia in the Mediterranean

The Bronze Age period of 3000-1150BCE saw a great flourishing of civilizations in the areas around Mediterranean Sea. Egypt remained, as it had been for thousands of years, an established and prominent civilization, and the Levant was populated by a network of sometimes cooperating, sometimes warring city-states. The Aegean island of Crete experienced a considerable expansion from around 1600-1450 with the growth of the Minoan civilization, which was followed by the Myneacean civilization on mainland Greece, that eclipsed Crete as the central civilizational power in the decades that followed Crete's decline. The Aegean civilizations were organized around a palatial system of government: the monarch lived in a primary palace and a central administration was conducted to organize agricultural and craft production and to distribute and trade these resources. These palaces provided security for their citizens, whilst taxing them and acting as a center of religious life for the people (Dickinson 2006, 35-8). In this environment, trade and diplomacy between Aegean civilizations also proliferated, as there is evidence of

enduring bi-lateral exchanges between cities around the Mediterranean in this period.[29] While the different civilizations around the Mediterranean waxed and waned in their power over the centuries, it is remarkable that the system of palatial government throughout the Mediterranean underwent a simultaneous collapse around 1177BCE.

Dystopia at the level of Society in the Bronze Age

There have been many different attempts to explain the likely causes of this collapse. Some explanations are environmental, attributing much of the decline to shifting in climate that caused drought, and also to an unprecedented number of devastating earthquakes. Others have suggested that changes in trade patterns and the rise of private merchants effectively isolated the palaces, leaving them obsolete. Still others have suggested that hostile forces, including the "Darian invasion" of outside Greek peoples could have destroyed the Mynecean civilization, whilst the rest of the Mediterranean was marauded by a band of unaffiliated "Sea Peoples" who travelled from city to city along the coast, taking what they could from the poorly defended and killing all those who opposed them. The precise cause of the collapse of the age is likely some combination of all the factors, which lends credibility to the theory of systems collapse that has gained prominence recently, and holds

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[29] There are records, for example, of trade delegations sent by Egypt's Thutmose III to what is now Lebanon, and with modern Turkey and perhaps what is now Cyprus (Cline 2015, 27-8). The growth of inter-state trade along with the diplomatic practice of gift giving between elites meant, "undoubtedly," that "ideas and innovations were occasionally transported along with actual objects," which helps to explain certain similarities in things like architectural style shared in Egypt, Anatolia, Canaan, and even the Aegean (Cline 2015, 59).

that the interlocking system of mutual interdependence was weak to collapse precisely because of its overlapping nature.[30]

What is striking in this period is its brutality, and the devastation caused by the unravelling of the Mediterranean system of politics. Mixing contemporaneous letters and later archeological evidence, Eric Cline reconstructs the sacking of Ugarit (now Northern Syria) by maritime invaders with horrifying bluntness. The leaders of the city received warning that the ships of the enemy were at sea, and were warned to "remain firm," but such a warning proved insufficient to protect the people and the city. What is thought to be the last letter from the city describes how "the army was humiliated and the city was sacked. Our food in the threshing floors was burnt and the vineyards were also destroyed. Our city is sacked. May you know it! May you know it!" As Cline goes on to say,

> "…the excavators of Ugarit report that the city was burned with a destruction level reaching two meters high in some places, and that numerous arrowheads were found scattered throughout the ruins. There were also a number of hoards found buried in the city; some contained precious gold and bronze items… All appear to have been items hidden just before the destruction took place; their owners never returned to retrieve them. However, even a severe and complete destruction of the city does not explain why the survivors did not rebuild, unless there were no survivors." (Cline 2014, 150-1)

The fact that the city of Ugarit received a warning and that the people of Ugarit told others of the devastation they experienced – "May you know it!" – proves that the possibility of complete destruction was a fairly broadly recognized possibility for the people of this time period. "The drastic nature of the Collapse needs to be emphasized," Dickinson says, as "…the archaeological evidence for destruction and dislocation surely indicates that what happened was far more catastrophic than a simple bypassing of palatial control of trade

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[30] For an overview of academic the debates with around the collapse see Dickinson (2006, 24-57), and for a compelling and more readable narrative of the period that includes explanations for the collapse see Cline (2014 139-70).

which caused the palaces' decline into obsolescence" (2006, 242). In what is the first case of the end of the world, these people at the end of the Bronze Age experienced the complete collapse of their shared system of political and economic organization in a violent and destructive conflagration.

Dystopia at the Level of Society in Classical Athens

Widespread social collapse occurred throughout the Mediterranean around 1177BCE, but new city states emerged in the same area, especially from around 800BCE.[31] Notably, by about 500BCE, Athens had established itself as a major power in the Mediterranean and by using its navy to end piracy in the area, established a network of trade through the Delian League that entrenched its economic and military power. As with the sacking of Ugarit some seven hundred years earlier, conflict and destruction at hands of foreign powers remained a real danger. In the Greco-Persian War most of Athens' defenses were destroyed or damaged and the people of Athens fled the city. As Thucydides tells us, once the land was free of foreign occupation (c. 480BCE), the Athenian people "began to bring back their children and wives and what property they had left from the places where they had hidden them away" (1972, 87-8). Here, then, we see that the life of people under siege and threat of plunder by hostile forces is remarkably similar to that in the Aegean centuries before; often the best hope for survival was fight, and failing that to run and hide away one's possessions in the hopes of rebuilding once the danger had passed.

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[31] There is some evidence of minor recoveries by some cities in the twelfth century, but certainly not to the level previously achieved, and, in any case, these too, eventually collapsed (Dickinson 2004, 60).

In order to improve their chances of rebuffing the enemy in the future, the Athenians took to rebuilding not just the houses in the city, but also rebuilding and reinforcing the city's fortifications, including the Long Walls from Athens to the Piraeus, that would secure a constant connection to the sea. This is an example of an attempt to minimize the dystopian possibility of sack by enemy forces. Unfortunately, this fortification of the city would have devastating consequences fifty years later when, in 430BCE, the decision to retreat within the the city walls upon the invasion by the forces led by the Spartan King Archidamus created the conditions for the spread of a plague of Typhus that killed up to a third of the population. Thucydides reports that "doctors were quite incapable of treating the disease because of their ignorance of the right methods," and that, "[e]qually useless were prayers made in the temples, consultation of oracles, and so forth" (1971, 151-2). Such was the devastation and loss – a horrifying and near apocalyptic and dystopian experience that far outstrips the levels of death caused by war, plague, and famine in the contemporary era – that Thucydides says, provocatively, "in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things" (1971, 152).

There was, then, a recognition of the precariousness of life and possibility of attack by hostile forces requiring robust defenses. Moreover, the people of Athens lived through the devastation caused by plague, so the possibility of an early death for oneself and one's family, and, in turn a crippling blow to the polity as a whole by depopulation was a lived experience.[32] Drawing on the typology of dystopian forms given in the introduction, then,

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[32] On the importance of keeping an appropriately populated city (appropriate both in terms of number and age) in order to ensure self-sufficiency and protection from others, see Aristotle's *Politics* Book 7, Ch. 4, 5 and 9 (1992, 401-6; 414-7). As another example of the lived experience of dystopia and social collapse in

dystopia was a reality and as such could be *described* as a set of events. In this description there is a certain resolution to one's fate, and a sense of hopelessness. Rather than dystopia as a something one may be averse to or have a phobia of, the inevitability of suffering because of an inability to do much to mitigate it produces a condition of dystopia without the phobia. Some attempts were made to avoid catastrophic dystopian outcomes through things like fortification. But, still, death at the hands of foreign forces and unseen pathogens produced staggering loss of life that reinforces in stark and tragic terms the prerequisite of power in any account of dystopophobia. If the polity is not able to act in ways to avoid the worst outcomes, then the idea of dystopophobia is either incoherent or inert.

Dystopia at the Individual Level in Classical Athens

In addition to dystopia at the level of society, there is something in Thucydides' description of the Athenian's insensitivity to suffering – that, "in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things" (1971, 152) – that

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Classical Greece, see Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean Civil War (1972, 236-45). In 427BCE general sense of fear caused by prospect of attack by the Peloponnesians, and internal faction between democrats and oligarchs left the Corcyrean polity in disarray. After a series of battles with the Peloponnesians the Corcyreans found a break in the fighting as the Peloponnese left and allied Athenian ships arrived as reinforcements. At this point, the Corcyreans "seized upon all their enemies whom they could find and put them to death… Next they went to the temple of Hera and persuaded about fifty of the [approximately 400] suppliants [members of the oligarchic faction] there to submit to trial. Then they condemned every one of them to death. Seeing what was happening, most of the other suppliants, who had refused to be tried, killed each other there in the temple; some hanged themselves of trees, and others found various other means of committing suicide…" Over the following days, "The Corcyreans continued to massacre their own citizens whom they considered to be their enemies… as usually happens in such situations, people went to every extreme and beyond it. There were fathers who killed their sons; men were dragged from the temples or butchered on the very alters; some were actually walled up in the temple of Dionysus and died there." As Thucydides goes on to explain, the events were not unique to Corcyra: "revolutions broke out in city after city, and in places where the revolutions occurred late the knowledge of what had happened in previous places caused still new extravagances of revolutionary zeal, expressed by an elaboration in the methods of seizing power and by unheard-of atrocities in revenge" (1972, 241-2). This event will be discussed in more detail in the Hobbes chapter.

resonates with Bernard Williams' powerful account of the Classical Greek worldview in regards to luck and slavery, and gives insight into the idea of dystopia on the individual level within otherwise non-dystopian context.

Of all the possible conditions one could be in during the Classical Greek period, being a slave is certainly amongst the worst. Slaves, as Aristotle tells us, were chattel to be uses as tools as a part of household management: "a slave is a sort of living piece of property" (1991, 64-5), and one would never choose to be a slave. Nonetheless, the system of slavery persisted. It persisted, Williams tells us, because "the Greek way of life, as it actually functioned, presupposed it." He continues,

> "(It is a different question whether as an abstract economic necessity they needed it: the point is simply that, granted the actual state of affairs, no way of life was accessible to them that preserved what was worthwhile to them and did without slavery.) Almost all of them took it for granted… What they found [hard] to do, once they had the system, was to imagine their world without it. For the same reason, they did not take too seriously the complaints of the slaves. They had nothing to put in the place of the system, and granted the system, it would be surprising if slaves did not complain…" (1993, 112).

It is an important quality of Classical Greek slavery then that, unlike American race-based chattel slavery, it was possible to experience a radical shift in one's social identity from a free person to then become the property of another as a slave.[33] As Williams puts it,

> "What made ancient slavery even more remarkable was the ready way in which a person could change from one of these identities to another. Some were born slaves, but you could become a slave from being free, by being captured, and this… was a well-known calamity, a piece of ill luck." (1993, 108)

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[33] I concede that the enslavement of otherwise free black persons following the ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) and the cavalier attitude of slave catchers purporting to uphold the *Fugitive Slave Act* (1850) muddies claim this somewhat.

In regards to slavery, then, the dynamic at play was as follows: 1) slavery was necessary to the economic system as a component of household management; 2) slaves needed to be replenished over time; 3) no one was willing to volunteer to become a slave as slavery is a miserable condition compared to freedom; 4) to satisfy the need for slaves, free people (ideally non-Athenians) were captured and turned into slaves by force; 5) this act of enslavement was manifestly morally indefensible to all as the shift from freedom to slavery is an affront to all the qualities of human experience that makes freedom valuable; 6) in order to think of themselves as people with integrity, Athenians either needed to abandon their entire way of life (per point 1), or find a way to make the act of enslavement acceptable (per point 5). On Williams' telling, the Athenians solve the problem at step 5 by reifying the idea of *bad luck*. On this worldview, it is simply a colossally large piece of bad luck for a free person to become enslaved by capture (Williams 1993, 108).[34] The effect of invoking the idea of luck here is to remove agency from the act of enslavement and to disregard the economic forces and internal logic of the social and political system of Classical Athens that incentivizes people to capture free people and enslave them. Instead, one's fate and that of previously free slaves is left to the vicissitudes of luck.

In light of the inability to do anything productive to remediate slavery – this worst feature of Athenian life – the people resolved themselves to it; in Thucydides' words, "they

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[34] Williams explains that the system of divine intervention by Gods like Zeus entails that some outcomes were a product of divine necessity; that the Gods could make some outcomes simply unavoidable. If *all* events were divinely ordained, there would be no place for luck in this cosmology, but, Williams says, the Greeks did not hold this kind of fatalist view of divine necessity, which was "not a plan for the whole world… [and] did not consist of one plan for one individual, except in very special cases" (1993, 104). As it was not possible not know what the Gods had planned for oneself, if anything at all, a view of luck fairly close to the idea of chance existed at this time. This view of luck is what Martha Nussbaum defines in *The Fragility of Goodness* as "events over which human agents lack control" (2001, xiv), and is why slavery produces such cognitive dissonance as, of course, slavery is a system of force and coercion perpetrated by humans and so is to some degree in human control.

paid no further attention to such things" (1971, 152) by deferring to the idea of luck. Slavery was the inescapable baseline of experience for Athenians at the time, and so, rather than interrogate slavery's causes and conceptualize it as a discrete harm to be avoided in a political theory, slavery was set aside as an object of concern that existed beyond the social, political, and the realm of human control. This elevation of bad luck in the schemes of Classical Athenian thinking prompts a slight revision to the idea of power at the heart of dystopophobia given in the introduction. We see here that it is not merely the power *to* impact the lives of others that has moral significance that can act as a prompt for thinking about bad outcomes for oneself and others. It is not just the power to influence other people that engenders moral questions and political questions, but *it is also the power to stop*. If one is inescapably trapped within a social and economic system that requires conformity and prevents critical and imaginative thinking about alternative ways of living, then this path dependency hampers conceptualization of dystopia and the worst parts of the contemporary society (like slavery) as something to avoid reproducing in future generations.[35]

Socrates

A complicated dystopophobic framework of political thinking emerges in the words of Socrates. At the core of Socrates' philosophy is the distinction between knowledge and

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[35] This anticipates some of the ideas put forward by Popper in his account of the Open Society. Popper makes the case that an open culture of self-critical analysis is required for the conceptualization of different forms of living and the improvement of society by correcting for the worst failures within society. The claim here actually goes further than Popper by suggesting that even an open society is not always sufficient to identify solutions to the worst aspects of society, like slavery. In addition to this system of open criticism the background social and economic conditions have to be conducive to conceptualization and implementation.

opinion and he proceeds by interrogating those who claim to know through a series of probing questions that reveal the speaker's motivated thinking and hubris. By disabusing his fellow Athenians of false beliefs, Socrates does his part to prevent them from acting wrongly – by, for example, prosecuting their own relations in the name of a false piety in *Euthyphro* (2002a) – thereby justifying his provocations on the grounds that they help Athenians avoid producing bad outcomes.

The problem of false belief is so dire on Socrates' estimation that the citizens of Athens are so utterly misguided that the primary problem facing Athens is *not* that the people all-too-often act in very bad ways. Indeed, Socrates goes so far in *Crito*, to wish that the people would act very badly, for this may suggest that they have insight into how to act very goodly as well. Instead, because of their ignorance, the people of Athens act irrationally and inconsistently by ricocheting from good to bad acts without comprehension. He says,

> "Would that the majority could inflict the greatest evils, for they would then be capable of the greatest good, and that would be fine. But now they cannot do either. They cannot make a man either wise or foolish, but they inflict things haphazardly." (Plato 2002c, 47).

On reading this, one might imagine the city as a stream with each person comprising a water molecule flowing within it. Because each molecule of water bounces down the stream haphazardly, the effect is that the water continues to generally cut down the same path year after year, without spilling over on either side. With greater knowledge of the truly good or truly bad, rather than bounce off one another haphazardly, it would be possible to cut a new path (either good or bad) through the force of water rushing together in one powerful motion, as sometimes happens when a sluice gate is opened and a large wave of water is released that can break past the banks eroded into place over the preceding

years. Socrates' role is to release this torrent of water – "to rouse each and every one of you" (2002b, 35) – by pushing and probing the false beliefs of his fellow citizens.

At the level of society Socrates criticizes the beliefs and values shared by the population at large in order to generate a self-examination that may yield a correction in one's individual actions and in turn the shared values of the polity. Note that it is immediately after his unmediated rebuke of his fellow citizens – "are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to the wisdom or truth or the best possible state of your soul? (2002b, 34) – that he describes himself as a gadfly upon the people of the state. He says,

"I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to this city by the god – though it seems a ridiculous thing to say – as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfil some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company." (2002b, 35).

Here the immediate bad outcome to be avoided is Socrates' own wrongful death. But the deeper reason why this would be a bad outcome for the polity is that Socrates is a rare individual who by reproaching the people prevents them from making further bad choices.

It is worth stressing that avoiding bad outcomes was not Socrates' only or primary aim. He shifts freely in his dialogues between the goal of making oneself as good as possible and the desirability of avoiding bad things for oneself and the polity.[36] But, it is

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[36] As an example of this consider Socrates' discussion with Callicles in *Gorgias*, wherein he makes the case that a good and virtuous life of self-restraint is desirable not just because self-restraint is intrinsically good,

also partly explained by Socrates' recognition of the complexity of the goal of avoiding

bad outcomes, in particular the possibility that acting in ways to avoid bad outcomes can

be counter-productive. On this he says in *The Apology* that humans do, of course, make

decisions and act in ways that we *believe* to be best, but often we are wrong. However, in

many of these cases, it is better to persist in one's course of action than to vacillate by

changing at the last minute in the face of impending disaster. "This is the truth of the

matter," he says,

> "wherever a man has taken a position that be believes to be best, or has been placed by his commander, there he must I think remain and face danger, without a thought for death or anything else, rather than disgrace" (2002b, 33).

Here we should place emphasis upon Socrates' use of the word "believes," because, as we

have already seen, Socrates is skeptical that most people have true beliefs about what is

best and so when they take a position, most do it haphazardly. In spite of this, though, when

one has taken a position, it is best to remain steadfast in that position "without a thought

for death or anything else." Precisely why remaining steadfast is preferable is somewhat

unclear in the text as Socrates gives several reasons for it, including the obligation to follow

superiors, piety to the Gods, and because fear of death is unfounded. That Socrates is

unclear and gives so many reasons in favor of this claim should not be counted against it,

though; it does not reveal a lack of clarity in his thinking. Instead, it is appropriately

reflective of the pluralistic nature of values that rightly inform one's decision-making. Here

Socrates recognizes further reasons why following through on bad choices is the right thing

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but because through self-restraint one will avoid the bad of punishment from Hades in the afterlife (Plato 1987, 109-10).

to do, an insight which he then goes on to act in accordance with in his fateful decision to remain in Athens and serve out his punishment by drinking hemlock when he could have escaped Athens instead (2002c, 56). This leaves us with a complicated picture of the role of aversion to bad outcomes in Socrates' thinking. He dedicated much of his time to probing the false beliefs of his fellow Athenians and also to prompting them to cast aside bad values like money-grubbing, and he stresses at many points in his recorded work that the virtue of these changes will be to avoid evils and bad outcomes. But, in addition to this he still concerns himself with the ideal of the good life and the good soul, and recognizes that although avoiding calamity (especially for oneself through death) may be desirable, there are nonetheless broader sets of countervailing obligations and concerns that can justify acting in ways that may lead to some bad outcomes.

Plato

Plato's writing is also of intense interest when thinking about aversion to dystopia in ancient political thought. Of course, he wrote extensively over the course of a long lifetime, and hints of the same considerations relevant to avoiding bad outcomes rather than achieving good ends pop up from time to time throughout his corpus. In assessing *The Republic* through the lens of dystopophobia, Judith Shklar's analysis of Plato in *Faces of Injustice* is an important initial point to consider as she describes Plato as the first philosopher of injustice who gave injustice its due by theorizing it as a concept distinct from justice. Plato, she says, is the first philosopher of injustice as he excoriates his contemporary polity and the paeans to justice that uphold it as "far from altering unjust people, it only encourages and maintains their habits… For what do law courts do but invite

the greedy to accuse the even more greedy of offenses arising from their greed and aggression?" (1990, 21). Plato's contribution to the idea of injustice is to make the case that against the dominant mode of upholding justice and the role of law is to merely "put injustice into temporary remission" (1990, 22). She continues,

> "[T]he realm of justice… [is] designed to check, but in no way redirect the ways of men perpetually at war with each other, with neighboring cities, and with themselves. Courts, lawyers, assemblies, juries, armies and all the normal political institutions are merely ways of organizing these disorderly public impulses, which mirror the psychic chaos of individual citizens" (1990, 23).

The baseline expectation is that as people are currently unjust and can be expected to continue to act in their own self-interest. The polity under the normal model of justice is organized in order to militate against these tendencies, but fails to address them at a fundamental level, thereby ensuring that they will inevitably persist into the future, albeit in a somewhat weakened form. Against this, Plato posits that it is only the ideal city in speech – in which all people act according to their nature and in harmony with one another by "minding [their] own business" (Plato 1991, 112) – that the forces of injustice (the disorderly individual impulses) fail to emerge and undermine the coherence of the society. Only a thorough revision of society to produce fundamental harmony is enough to fully banish injustice, and so, on this interpretation, Plato is sensitive to the bad of injustice in the Republic, as is evinced in his willingness to endorse a far more comprehensive reorganization of society under the direction of philosopher kings, even at the risk of ridicule by his contemporaries for the outrageousness of his arguments. As injustice is a bad thing one ought to avoid Plato is dystopophobic.

Shklar is surely right in her assessment here, but only so far as she takes it. We can push the point further. Assuming what Plato says is true and the realization of justice

requires a comprehensive reorganization of society, as someone attuned to injustice in the "normal mode," as Shklar describes it, Plato is painfully aware of the need to make his account of the transformation of society to his utopian goal palatable to his contemporaries. If he is unable to have his contemporaries buy in to the superiority of the utopian vision to the status quo for them individually, then he cannot expect any of them to endorse his vision in the cut and thrust of politics, in which case Athenian society would be stuck perpetually in a sub-optimal unjust society in the normal mode rather than reaching the utopian highs it could otherwise reach. In order to convince his contemporaries, much of the text in *The Republic* is dedicated to proving that the pursuit of justice is in the individual self-interest of Athenians. This is of interest for the reader because, in making this case the argument is made that that acting justly – i.e. doing the right thing – is a good thing to do because in so doing, one avoids further inevitably bad outcomes for oneself. This is a dystopophobic argument on the individual level: act rightly as an individual in order to avoid some further bad for oneself. As I will contend below, this sets up a tension in the text between the utopian vision of society as a worthy ideal to aspire towards and the individual-level dystopophobic argument that bringing about justice is good in order to avoid some further bad for oneself. The expression of the individual level dystopophobic argument at the start and end of *The Republic* suggests that in the final analysis (just as in the first analysis), the ideal of justice to aspire towards is not a motivating ideal and that instead it is the aversional end of avoiding bad outcomes that is motivating.

In just the first few pages of Book I, the elderly character of Cephalus prompts a discussion of justice by saying that the great wealth he has accumulated over his lifetime has been a good thing because it has freed him from acting unjustly in life by feeling

compelled to cheat or lie to others out of necessity.[37] Notably, that Cephalus has not acted

unjustly in his life is important because, as one becomes old, Cephalus says one becomes

sensitive to the threat of eternal damnation in Hades for ones crimes and misdeeds on Earth.

He says,

> "…that when a man comes near to the realization that he will be making an end, fear and care enter him for things to which he gave no thought before. The tales told about what is in Hades – that the one who has done unjust deeds here must pay the penalty there… [The elderly become] full of suspicion and terror; and he reckons up his accounts and considers whether he has done anything unjust to anyone. Now, the man who finds unjust deeds in his life often even wakes from his sleep in a fright as children do, and lives in anticipation of evil. To the man who is conscious in himself of no unjust deed, seed and good hope is ever beside him…" (1991, 6)

Note the strong aversional argument on the individual level here: do good things now in

order to avoid a very bad outcome – a tormented life in Hades – later. Cephalus does not

defend justice as good on its own terms, but instead as something worth pursuing in order

to avoid some other bad outcome. This perhaps belies a lack of belief in the intrinsic value

of justice on Cephalus' part, and certainly is evidence of the strong motivational power of

avoiding bad outcomes.

Two chapters later Glaucon makes the case that even if justice were a good that is

worthy of being pursued on its own terms, people are not motivated to act according to

justice and will always choose self-interest if they can get away with it. He argues this point

through a famous thought experiment: if a person had the power to become invisible – like

the man who possessed the Ring of Gyges – then this person would not submit to the

principles of right action that society upheld. Instead, they would use this power to pursue

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[37] Once again, the insight from a few pages prior emerges here in the recognition that what matters for the idea of aversion to dystopia and other bad outcomes to take hold is not only the recognition that things are less than fully ideal and could be organized differently in order to mitigate the worse of them, but, in addition to this, one also needs the capacity to make things different for aversion to the bad that constitutes normal political life to be something one desires to correct.

their own interest, by – in the story at least – killing the king, sleeping with the queen, and placing himself on the throne (1991, 38). Glaucon sums this up by saying that principle and interest do not align: "Justice is not one's private good, since wherever either thought he could do wrong with impunity he would do so." Glaucon concludes that the self-interest is the relevant metric for measuring the value of an action and of the polis: if self-interest is not maximized, the logic runs, then one has reason to and will inevitably repudiate the norms of the polity and instead do what benefits oneself.

It is important to lay out the narrative of the text as it is here, in response to Glaucon's claim about the misalignment of self-interest and justice, that the character of Socrates introduces the ideal "city… in speech" (1991, 45) for which *The Republic* is famous. The precise nature and parameters of the city in speech and the ideal of justice that it realizes occupies most of the rest of the book and its purpose – as proven by the narrative arc of the text – is to show to Glaucon that this just society is perfectly compatible with the self-interest of individuals within society.[38] The strongest case the character of Socrates makes in favor of the claim that self-interest is compatible with justice appears in Book IX, when he describes the tyrannical individual as controlled by his urges and pursuit of base self-interest, which, if allowed to continue unimpeded, would ultimately cause the tyrant

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[38] For further proof of this need to appeal to Glaucon's self-interest, see Glaucon's objection to Socrates' first account of the just society as a merely self-sufficient proto-city comprised of people with modest aspirations, merely to eat enough to be full, spend time with friends, and "not produce children beyond their means, keeping an eye out against poverty and war" (1991, 49). Glaucon objects that merely avoiding poverty is not enough for a good life, certainly not compared to the life he currently leads in Athens with all its riches and indulgences. He says, "You mean to makes these men have their feast without relishes," (49), which in turn prompts Socrates to articulate the larger and more complicated polity of the Republic with the three differing classes. Socrates is clear that he believes this small self-sufficient society is the most just and ideal one – he says, "Now, the true city is in my opinion the one we just described" – but is forced over the next eight chapters, in order to show how justice is compatible with self-interest, to describe how a richer "feverish" city with all the relishes Glaucon wants is also just (1991, 49).

to be enslaved by his passions and to act in ways all persons would agree are wretched and that no one would desire to emulate (1991, 260). Against this undesirable and self-defeating ideal of the self-interested tyrant, Socrates puts suggests a tripartite form of the human soul in which the self-interested (appetite) portion of humanity exists along side the rational and spirited sides. To act unjustly is to act according to only one of these three parts of the soul, especially the appetitive side, as in the case of the tyrant. Instead, when all three parts of the soul are in harmony, and the appetites appropriately controlled by the rational portion of the soul, then individuals can choose what is truly better for them: they will choose to act justly, according to their enlightened self-interest.[39]

This argument in favor of acting justly is radically different to that given by Cephalus. To be sure, the character of Socrates does point to the negative consequences of acting wrongly – that one risks ending up like the tyrant. But at the center is an aspirational vision of the good and justice as ends to be pursued as good in and of themselves, which is appreciable to those people who have well-ordered souls. Unlike Cephalus who in a dystopophobic line of reasoning acted rightly to avoid punishment in Hades, it is the intrinsic virtue of justice that is intended to be motivating in the extended Platonic view expressed by Socrates. Importantly, then, this is the strongest case one can make that in this text Plato is *not* dystopophobic – it is the good of justice in bringing about something good that makes it an ideal to aspire towards, not the badness of some non-justice thing

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[39] "…it's better for all to be ruled by what is divine and prudent, especially when one has it as his own within himself… [if this is true,] then in what way, Glaucon, and on the basis of what argument, will we affirm that it is profitable to do injustice, or be licentious, or do anything base, when as a result of these things one will be worse, even thought on acquires more money or more of some other power?" (1991, 273).

that is to be avoided, and all would choose to act rightly if they had correctly ordered souls.[40]

But, importantly, the text does not end in Book IX. Instead, it ends in Book X, which supplements the argument about the soul with the same logic of divine punishment put forward by Cephalus in Book I. After a long discussion of the ways that evil and unjust actions can deform both the body and the soul, Socrates puts it to Glaucon in Book X that surely any just God would not reward the wicked and punish the righteous in the after life. Socrates says,

> "…it must be assumed in the case of the just man that, if he falls into poverty, diseases, or any other of the things that seem bad, for him it will end in some good, either in life or even in death. For surely gods at least would never neglect the man who is eagerly willing to become just and, practicing virtue, likens himself, so far as possible for a human being, to a god."
> "It is quite likely," he [Glaucon] said, "that such a man isn't neglected by his like."
> "And, in the case of the unjust man, mustn't we think the opposite of these things?"
> "Very much so." (Plato 1991, 296)

The text ends, then, not on the triumphant account of the virtue of justice in Book IX, but instead with a fairly base appeal to self-interest in Book X. And, importantly, this is exactly what the book started with in Cephalus' account of the goodness of justice in Book I. The reader ends, then, where she started – *The Republic* is bookended by two dystopophobic arguments that it is good to be just and act rightly in order to avoid some further bad outcome in the after life. It is in light of this that when reading Plato through the lens of dystopophobia, one should take the argument further than Shklar who (in her self-consciously more circumscribed analysis) emphasizes Plato's analysis of injustice in *The Republic*. To be sure Plato makes the case for banishing injustice in the way that Shklar

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[40] This is also the strongest argument that counts against Shklar's view that Plato is the first theorist of injustice. He does talk of injustice in many places, but his enduring focus in the text is the idea of justice and how to reconcile it with self interest.

describes, but more than this, *literally* surrounding the entire text is the dystopophobic argument addressed at the individual level that one should act justly in order to avoid bad outcomes for oneself in the after life.[41] It is in *this* way that Plato is most prominently a dystopophobic thinker, and it is in this way that he reveals the limitations of his argument about the virtue of justice as something worthy of aspiring towards.

Moving on from *The Republic*, Plato's last text, *The Laws*, is interesting for dystopophobic observers. In one regard the text is the polar opposite to Plato's early text, *The Republic*, which advocates for rule by philosopher kings in whom the arbitrary power to steer the ship of state is invested. By contrast, in his later work, Plato dedicates most of his time to argue for the importance of the titular laws – rather than arbitrary rule, upheld if necessary by coercion – including the need for extensive preambles before each law in order to explain the goals and intention of each law, thereby securing for them greater support and understanding amongst the population and in turn obviating much of the need for heavy-handed enforcement (Plato 1997, 1391-1409). That being said, as with *The Republic*, in *The Laws* the question is raised about the ends of politics: is the goal to avoid

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[41] This argument is notably not unique only to *The Republic*. In *Gorgias* Socrates makes numerous arguments against Callicles' claim that the unmitigated pursuit of self-interest is the best way of living, but he ultimately ends his argument that the good life is characterized by self-restraint through the threat of judgment in the afterlife. Those who acted wrongly on earth will have their deformed souls judged and then dismissed "to await suffering its appropriate fate" (1987: 105-9) suggesting that if Callicles were to continue his manipulations and domination over others his soul will suffer the consequences in death. The claim here, then, is that "true politics" and right living is justified not because it will fail to bring happiness to the hedonist in this world; Socrates seems to concede that it might not and that the hedonic Callicles might be happy with the satisfaction of his ever expanding appetites. Instead, right living is preferable to hedonic living on earth because unjust hedonists like Callicles will receive "suffering appropriate to its fate," and those who benefitted from injustice on Earth have this injustice made even by Hades through "pain and suffering" (1987: 109-10). We should take from this, in the closing pages of the Gorgias, that the ultimate virtue of Socrates' account of right living is not because it brings some happiness to those who live rightly and that it benefits the polity as a whole (although it does do these things), but ultimately, the virtue of right living is that one *avoids* the horror of "undergoing eternal punishment in Hades" as we see in the examples of Tantalus who was starved and dehydrated, the exhausted and frustrated Sisyphus, and Tityus whose body was physically spread out over nine acres of land (1987:110).

bad outcomes, like defeat in war, or is the end of politics to produce good outcomes, like virtuous citizens?

Taking the dystopophobic view that the end of politics is to avoid defeat is Clinias, the Cretan, who makes the realist case of international relations that all states are "engaged in a never-ending lifelong war against all other states," and that accordingly, "what most men call 'peace' is really only a fiction, and that in cold fact all states are by nature fighting an undeclared war against every other state." In this context of persistent conflict amongst states, he continues, the ends of politics must be, as it is in Crete, success in fighting wars for "if we don't come out on top in war, nothing that we possess or do in peace-time is of the slightest use, because all the goods of the conquered fall into the possession of the victors" (1997, 1320). Here, the dystopophobic case is clear. There is an unambiguous bad outcome that must be avoided – loss in war – as this bad outcome is so bad that it undoes any good that could otherwise be achieved in society by leading either to the early death of those unsuccessfully fighting the war, or by the impoverishment of those who survived by the expropriation of their possessions by the victor. State policy must rightly be oriented around avoiding this bad outcome, in this case by developing the skills in the population to successfully win wars, even if this emphasis upon martial ability lowers the horizon of the polity from cultivating other qualities in the citizenry, like individual virtue. Here, the *form* dystopia advanced is a descriptive account of the condition of Greek city states as locked in endless conflict, and *functionally* the dystopia acts as a premise in order to argue for policy to avoid that bad outcome.

Arguing against this position is an unnamed Athenian, who strikes the opposing view that rather than enact laws with the end of avoiding the worst outcomes, the best

legislator "will enact his every law with the aim of achieving the greatest good" (1997, 1323). Success in war is not the end to be achieved; instead, peace is the end to be achieved, which can be realized only through the use of "war as a tool of peace" (1997, 1323). In making his case the Athenian does not directly engage with Clinias' claim that loss in war is *so bad* that it renders moot any benefits that virtue and other goods can bring to individuals and society. Instead he argues that the Cretan approach is self-defeating as it risks producing another outcome that as equally undesirable as loss in war. The Athenian coaxes Clineas into agreement over the concern that the sole focus on martial virtues at the cost of teaching other virtues like courage and self-rule will inevitably lead to corruption by the desire for the good things in life. "If our citizens," he says, "grow up without any experience of the keenest pleasures, and if they are not trained… to refuse to be pushed into any disgraceful action, their fondness for pleasure will bring them to the same bad end as those who capitulate to fear… they will become slaves of those who are able to stand firm against the onslaughts of pleasure and who are past-masters in the art of temptation" (1997, 1329-30). There is, he concludes, a double threat from both an excess of badness (loss in war) and an excess of goodness (endless pleasures from indulgence):

> "Pleasure and pain, you see, flow like two springs released by nature. If a man draws the right amount from the right one at the right time, he lives a happy life; but if he draws unintelligently at the wrong time, his life will be rather different. State and individual and every living being are on the same footing here." (Plato 1997, 1331)

The solution to this dilemma of choosing between the opposing threats of goodness and badness is to inculcate in the population a sound ability to judge between the two, so they can choose intelligently. The laws of the state, the Athenian concludes later, are an important means of educating and directing the population in these ways so that they

choose rightly between the two and are therefore not unduly fearful of loss, but also not harmfully gluttonous for the good (1997, 1364). This later text recognizes a need to orient the polity avoid calamitous outcomes like crushing defeat in war. But, rather than exclusively focus upon this end, though, the Athenian endorses a mixed view that steers a middle path between avoiding loss and moderating one's desire for good that produces virtuousness in society that is the rightful end of politics. This mixed view is quite distinct from *The Republic*, in which injustice and avoiding bad outcomes plays a far more prominent and enduring role in the argument.

III. Rome

In the fading years of the Republic during the first century BCE, Rome was very different to Periclean Athens of a few centuries earlier. In simple quantitative terms, Athens was a small city state of a few hundred thousand, whereas the Roman Republic was a sprawling empire that spread through Sicily, Macedonia, Gaul and Spain and far exceeded the size and strength of Athens' Delian League. Up to four million citizens lived within Roman controlled territory, with nearly a million of them living in the city of Rome, alone. In addition to scale, the system of government differed, too. Rather than direct democracy with positions in important political and bureaucratic roles often selected by lot, the Roman polity was built upon a complicated system of representative government that (by the time Cicero became an adult c. 90BCE) centered around the Senate.

The first century BCE was a high-point of Roman economic and military success. War was brutal and humiliating defeat could lead to the loss of thousands of Roman soldiers as occurred at the hands of Hannibal in the battle of Cannae. During the final

destruction of Carthage in 146BCE – which brought an end to the city that gave birth to Hannibal, who had so threatened Rome in the years before – even the losers acted with terrible cruelty: "On one occasion, the Carthaginians were supposed to have paraded Roman prisoners on the city walls, flayed them alive and dismembered them in full view of their comrades" (Beard 2015, 209). But, as Rome consolidated power and refined tactics, losses become less frequent and it was Roman soldiers who meted out murderous rampages during the plunder and sack of their vanquished enemies. This record of greater success in the later years promised unprecedented riches for those who made it home after successful triumphs abroad.

At this time the riches won by military commanders were so large that a successful military campaign and the plunder won therein was enough to catapult one to the top of the economic pyramid. The economic inequality of the period entailed that it was possible to not only win gold and land, but also to use these new assets to win for oneself political positions by, in effect, obtaining votes by bribing powerful leaders who influenced tribal votes, or through lavish banquets and games designed to curry favor amongst the masses. By 83 BCE, when Lucius Cornelius Sulla Felix gave himself the ancient title of Dictator and remade the Roman political system to favor his long-term political survival, preference for political and social esteem above material wealth was over. The ferocity of political struggle was so great, and the possibility of death or exile for failed political maneuvers was so high, that the structure of incentives pushed effective military leaders like Sulla to use their wealth and power to secure the political power necessary to vanquish their enemies and protect themselves from prosecution. While life was hard for the average Roman, the stakes in politics were so high that without the right network of support

(preferably military support), and unless one shrewdly cast their support behind the eventual winners of the internecine battles that comprised the Roman civil wars, even the richest and otherwise most esteemed risked death or exile.

Cicero

It is in this circumstance, where political esteem had been subordinated to the satisfactions of material wealth and the accumulation of power, that Cicero has much to say that is relevant to the political idea of avoiding bad outcomes. In his first speech as Consul in 63BCE Cicero made the case that the greatest threat to the Roman Republic was not the military forces of foreign adversaries, but instead was the abuse of the terrible power of the Roman state itself by grasping individuals attempting to promote their material self-interest and public renown. In response to a newly proposed agrarian bill that functioned as a populist power grab by Caesar, Crassus, and their allies to win the support of the common people, Cicero warns,

> "O tribunes of the people… Conspire with us; agree with all virtuous men defend our common republic with one common zeal and affection. There are many secret wounds sustained by the republic… [but t]here is no external danger. There is no king no nation, no people in the world whom we need fear. The evil is confined within our own walls internal and domestic very one of us to the best of his power ought to resist and to remedy this… All men, who wish to be safe themselves, will follow the authority of the consul, a man uninfluenced by evil passion; free from all suspicion of guilt; cautious in danger; not fearful in contest. But if any one of you cherishes a hope that he may be able in a turbulent state of affairs to promote his own interests, first of all, let him give up hoping any such thing as long as I am consul." (Cicero, *de Lege Agraria*, 1.26-7)

As the man elected to the highest office in the state, here Cicero sets out the Roman condition clearly: Rome is not weak to outside assaults, but instead is rent by internecine fighting. This fighting is by powerful elites like Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar who use, respectively, their armed supporters, wealth, and political acumen to win political power

and economic advantage for themselves and to punish their political enemies. These prideful and grasping people pursue power, even if the effect of their actions is the long-term (and perhaps even immediate) harm to the Roman state itself and its people. This is a dystopophobic argument that it is the selfish actions of the powerful to improve their individual condition at the expense of the general interest that threatens to sever the ties that bind the Roman polity as a democratic republic. If Rome and the people of Rome are to be safe, then each person must repudiate these pretenders and their means of achieving power, and instead act in selfless ways that benefit the polity rather than one's immediate self-interest; the Senate must be uninfluenced by evil passion and free from all suspicion of guilt. Here the threat of dystopian disintegration is invoked to criticize the status quo and encourage a public-spiritedness (with Cicero in its vanguard) to prevent that bad outcome from materializing.

Cicero gives an extended account of these issues in *On The Commonwealth*, written during his years in exile from Rome, c. 55-51BCE. In this text the character of Scipio concludes that the best political system is some form of democracy that ensures that the republic remains the "people's affair"[42] (1976, 136) by retaining the power to make laws in the hands of all citizens rather than the powerful few. He says,

> "…there is no form of government less subject to revolution or more stable [than democracy]; and that the kind of state in which harmony is most easily attained is one in which the interests of all the citizens are the same. Dissention… arises from diversity of interests, whenever the well-being of some is contrary to the well-being of others. Consequently, when the government was in the hands of aristocrats, the form of the state has never remained stable… Since, then, law is the bond that holds political society together, and since equality of rights is a part of law, by what principle of right can an association of citizens be held together, when the status of these citizens is not equal?" (1976, 136)

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[42] As he defines it, a commonwealth is a "people's affair" by those who are of "common agreement about law and rights" who seek "mutual advantages" (1976: 129).

This is a rich quotation that reveals a lot related to dystopophobia. It worthwhile to note Cicero's identification of the connection between political conflict and the "diversity of interests" of the individuals in society, as this is a problem that will reemerge in the next chapter in more detail, with Hobbes' account of the disintegrating forces of disagreement as a product of his nominalist view of concepts like good and evil. Remaining with Cicero, though, what is interesting is the way in which he closely connects justice as a scheme of moral equality with the further desire for peace and stability. If an end of society is the well-being of its citizens, and if justice requires equality between citizens, and if society must be stable to achieve these things and not disintegrate into a dystopian disaster, then, on Cicero's telling, the fundamental problem confronting society that must be resolved in order to avoid dystopia is how to constrain the rich and powerful and ensure that power remains in the hands of the demos. The problem is how to prevent a Sulla, Crassus, Pompey or Caesar from using the polity for their own ends and as an extension of personal power rather than joining with others in a true republic: a *res publica*; a people's affair.

The overlaps between this text and Plato's *Republic* are remarkable. Much of *The Republic* can be read as an attempt to educate aspiring political elites – Glaucon and Adeimantus – to suppress some of their private interest (in winning power and prestige in Athens as members of a powerful and wealthy family) and instead choose the public interest (by endorsing Socrates' city in speech). Both Cicero and Plato make the case that the powerful must place the public over their private good; public and private interest must be reconciled. What is most remarkable is that Cicero, like Plato, invokes the threat of divine punishment as the final reason to act in the public interest. Recall that *The Republic* opens with the claim by Cephalus and closes with the claim by Socrates that it is good to

be just and act rightly in order to avoid some further bad outcome in the afterlife. In spite of all his arguments in *On The Commonwealth* about the virtue of a *res publica* as a stable and just system of government, Cicero also ends his book with the argument that almost irrespective of these virtues, one should act rightly in order not to suffer loss in the afterlife.

At the end of book three of *On The Commonwealth*, Cicero's skeptical interlocutor Laelius complains that although Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Serapio was integral in the overthrow of the tyrannical populist Tiberius Gracchus, "no statues ha[ve] been publicly reared… to repay him [for this]" (1976, 255). The implicit challenge to Scipio here is, as Glaucon put it to Socrates, why should anyone (and particularly a statesman) act rightly and do what is just for the others and the state at large if the outcome is not to the benefit of the statesman himself? Why overthrow Gracchus if you are not going to be remembered and appreciated for it? In response, Cicero ultimately invokes the threat of divine judgment to justify right actions, even without proper reward on earth. Cicero's character Scipio responds that "All men who have saved or benefited their native land, or have enhanced its power, are assigned an especial place in heaven where they may enjoy a life of eternal bliss" (1976: 255). By contrast, "the souls of men who have surrendered themselves to carnal delights, who have made themselves… slaves of passions, and who have been prompted by lust to violate the laws of the gods and men, wander about near the earth itself, after their escape from the body, and do not return hither indent after they have been driven about for many ages" (1976, 267-8). This afterlife in a realm of existence near death is like a "bondage of the flesh" and "a prison" that one must escape from in order to become alive (1976, 259).

The outcome of all this is that Cicero makes several different aversional arguments pitched at different levels in his speeches and writing. *Descriptively*, the threat to the polity is the internal fraying of the social fabric by those pursuing their self-interest. In the preceding decades this internecine political competition descended into a number of civil wars that killed and immiserated thousands. This internal division threatens to finally destroy the republic itself, leading to instability, inequality, and the loss of the polity as a tool for mutual advantage, which is the ultimate bad end to be avoided by instead placing public over private interest. As with Plato, the need to place public over private interest is the central political problem, and, once again, as with Plato's *Republic*, the text ends with an *aversional* argument aimed at the individual: put public good above private interest or you risk an afterlife of great pain and suffering.

Augustine

As in the years between Pericles and Cicero, there had been considerable change in Rome over the approximately 400 years between Cicero writing in the waning years of the Roman Republic, and St. Augustine's reflections on the condition of the Roman Empire. With Octavian's ascension to 'First Citizen' in 31BC and the subsequent expansion of the empire a centralized political system emerged that was incompatible with direct political activity and engagement by the masses of the people. Instead, with the move from Republic to Empire, a sizable civil service was entrenched, and the bureaucrat replaced the citizen as the holder of public office. This displaced disagreement and public discussion of decision-making; hierarchy and bureaucracy emerged as dominant political forces, and corruption and bribery spread throughout the empire. The conferment of full citizenship rights to

persons within Roman territories through the Edict of Caracalla in 212AD finally destroyed idea that political engagement, shared language, custom, and ideas, were at the heart of a political community. Instead, legal status was the standard, and the law established the bounds in which one was able to act. As long as one remained within these bounds, the Roman state gave citizens latitude to live their lives as they pleased. Sheldon Wolin has made the case that this alienation from political activity explains the endurance and flourishing of Stoic thought throughout the period (2004, 70-75). This line of thought tasked adherents with following nature as the guide to individual action, where one took satisfaction in fulfilling one's role in the cosmic drama of nature, so that even if political society was unwelcoming, the individual is nonetheless at home with his place in the world.

In addition to Stoicism, religious conviction and especially Christianity flourished throughout the Empire, and it is through this lens that St. Augustine gives a diagnosis of the Roman political condition. Augustine writes *Confessions* (c. 400AD) in response to his dissatisfaction with his experience as a successful Roman rhetorician and speechwriter. The fact that he had "become a problem [question] to myself" (1961, 239) led him to probe his life and memories to understand why he found himself lost, although he was fabulously successful by the standards of the Roman system. He bemoans the emptiness of the ends one can hope to achieve in Rome. With hard work, training, and good fortune, one might be able to rise through the ranks and become a friend of the Emperor he says, but what is the virtue of this end, and at what cost does this success come with (1969, 167-8)?

Augustine's diagnosis to this predicament echoes Cicero's: it is necessary to diminish the deleterious effects of this pursuit of *cupiditas* through, as much as anything,

a reorientation of values and the ends of the state. In order to do this, as he argues in the *City of God*, it is necessary to reckon with the foundations of the society that reverberate through to the contemporary moment and shape the values and ideals of the people of his time. As he makes the case, the shared belief, common origin, and common stories define and orient people within the polity: Rome was born in violence, in the fratricide of Remus (2003, 600) and deceit was added to the founding myths of Rome through Numa's introduction of and amendment of laws and practices in the years after Romulus' death (2003, 66), the reasons for which were subsequently burned with the support of the senate who "deemed it more tolerable that the community should remain deluded, in ignorance of the reasons froth their ceremonies, then it should be distressed by learning the truth about them" (2003, 296). Augustine concludes that the heroism of Romulus – along with conquest – became the foundation of civil affection, loyalty, and unity in Rome. Ultimately, then, the people valorized a standard of heroism and adopted success as an end in itself, engendering the selfish contemporary pursuit of self-aggrandizement and success within the Roman system, even if that left Rome weakened and prone to sack in 410AD. Here, Augustine is describing Rome as something of a failed or fundamentally flawed state. This is not Cicero's good Republic rent in two by warring factions that can be brought into line under the direction of a good Consul, but instead is far more thoroughgoing. Augustine presents an indictment of Rome to its very core – in its founding by Romulus. The problem is not merely a few bad actors and the proximate system of incentives that encourages and allows them to arrogate power. Instead, the entire edifice of Roman thought and belief propagated down to posterity over centuries is to blame. It is this view of society as

essentially corrupted and sublunary that corresponds with his distinction between the City of God and the City of Man.

Early in Book 19 of *The City of God*, Augustine prompts his discussion of politics with the claim that "we are beset by evils, and we have to endure them steadfastly until we reach those goods where there will be everything to supply us with delight beyond the telling" (2003, 857). This is not a view of mankind conducive to utopian idealization. In life we are beset by dangers, which causes even good men to have to be on guard (2003, Bk 19, Ch 8). In this circumstance, it is necessary to endure the world of man, and structure it in such a way that we are able to live peacefully together without being wholly subsumed by the force of evil and our own limitations. So, then, in the first place we must attempt to mitigate the bads we will inevitably experience, rather than aspire to some comprehensive positive political ideal. To be sure, Augustine is not without any conception of the good or a preferable political ideal. His goal was to "define a civil community in a way that would enable Christians to give full weight to its claims on them, no less than on its pagan members and functionaries," (Markus 1994, 247), and he attempted to do this through a modified account of the Cicero's commonwealth (Augustine 2003, 881-3), in which the people share a common object of love in God (2003, 890-1). That being said, citizens in the commonwealth will nonetheless continue to run up against the limitations that plague all humans. Although we might all agree that peace is a worthwhile and valuable end, "even peace is doubtful, since we do not know the hearts of those with whom we wish to maintain peace" (2003, 858).

To reinforce this insight, it is worth pondering on Augustine's account of the judicial system. Law is, of course, a necessary feature of the polity required to maintain

order and justice and ensure that all people are treated equally under some objective standard that establishes some minimal level of predictability to social life. More than this, however – as noted above – with the expansion of citizenship through the Edict of Caracalla, law rather than culture or belief became the social glue that held citizens together the Roman Empire. Law is important then, especially in Rome, but, as Augustine says, this system is necessarily imperfect due to humankind's inability to see into the minds of others and the infelicity of language which breeds misunderstanding. Regrettably, this "ignorance of the judge is often a calamity for the innocent" (2003, 859) and although this terrible problem needs to be solved if we are to live in a better society, "ignorance is unavoidable – and yet the exigencies of human society make judgment also unavoidable." This Augustine describes as the "wretchedness of man's situation" (2003, 860). Judgment is compromised in the city of man, and so in these circumstances, the best we can do is the best we can do. We can attempt to improve our wretched condition by reducing the calamities done to the innocent through judicial ignorance by greater consideration of language and by cultivating the "mutual affections of genuine, loyal friends" (2003: 862), but we ought not to be too sanguine about our prospects.

There is something remarkable and distinct in this view of society. Yes, society is a system of social cooperation, but, uniquely on Augustine's telling, although each person lives together, interacts with one another, and does an incredible job of cooperating with one another, even over the sprawling distances of the Roman Empire, we are all, in a fundamental and unavoidable way, estranged from one another. We never know what's truly in the hearts of our fellow citizens and so we are liable to innocently make mistakes in our interactions with others (in the most extreme cases, for example, by condemning to

death innocent people in the court of law). More sinisterly, we are always at risk of deceit and skullduggery by others who can conceal their duplicitous designs from us. This view of society and the relations between individuals sets Augustine apart from Cicero and Plato. The latter two are optimistic that terms of social cooperation can be hit upon that bring about order and justice (either by changing the institutions of society to bring about harmony or by suppressing the selfish desires of powerful individuals). Whereas Plato believes that injustice is a malady caused by imperfect social institutions that can be eradicated through a fundamental reorganization of society, Augustine, by contrast, sadly concedes that injustice is the regrettable condition of humankind that, on Earth, can never be eradicated. While there are things that humankind can do to remediate the worst features of our condition, justice, perfection, and the ideal realized on earth are not live possibilities, leaving the human race merely to manage injustice, rather than achieve an ideal of justice.[43]

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[43] Here I am reminded of – though I wouldn't stake *too* much on – a connection with Bonnie Honig's idea of the "remainder" in politics (Honig 1993, 126-61). On Honig's view, any political settlement will fail to fully encompass the needs, interests, and desires of all citizens, therefore leaving them out of the terms of social organization (or, to put it the other way, therefore fail to fully integrate them into the terms of social organization) that, in turn, necessitates, at some point in the future, a renegotiation of the terms of social cooperation to integrate the remainder that, inevitably, will produce further remainders in society. In Part III of *A Theory of Justice* Rawls advances a political psychology of citizens in the just society that explains why all would uphold and support as legitimate his scheme of social organization of the basic structure of society. (In a recent edition of *The Boston Review* (2019), Samuel Scheffler advances an interesting account of Rawls' political psychology and the production of illiberal citizens in contemporary America that expresses – unconsciously, I would guess – Honig's account of remainders in society.) Honig rejects Rawls' political psychology as implausible, through reference to Nietzsche and a more diverse view of human psychology that could not be caught and constrained within Rawls' political psychology and would, as a corollary, exist as a remainder within his system of social cooperation. Honig's case is made strong by her particular appeal to Nietzsche and, as she calls them, the "rogues and idiosyncratic misfits" that he writes of in his philosophy. I wonder, though, whether an appeal to Augustine could have been equally as effective. After all, if we cannot know what is in the heart of our fellow citizens, then we cannot be optimistic in our expectations from others and their assent to the terms of social cooperation. Instead, we must always we wary that they, or others, may be remainders within our scheme of social cooperation that may, at a later date, demand a reestablishment of the terms of cooperation.

At this early point one should note a compelling overlap here with Karl Popper's view of the world explored in chapter six of this text. There it is explained that Popper repudiates any attempt to identify or explain the essential qualities of the natural world, including humans in society. We might never know and there might not even be anything, as Augustine says, in the "hearts of those with whom we wish to maintain peace" (2003: 858). We can, however, see how people – externally – act, that is, how they respond to stimuli, including the laws, principles, and incentives in society. Once we see how people act (and they report to us how they feel) it is possible to reorganize society by changing the laws, principles, and incentives of society in ways that reduce the amount of (reported) bad outcomes caused by those stimuli. As with Augustine, in Popper's philosophy, the focus in not internal and intrinsic, but instead is upon that which is external to each. Popper proposes a system of piecemeal social engineering to tinker with the objective external features of society in order to reduce suffering in the world. Augustine similarly confines his interest to external objects of shared interaction by, for example, establishing a commonwealth oriented around the love of God as a shared object of concern (2003, 890-1). Do not hope for utopia on earth, though such efforts do something to reduce the possibility of the worst dystopia and social dysfunction.

IV. Conclusion

Much has been said in this chapter that will be returned to again over the following chapters. Notably, however, the view of society as comprised of powerful individuals whose self-interest needs to be subsumed under the good of the polity if one is to avoid injustice, civil war, and dystopia is shared by Cicero and Plato. Perhaps not incidentally,

in order to align the self-interests of the powerful with the public interest of all in the polity, both Cicero and Plato each ends up appealing to divine punishment in a further plane of existence that would be a dystopia far worse than could be compensated for by accolades and material enrichment on Earth. In so doing, each firmly invokes a dystopophobic framework of avoiding bad outcomes as central to political theorizing. By contrast, Augustine describes life on Earth as necessarily imperfect and incorrigibly unjust. Rather than invoke a further world of pain and suffering to be endured by the wicked on earth as a means to corral good behavior by the living, Augustine contrasts the ideal City of God against the pale shadow of that city here on earth. In this circumstance, when the polity is beset by imperfections and injustices, the best we can do is remediate the worst features of this imperfect dystopia – it is certainly a dystopia compared to the City of God – by sharing amongst the populace a love of God.

Chapter Four: Hobbes

I. Introduction

Thomas Hobbes opens his "Preface to Readers" in *De Cive* (On The Citizen) with a warning to political thinkers. Politics, the object of study for political philosophers, is different to other areas of study. Politics is a serious business. This is not to say that philosophy of the mind or epistemology is unimportant, nor is it to say that they are unenjoyable or trivial. Unlike politics, however, they are a step removed from actual substantive consequences for people and the quality of their lives. After all, "if an error creeps into speculation on subjects which we take up as intellectual exercises, no harm is done, all that's lost is time" (Hobbes 1998, 8). By stark contrast, however, the outcome of political thinking – or, more accurately, ill-thinking – is often tragic and deadly. The likelihood of violence, harm, misery, and the live possibility of otherwise avoidable death animates Hobbes' philosophical program. Not only can good political theory help ameliorate bad outcomes but the reverse is also true, as bad political theory can exacerbate them. Accordingly, "nothing can be imagined more useful than…" the ability to replace false doctrines that lead to the immiseration of millions with sound true doctrines that avoid conflict (1998, 10). On one level, then, Hobbes' political philosophy is methodologically preoccupied with avoiding misery and dystopia by formulating a true account of politics that removes the dangerous errors in previous doctrines.[44] At a second, substantive level,

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[44] Indeed, Hobbes maintains that it is the obligation of the sovereign power to preserve the safety of the people under their protection and to help realize for them the contentments of life (Hobbes 1985, 376), and to publically instruct the people in Hobbes' correct political doctrine through the universities in order prevent the foment of disagreement amongst citizens about the right form of government and the otherwise inevitable spread of dangerous false political philosophies (1985, 383-6).

Hobbes' philosophy is also oriented around an aversion to bad situations as he famously describes a state of anarchy, without a political sovereign to rule over the people, as a state of nature in which people live lives that are "nasty, brutish, and short" (1985, 186). This chapter explores this dystopophobic quality of Hobbes' thinking by foregrounding and analyzing his account of dystopia, its function in his political thinking, and teasing out insights from this focus on avoiding dystopia.

Section II describes the qualities of Hobbes' state of nature in order to place it within the typology of dystopias put forward in chapter two. Here, I introduce the idea of *the circumstances of dystopia*, which this dissertation coins as as the circumstances that tend towards dystopia by making social cooperation very difficult and dangerous, to the mutual disadvantage of the people within these circumstances. Fear and equality, vainglory, and disagreement are highlighted as components of these circumstances of dystopia that engender conflict in the state of nature. This section advances a firm and quite rarely shared interpretive claim that vainglory is the undergirding operating concept in Hobbes' account of the state of nature that tends towards conflict. This insight is used to make the case that relative rather than absolute material scarcity is a reason for conflict in the state of nature, as what individuals desire is more goods than others, rather than the minimal number of goods to make a living. The form of Hobbes' state of nature is described as primarily *hypothetical* and *theoretical*. It is hypothetical as Hobbes asserts that state of nature is never thought to have really existed in nature, and is theoretical as Hobbes theorizes how ubiquitous human motivations and psychology manifest in both a context without a sovereign to keep people in order and in society, and explains how, according to this theory, dystopia is a live possibility.

Section III covers Hobbes' description of the formation of the polity in order to elucidate the function of dystopia in this process of formation. As the state of nature is so wretchedly awful, the political state is formed by contract between individuals as an act for mutual advantage. By contrasting the sovereign state with the state of nature the benefits provided by the new political system (including the fostering of trust between citizens) are emphasized, and, on the other side of the ledger, the associated costs (in the subjugation of oneself to an all powerful sovereign) are made considerably more palatable. So, the state of nature acts quite straightforwardly as an aversional end to be avoided by forming the state. But, more than this, Hobbes' dystopia plays an educative function by alerting individuals to the passions and motivations already internal to them and the ways in which this psychology can manifest in disadvantageous and advantageous ways, depending upon the political (or, indeed, apolitical) context in which people find themselves. Hobbes' dystopia also works in a justificatory capacity by rationalizing the arrogation of ultimate political authority in the hands of a single sovereign source.

Finally, Section IV is a fairly long application of the insights gleaned thus far to produce a novel interpretation of Hobbes' account of language. Previous compelling interpretations of Hobbes have emphasized the "communicative basis of political order" in Hobbes' writing (Ball 1995, 90). On this largely sound view, the destabilizing force of disagreement in society stems from a lack of uniformity in the *definitions* of words in society, causing individuals to misunderstand and come into conflict with one another; as the linguistic framework of society frays, so in turn the cultural, structural, economic, and material framework of society unravels and potentially collapses. This interpretation plays down the causal power of the material context of the polity and elevates language as the

primary cause of the good and bad natures of the polity. Against this interpretation it is claimed here that one must not forget that the causal arrow runs the other way as well. Hobbes advances the state of nature as a discrete and particular material *context* in which people can live that in turn influences the type of language that they use. Rather than shift the *meaning* or *definition* of words as Ball stresses (1995, 90), these dystopian material circumstances shift the *valence* of words, making otherwise positively oriented concepts like "trust" and "rational planning" negative and undesirable, even though their strict definition remains the same. The section ends by briefly applying this insight about the shifting valence of concepts to the work of Tommie Shelby in ways that refines *and extends* his insights. The application of these ideas to recent theories demonstrates both the interpretive and the philosophical virtue of this dissertation and the fecundity of the emphasis it places upon the idea of dystopia in the work of important political theorists.

II. The State of Nature

The dystopia at the heart of Hobbes' political theory is anarchy – a state of nature – in which people live without a final authority to "keep them in awe" (Hobbes 1985, 223). Hobbes describes this state of nature as a place where all live in "continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (1985, 186). Of course, if life lived with other human beings without any external system of social organization is a miserable and dangerous one, then this is a crushing indictment of humans and human nature. On this view it is the natural qualities of human beings left free to act without external impediment that leads to fighting and killing. We are to blame.

At this early stage let me introduce a new concept: *the circumstances of dystopia*. I define these as the circumstances that tend towards dystopia by making social cooperation very difficult and dangerous, to the mutual disadvantage of the people within these circumstances. This concept is, as one might suspect, an adaptation of the notion of the circumstances of justice proposed by Hume (1967, 484-501) and notably employed later by Rawls (2008: 126-30). As with Hobbes, Rawls assumes that society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage. He defines the circumstances of justice as "the normal conditions under which human cooperation is both possible and necessary" (Rawls 2008, 126). In these conditions, virtues like justice can helpfully assist in the determination of a good and desirable distribution of the benefits and burdens of society. By contrast, if these minimal circumstances were not to obtain – if, for example resources were so abundant "that schemes of cooperation become superfluous," or so scarce that "fruitful ventures must inevitably breakdown" (2008, 127) – then there would, Rawls says, be "no occasion for the virtue of justice, just as in the absence of threats of injury to life and limb there would be no occasion for courage" (2008, 128).

The salient difference between the circumstances of justice and the circumstances of dystopia is in their orientation. The circumstances of justice outline the conditions – of society, people, resources, and the like – that conduce to (or set the necessary foundation) that, in Rawls' words, occasions justice. By contrast, the circumstances of dystopia outline those conditions that tend towards dystopia – those qualities in people, society, resources, and the like that conduce to the immiseration of the people. They are the circumstances that lead not to cooperation for mutual advantage, but instead push people towards noncooperation for the mutual disadvantage of the people within those circumstances.

As an example of the circumstances of dystopia consider Hobbes' state of nature. On this, Gregory Kavka provides a very useful overview of Hobbes' account of the qualities of human nature that, if left unchecked, together inevitably produce the violent dystopia Hobbes envisages. People, Kavka says, are *egoistically* concerned with their own well-being, which has two particular manifestations in a strong *aversion to death* and a pressing *concern with one's status and reputation* amongst others. In their activities people are *forward looking*, as they act now in order to secure advantage and avoid loss in the future. These pursuits lead to conflict amongst people as individuals have *conflicting desires* that cannot all be satisfied, which, because of the *rough equality* between individuals often precipitates violence as no single person is able to decisively win all battles and impose a final system of cooperation under their control (Kavka 1986, 33-4). Consequently, anarchy entails endless fighting and disagreement that is inimical with a peaceful and happy existence. Because egoism, aversion to death, and rough equality and the rest conduce to fighting rather than mutual advantage, they are on Hobbes' theory, part of what I have called the circumstances of dystopia.

This notion of the circumstances of dystopia is an insight one can draw out of Hobbes' work that affects the function of dystopia within his political theory. In order to appreciate this function of dystopia in his political theory the remainder of this section of the text lays out Hobbes' account of the dynamic of dystopia in more detail. In particular, focus falls upon fear and equality, scarcity and vainglory, disagreement, and stability. The text dwells upon relative scarcity and vainglory for some time as I put forward a fairly novel account of the relationship between these two that invokes the idea of positional goods to explain why the state of nature is so undesirable and wretched. Then, following

the typology given in chapter two of this text, this section gives an account of the form of Hobbes' dystopia.

Fear and Equality

The state of nature is a state of war: "during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man against every man" (1985, 185*)*. As he also says in *De Cive*, "men's natural state, before they came together into society, was War; and not simply war, but a war of every man against every man" (1998, 29). This isn't "simply" war, but a particular type of war that reflects the fundamental qualities of human nature – it is a very human dystopia produced by the people that live within it. Although there is fighting and there are battles between competing groups and individuals, it is not the act of fighting that makes this a state of war. Instead, it is the knowledge that fighting could break out at any moment. Hobbes makes an analogy, noting that the idea of foul weather is not fully reflected in the fact that there are a handful of specific showers here and there. Instead, foul weather is present in the persistent worry that the skies could open up at any moment over a few days. Similarly, war does not consist in the fighting, but in the "known disposition thereto" (1985, 186), and in defining this very human war this way, Hobbes draws attention to the human experience of *fear*. To be sure, in the vital competition with others in the state of nature, many, even all persons may be able to scrounge together some minimum level of comfort and satisfaction. A life spent scrambling for survival might be pleasantly punctured by periods of tranquility, peace, and meager prosperity. But even so, at the back of the

mind a nagging fear that all this could change calamitously at a moments notice weighs heavily, preventing any life from flourishing.

This fear is particularly debilitating in the state of nature because of the forward looking quality of human beings. As Kavka notes, on Hobbes' view, "Individuals care about their future, as well as present, well-being, and act accordingly" (1986, 33 also McQueen 2018, 123). Because of the constant threat of attack individuals are deeply uncertain about their future well-being. Those individuals who "continually endeavoreth to secure himselfe against the evill he fears... hath in his heart all the day long, gnawed on by feare of death, poverty, or other calamity; and he has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep" (Hobbes 1985, 169). To this, we can add that this repose can also be found in death, which leaves people in an uneviable dilemma: worry endlessly about your future, or end your life?

Fear has a further effect. Beyond merely frustrating each individual's chances of living a flourishing life independently of others, fear also impels each person into conflict with those other people in the state of nature. Fear is akin to a positive feedback loop in which the possibility of rain this afternoon raises the chances of further showers earlier in the morning and through the night. To understand how fear can lead to further violence, an important premise is required: *equality*. As Hobbes notes, although some individuals may be stronger or of quicker mind than others, "when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable... for... the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others" (1985, 183 see also 1998, 26). And, after all, everyone sleeps at some time. If on the one hand a person living in the state of nature correctly saw themselves as superior in strength and skill to

each and every other person in the state of nature, then over time a stable equilibrium might eventually develop. Seeking to avoid confrontation the weak might willingly subordinate themselves to a strongman, or apply their skills of stealth to avoid confrontation with the strongman and their allies. Although neither of these outcomes are particularly palatable, both are fully compatible with a state of nature in which violence decreases over time. At least, that is, until the strongman dies. However, if one or a handful of individuals correctly see themselves as equal to any contender, then they have little reason to back down from a challenge, and little reason not to mount a challenge if they believe the outcome will favor them (often for contingent and short-term advantages, like actually being awake, for example).

Accordingly, the fear that others may harm or kill you, combined with the symmetrical belief that it is possible to gain advantage and stave off death by taking from and subduing others, inclines those in the state of nature into conflict with potential enemies. In these circumstances of mutual fear and ability to do harm "we cannot be blamed for looking out for ourselves; we cannot do otherwise" (1998, 27). This is a collective action problem in which the soundly self-interested attempt of each to secure their self-protection through pre-emptive strikes and opportunistic skirmishes perpetuates the cycle of violence (and fear of violence) that precludes any lasting cooperation. It is the fact that "we cannot do otherwise" that makes Hobbes' account of the state of nature an example of the circumstances of dystopia; fear combined with equality in the absence of an external power to keep each party in line conduces to violent conflict instead of cooperation for mutual advantage.

<u>Vainglory & Relative Material Scarcity</u>

Fear of death and the possibility of violent confrontation are certainly at the center of Hobbes' account of the state of nature – it permanently simmers beneath the surface. But violence does not occur wholly at random or without warning, like a flash rainstorm would in seventeenth century England. In the first place violence is not wholly random because some circumstances, like scarcity of resources, are more likely to lead to conflict than others, like superabundance. Moreover, some personality traits, such as vainglory, increase the likelihood of clashes and quarrels. So, any particular state of nature is the product of individual actions manifest within a particular circumstance and therefore depend on the interconnection between structural circumstances and individual characteristics. Taking these in order, Hobbes firmly states that "the most frequent cause why men want to hurt each other arises when many people want the same thing at the same time without being able to enjoy it in common or to divide it" (1998, 27). There is no equivocation in Hobbes' words here: scarcity of resources is the "most frequent" cause of clashes. He speaks with similar conviction in the *Leviathan* when he says, "therefore, if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies" (1985, 184). The point is fairly straightforward. Scarcity matters as, after all, if there were more goods available – such as infinitely more land to live on, as Locke thought of the Americas, or goods fell like manna from heaven (Nozick 1974, 198) – then there would be no need for conflict, at least over material goods. It would be unnecessary to establish a way to divide goods or share them in common if there was enough available that each could have one, or two, or however many they want. In the state of nature, however, scarcity leads to

competition for precious goods, which is ultimately decided by violent conflict either to defend one's goods (diffidence) or to win goods from another (gain) (1985, 185).

As all are equally capable of killing each other in the state of nature, then prudent persons are likely to try to eke out a living independently of other persons who are liable to harm or kill them in order to take their scare resources. But some people are motivated by more than the mere desire to survive. They do not fight only for gain or to protect their property and goods, but also yearn for the glory and flattery those around them (1985, 125). These people overvalue their own strength and will demand more honor for themselves (1998, 26). Indeed, so fundamental is this desire for glory that Hobbes asserts that it is one of only two motivations for human sociability: "So clear is it from experience to anyone who gives any serious attention to human behaviour, that every voluntary encounter is a product of either mutual need or the pursuit of glory" (1998, 23). Of course, not all encounters are voluntary – certainly not in the state of nature – and so these vainglorious few when unconstrained by laws will attempt to arrogate glory and esteem to themselves by subordinating and dominating the people they believe are beneath them. Accordingly, one would be well advised to avoid individuals and groups seeking glory in the state of nature.

One might be tempted to separate scarcity and vainglory as two distinct causes of conflict. After all, it is perfectly comprehensible that scarcity of goods alone will likely influence the terms of social cooperation, or even whether cooperation is possible or necessary at all. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, for example, Hume asserts that in a hypothetical world (set starkly against the Hobbesian state of nature) in which "the rivers flow'd with wine and milk: the oaks yielded honey; and nature spontaneously produc'd her

greatest delicacies," then in these circumstances, he continues, "Cordial affectation, compassion, sympathy, were the only movements, with which the human mind was yet acquainted" (1967, 494). And in his lectures on Hobbes, John Rawls, who was influenced by Hume's account of the circumstances of justice, treats scarcity as a standalone issue in Hobbes's thought. He says, "…scarcity, Hobbes believes, leads to competition between people. If we wait until others have taken all they want, there will be nothing left for us. So, in a state of nature we must be ready to stake out and to defend our claims" (Rawls 2007, 44). On this interpretation of Hobbes, the primary cause of conflict from scarcity arises from the depletion of an absolute set *number* of goods available for division: the fewer the number of goods, the greater the likelihood of conflict; the more goods available, the less conflict, as in Hume's land of milk and honey.

Further to this, vainglory is a motivation that applies irrespective of the amount of goods available in society. The industrial revolution and globalization has made the world wealthier than at any point in history, with ever more goods that could be shared and divided. However, contemporary society is certainly not short of vainglorious grandstanders. So, scarcity and vainglory can and often are treated as separate features of Hobbes' state of nature that lead, in their own ways, to conflict. While there is some truth to this account, careful reading of Hobbes' words on the matter reveal an important connection between the two as competition for goods leads to glory. As Hobbes' makes the case, scarcity is not merely a question of how many of a good are available, but it is the possibility of the division of a good that is important. Scarcity occurs, as he writes in *Leviathan* when two persons want the same item that "nevertheless they *cannot both enjoy*" (1985, 184). Similarly, in *De Cive*, the most frequent cause of hurt occurs when more than

one person want the same thing, "without being able to *enjoy it in common or to divide* it" [emphasis added] (1998, 27). To focus on merely the amount of goods available downplays this quality of especially some goods that they cannot be shared or divided and the social dynamics that emerge when competing for this special type of goods.

What kinds of goods cannot be divided and shared? This is an interesting question because many of the examples of goods that Hobbes offers are clearly capable of being divided and enjoyed in common. He says in the state of nature, "where an Invader hath no more to feare, than an another mans single power; if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossesse, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also his life, or liberty" (1985, 184). These examples are a little bewildering if they are meant to demonstrate times when goods cannot be enjoyed in common, as plants and buildings are easily shared and enjoyed by numerous persons. Houses can be portioned up into multifamily homes. Moreover, plants and other sown crops are commonly harvested and sold in portions to many different customers. Indeed, if the invading horde instead chose to share the home with the farmer apply their united efforts to boost the yield of the farm, they may be able to feed and house each and every one of them quite commodiously. So, far from demonstrating the inability of some goods to be separated and shared, Hobbes' examples are perfectly clear cases of divisible goods.

How are we to explain this incongruity? Fear is certainly one consideration. If two people fear each other, they cannot share as the threat of death pushes them to fight and compete. But another answer lies in the close connection between scarcity and vainglory. In the first place, one should not expect individuals in the state of nature to live together

and tend to a farm because "men have no pleasure, (but on the contrary a great deale of griefe) in keeping company, where there is no power able to over-awe them all" (1985,185). This is because without the absolute power of a sovereign strong enough to awe all persons (such that each citizen is vanishingly insignificant in comparison to the glory of the sovereign or product of a combined community), then individuals engage in a comparative assessment of their merits with their compatriots. In such circumstances, "upon all signs of contempt, or undervaluing, [each person] naturally endeavours… to extort greater value from his contemners" (1985, 185). Each citizen compares himself favorably with his peers leading him to rile at any slight or contempt and causes him to "demand more honor for himself than others have" (1998, 26). Vainglory causes a shared home to become the site of competition and conflict rather than cooperation. Consequently, what would otherwise have been sufficient to house several persons becomes grossly insufficient as, even in the absence of fear, each person requires more to correspond with the size of their inflated ego. Each requires at least his own accommodation, thereby causing otherwise avoidable scarcity and competition and conflict amongst individuals over the scarce good.

A deeper connection between scarcity and vainglory can be appreciated by introducing the economic idea of positional goods. These are goods that gain their particular and especial value not from the internal qualities of those goods themselves, but either by how desirable they are to other people, and/or how much of them one person possesses compared to another.[45] Although positional goods are commonly conceived of as

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[45] As Adam Swift describes in his book *How Not To Be A Hypocrite* (2003, 23-5), a queue is the quintessential example of a positional good. Imagine that two people have formed a queue at the bank and you join the queue to become the third in line. The amount of time it will take you to be able to conduct your business

a set number of goods like honors and education, just about any good can become positional if viewed through a particular perspective. On this point Brian Barry describes positional goods as a "pathology of inequality" as even wealthy citizens in a community of people with 16 bedroom houses can develop status anxiety and have their self-image threatened when "a rich interloper… proposes to build [a home] with sixty four" bedrooms (2005, 175). Ultimately, he concludes, in societies with high inequality "The cost of 'keeping up with the Joneses'… rises in line with the standard of material prosperity. Achieving the same social standing as before costs more and more… [and] the problem of waste in 'keeping it up' is exacerbated by increasing inequality, because most people aspire to a level a bit higher than their own" (2005, 177).[46] In a pathological context just about anything can be a positional good – from houses, to cars, even to whether or not you wear braces – if one cares about how much one has compared to one's peers, and, to bring this back to Hobbes, we know that in the state of nature many are driven by vainglory and delusional self-regard to see themselves as better than and to demand better than others. Accordingly,

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with the teller depends upon the two people in front of you, which you might worry could take longer than you would like. Now imagine a bus pulls up outside, 20 people exit and they all join that same queue. In this circumstance, the amount of time it will take you to get the to teller remains exactly the same – you still have two people in front of you. Now, though, you would be forgiven for feeling a little smug. This is because the positional value of your place in the queue has increased dramatically; being third and last in line compared to third in a twenty-three long line is a considerable positional difference.

     A few further examples of positional goods: In a race the value of winning the gold medal comes from running faster than one's competitors – i.e. one's position in the race – rather than beating the world record time. Knighthoods and other honors gain their prestige because of their scarcity; if everyone who wanted one received an academy award, there would certainly be no an annual Oscars award ceremony with great pomp and fanfare. Finally, the level of education one has is a positional good; if many many more had advanced degrees, then the "college wage premium" that graduates receive would swiftly evaporate (Goldin & Katz 2009, 320-23).

[46] See also Veblen on Pecuniary Emulation and his insight that when the possession of wealth "becomes, in popular apprehension, itself a meritorious act," then people manifest a tendency to "make the present pecuniary standard the point of departure for a fresh increase in wealth… [and s]o long as the comparison is distinctly unfavorable to himself, the normal, average individual will live in chronic dissatisfaction with his present lot" (2007, 24-6).

scarcity put in terms of the *absolute* amount of goods available in the state of nature (as Rawls interprets Hobbes) is not the whole problem. Additionally, *relative scarcity* matters, in which if standards of material prosperity were to rise, then the former amount of goods and wealth would be insufficient for the vainglorious strivers. If others began to catch up with the prosperity of the particularly rapacious few, then that would be a sign of undervaluing the brilliance and character of these vainglorious self-deceivers, warranting a violent and expropriative response to reestablish dominance. Consequently, in the case of the farmer whose plants and house could not be divided, what matters is the fact that the modest success of this farmer undercuts the relative success of those around him, which is therefore the cause of further violence.

This work is not the first to apply the idea of positional goods to Hobbes' thinking. In a fairly early case, Iain McLean interprets the state of nature in a game-theoretic framework and emphasizes the effect of zero-sum positional goods upon the rationality of decisions within that matrix. However, he does not extend the idea of positional goods to material goods (1981, 345). More recently, Daniel J. Kapust stresses the desire for flattery and adulation (rather than wealth) as a vainglorious human desire that would be manifest in the sovereign and threaten the stability of the social order (2011, 684). Barbara Carnevali takes the opposite tact to this work and interprets the positional desire for glory in Hobbes as a repudiation of the pursuit of material wealth, and instead focuses on the drive for the positional "immaterial" qualities of prestige and social capital of the kind theorized by Pierre Bordieau (2005, 12). Philip Pettit's reading of Hobbes follows the line of argument in this text by explicitly identifying the importance of relative (rather than absolute) material abundance when he says, "that in a competitive world where the objects of desire

are scarce, what will really matter to any creature is not the absolute level of its resources but their level relative to the resources of others" (2008, 92). However, Pettit cashes out the importance of relative material abundance *not* in terms of glory, but instead, emphasizes the importance of material resources to *power* – material goods matter because they allow one to dominate and exercise power over others, which itself may bring some glory, but is especially important for protection and self defense. Pettit is not wrong to note the connection between relative material wealth and power – as Adam Smith puts it pithily, "Wealth, as Mr. Hobbes says, is power" (2002, 32). But there is more to material wealth than its convertibility into power: relative wealth is a direct expression of one's elevated status over others and is a point of conflict between people directly because of that. Indeed, the best interpretation of Hobbes on this point comes from Arash Abizadeh, who stresses the relationship between material goods and glory when he describes Hobbes' "competition argument as derivative of his glory argument" (2011, 310). This is to say that the pursuit of glory is preeminent, and a clear and manifest way to achieve and express one's glory is refuse to share and divide one's goods, and instead to win oneself a convenient seat and to plant, sow, and build for oneself whilst simultaneously depriving others of those things.

One may be skeptical of Hobbes' pessimistic account of human psychology and motivation. That being said, if one holds one's skepticism in abeyance and takes Hobbes' view as it is, then what one sees is another example of the circumstances of dystopia. Rawls describes the qualities of human character – including powers of reasoning, memory, attention, and rough similarity in needs and interests – as the subjective circumstances of justice (2008, 127). For his part, then, Hobbes offers vainglory, along with fear and equality, as components of the subjective circumstances of dystopia as the desire for esteem

and prominence over others prevents cooperation for mutual benefit by sharing and dividing goods as, for example, a Rawlsian theory of distributive justice does. Instead, vainglory propels individuals into conflict to the mutual disadvantage of all.

Disagreement

Hobbes published *De Cive* in 1642 and in completed the manuscript for *Behemoth* around 1668, in which he recounts the causes of the English Civil War. In both of these texts, and in *Leviathan* – published in 1651 – the idea of disagreement is recurring and important theme.[47] In each of these works Hobbes explicitly details the disintegrative effect of disagreement upon *society*, and the ways in which disagreements from individual conscience, religion, and the distribution of political power undermine the integrity of the political system and produces war and conflict amongst the population (1985, 236-7; 1998, 26 & 131-142; 1990, 6). The relationship between disagreement and society will be explored later, but, as the current focus is upon Hobbes' dystopia at this point attention will fall upon Hobbes' account of the motivations in individuals that drives them to quarrel in the state of nature.

Importantly, Hobbes' meta-ethical views and his subjectivist account of moral beliefs quite naturally explains the inevitability of dispute and disagreement in his thinking. Echoing Protagoras' dictum that "man is the measure of all things," Hobbes opens chapter two of *Leviathan* with the similar assertion that "men measure, not onely other men, but

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[47] Indeed, Hobbes continued to edit and authorized reprints of *De Cive* throughout his life (Tuck 2015, 35), which is strong evidence that he never fully repudiated his earlier arguments and thought they retained value for readers. This is why this current work comfortably takes insights and arguments from all three texts and amalgamates them into a single coherent political theory.

all other things, by themselves" (1985, 87). In saying this Hobbes puts forwards the proposition that the standards of judgment are internal to each individual, rather than correspond to some objective standard that all persons might in principle have epistemic access to. This explains why it was inevitable that, as he says in Behemoth, once the bible was translated to English "every man became a judge of religion, and an interpreter of the Scriptures himself" and new denominations of Christian theology proliferated and thereby threatened the integrity of the English polity (1990, 22). He explains this subjectivist theory in more detail noting in *Leviathan* that, when persons endeavor towards some end, they are driven by appetite or desire. Each of these appetites and desires are the product of individual imagination and thinking, so they lack any objective foundation. Hobbes introduces normative considerations at this point by asserting that evaluative and (at least tangentially) normative concepts including "love" and "hate" are merely terms attached to those things men desire and are averse to: "that which men Desire, they are also sayd to LOVE: and to HATE those things, for which they have aversion" (1985, 119). Ultimately, he says,

> "…whatsoever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*; and his Contempt, Vile, and Inconsiderable. For these words, Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that uselth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; not any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man… that representeth it…" (1985, 120).

This is a theory according to which objects in the world do not possess intrinsic axiological properties, but instead are imbued with value (or disvalue) by being valued (or disvalued) by individual people. On Hobbes' view there is diversity between people and therefore disagreement between them, and this disagreement with others is an unpleasant experience. "To agree with an opinion," Hobbes says, "is to Honour; as being a signe of approving his

judgement, and wisdom. To dissent, is Dishonour" (1985, 153). As Teresa Bejan sums up the predicament, there is in Hobbes' theory a "*disagreeableness* of disagreement," as, "the fact of disagreement was itself an insult, as an assault on equal dignity." The capacity of society to endure in these circumstances, Bejan says, "depended ultimately on how much disagreement people could bear, before giving up on words and resorting to swords" (2017, 85; 90-1).

In addition to this disagreement *between* people, though, there is also disagreement *within* individual people over time. As one's appetites and desires can shift, and at any time as new imaginations and ideas enter the mind and become prominent. The mind is always in motion and so some amount of caprice and perpetual desiring is a feature of the human condition that "ceaseth onlely in Death" (1985, 161). Consequently, Hobbes' subjectivism precludes harmonious cooperation for two interlinked reasons. Firstly, there is (at least the real possibility of) great diversity beliefs about good and evil *between* all persons, as the highest good for one person can be the depths of depravity for another, depending upon their respective appetites and desires. Secondly, there is great diversity in beliefs about good and evil *within* all persons, as one's appetites and desires can shift. In light of these considerations, Hobbes is led to conclude that "there is no such *Finis Ultimus* (utmost ayme,) not *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers" (1985, 160). Instead, disagreement over the valuable ends of life is the inevitable condition of humankind.

It is this fact – there is is no *summum bonum* – that makes Hobbes' account of the state of nature as the *summum malum* so important. With no definitive ideal towards towards which we should aim, Hobbes instead orients his political thinking away from the

worst outcome of the state of nature. In so doing, he is dystopophobic. As Philip Pettit convincingly interprets Hobbes on this point, disagreement over the ends of life is inevitable from the *perspective of each individual*, which drives them to quarrel. But, if one takes a step back from the individual perspective and tries to "see things from [a] more encompassing view" that assesses those things individuals desire not just now, but consistently over the course of their whole lives, then a pattern emerges: self preservation and the other "contentments of life" are good and death is bad (Pettit 2008, 87). In particular, the state of nature is so wretchedly miserable by depriving people of contentments in life and elevating their chances of violent death that persons share the minimal belief that the state of nature is bad and therefore share a belief in the virtue of coming together to form a sovereign to exit it.

In his account of the *summum malum* Hobbes paints a bleak picture of a war of all against all that arises from the human quality of general equality of strength and intelligence amongst people. The preeminent fear of those in the state of nature is the real possibility of death at any moment. The conflict between individuals is goaded by the competition for scarce goods combined with the effects of the pursuit of glory. Moreover, this conflict is, at a fundamental level, an expression of the meta-ethical fact that concepts like good and evil are merely subjective expressions of desire and aversion. Because of this life-and-death competition for survival, the better things in life are unattainable:

> "There is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short." (1985, 186)

It is the fear that is the most miserable aspect of this dystopia. To be sure, this is certainly a state of remarkable privation. There is no industry or trade, so there is little possibility of rising above absolute scarcity.[48] Further still, even the development and refinement of primary and elementary concepts like time is impossible in these circumstances. Life is so dangerous and all endeavors so perilous that one's self-conception as a being with a full life over the course of time eludes those in the state of nature. And a solitary, poore, nasty, brustish, and short life is no life at all. But the most miserable aspect of this existence, what is "worst of all" is the constant fear of death; the uncertainty that at any moment the heavens will open and the rain will pour down upon you, and that in the time it takes thunder to clap your life could be over. At least on this we can agree.

Here Hobbes puts his finger on an objective quality of the circumstances of dystopia. It could have been the case that human beings were born without a desire for glory and the urge to dominate others. Had we evolved differently, humankind may have been physically robust enough to render the threat of violent death of no concern. These subjective qualities of humanity would have thereby been different and not manifest in ways that conduce to dystopia in the ways Hobbes describes. However, that the world is devoid of intrinsic value properties is not contingent upon human evolution; it is an objective quality of the material universe that exists independently of whether humans or other creatures exist as they do. Because the universe does not (on Hobbes' theory) contain intrinsic value, it is therefore nearly inevitable that disagreement between human beings

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[48] As another example of the privation of the state of nature Hobbes says in a description later, "For amongst masterlesse men, there is perpetuall war, of every man against his neighbor; no inheritance, to transmit to the Son, nor to expect from the Father; no propriety of Goods, or Lands; no security; but a full and absolute Libertie in every Particular man" (1985, 266).

will occur, especially over the ideal ends worthy of pursuit. However, because human beings actually did develop an acute capacity to fear one another they can, if they adopt an "encompassing view," come to appreciate their shared revulsion of the state of nature.

Stability

In his description of the persistent fear in the state of nature and the meager life that is possible in this condition, Hobbes makes a convincing case that the state of nature is a condition of such wretchedness that individuals would agree to leave it if they could. There is, however, an extra turn of the knife yet to come because, in addition to being awful, the state of nature is remarkably stable over time. It is akin to a dysfunctional equilibrium (Fukuyama 2011, 45), wherein equality, fear, scarcity, and vainglory combined in the absence of a sovereign power to rule over them leads to recurrent and enduring – "perpetuall" (1985, 260) – warfare between participants.

This balance between parties is the inevitable logic of the circumstances of dystopia in which these people in the state of nature find themselves and so, without sharp changes in their condition, then it is unlikely that the state of nature will change. And there is little reason to think that there will be changes in the condition of these people. Firstly, there is little to nothing that just one person can do on their own as the differences between individuals are not considerable. Consequently, we are unlikely to see local aberrations from the norm of war due to the actions of a small number of powerful, intelligent, or otherwise remarkable people. In addition to divergence from the state of war within local geographical areas, one should not expect a slow evolution away from war for all parties across the whole state of nature due to things like technological process that could mitigate

the effects of scarcity. As Hobbes makes the case, in the state of nature there is no technology or investment because the security of these investments is uncertain, so one should expect persistent immiseration and stability over time.

The most famous line from *Leviathan* – that life in the state of nature is "nasty, brutish, and short" – provides further reason to expect that the state of nature would be stable over time. Particularly, if life in the state of nature is short, then this means that there must be a fairly consistent "churn" of people living in the state of nature. Unless the human race would go extinct in the state of nature, then we should assume that life expectancy must be low and also that a fairly high and consistent number of children must be born. We know that there are no long-term institutions to pass on wisdom to the next generation, but in addition to this, in these circumstances of short life expectancy and a high birthrate, there would not be many wise older persons available to pass on knowledge acquired over a long life. The state of nature contains "no account of Time" (1985, 186), and without older persons and institutions to help raise children, one can imagine that each generation would live in a chronologically primitive existence in which events would hit in a bewildering succession with great immediacy. Rather than long term planning and strategy, these young people would be furnished with nothing to confront their conditions other than local and immediate tactics. Accordingly, each current generation is liable to make the same mistakes as each previous generation, and is unlikely to be capable of cooperating with other people as the possible benefits of such cooperation are unproven and unsupported by knowledge and experience from previous encounters in previous generations. Of course, Hobbes believes that *if* people do think aright (with the correct definitions of words), they will *eventually* come to agree that exiting the state of nature is of the highest (and shared)

importance; that is to say, he believes that his political philosophy is potent. But prior to this fairly elusive agreement the state of nature is disposed towards a persistent and stable condition of war.

The Dystopophobic Form of the State of Nature

Recall the typography of dystopian forms given in chapter two. In the first place Hobbes' state of nature is most clearly a *hypothetical* account of a dystopia that does not exist. The state of nature is an ideal type rather than a recounting of human history before the invention of the political state. This is why Hobbes says, "It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this, and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world" (1985, 187). In the state of nature, the dynamics of dystopia are salient, unfettered, and clearly defined. The worst possible world is therefore presented to the reader in unadulterated form.

Of course, just because it is an ideal type does not mean that Hobbes' state of nature is entirely divorced from reality – it is not purely, or only hypothetical. He claims, for example, that many of the "savage" peoples in America "have no government at all; and live this day in that brutish manner" (1985, 187). Moreover, Hobbes believes that most readers will recognize deep parallels between their lived experience and the state of nature. To prove his claims about human motivation he puts a challenge to his reader: "Nosce teipsum, Read thy self" and see in your own actions recognition of the cynical nature of humans I put forward (1985, 82). Interrogate one's own actions – "when going to sleep, he locks his dores; when even in his house he locks his chests" (1985, 186-7) – for a condemnation of one's trust in others and fear of transgression equal to anything Hobbes

has to say. Finally, Hobbes describes contemporary sovereign powers as living in a "state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another…which is a posture of war" (1985, 187-8). Later he claims that, "the Law of Nations, and the Law of Nature, is the same thing," leaving the sovereign with the right to act with license "in procuring the safety of his own Body" (1985, 394). This description of inter-sovereign conflict has been integrated into realist theory of international relations and speaks to the close tracking between Hobbes thinking and real political experience (Boucher 1998, 145-71).

Good research follows from close scrutiny of these examples of Hobbes' state of nature manifesting in reality. For example, Charles Mills gleans insights into the the texture of English racial anxieties in the response of Hobbes' contemporaries to the analogy between the state of nature for Englishmen and the Native Americans. On the one hand, Hobbes is something of a "racial egalitarian" by suggesting that "*even Europeans* could descend to their [Native American] state," which was a shocking enough claim to elicit an "uproar that greeted his work" (1997, 66). On the other hand, Mills diagnoses a "tacit racial logic" in Hobbes' text: "the *literal* state of nature is reserved for nonwhites; for whites the state of nature is hypothetical" (1997, 65-6). And in this insight derived from attention to the overlap between the state of nature and reality – "by looking at the *actual* historically dominant moral/political consciousness and the *actual* historically dominant moral/political ideals" (1997, 92) – political theorists are better able to understand how race came to be conceptualized and reproduced, and how these racial ideas have stratified Western societies into a racial hierarchy.

However, in addition to this good work that focuses upon the historical and empirical manifestations of Hobbes' state of nature, much would be lost by failing to scrutinize the hypothetical component of Hobbes' dystopia. There has, Hobbes says, "never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of warre one against another" (1985, 187), so Hobbes' intention in articulating the state of nature is (at least partially) to produce a concept abstracted from reality and the experience of people in England, that is, a *hypothetical* dystopia.

As part of the abstraction from reality to a hypothetical dystopia, Hobbes introduces a *theory* of dystopia that is part of a broader theory of how the world and the people within it function. In especially *Leviathan*, but also in a less developed form in *De Cive* and in a more historically grounded form in Behemoth, Hobbes presents a theory of human psychology, motivation, language, meta-ethics, and more. The form of Hobbes' dystopia is therefore also theoretical – it is part of a part of a broader theory of how the world functions in ways that increases the likelihood of dystopia manifesting. These ideas about human nature explain how individuals and groups function in ways that produce favorable and detrimental outcomes for people. In particular, fear, equality, vainglory, and disagreement are implicated in this vicious circle of social disintegration, civil war, and anarchy. By abstracting the actual human condition in contemporary England to the root causes of civil war and dystopia found in human nature, Hobbes presents the reader with the circumstances of dystopia – those qualities of the human and material condition that conduce to conflict and make a just system of cooperation for mutual advantage (nearly) impossible.

Importantly, because Hobbes produces the circumstances of dystopia as an abstraction from the condition of his time, the ideas that he puts forward can be adapted for use in the current moment and used to supplement and augment contemporary philosophical arguments, as I do in the case of Tommie Shelby, below. Before then, let us recount Hobbes' view of the formation of the state in order to best express the function of dystopia in Hobbes' political thought.

III. Creating the State

The virtue of the state is that it relieves people of the misery of life without it and makes possible cooperation for the pursuit of good things. As Hobbes puts the point, "without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they [the people] are in that condition which is called Warre" (1985, 185), and in this condition of war there are no arts, industry and culture, there is consistent far of death, and life is nasty, brutish, and short. In order to extricate themselves from this condition of war, individuals in the state of nature agree to "tye them [each other] by fear of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and the observation of those Lawes of Nature" (1985, 223). By arrogating the absolute power to a sovereign to make laws, declare war, and most importantly, to punish individuals who do not follow the law or act in ways that threaten the sovereignty of the polity, this new Leviathan ruling over all frees citizens from living in fear of one another.

The sovereign sets the conditions for commodious life together by, most importantly, fostering trust between citizens. Rather than live in perpetual fear of a violent death at the hands of other human beings, the persistent threat of punishment for failing to follow laws or by acting in violent ways allows individuals in their daily lives to proceed

with the expectation that others will (out of fear of punishment) act rightly towards them. Without external assurances from a sovereign power, there is little reason to ever act benevolently towards others.[49] Hobbes says that without this external force "there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutual help; nor reconciliation of one man to another; and therefore they are to remain still in the condition of *War*" (1985, 209). Trust and faith in one's fellow compatriots is absolutely essential to cooperation. When adhering to the laws of nature guaranteed by a sovereign, one can finally act well towards others with the expectation that this will be reciprocated, and so, war is avoided and culture, arts, industry, letters, and social life can flourish.

The state, then, offers clear and tangible benefits to each and every one of its would-be members. In describing the state of nature and the virtue of the state in this highly individualist way, Hobbes presents a theory of society as a system of cooperation for mutual advantage in which moral and political norms are established by rational self-interested individuals pursuing precisely that self-interest. The sovereign, through its power to set laws and punish transgressors, minimizes the chances for misunderstanding and disagreement, and when there is disagreement lowers the possibility that this will erupt into dangerous and deadly fighting. This frees individuals from fear, and allows civil and economic life to flourish in this new context of faith and trust in one another to uphold their

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[49] Hobbes describes this dynamic of trust as one of the laws of nature. Natural law, he says in *De Cive*, dictates that no one should accept a benefit from another on good faith, unless you as the beneficiary have every intention of and ability to ensure that the giver does not regret his good deed (1998, 47). In *Leviathan*, this precept shifts forward to the fourth position and reads: "*That a man which receiveth Benefit from another of meer Grace, Endeavor that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will*" (1985, 209). It is the sovereign who ensures that one can give benefits with the expectation of compensation and remuneration. As they are largely extraneous to the argument pursued in here, this text does not engage in detail with Hobbes' views on the laws of nature. For more information on this topic one might consult (Zagorin 2009).

agreements. Moreover, this system is stable and enduring as the threats to the social order (like disagreement, conscience, and the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of the public good) can be squashed by the sovereign swiftly and with great vigor (1985, 363-376; 1998, 131-141).

Making Suffering Safe for Society

On this telling, it is certainly true that society under the direction of an absolute sovereign brings advantages to its members by taking them out of a state of war and placing them in society in which civil life can flourish. But, this is not to say that life in society is perfect and without any fear, suffering, or hardship. Hobbes makes this clear when he notes that it is impossible to include as part of the covenant to create the sovereign that one agrees not to defend oneself from harm by the sovereign. He says,

> "For though a man may Covenant thus, *Unlesse I do so, or so, kill me*; he cannot Covenant thus, *Unless I do so, or so, I will not resist you when you come to kill me*. For man by nature chooseth the lesser evil, which is danger of death in resisting; rather than the greater, which is certain and present death in not resisting" (1985, 199).

Although life in society is generally superior to life in the state of nature, there are nonetheless moments when one comes into conflict with the sovereign – by, for example, contravening a law or refusing to fight in a war one objects to. When this occurs, the possibility of harm, suffering, and death are immediate and acute. In these circumstances one will, by the natural instinct to avoid the greater evil of death at the hands of the sovereign, fight or flee.

Importantly, there are many times when the sovereign is expected to inflict considerable pain and suffering on citizens. In order to ensure that citizens will not kill or

steal, the sovereign is invested with the power to penalize as the assurance of security is only achieved "when the penalties for particular wrongs have been set so high that the consequences for doing them are manifestly worse than of not doing them." As Hobbes continues in words that echo his later claim in *Leviathan* that man chooses the lesser of two evils: "For by necessity of nature all men choose what is apparently good for themselves" (1998, 78). Accordingly, the public ministers acting on behalf of the sovereign have the "Authority from the Soveraign, to procure the Execution of Judgments given; to publish the Soveraigns Commands; to suppresse Tumults; to apprehend, and imprison Malefactors; and other acts tending to the conservation of the Peace" (1985, 293). Moreover, it is not just the sovereign that has the right to inflict suffering on others. Against the fool who "hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as justice," and refuses to uphold his covenants (1985, 203), the common people can, out of self-defense, "cast [him] out of Society, [so that] he perisheth" (1985, 205). So destabilizing is this foolish skeptic that, "all men that contribute not to his destruction, forbear him onely out of ignorance of what is good for themselves" (1985, 205). Hobbes' choice of words here is notable as to say that "the fool has said in his heart that there is no justice" is to paraphrase Psalm 14 that reads "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."" In using these words, Hobbes is engaging in a rhetorical strategy by invoking popularly accessible religious language that, as McQueen says (below), draws parallels between the role of the sovereign, and, in particular, the overlap between the sovereign and the role God plays in Judaism.[50]

So, the people, and especially the sovereign, have the power and right to inflict suffering and even death upon others. More than this, though, the sovereign has the *duty* to

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[50] I extend my thanks to Andy Murphy for direction on this last point.

inflict considerable suffering upon individuals in order that the punishments exceed the possible benefits of transgressing the law. Hobbes says,

> "If the harm inflicted be lesse than the benefit, or contentment that naturally followeth the crime committed, that harm is not within the definition [of punishment]; and is rather the Price, or Redemption, than the Punishment of a Crime: Because it is the nature of Punishment, to have for end, the disposing of men to obey the Law; which end (if it be lesse than the benefit of the transgression) it attaineth no, but worketh a contrary effect" (1985, 355).

In saying these things, then, Hobbes is justifying suffering, by setting the terms upon which suffering is acceptable in society.

Hobbes' account of the sovereign's considerable latitude to harm and kill citizens in society is notable as he justifies the creation of society in order to reduce the possibility of violent death. This reveals that the aim of Hobbes' text is not to show how to remove *all* suffering from human life, but instead how to establish a system with lower levels of violent death than in the state of nature, to justify this as a rational and publically promulgated framework of suffering, and reconcile individuals to that minimal level of violent death, which Hobbes does through the idea of the will. The violence of state of nature emerges as individuals have desires and ends that conflict with each other, which a sovereign solves by uniting each of these individual ends into one single end: the end of the sovereign. A state is characterized by the fact that the divergent ends of each person in the state of nature come together and then "becomes one person" by uniting their respective wills (1998, 76). On this account, each and every person is to "conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will." As he continues, "This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH" (1985, 227). According to the logic of the argument, then, death at the hands of the sovereign is qualitatively different to death at the

hands of an enemy in the state of the nature because, as a manifestation of one's own will, to die at the hands of the sovereign is, in effect, to will one's own death through the mechanism of the sovereign. This is not to say that one should willingly submit to imminent death by the sovereign (1985, 353), but that the exercise of the sovereign's power against oneself is nonetheless legitimate as an expression of one's own will when creating the sovereign.

This quality of the sovereign as the united will of the people is visualized in the Frontispiece to Leviathan that Hobbes designed. There, a sovereign towers over an apparently well-ordered city below. In his right hand the sovereign holds a sword that symbolizes the power of the sovereign to inflict violent punishment on troublesome citizens and duty of the sovereign to use violence to protect against hostile foreign powers. In his left hand is a crosier that symbolizes the sovereign's religious authority. At first glance the sovereign appears to be wearing some kind of chainmail armor, the links of which, on closer inspection, are revealed to be the figures of the people, each standing close together and facing the sovereign (i.e. facing away from the viewer). This symbolizes the strength of the community in coming together under the protection of the sovereign that they collectively constitute, and the way in which the sovereign has their attention by keeping the people in awe of him, rather than each other.

One way to think through this quality of making suffering safe for society is to say that Hobbes' dystopophobia operates at two levels. At the first level, of society versus anarchy, society is a Pareto improvement as it is better in every way and worse in none for each individual. The state of nature is so terrible through its privation and the inescapable fear of violent death that all persons are not just better off in society, but considerably better

off in society under the power of a sovereign. The creation of political society is a dystopophobic achievement as through the formation of the sovereign all parties avoid the bad condition of being in the state of nature.

In the second level, though, once in society, we can ask how *individual lives* go and whether bad things can be avoided for them. Hobbes' response here is that some minimal level of suffering for some portion of the population is ineliminable in order to properly punish transgressions and to keep order and security. The sovereign does not have *carte blanche* to harm individuals capriciously and arbitrarily as the actions and judgments of the sovereign must comport with the laws of nature, which principally requires that the sovereign treat all citizens with equity: "that he deale Equally between them" (1985, 212). The sovereign cannot punish unjustly, for this would provoke indignation in the population that "carrieth men, not onely against the Actors, and Authors of Injustice; but against all Power that is like to protect them" (1985, 389). And if citizens are commanded to act in ways that threaten their lives and health, they retain the liberty to disobey as "no man is bound by the words themselves, either to kill himselfe, or any other man" (1985, 269). But, fundamentally, what Hobbes offers is not a progressive ideal at this second level. The main dystopophobic gains occur in move from anarchy to society and the ensuing liberation from fear. At the second level, in society, there will be some improvements in life and wellbeing as industry and culture refines and improves under the protection of the sovereign. The liberty of the citizens to make these improvements in their condition occurs when the law is silent, which "is in some times more, and in other times lesse," as the Sovereign judges necessary to protect the people (1985, 271). However, the rearguard defense by the sovereign against the slide back into anarchy is of such paramount importance that a

minimal level of suffering from the sovereign is inevitable and appropriate to prevent that fate. Accordingly, there is no final utopian resolution to human disagreement that obviates the need for a sovereign and removes all suffering and harm; the best we can do is to submit dutifully to the sovereign as it dictates, and make the best lives we can where the law of the sovereign is silent.

This anti-utopian belief that a final resolution to political disagreement that will usher in an age of human flourishing will forever remain elusive, combined with the view that great anti-dystopian gain can be made in the move from anarchy to commonwealth invites a framing of dystopophobia on two levels. On the first, the aim is to extricate people from actual dystopia or the circumstances of dystopia that tend to produce dystopia – i.e., establish conditions that conduce to cooperation for mutual benefit. Of course, in Hobbes' case that is achieved through the formation of the sovereign, which brings sizable benefits to citizens including industry, arts, letters, and science. (For other thinkers, like Karl Popper, for example, that first shift is found in the creation of the open society.) At the second level, when one has made these gains at level one, the enduring need to consolidate power in the hands of a sovereign to keep disagreement quelled makes Hobbes skeptical that it is possible to interrogate and mitigate the most miserable and dystopian experiences. As he dwells on in Chapter 30 of *Leviathan*, instead people are to be educated and the point reinforced that the citizens are not to demand considerable changes in government (1985, 379), and should instead focus on following the laws of nature (1985, 382). For his part, as we will see in the next chapter, Burke is more optimistic about progress at this second level as society has and will continue to become ever more refined over time to the benefit of all (even if the most lowly in society will never reach a condition anything near to that

of the elite). Further, Popper has confidence in an iterative program of piecemeal social engineering to improve the condition of especially the worst off in society. But for Hobbes, subjugation under a violent sovereign is our permanent fate. I will return to this two-level distinction between dystopophobia in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

The Function of Hobbes' Dystopia

The second chapter of this text put forward three functions of dystopia: rhetorical, educative, and analytical. The methodology and areas of focus in this text highlight some of these functions of dystopia in Hobbes' work, but regrettably deemphasizes others. For example, there is a clear *rhetorical* function of dystopia in Hobbes' thought that remains unexcavated in the preceding text. Quentin Skinner charts the development of Hobbes' rhetoric from his early writings up through *Leviathan* and identifies in that later text a recognition on Hobbes' part of "the inescapable need for an alliance between the art of rhetoric and the methods of science" (2004, 346). In regards to dystopia in particular, Allison McQueen brings these rhetorical qualities to the fore through her focus upon the idea of "apocalypse" and the religious underpinnings of social conflict. Hobbes, she says, "combats the politically destabilizing potential of the apocalyptic imagery [in common English discourse] not by trying to escape or condemn it but by attempting to put it back in the service of sovereign power" (2018, 122). Hobbes "offers a captivating vision of a secular apocalypse in which the terror of the state of nature is the narrative prelude to an enduring commonwealth" (2018, 133), which is presented to the reader as a "secular mirror image of the Kingdom of Christ" (2018, 138). Both the secular and sacred Kingdoms, McQueen continues, "emerge from a battle with the forces of chaos… put an end to the

moral and semantic disorder of the state of nature, while Christ/God wins a final victory against primordial anarchy… [and] political authority in both the secular and sacred kingdoms is absolute" (2018, 138).[51] These religious themes, McQueen maintains, are intended to resonate with Hobbes' religious audience and so his secular apocalypse acts as a form of rhetorical strategy to win support for his views.

Beyond this rhetorical quality to Hobbes' dystopia, his political theory and the state of nature within it plays a considerable *educative* role. In particular, as an account of the circumstances of dystopia, *Leviathan* provides perhaps the most comprehensive account we have of the passions and vices that cause individuals to act in harmful ways. Premier amongst these motivations is vainglory and the desire for esteem and accolades. Fear is of course also a central cause of preemptory attack that, in turn, sows further fear and perpetuates the state of nature. To these, Hobbes explains how confounding factors including equality entrenches dystopia. As Teresa Bejan makes the case, upon signing the social contract the sovereign is established to rule over vainglorious and otherwise quarrelsome people, and so the benefits of peace and cooperation required that these people be made more tolerant and complaisant: "the sovereign could not afford to leave people as they were; he had an essential educative role to play" (2017, 86).

In the process of explicating the circumstances of dystopia, Hobbes is careful to educate readers of the right definitions of passions and psychology that influence human encounters. He gives a series of definitions to human emotions and qualities including wit, rage, joy, madness, hope, confidence, melancholy, ambition, and more (1985, 121-6, 135-

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[51] As an example of the connection between political authority in secular and sacred kingdoms Hobbes says, "In the Kingdome of God, there may be three Persons independent, without breach of unity in God that Reigneth; but where men Reigne, that be subject to diversity of opinions, it cannot be so" (1985, 372).

40). Additionally, his subjectivist theory of good and evil explains how otherwise reasonable and deliberative people can come into disagreement over the most valuable ends of life. Further, Hobbes furnishes his readers with a methodology – "Nosce Teipsum" – to prove the veracity of his claims about human passions as "whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions" (1985, 82).

The educative function of dystopia as part of Hobbes' political theory cannot be understated as Hobbes consciously advances education as the purpose of his political theory. The popular adoption of false moral philosophies and political doctrines are, Hobbes says, the cause of "all quarrels and killings" (1998, 9). By propounding his true theory of politics that "sets out men's duties, first as men, then as citizens and lastly as Christians," Hobbes' goal is to cause readers "to think it better to enjoy your present state (though it may not be the best) rather than go to war, and after you have been killed or died of old age, leave other men in other times to have a better life" (1998, 7, 14). As he says at the end of *Leviathan*, "most men, knowing their Duties, will be the less subject to serve Ambition of a few discontented persons, in the purposes against the State; and be lesse grieved with the Contributions necessary for their Peace, and Defence" (1985, 728). It is the knowledge of human nature and the circumstances of dystopia that tend towards mutual disadvantage that causes individuals to appreciate their currently elevated condition. Accordingly, Hobbes affirms that within a *hypothetical* sovereign state headed by the kind of Leviathan ruler he endorses his political theory should supplant the erroneous political doctrines within the universities (1985, 383), and in his current *actual* circumstances his

philosophy "may be profitably printed, and more profitably taught in the Universities" (1985, 728). In light of these claims about the educative role of Hobbes' theory, Mark Button's book *Contract, Culture, and Citizenship* cogently and consistently argues that Hobbes intends his for his theory to educate and shape the belief, passions, and actions of citizens. Contract makes citizens, Button claims, and "the transformative aims of Hobbes's moral and political thought are best seen as working on and trying to share conscience, belief, and opinion in an effort to remove, or at least diminish and soften, the inevitable antinomies that arise between conscience and commonwealth, private judgment and public reason" (2008, 39).

These remarks about the educative function of Hobbes' dystopia overlap with the analytical function of dystopia as part of a philosophical argument; after all, citizens are educated of the truth of the political on Hobbes' view by being exposed to sound and valid political arguments. At the heart of Hobbes' philosophical argument is the claim that although utopia may be a hypothetical ideal to aspire towards, such an ideal is in fact illusory. There is no "*Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) not *Summum Bonum*, (Greatest Good,) as is spoke of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers" (Hobbes 1985, 160). Instead, agreement can only coalesce around the worst outcome to be avoided, i.e. the state of nature. Because Hobbes conceives of dystopia as an uncontroversial end to be avoided, it functions as a sound premise upon which to build the rest of his political philosophy: the state of nature is the worst end to be avoided, so dystopia plays an *aversional* role in his philosophy.

As an extension of this aversional quality to Hobbes' argument, the live possibility of dystopia has a justificatory role within his philosophy. It is because the state of nature is

so wretched that he can make the case that although life under the power of an absolute sovereign is imperfect, the constrictions placed and demands made by the sovereign are considerably more palatable than the alternative. Hobbes says,

> "…a man may here object, that the Conditions of Subject is very miserable… [however] the estate of Man can never be without some incommodity or other; and the greatest… is scarce sensible, in respect of the miseries, and horrible calamities, that accompany a Civill Warre; or that dissolute condition of masterlesse men, without subjection to Lawes, and coercive pPower to tye their hands from rapine, and revenge" (1985, 238).

From the unlimited power of a sovereign, Hobbes says later, "men may fancy many evil consequences, yet the consequences of the want of it, which is perpetuall warre of every man agasint his neighbor, are much worse" (1985, 260). Indeed, it is because of unambiguous wretchedness of the state of nature compared to the relatively trivial inconveniences in society that Hobbes believes he justifies the status quo, thereby causing his fellow country men to "think it better to enjoy your present state" (1998, 14).

Over all, then, the unmediated misery of Hobbes' dystopia is the cornerstone of an argument about the superiority of even dysfunctional political systems over anarchy that thereby justifies the status quo, and, more than this, gives good reason to arrogate absolute power in the hands of a single sovereign. As part of his explanation of the dynamics of the state of nature, Hobbes reveals to his readers their own passions and psychology, the way in which these would manifest in the state of nature, and explains why they should be subject to control by a sovereign power in order to arrest the possibility of civil war and the liquidation of the polity. Dystopia in Hobbes' philosophy therefore has a profound educative and and justificatory function.

IV. Language, Dystopia, and the Valence of Words

The previous section showed how the sovereign is constituted by the people – as is illustrated in the Frontispiece to *Leviathan*. Importantly, though, on Hobbes' view, human beings are constituted in a fundamental way by language. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of political at a more fundamental level requires one to engage with the role of language in politics. Of course, human beings are constituted of more than *just* words. Hobbes makes clear in the first two chapters of *Leviathan* that human beings, their senses, and their imaginations are composed of matter in motion (1985, 86). That being said, in the immediately succeeding third chapter it is speech and language that Hobbes describes as humankind's "most noble and profitable invention" (1985, 100). Speech is valuable on Hobbes' view as it allows humans to transfer mental discourse into verbal discourse that can be shared with others. Speech also allows ratiocination – rather than just deliberation – to occur, where the correct definitions of words are put down as part of premises in arguments from which correct conclusions can be drawn (1985, 105; 110-118).

As Philip Pettit makes the case in his recent articulation of Hobbes' philosophy, the development of this ability to reason empowers human beings to reason about the objects of their desires for the first time (2008, 41-54; 84) and to reason about the consequences of their actions, such as the actions humans take in the pursuit of their desires and the effects these actions will have upon similarly situated other people (2008, 91). In thinking this way, human beings make a radical shift from the internal and immediate. Rather than merely think (internally deliberate) about their immediate desires as they emerge, through language human beings can reason about their desires not just now, but also their desires tomorrow, a week from now, and even into the distant future. More than this, humans can

also think about other people and the ways in which others may assist or frustrate them in the pursuit of their desires. Importantly, it is this dynamic of thinking about future desires (and the fear that these future desires will be frustrated), and it is the public concern with the actions of others that sets up the social and political dynamics of human life. The combination of planned social cooperation and competition in order to achieve some reasoned outcome is a component of a recognizably human life, as opposed to the life of a non-human animal, and so, as language is the prerequisite for this public long-term competition and cooperation, in this way language constitutes human beings.

One may conclude from these considerations that language is part of both the circumstances of justice and the circumstances of dystopia. The ability to talk and share ideas is a prerequisite for agreement over the principles of justice, and the establishment of the sovereign. This ability is also the prerequisite for disagreements that arise between individuals over unsound reasoning caused by divergent views about meanings of words. In the most extreme but nonetheless all-too-common cases, this disagreement can erupt into violent conflict, and so language is implicated in the circumstances of dystopia as a contributor to competition, war, and mutual disadvantage.

As it is so central to Hobbes' philosophy there is no shortage of literature analyzing the components of and the coherence within Hobbes' philosophy of language.[52] Of these, Terence Ball's account of Hobbes' view of language is useful for our present purposes as

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[52] Philip Pettit's introductory overview of the role of language in Hobbes is an excellent starting point (2008). There Pettit outlines Hobbes' philosophy of language in the first few chapters and then later applies it explicitly to political matters. Duncan Stewart's chapter on Hobbes' philosophy at the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2019) contains helpful introductions to the main components of Hobbes' theory of language, including signification and nominalism. Arash Abizadeh's recent article on Hobbes' philosophy of language (2015) gives more details on these components of Hobbes' thought and more in his critical reformulation of Hobbes' thought. For more on the political use of language in Hobbes, one would do well to start with Terence Ball's work discussed above (1995) and Sheldon Wolin (2004, 231-2).

Ball focuses upon the relationship between language and politics in Hobbes' philosophy. In particular Ball identifies what he calls a "central Thucydidean theme" within Hobbes' political philosophy. According to this theme, "it is through the medium of language that societies exist and through speech that men reason, rule, lie, command… accuse and excuse, commend and condemn" (Ball 1995, 88). And, importantly, political conflict and break down is not the product of natural and material causes that social scientific theorizing can identify, but instead "upon closer inspection [is] the creations – or rather, the miscreations – of men talking past one another, failing, because of unperceived though potentially remediable distortions and misunderstandings" (1995, 90). In particular, when words *lose their established meaning* misunderstandings occur, and this, on Ball's interpretation of Hobbes and Thucydides, is the cause of political breakdown. In the next section I will give Ball's account of the connection between meaning and political conflict in more detail, in order that, in the subsequent sections I can push back against his interpretation of Hobbes on the grounds that it is not changes to the *meanings* of words that breeds misunderstanding, but the instead is changes to the *valence*, or connotation, of words. This shift in the valence of words is itself caused by changes to the natural and material context of the polity – in particular in a drop from normal society to dystopian conditions – that breeds the misunderstanding identified by Ball and compounds social conflict. This line of argument is important, then, as it shows how dystopophobia and the foregrounding of the idea of dystopia can generate new interpretive insights.

<u>Changing the Meaning of Words</u>

Having read the ancient Greeks at a young age, Hobbes translated Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* into Latin in 1629. This was Hobbes' first published book and appeared about 15 years before *De Cive*. As was raised briefly in the previous chapter, the the Corcyraian Revolution was an event during the Peloponnesian War of great destruction and violence.[53] Thucydides tells us that in 427BCE a general sense of fear caused by the prospect of attack by the Peloponnesians, and internal faction between democrats and oligarchs left the Corcyraian polity in disarray. After a series of battles with the Peloponnesians, the Corcyraians found a break in the fighting as the Peloponnese left and allied Athenian ships arrived as reinforcements. At this point, the Corcyraians,

> "seized upon all their enemies whom they could find and put them to death… Next they went to the temple of Hera and persuaded about fifty of the [approximately 400] suppliants [members of the oligarchic faction] there to submit to trial. Then they condemned every one of them to death. Seeing what was happening, most of the other suppliants, who had refused to be tried, killed each other there in the temple; some hanged themselves of trees, and others found various other means of committing suicide…" (1972, 241-2)

Over the following days, "The Corcyraeans continued to massacre their own citizens whom they considered to be their enemies… as usually happens in such situations, people went to every extreme and beyond it. There were fathers who killed their sons; men were dragged from the temples or butchered on the very alters; some were actually walled up in the temple of Dionysus and died there." As Thucydides continues, the events were not unique to Corcyra: "revolutions broke out in city after city, and in places where the revolutions occurred late the knowledge of what had happened in previous places caused still new

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[53] Terence Ball uses the spelling "Corcyraian," whereas most other writers and the translation of Thucydides cited in this text use the spelling "Corcyraean." As this chapter is a response to Ball, for the sake of consistency it follows Ball's lead and adopts the spelling "Corcyraian," unless directly quoting from other sources.

extravagances of revolutionary zeal, expressed by an elaboration in the methods of seizing power and by unheard-of atrocities in revenge" (1972, 241-2).

In drawing our attention to the fact that Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War was an important component of Hobbes' intellectual development, and by emphasizing the parallels between the Corcyraian Revolution and Hobbes' account of the state of nature, Ball provides insight for a dystopophobic reading of Hobbes' philosophy. Although the state of nature as Hobbes presents it in *Leviathan* is unique to his philosophy and diverges from the precise events of the Corcyraian Revolution, the family resemblance shared between the two lends further credibility to Hobbes' view that violent conflict and the fear it generates is not an aberration that occurred merely during the English Civil War, for example, but instead is endemic to the human condition.

Beyond this, though, in Ball's interpretation, the Corcyraian Revolution is informative of Hobbes' view of the relationship between language and politics. Importantly, Thucydides connects social discord to disagreement over the meanings of words in a way that overlaps with Hobbes' later claims about disagreement in the state of nature. Thucydides claims that during the Corcyraian Revolution,

> "To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to *change their usual meanings*. What used to be described as thoughtless acts of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character; ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfitted for action." [Emphasis Added] (1972, 242)

The horrific events of war caused a shift in the *definitions of words* such that, in Terence Ball's words, "conceptual confusion and political chaos are one and the same" (1995, 90). This is to say that it is the failure of individuals during the Corcyraian Revolution to share

a scheme of words with set meanings (i.e. definitions) that precludes cooperation.[54] This is a circumstance of dystopia. Whereas some act spiritedly through reckless violence, others hold back and hesitate. This difference in public action springs from the difference in the definitions of courage and cowardice held by these citizens and without some central shared definition of words, it will be impossible to order society once again and return to normality; chaos will persist.

Importantly, Hobbes' account of disagreement shares many overlaps with Thucydides' account of disagreement as a consequence of the flexible definitions of words. He says in his account of reasoning that without accurate definitions of terms individuals will reason incorrectly from false premises and therefore reach specious conclusions (Hobbes 1985, 112). This focus on language also appears in the discussion of the fool in Chapter 15 of *Leviathan*, who disputes Hobbes' definition of justice as keeping one's

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[54] One may want to press on an ambiguity in the word "meaning," here. As "meaning" is not identical with "definition," one may claim that I am misunderstanding the claim that Ball is making. Meaning could be interpreted broadly to include both the strict definition of a word or concept, but also the more general quality of a concept. This more general quality of the concept might include the positive or negative valence or connotation of the concept, that I stress in the following pages. If Ball is invoking this broader view of the word "meaning," then he and I are in agreement.

There is certainly something to this possible response to the claims outlined here. And, if one read only Ball's review of James Boyd White's book *When Words Lose Their Meaning* that influenced Ball's book *Reappraising Political Theory*, then this would be a solid criticism. In that 1986 text Ball discusses Thucydides and not Hobbes in great detail, and the broad notion of word "meaning" is compatible with his remarks there. However, in the later text that is currently under scrutiny (1995), Ball takes his insights from that earlier review – especially the interpretation of Thucydides as preoccupied with the communicative basis of political order (1986, 625-9) – and applies it to Hobbes. For his part, Hobbes seeks the correct *definitions* of terms, and in discussing Hobbes, Ball emphases the world of "mutual meaning and shared *significations*" [emphasis added] (1995, 96), and repeats Hobbes' objection that preceding philosophers have "heretofore lived in a world of words whose meanings they refuse to *define*" [emphasis added] (1995, 98). Ball says, describing Hobbes' linguistic project, "Just as geometers could not calculate without first agreeing on definitions, so citizens cannot live together without sharing a common vocabulary of concepts whose meanings are fixed in advance" (1995, 99). Once again, this repetition of the word "define" and use of the word "vocabulary" circumscribes the focus of meaning in Hobbes down to an issue of definition, which is how I therefore read Ball's use of the term as functionally synonymous with "meaning" in the later 1995 text.

covenants. In telling words the fool says, "*you* may call it Injustice, or what other name *you* will; yet it can never be against Reason [to break one's covenants], seeing all the voluntary actions of men tend to the benefit of themselves" [Emphasis added] (Hobbes 1985, 204). This recurrent focus on the definition of justice *you* (Hobbes) hold, vs. *me* (the fool), captures Hobbes' emphasis upon the need for uniformity in definitions in order to preclude these kinds of disagreements. Indeed, Hobbes concludes that in these cases citizens can kill the disagreeable fool. Finally, in Chapter 29 on the causes of dissolution of a commonwealth, Hobbes affirms that the spread of private judgment and the use of individual conscience "men are disposed to debate with themselves, and dispute the commands of the Commonwealth" (1985, 365 see also: 1990, 21-22; 1998, 131-41). This once again connects political chaos to a lack of uniformity in words and the concepts these words represent as if each person can use their own judgment to determine the meanings of words – like the fool does with justice – then they will disagree with each other and the sovereign.

There is, then, considerable textual evidence to support the view that both Thucydides and Hobbes see conceptual and definitional change as intimately connected to political discord and violence. On Terence Ball's maximalist interpretation, Hobbes and Thucydides share a view of the "essentially *conceptual* character of political conflict" (1995, 91). In saying this Ball is pointing the causal arrow in one particular direction: first disagreement over concepts occurs, and, because of this, secondly, political order is impossible. He says, "When [first] words lose their meaning, communication – and therefore community – is impossible" (1995, 90). On this view, shared language is the foundation on which the superstructure of politics is built: "polities are the collective

communicative creations of their members" (1995, 91) and it is the revolution in Corcyra "in which the conceptual and communicative *basis* of political order is most fully and dramatically exemplified" [Emphasis added] (Ball 1995, 90). While there is much that is attractive in Ball's vision of politics in both Hobbes and Thucydides, a dystopophobic approach causes me *not* to conclude that the Corcyraian Revolution demonstrates how political order has its *basis* in common language. Instead, what is striking about Thucydides' history is the way in which the material conditions of society – most especially the military and tactical pressures of the Peloponnesian War – produce a circumstances of dystopia that then causes words to change their meaning. In this case, divergence in language is often a symptom of dystopian political circumstances, rather than (only) a cause of it.

The Dystopian Circumstances of Society and Language

Disagreement caused by shifting meanings of words can contribute to the dissolution of a commonwealth. Additionally, Hobbes notes in his chapter on the dissolution of a commonwealth that there are several other kinds of missteps that can also cause the same political tumult and dissolution as caused by the subjective definitions of words. For example, unless the sovereign can raise money by taxing citizens, then the sovereign will likely be unable to adequately defend the commonwealth against invasion by hostile foreign forces (1985, 367-8). In the case of successful invasion there is no disagreement over the meanings of words. The words remain the same. Instead, there is an exogenous threat to society that if not met will leave individuals "at liberty to protect himselfe by such courses as his own discretion shall suggesteh unto him" (1985, 375). This condition of

liberty to act as one sees best in the name of self-preservation is characteristic of the state of nature and, even without disagreement over the definitions of words, is a prominent contributor to the condition of violence in that state. What we see in this case is that Ball's insight is correct to some degree, but he goes too far. Hobbes' political theory does not contain, as Ball claims, "an essentially *conceptual* character of political conflict" (1995, 91). Instead, there is a *partially* conceptual character of conflict, and a partially material condition of political conflict. In some cases, political conflict can be caused by noncommunicative sources including: invading armies; internal threats from corporations and people who, through their resources and charisma, threaten sovereign authority (1985, 374-5); or, we might speculate, by natural and economic disasters that diminish the power of the sovereign by detracting from the resources at its disposal.

This point about the importance of material conditions can be reinforced by returning to Thucydides. In the text he says, "To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change" (1972, 242). Note the causal chain here: first events changes, and so, too, then, did words change. The events experienced by the Corcyraians were, of course, the events of the Peloponnesian War that spread paroxysms of social, political, and economic dislocation throughout the Mediterranean. The proximal events were the attempts by Spartan allies to convince Corcyra to change her alliance from Athens to support the Spartans, and the bloody navel battles by Athenian and Corcyraian ships against the Spartans on the water outside the city of Corcyra. These events placed acute pressure upon the people of Corcyra as a much smaller city state to pick the right side in the fight between the relative behemoths of Athens and Sparta; the cost of an incorrect choice could be the annihilation of the entire city. The material causes of at least the first

violent outbursts and waves of recrimination, then, were the Peloponnesian War and the fear that was generated amongst the people of Corcyra were they to choose wrongly. Absent these causes, the violence and the subsequent shifts in meaning that Ball identifies may never have occurred.[55]

Ball wants to claim that Thucydides departs from the traditional interpretation of him as supplying a "scientific explanations of the social and political phenomena" (1986, 625) or a "straightforwardly naturalistic account of the etiology of one war" (1995, 89). Against this, Ball pushes the idea that Thucydides instead presents a different account of the causes of conflict as rooted in the destabilization of the communicative basis of political order (1995, 90). But, as we have seen, even if "polities are the collective communicative creations of their members" (1995, 91), these creations are not made independently of naturalistic and empirical phenomena as the material context in which these members live can prompt changes to the words that form that communicative order. In his account of the Corcyraian Revolution, then, Thucydides is not doing something wholly detached from the rest of his work – this is not, as Ball claims, a discrete and independent linguistic turn in Thucydides. Instead it is an extension of his naturalistic account of the etiology of war applied to language in the polity, and this point can be reinforced by extending the analysis of Thucydides beyond only the Corcyraian Revolution (which is Ball's only data point),

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[55] Thucydides also says that individuals were propelled by "love of power" and by "greed and… personal ambition" to worsen the political chaos in the city in order to benefit themselves (1972, 243). This is surely a cause that made the situation in Corcyra worse – it is an amplifying factor that exacerbates problems in the material condition of society that is evident in Hobbes' state of nature, too. And, importantly, this source of political chaos is not a product of divergent meanings of words; it is a consequence of subjective circumstances of dystopia. This therefore militates against Ball's maximalist claim that "conceptual confusion and political chaos are the same" (1995, 90).

and supplementing the revolution with Thucydides' account of the plague in Athens some years earlier.

In his recounting of the plague in Athens, Thucydides describes in detail the bleeding, coughing, vomiting, and general suffering experienced by those who caught the disease. Over several pages he ruefully and sensitively recounts the inability of Athenians to care for their friends and family – either because they were sick themselves or would likely contract the disease from close proximity with their infected family – and the shame felt by the citizens for thinking of their own safety (1972, 154). In these circumstances, the norms of society broke down, as funeral ceremonies "which used to be observed were now disorganized, and they buried the dead as best they could… [or] they would throw the corpse that they were carrying on top of the other [funeral pyre] and go away" (1972, 155). Here, then, is a naturalistic phenomenon: the spread of disease. This disease disrupted and social norms and precipitated a period of "unprecedented lawlessness" as no person "showed himself willing to abide by laws, so doubtful was it whether one would survive to enjoy the name for it" (1972, 155). This is a material cause of political conflict and lawlessness, and proof that the basis of political order is not only communicative. And, in describing this phenomenon, Thucydides says, tellingly, that "Words indeed fail when one tires to give a general picture of this disease" (1972, 153). This suggests that it is words that change (or fail to change or become invented) to adequately describe these new and horrific circumstances, rather than words in some way causing the breakdown of society.[56]

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[56] As another example of how words (and indeed memories) adapt to circumstances, Thucydides says that during this plague the minds of the people turned to an ancient oracle, which read *"War with the Dorians comes, and a death will come at the same time*." There was, Thucydides says, some controversy over whether the line read "death will come" or "dearth will come," but as death was everywhere in Athens at the time "the view that the word was 'death' naturally prevailed." This, he continues, "was a case of people adapting

Dystopia: Shifting Contexts, Switching Valence

Ball is right that the conceptual is important in both Hobbes and Thucydides, but this focus on the conceptual cannot come at the exclusion of the material context of the polity. Indeed, let me suggest that the focus upon the material dystopian circumstances advocated here permits an insightful reinterpretation of Hobbes and Thucydides that has relevance for a dystopophobic approach to political thinking. In particular, I will claim that the shift in context from an otherwise fairly sound to a dystopian context causes not just a shift in the meaning of words that Ball stresses. Prior to this shift in *meaning*, the shift in context alters the *valence* of certain concepts – from positive to negative – that explains why it is that the meanings of the words that represent these concepts change.

Consider the example of cowardice in Thucydides' account of the Corcyraian Revolution. He says, "to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward (1972, 242). (In the version of the text used by Ball the line translates as, "prudent hesitation, specious cowardice" (Thucydides in Ball 1995, 90).) Let us assume "coward" to mean someone who lacks the courage to do dangerous things for fear of pain or harm to herself. In the context of the passage one can reasonably state that this definition of "coward" existed both before and during the revolution. If your fear outweighed your courage you were a coward, both before and during the revolution – the concept and definition of "coward" remains consistent. So, then, the shift in meaning is not within in

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their memories to suit their sufferings… if there is ever another war with the Dorians after this one, and if a dearth results form it, then in all probability people will quote the other version" (1972, 156). Quite clearly, the basis of the social order is the material world and the experience of death and suffering, and, in response to this, memories, words, and cultural artefacts like oracles shift in response to those changes in circumstance.

the concept or definition of coward itself. Instead, what Thucydides identifies here is a dispute over the actions (or lack of actions) that are *evidence of cowardice* in people, which is an empirical dispute. On this point it is therefore possible, at least in principle, to make cognitive claims about those actions that are and are not evidence of cowardice. Consider two examples:

> 1) A frenzied young member of the pro-Athenian commoner faction accuses an elderly and sagacious man of cowardice for failing to pick a side in the Corcyraian Revolution and fight accordingly. The elderly man has been hesitating and failed to pick a side because of a paralyzing fear that his vulnerability as an old man entails that raising his public profile by choosing a side will greatly increase the likelihood that he will be violently killed.

> 2) A frenzied young member of the pro-Athenian commoner faction accuses an elderly and sagacious man of cowardice for failing to pick a side in the Corcyraian Revolution and fight accordingly. The elderly man is actually secretly working very effectively for one side. This puts the elderly man at great personal risk on two fronts by making himself subject to criticism for his public proclamations of neutrality, and also a target for his clandestine partisan activity, were he to be caught by the opposing side.

Here we can make a cognitive judgment: person 1 is a coward and person 2 is brave, even though, from the perspective of the young Athenian partisan, each looks the same. By accusing the first person of cowardice the young partisan has not changed the meaning of the word coward and instead has accurately (even if accidentally) identified cowardice. In the second case the young partisan has misidentified cowardice as, rather than being cowardly, the second person is being calculating and brave. On this point one might accept that without uniformity in these judgments of what actions (or lack of actions) are evidence of cowardice (in Hobbes' case, for example, by a sovereign with ultimate authority on these issues), then social cooperation becomes difficult. Individuals who until now had acted prudently by waiting would be criticized and condemned as cowards for exactly these same

actions leaving all parties unsure about how their actions will be interpreted by others, thereby further sowing fear and social discord. But, of course, this is not the same thing as concluding that cooperation is difficult because the meanings of words have changed.

That being said, rather than just focus on the meanings of words and cognitive judgments of whether certain cases of action fall within or outside a concept like cowardice, there is another component to calling a person a coward that is excluded from Ball's analysis of Thucydides' account of the Corcyraian Revolution. To criticize another as a coward is also a non-cognitive act of disapprobation. To claim another person is cowardly is an emotive expression that conveys the speaker's attitude to the subject of the remark that may then, if it is taken up by the judicial authorities, bring about materially unpleasant consequences for the subject of criticism. Whether the accusation of cowardice is strictly correct according to the established definition of cowardice is beside the point from this perspective. Instead, it is the disapproval that the accusation of cowardice that is important, whether or not it is strictly true. This non-cognitive component to accusations of cowardice is important as it allows one to reinterpret the shift of meanings discussed by Ball. In effect, those accusing others of cowardice are saying that, "in these new circumstances, in the hell of war, those qualities like thinking of the future and prudence that were valuable and commendable during peace are not commendable now; quite the opposite they deserve disapproval, which is conveyed by calling you a coward. Instead, previously undesirable qualities like spirited action and frenzied violence are to be commended."

In normal circumstances prudence, waiting, and thinking of the future are good things – they are components of cooperation for mutual advantage. In ordinary circumstances such circumspect individuals would not be called cowards and this is (in

part) because in these ordinary circumstances when the future is fairly predictable then prudence pays dividends and is worthy of emulation. By contrast, in the midst of a dystopian bloody revolution, within the broader uncertain context of war between Athens and Sparta, then hesitation is maladapted. In the cut and thrust of the vital struggle for survival waiting either proves that one fails to appreciate the stakes of the conflict, or that one is an uncertain and untrustworthy future ally. These same acts of waiting and thinking about the future shift their valence from being positive to being negative things as the context changes from one of peace to one the dystopian context of brutal conflict. And this shifting of the valence of concepts occurs down the list of examples that Thucydides gives. "Cautious… plotting" against one's enemies was the mark of an anti-social individual who should not be cooperated with under normal circumstances, but in the bloody revolution, such cautious plotters make good allies. Moderation of one's views of matters and the ability to see each side – a sign of a healthy and perspicacious mind in normal times – is a liability to be destroyed in times of apocalyptic turmoil "either for not taking part in the struggle or in envy at the possibility that they might survive" (1972, 244). Intelligence, which was previously desirable to have became a liability as "those who were least remarkable for intelligence showed the greater powers of survival [as the less intelligent]… fearing they might lose debate or find themselves out-manoeuvred in intrigue by their quick-witted enemies, they boldly launched straight into action" (1972, 244). And on, and on.

The point to stress here is not that meanings have changed, but instead that the valence of the terms shifts in different contexts. This is to say that whether hesitating prudence is a positive or negative thing depends upon the context. Whether one feel

positively or negatively about frantic violence depends upon whether one is at war or at peace, in normal or dystopian circumstances. To put it in terms given by Thucydides, the war had created a new material context of political chaos as "everyone had come to the conclusion that it was hopeless to expect a permanent [peaceful] settlement" (1972, 244). In this new context old qualities changed their valence from positive to negative.[57] The conclusion of this line of argument, then, is that when societies fall into dystopia – that is, when their material condition degrades dramatically – even if the meanings of words remain fixed, the valence of words (whether they are positive or negative) can switch, which can explain the political chaos discussed by Ball without going so far as him in requiring that words change their meanings.

The Switching Valence of Words in Hobbes

Importantly, this switch in the valence of words occurs in Hobbes' writings and reveals something about dystopia. Consider first the idea of stability. Recall that one of the worst features of the state of nature is that it is remarkably stable. It is unlikely, for example, that a single strongman could accumulate enough power in the state of nature to function as a

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[57] As another example of this shift in valence, consider again the plague in Athens. Thucydides says that the plague brought a period of unprecedented lawlessness, and that this was because "no one expected to live long enough to be brought to trial and punished". In these uncertain times, when one's horizon of the future was dropped from years and decades to mere days and weeks, people "resolved to spend their money quickly and to spend it on pleasure, since money and life alike seemed equally ephemeral." "It was generally agreed," Thucydides tells us, "that what was both honorable and valuable was the pleasure of the moment and everything that might conceivably contribute to that pleasure" (1972, 155). The reference to what is honorable here perhaps suggests a change in the meaning of words, as before the plague profligacy was hardly honorable. But the reference to what is valuable clearly speaks to the issue of valence. The value of actions – what is seen as positive or negative, what is desired or not desired, what is appropriate or inappropriate, defensible or indefensible – has changed in this new context. Whether one understand and applauds great spending depends here, on whether one is in normal or dystopian contexts. The so the valence of profligacy has shifted in this new context when otherwise prudent saving for the future is maladapted.

proto-sovereign as the equality between individuals entails that even the strongest strongman will be vulnerable while sleeping. The only escape from a "perpetuall" (1985, 260) war of all against all is the particular type of covenant to form an absolute sovereign that Hobbes describes (1985, 227). One way to put this act of state formation is that the purpose of forming the sovereign is to break the stability of the state of nature and create a new and differently stable social world under the power of the sovereign. Here, in the act of forming the sovereign, the material context of life for people has changed, from an uncertain and fearful life in the state of nature to the more peaceful and prosperous life in a commonwealth. And, in is this change of context, so, too, has the valence of the concept of stability changed. Whereas the stability of the dysfunctional anarchistic arrangement without government had a negative valence, the stability of the new order has a positive valence. Indeed, so precious is the stability of the commonwealth that Hobbes' primary concern after establishing the commonwealth is to ensure that it should remain stable and enduring (Hobbes 1985, 363-76; 1998, 131-42). So, then, when applied to political arrangements, the idea of stability switches valence from negative to positive when changing context from the state of nature to a commonwealth.

As a second example, consider the idea of trust. Hobbes is clear that trust is so important to a flourishing and safe life that it is included as one of his laws of nature. The fourth law of nature (in *Leviathan*) requires that because individuals only help others with the expectation of assistance in return: one ought not to receive gifts from others unless one is able to reciprocate (1985, 209). If one receives a gift that one is not able to pay back in turn, then trust is broken and the foundations of peace and comity between people are damaged. Trust, on this view, is a good thing, which is why trust is one of the things that

the sovereign secures for its citizens. By empowering the sovereign to enforce contracts (so they are not merely words) cooperation can occur in society between individuals who are otherwise strangers. Even though they do not know each other, these strangers know enough: if the other party does not fulfil their end of the bargain, whatever that bargain might be, then the sovereign can punish the delinquent party. In these circumstances, industry and culture can flourish. Indeed, to lack trust in society is to make oneself a hermit or a pariah – isolated from complex forms of cooperation in society. One might even speculate that a lack of trust in society on the part of individuals is an implicit and destabilizing rebuke of the sovereign through the implication that the sovereign could not punish as necessary. Consequently, any sovereign concerned about her standing may be well-advised to punish such impertinence by untrusting citizens. All this is to say that to lack trust in society is to be worthy of disapprobation. Trust has a positive valence within the commonwealth and to lack trust is negative.

What about in the very different context of the state of nature, though? As Fredrick Weil says, "fear is the obverse of trust" (1986, 760), and as fear is the primary psychological quality of the state of nature, there is therefore no trust. What, then would we say to a person who bucked the norm of fear and decided unilaterally to trust the people they met? It would be right to call them a naïve fool for the rest of their inevitably short life. This is because although the meaning of trust remains the same in the state of nature as in society, in the dangerous context of the state of nature the valence of trust changes from positive to negative, and ought therefore not to be practiced by people in the state of nature, if they know what is good for them.

One final example that hems closely to Hobbes' own words: In *Behemoth* Hobbes describes the virtues of the sovereign that "tend to the maintenance of peace at home, and to the resistance of foreign enemies" (1990, 44-5). These virtues include fortitude, frugality, and liberality. Note that in the text Hobbes does not say that these virtues are absolutely good things because of the intrinsic properties of the virtues. Instead, these are virtues as the *tend* to the maintenance of the commonwealth. So, in normal times, frugality is a virtue as it "increases the public stock, which cannot be too great for the public use" (1990, 45). But times are not always ordinary, and in extraordinary times, extravagant spending may be appropriate. A penny-pinching sovereign who fails to press her military advantage with a decisive early victory against a hostile foreign power may prove to be penny-wise but pound-foolish by protracting the conflict into the long term at greater expense to all parties. Indeed, although it may be true that the common stock can never be too great, a frugal sovereign would be wrong to resist spending down that stock, and even skyrocketing public debts, if to do otherwise would leave the commonwealth vulnerable to destruction by a hostile neighbor. "In sum," Hobbes says, "all actions and habits are to be esteemed good or evil by their causes and usefulness in reference to the commonwealth" (1990, 45). Importantly, what is and is not useful to the commonwealth is partially contextual as what conduces to utility in normal times can be the opposite in dystopian times. Because of this, the valence of even the sovereign's virtues like frugality can shift their valence from good to evil in these changing contexts.

The dystopophobic lens and focus upon the dreadful context and dynamics of dystopia brings into focus something important in Hobbes, Thucydides, and in the nature of concepts themselves: the valence of concepts can shift from positive to negative (and

vice versa) depending upon the context, even if (contra Terence Ball) the meaning remains the same. This is a valuable insight on its own terms, has sizable textual support, and tracks with Hobbes' meta-ethical views about the nature of values. In particular, his insistence that good and evil (i.e. the positive and negative valence of concepts) are not intrinsic to things like stability, trust, and frugality, themselves – "There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person… that representeth it" (1985, 120). How people represent these values is informed, in part, by the circumstances in which they find themselves, and so the valence of concepts is influenced by the good or dystopian circumstances of the polity. This insight is also valuable as it reinforces the virtue of this work and demonstrates the insights that can be gained by foregrounding the idea of dystopia when reading thinkers like Hobbes. It is a fecund approach that produces new interpretive insights that contradict and improve upon very attractive previous interpretations given by scholars like Ball. Finally, in addition to this, these claims about the importance of context to the valence of values has use and provides insight when applied to the work of Tommie Shelby, as discussed in the second chapter of this text.

<u>Switching Valence and The Dark Ghetto</u>

As an example of valence switching reconsider Tommie Shelby's account of *Dark Ghettos* (2016). There he describes a ghetto as a discrete site of injustice – in which citizens live lives characterized by injustice – within the context of the United States more broadly that is considerably more just than the ghetto. Shelby makes the case that the duties of citizens in the ghetto differ from the duties of those outside the ghetto as the material conditions –

i.e. structures of power, poverty, and justice – differ from those outside the ghetto. For example, because gainful employment is limited in the ghetto, and because structural forces (like policies of mass incarceration) increase the chances of receiving a criminal record and thereby decrease the chances of gainful employment outside the ghetto, a vicious circle occurs that more deeply entrenches the denizens of the ghetto in a life of crime.[58] Whereas "most U.S. citizens think everyone including the poor should obey the law" (Shelby 2016, 215), Shelby argues that the history of discrimination and the nature of injustice in the ghetto entails that "when the ghetto poor in the United States refuse to respect the authority of the law *qua* law, they do not thereby violate the principle of reciprocity or shirk valid civic obligations (2016, 218). Specifically, the ghetto poor may legitimately contravene the rule of law in several ways:

> "…taking the possessions of others, especially when these others are reasonably well off, may be permissible. Mugging someone at gunpoint does not show sufficient respect for the victim's claims to be free from threats against their person. But shoplifting and other forms of theft might be permissible. In light of the hazards of participating in gang culture, recruiting children into gangs shows insufficient concern for the weak and vulnerable. Yet given the advantages of concerted group action, participating in gangs may be a defensible and effective means to secure needed income. Something similar can be said in favor of prostitution, welfare fraud, tax evasion, selling stolen goods, and other off-the-books transactions in the underground economy." (Shelby 2016, 220).

The tentative and equivocal quality of Shelby's language in his repeated use of the word "might" here reflects the fact that Shelby does not believe that breaking the law is an unambiguously good thing. Indeed, even shoplifting has negative effects upon others by possibly producing a feeling of unfairness and injustice on the part of otherwise good store owners who may have to pay more to insure their business. That being said, the rule of law

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[58] It is this self-reinforcing component that makes the ghetto an example of circumstances of dystopia – a dynamic occurs that not only precludes cooperation but also tends towards hostility and lack of cooperation.

lacks the clear and unambiguous positive valence that it has as part of a theory of justice (as explored extensively by Rawls in his discussions of stability). The definition of the rule of law remains the same both within and outside the ghetto as prostitutes in the ghetto do break the law when they engage in sex work. But Shelby wants to say that even though this is a violation of law and threat to rule of law, such illegal acts are nonetheless defensible and even excusable. Because of this, to prosecute such people as demanded by the rule of law would be a bad thing. In this way, then, the rule of law can in some cases take on a negative valence. Indeed, the dogged prosecution of all crimes in the name of the rule of law and the attendant stigmatization of ghetto denizens as criminals perpetuates the unjust ghetto that we ought to try to end.

Recall Shelby's claim that non-ideal political theory ought to produce four sets of principles: 1) principles of reform and revolution; 2) principles of rectification; 3) principles of crime control; and, 4) principles of political ethics. These "principles and values" of political ethics, Shelby says, "serve as the basis for criticizing the failure of individuals to promote just circumstances and to avoid complicity with injustice" (2016, 12). It is here, as part of the basis of criticism, that this work's focus on the circumstances of dystopia and the switching valence of concepts has something to contribute, as one way in which individuals may be complicit with injustice is by failing to appreciate the switch in valence that otherwise good concepts have in the circumstances of dystopia.

Consider an individual who desires to preserve justice in society. This person may reasonably revere and work to uphold the rule of law, by, say, working as a government prosecutor and prosecuting all crime as it occurs. As crime occurs in at an elevated rate the ghetto, this prosecutor may, in the name of the rule of law, prosecute the denizens on the

black ghetto at a higher rate than those people in the rest of society. If Shelby is right, though, and the history of injustice and racism in the US has shaped the creation of the ghetto as a site where crime is a defensible and effective means to secure needed income, then the prosecution of all crime in the ghetto in the name of the rule of law is less clearly sound. Such prosecutions ignore the rational incentive structure confronted by denizens of the ghetto and risks perpetuating the poverty in the ghetto by imprisoning and stigmatizing the black victims of generations of injustice in the ghetto. Here the rule of law has switched its valence from something unambiguously good in a just environment, to something less clearly good, perhaps often bad, in the circumstances of dystopia that characterize the ghetto. Here, the concept of the circumstances of dystopia and the insight that the valance of values can switch in these circumstances is a tool as part of the principles and values of political ethics. These insights can be raised to the well-meaning prosecutor[59] as a way to cajole them to interrogate their views about the rule of law and its unreflective application to unjust circumstances. So, then, more than only demonstrating how criminal activity can be rational and defensible in the ghetto, as Shelby does, one can show how as part of one's political ethics the circumstances of dystopia demand a reassessment of one's values to ensure they have not switched valence, and, in turn, require a recalibration of one's actions to ensure one is not perpetuating injustice and the circumstances of dystopia.

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[59] Of course, this approach will have little effect upon an individual prosecutor who invokes the rule of law in bad faith as a patina of legitimacy to his racist animus towards the black denizens of the dark ghetto. But that is just to concede that what I am saying here is not a panacea.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Hobbes' dystopia is an ideal type. It offers readers an account of the horrors of anarchy stripped of the contingencies of an historical study (of the kind offered by Thucydides, for example). While Hobbes is influenced by that history, his state of nature is distinct as it is a dystopia abstracted from the specifics of history, such that it is a *hypothetical* dystopia that could come to pass (as in the English Civil War), and does exist to varying degrees in North America and in the relations between sovereign states. Additionally, the state of nature is *theoretical*, that is to say that it is part of a theory how how individuals (and their psychology and incentives) function in the world without an absolute sovereign as a bulwark against the dissolutive forces of anarchy.

Beyond the form of dystopia, this work stresses the *educative function* of Hobbes' dystopia as a means to come to understand oneself – including one's passions and motivations – and also one's political obligations. The purpose of this education is to reconcile individuals to the polity, rather than agitate for dangerous reform. As part of this education, the idea of dystopia functions *analytically* as a *justification* of absolute sovereignty, or, as a second best, a defense of the status quo against the possibility of anarchy. The dystopia of the state of nature is so wretched that it functions *aversionally* as an end to be avoided at just about any cost.

In the process of developing these claims about Hobbes' dystopia and his dystopophobia, this chapter has advanced a handful of particular interpretive and philosophical claims. Prominently the idea of the *circumstances of dystopia* has been proposed as an account, not of the descriptive qualities of any particular dystopia, but instead as a second order account of the system of beliefs, psychology, material conditions,

etc., that together tend towards dystopia by pushing people towards non-cooperation and conflict for mutual disadvantage. When combined with the fact that Hobbes does not supply a robust theory of progressive improvement in society as he instead wins most of his anti-dystopian gains in the initial move from anarchy to commonwealth, one can tease out a two-tiered dystopophobic approach that one may follow. On the first level the aim is to extricate oneself and humanity from the worst dystopia, or, in other words, to correct or nullify the circumstances of dystopia that tend towards quarrel and mutual disadvantage. At the second level, once some minimally sound political system is in place, one can then ask how lives go, and whether in this broader non-dystopian context individuals or disadvantaged groups lead bad lives that, on a dystopophobic approach, ought to be addressed. This two-tier distinction reemerges in the discussion of Karl Popper and is important in the proposals contained in the conclusion to this dissertation.

It is also worth noting that this chapter advances two fairly novel interpretive claims. The first is that relative material scarcity rather than absolute material privation ought to be emphasized as a powerful cause of conflict in the state of nature. The prompt for this reassignment of emphasis is the further interpretive claim that the pursuit of glory ought to be read as the predominant human motivation and cause of other undesirable human motivations that characterize the state of nature, including, notably, the ubiquitous feeling of fear. Secondly, following Ball, this chapter accepts the claim that Hobbes' polity is intimately connected to the linguistic framework shared by citizens; misunderstanding is *a* primary cause of social decay, which is why a primary obligation of the sovereign is to publically give words fixed meanings. That being said, this chapter refines this view by reintroducing the material context in which words are expressed and can change their

meaning. While Hobbes' dystopia is hypothetical, it is a more-or-less live possibility (the English Civil War) that is experienced by some now (North America) and others in the past (the Corcyraians). In these dystopian contexts, the valence of words can change as that which was commendable suddenly warrants opprobrium. Against Ball's view that the linguistic forms the "basis" of society and that the causal arrow runs linearly from disagreement over words to social disorder, this chapter advanced a circular causal account, in which: 1) being placed in the circumstances of dystopia can shift the valence of words, even as the definitions remain constant, thereby causing communicative breakdowns; just as much as, 2) a communicative breakdown can cause society to fall into the circumstances of dystopia.

The case was made that these insights about the shifting valence of words can shed new light upon contemporary philosophical discussions including the obligations to those in the ghetto and the role of shifting valence as part of a program of political ethics of the kind proposed by Tommie Shelby. Taken together, the interpretive and philosophical insights of this chapter reinforce the virtue of a dystopophobic analysis of prominent thinkers about dystopia, like Thomas Hobbes.

Chapter Five: Burke

I. Introduction

Peter J. Stanlis opens his edited volume of Burke's writing by reciting William Hazlitt's remark that "the only fair specimen of Burke's writing is all that he wrote, because each new work shows additional evidence of his power in thought and brilliance in expression" (1963, vii). It is certainly true that unlike analytic philosophers, Burke eschews a formal exposition of his political thinking from first principles, so, if one wants a comprehensive understanding of his views as they evolved and were refined, a broad engagement with his *oeuvre* is warranted. That being said, as the primary object of concern in this text is dystopophobia and the ways in which dystopophobic concerns manifest in Burke's writing such a capacious approach is inappropriate. Thus, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* – his polemic against the revolutionary overthrow of the Ancien Régime in the name of the Rights of Man – is taken as the primary point of reference here. Written in the months after the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789 and released the next year, *Reflections* was immediately occasioned as a response to Rev. Price's commemoration of the 1688 Revolution, in which Price argued that respect for the goals of the revolution required a considerable reform to English politics to establish equal representation in a powerful House of Commons. In response, *Reflections* is a sustained account of why such revolutionary and egalitarian activity will inevitably lead, as the dystopophobic theorist worries, to dystopia and misery. In spite of the particular relevance of *Reflections* for the subject of this text, Hazlitt's remark still rings true and so I make reference to a broad

selection of Burke's earlier and later works in order to substantiate the insights drawn from *Reflections* and to demonstrate the consistency of Burke as a thinker on these topics.

In order to give the necessary context required to appreciate Burke's dystopophobia, the next section of this chapter presents Burke's enduring view of society as a remarkable human achievement that produces considerable advantages for people, including peace and prosperity. The institutions of society including religion, morality, and manners, acculturates individuals, forming their essential character as "civil social" beings, who live together in a complex and harmonious society. Section three emphasizes the components of this view of humankind and society that are particularly relevant to dystopophobia. Burke worries that self-interest is a potent motivator for calamitous social disruption that it is imperative to control for fear that the institutions of power in society will be coopted by these dangerous revolutionaries and turned on the polity itself. On Burke's telling the institutions of the status quo have especial moral value as the source of norms and individual character and therefore have particular claim to preservation. Finally, Burke's skepticism of rationalist philosophy explains his reasons for doubting the efficacy of philosophically-informed social reform. Section four defines Burke's dystopophobia according to the terms set out in chapter two of this text as a projective dystopia that extrapolates events in France to England and notably focuses on the function of dystopia in Burke's thinking as a justification of inequality and an attempt to reconcile the poor and disaffected to their lowly station in society. The body of the chapter ends in section five with some reflections on the relationship between dystopophobia and conservatism. I argue that there is indeed a conservative strand to dystopophobia, but that purposeful and particular attention to individual claims of injustice and immiseration and a programmatic

attempt to assist these people in ways Burke refuses to entertain can ensure that dystopophobia is not evacuated of all its promise as a progressive theory.

II. Burke's View of Society and Humankind

That Burke is a conservative thinker determined to defend against the adverse effects of revolution is well-known. But, when repeating this account of Burke, it is important not to forget that *Reflections* was written in 1789, years before the King and Queen were killed and the Revolution descended into the Terror. In order to understand why Burke was able to write with such prescience on these matters, it is necessary to understand how his established views about the nature of humankind and society left him acutely sensitive to the potential danger of revolution, especially revolutions driven by philosophically derived theories.

The Advantages of Society

One reason why Burke is at pains to defend English society against the threat of dislocation and perhaps even collapse by revolutionary forces is his heightened sensitivity to the benefits that society brings to people. Early in *Reflections* Burke describes a good society as possessing "discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidarity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners" (1993, 8). Of course, undisciplined armies are ineffective and wasteful, and therefore undesirable. On the other side, peace and order (secured, often, through a strong military) are quite straightforwardly good things. But to

get a sense of Burke's bigger picture of the virtue of political society it is worth considering them in light of his accounts of society from his very early writings.

For example, in his *Abridgment of English History* from 1757, Burke describes the British Isles following the end of Roman domination as a wretched place as the people there suffered "the most dreadful calamities from the fury of barbarous nations which invaded them, they fell into that disregard of religion, and those loose disorderly manners, which are sometimes the consequence of desperate and hardened wretchedness" (Burke 1757, 84). Without solid and stable government, people are at risk of predation by outside forces and therefore remain in a precarious and hardscrabble condition that denies them the opportunity to develop their skills, talents, social intercourse, trust, and cooperation. It is, broadly, these latter qualities that fall under Burke's definition of civil and social manners, and so it is government that allows people to bring themselves up above a condition of wretchedness. And it is this role of government to empower people to bring themselves up that is important. Far from the view of natural rights theorists like Lord Bolingbroke – that government tramples upon the natural rights and freedom of some by giving political power to others – Burke makes the case in his first published work *A Vindication of Natural Society* that society allows a people to rule over themselves, rather than the rule of invaders (Burke 1756, 61). To be sure, society does not give individuals license to act just as they wish, but nonetheless society presents people with greater or lesser opportunities to work, learn, practice religion, accumulate property, cultivate taste, and engage in social intercourse with one's fellow citizens.

When describing how France would have benefited by avoiding revolution later in *Reflections*, Burke points to the liberty of the French people, and the example this sets for

those who would otherwise embrace despotism. The French could have shown the world that "liberty was not only reconcilable, but as, when well disciplined it is, auxiliary to law" (1993, 37). To be sure, many in contemporary society have diminished life-chances compared to the wealthiest and refined members of English society. But even these people in contemporary European society live lives with greater freedom than those under tyrannies in the rest of the world. The English constitution since first set out in the Magna Carta carves out distinct rights and protections for (at least a portion of) the people against the interests of an otherwise unchecked (and often insatiable) king. As Richard Bourke describes Burke's view, "the overriding achievement of modern European history was the liberation of jurisprudence from the hands of power," that, together with other constitutional arrangements "facilitated the establishment of modern freedom" (Bourke 2015, 20-21). Good government, then, allows commerce between people, robust "but unoppressive" government revenue, a powerful army, funded by that revenue, a reformed clergy, and a spirited nobility that to "lead [the] virtue" of the people (Burke 1993, 37).

In characterizing this quality of Burke's thinking, David Dwan describes Burke as "a utilitarian in the extremely trivial sense that he wanted good outcomes for people" (2012, 142). In saying this, Dwan marshals the kinds of examples given above to show that Burke believes that a salutary proposal to change a law or institution in society draws *at least some* value from the fact that it would make people's lives go better. But, even so, Burke is not a thoroughgoing utilitarian in the mold of Bentham or Mill for several reasons. Firstly, Burke is attuned to more than mere goodness in public policy as throughout his work he also invokes other competing values including justice and tradition to be considered in political deliberation. Secondly, as Dwan makes the case (2012, 134-6) even

when he does consider utility, Burke is not a *hedonic* utilitarian; that an outcome is good

does not simply mean that it produces subjective feelings of happiness in people. Instead

good outcomes correspond with and enrich something more about the human condition

that is satisfied and fulfilled by more than mere pleasure. Goodness is, on Burke's view, a

quality that corresponds with the good qualities of human nature as a product of the "civil

social" structure that influences our values and ideals, and includes things like freedom,

peace and security, learning, religion, and social intercourse. Because of this, thirdly,

Burke's methodology differs starkly from the utilitarians. As Dwan continues, Burke was

not an aggregationist who sums up utility and balances it against the *dis*utility of the

opposing outcome. Instead Burke is a pluralist thinker who draws upon a far greater range

of considerations and means of political deliberation to reach sound proposals to reform

government.

While Dwar's account of Burke's views on utility is quite true, an exception

emerges when Burke turns his attention from utility to the real possibility of disutility and

very bad outcomes. At many points in his writings Burke stresses not that "he wanted good

outcomes for people" as Dwar puts it (2012, 142), but instead, more explicitly, that he

wanted to avoid bad outcomes for people. Even when citizens find their society odious due

to things like gross economic inequality, citizens accept this condition "not from love of

them [inequality], but for fear of worse." We tolerate them, he continues, "because property

and liberty, to a degree require that toleration" (1993, 163). Importantly, when talking in

this aversional pitch, Burke sometimes invokes utilitarian-type considerations and ways of

thinking that Dwar tries to separate from Burke's thinking. For example, Burke explicitly

uses aggregative language to assert that good outcomes have to be ten thousand times better

than the existing good to be worth the risks caused by reform (1993, 96). In light of these considerations there is value in distinguishing between Burke's relationship with utility and his relationship with disutility, as the threat of great harm and loss weighs on him more heavily than a desire for good outcomes for people. Consequently, amongst other things, this chapter functions as an attempt to enrich and extend Dwar's sound assessment of Burke's relationship to utility by applying it to the further and distinct case of disutility – that is, to dystopophobia.

The Rights of "Civil Social Man"

While society brings to its members innumerable good things on Burke's telling, individuals are not due these good things (peace, freedom, religion, and such) because of anything like a natural or pre-political human right. Instead, these advantages of society are what Burke calls the "*real* rights of men" and are discovered through historical experience and justified by their proven benefits in practice, rather than by reference to an abstract philosophy (1993, 58). In the context of English history, Burke traces English rights to the social and political institutions and norms that were first agreed upon in Runnymede in 1215, and over the intervening centuries these institutions were improved, modified, and entrenched into political rights that comprise an "*entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to posterity" (1993, 33). The English political system had functioned (more-or-less) effectively over these centuries and so claims of political right are endorsed to protect precisely these social and political norms that produced the wealth, security, and well-being of the English up until the revolution,

and beyond. "If civil society be made for the advantage of man," Burke asserts, "all the advantages for which it is made become his right" (1993, 59).

In light of this history Burke argues that the 1688 revolution was not an attempt to remake English society *de novo*, but, instead, was made to "preserve our *antient* indisputable laws and liberties, and that *antient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty" (1993, 31). The parties to the revolution "wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we posses as an *inheritance from our forefathers"* (1993, 31), and so their "whole care was to secure the religion, laws, and liberties, that had been long possessed, and had been lately endangered" (1993, 32). Burke lists prescriptive rights established by the English, including the right to live under the laws, "a right to justice… a right to the fruits of industry… a right to the acquisitions of [one's] parents… and to the nourishment and improvement of [one's] offspring" (1993, 59). To this, he adds a right of free action, within the limits that one cannot harm others: "Whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do for himself" (1993, 59).[60]

Much of this is fairly pedestrian and well within the liberal tradition of rights as it has come down to the present day. Where Burke departs from this tradition is in his provocative but vexing account (to some contemporary audiences) of the rights of citizens to participate in and benefit from society. He says,

> "In this partnership [between men to advance society] all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership, has as good a right to it, as he that has five hundred pound has to his larger proportion. But he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock; and as to the share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I must deny to be amongst the original rights of man in

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[60] For more on Burke's distinction between descriptive and prescriptive rights see, *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796, 309).

civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention." (1993, 59)

The claim here is that there is a certain class of people who have the right to participate in government to a much greater degree than others, thereby denying the essential equality of all people to rule. On the one hand, one can explain this belief by reference to Burke's note that individuals have unequal stakes in society, as the rich and powerful have far more to lose through poor policy-making and the potential disintegration of society than do the poor and disempowered. There is a deeper idea at play here, though, that turns on Burke's rejection of the idea that humankind shares any *essential* qualities at all. Instead, humankind is on Burke's view "in a great degree a creature of his own making" (1993, 92). This is to say that – yes – society is the product of human action and willing, but, more than this, social and cultural norms also influence individual *character*, forming a "civil social man." The claim, then, is that human nature is a product of the laws, institutions, religion, manners, and other social norms in which humans live, and this is an enduring component of Burke's philosophy.

In *Vindication*, for example, Burke pushes back against Bolingbroke's view that (as Burke describes it) humans have "implanted in us by Providence, ideas, axioms, rules, of what is pious, just, fair, honest," which facilitated fair and just cooperation in the state of nature (1756, 62). It is not the case that all people in the state of nature relate to each other either as individuals, whose natural sense of rightness and justice produce a "benign and healing effect in the general voice of humanity," that takes hold, and "never fails to work a salutary effect" (1756, 61). Instead, it has never been the case that humankind has lived in nature at all, and so there is no human nature devoid of political influence. Contrary to Bolingbroke, it is through cooperation in society that people learn to relate to one

another. It is there that they develop bonds of affection and learn to engage with one another, not according to some abstract and dubious conception of "humanity," but instead as real substantial people, in part, comprised of their national affiliation.

Interestingly, Burke sees himself as a product of precisely this force of acculturation and character formation, and acted accordingly. For example, during his time studying to be a lawyer in the 1740s, Burke helped to found the *Academy of Belles Lettres*, a club in which members met to discuss the ideas and new publications of the day in order to ""improve" club members by exposing them to the refined and useful arts" (Bourke 2015, 56). As part of this academy of letters Burke reviewed and disagreed with Rousseau's views on the role of the theater upon human character. Rousseau asserted that "theatre is a form of amusement" it has as its "principal object" the aim of pleasing its audience (Rousseau 1960, 16). He concludes from this claim that, firstly, by appealing to the baser instinct of pleasure in people, and secondly, by detracting them from other more worthwhile character-forming activities like caring for one's friends and family, theater therefore cannot improve human character. Against this view, Burke invokes the idea of social character formation to argue that although it might be true that those attending plays lack morals in "small and indigent states" like Geneva, in Great Britain the good people have much to gain in improvement of their character and expansion of their understanding by attending the theater (Burke c.1759, 106).

Burke's notebook (written around 1750-56) includes a comprehensive example of a "civil social man" who has gained most from living and refining himself within in society. This ideal refined person of character has access to all forms of learning such as science and mathematics, but, more than this, also access to forms of learning like art and poetry.

These latter forms of learning are not pursued with the direct intention of improving character, but they have that effect indirectly. So, whereas some disparage these forms of learning as extravagance, Burke sees in them the means to "implant an elegant disposition into the mind and manners and to root out of them everything sordid, base or illiberal" (Burke 1957, 87). These arts are important, he claims in a pregnant assertion, because "they apply to the passions, in which, more than in any faults of reasoning, the Sources of all our Errors lie" (1957, 88).[61]

The consistent conclusion in Burke's work is that society has a central role in the refinement of these passions and the orientation of the person through the development and maintenance good character. Those who have refined their passions and their character possess the self-knowledge to be skeptical of abstract reasoning, are trusting of their passions, and are deferential to custom:

> "A man who considers his nature rightly will be diffident of any reasonings that carry him out of the ordinary roads of Life; Custom is to be regarded with great deference especially if it be a universal Custom; even popular notions are not always to be laughed at. There is some general principle operating to produce Customs, that is a more sure guide than our Theories. They are followed indeed often on odd motives, but that does not make them less reasonable or useful. A man is never in greater danger of being wholly wrong than when he advances far in the road of refinement; nor have I ever that diffidence and suspicion of my reasonings as when they seem to be most curious, exact, and conclusive." (Burke 1957, 90)

More than merely their greater stake in the success of society, it is the refined qualities of the upper-classes that endows them with greater understanding of society. In particular, as he meditates on towards the end of *Reflections*, the unequal distribution of wealth, opportunity, learning, culture, and religion in society entails that it is the upper class of society who are most able to cultivate and employ their character. "Public virtue," Burke

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[61] For another example of a refined character see his description of a gentleman (1957, 104-8, especially 105).

asserts, "being of a nature magnificent and splendid, instituted for great things, and conversant about great concerns, requires abundant scope and room, and cannot spread and grow under confinement, and in circumstances straitened, narrow, and sordid" (1993, 228). A robust public revenue is required to elevate people and society above the straitened circumstances that confine human and social perfection. With such revenue it is possible to develop true "magnanimity, and liberality, and beneficence, and fortitude, and providence" that are necessary for the "tutelary protection of all good arts" (1993, 229). Along with the self-abnegating qualities of "labor, and vigilance, and frugality, and whatever else there is in which the mind shews itself above the appetite" (1993, 229), especially the exalted elite are able to marshal the qualities of state to improve both their own virtue and the virtue of the polity. As he says later in *Letter to William Elliot*, "virtue and religion [are] the true foundation of all monarchies" (1795, 266). Therefore, "the prosperity and improvement of nations has generally encreased with the encrease of their revenues," and will continue to improve so long as a balance is struck between the use of these revenues to "strengthen the efforts of individuals, and what is collected for the common efforts of the state" (1993, 229).

The Harmoniousness of Society & Political Deliberation

Even though he believes that the elite in society are more refined and therefore possess greater ability, and even though he concludes that the elite therefore rightly ought to rule in society, Burke does not describe the upper-classes as a monolithic body. Society is a harmonious whole on Burke's view, but not because its constituent parts (including the upper-classes) are all entirely uniform. Instead, society hangs together fairly precariously

in a balanced and delicate whole and therefore ought not to be too greatly disrupted by reform. He says, describing the former French system,

> "Your constitution was suspended before it was perfected; but you had the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished. In your old states you possessed that variety of parts corresponding with the various descriptions of which your community was happily composed; you had all that combination which, in the natural and political world, from the reciprocal struggle of discordant powers, draws out the harmony of the universe." (1993, 35)

The invocation of the harmony of the universe corresponding to the harmony of human society is a rhetorical flourish, as aside from some comments on the previous page, there is nothing much else in this text that similarly evokes this cosmology.[62] That aside, he continues,

> "These opposed and conflicting interests, which you considered as so great a blemish in your old and in our present constitution, interpose a salutary check to all precipitate resolutions; they render deliberation not a matter of choice, but of necessity; they make all change a subject of *compromise*, which naturally begets moderation; they produce *temperaments*, preventing the sore evil of harsh, crude, unqualified reformations; and rendering all the headlong exertions of arbitrary power, in the few or the many, for ever impracticable" (1993, 35).

In this image of society, the respective components of society, from the monarchy through to the military, and clergy, each have their own conflicting interests.[63] To be sure, there are certain minimal terms of social cooperation, such as robust but unoppressive public

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[62] Indeed, much of his other writings, especially his early notes, firmly distinguish between the grand cosmology of religion on one hand, and the social and political world on the other. In *Religion as an Engine of no Efficacy*, for example, he asserts that although religion can be used as a political tool to achieve law and order by influencing human behavior by invoking the possibility of divine reward and punishment, to use religion in this way would ultimately undermine the authority and grandeur of religion. Unlike politics, religion speaks to more elevated concerns of the human condition, and accordingly, if religion were to be brought into correspondence with politics, over time religion would be eroded and degraded and therefore cease to achieve a political end of uplifting people and ensuring that they follow the law. It would be come an engine of no efficacy (1957, 67-9). In this example, then, the grand harmonious world of God's universe is strictly divided from political practice.

[63] Burke gives another example of the harmonious functioning of society later in the text. He asks the revolutionaries, "Have they never heard of a monarchy directed by laws, controlled and balanced by the great hereditary wealth and hereditary dignity of a nation; and both controlled by a judicious check from the reason and feeling of the people at large acting by a suitable permanent organ?" (1993, 124).

revenue to which each can agree. That being said, in everyday political life, each is competing with the other in order to improve her own circumstances. Some of this competition is desirable in and of itself as each component of the polity acts as a Montesquieuean check against the others ensuring that the society will not become deformed or ill-balanced towards one area of life, thereby stifling the harmony that good societies have.

The existence of conflicting interests engenders deliberation and compromise, which together help to harmonize society. It is a condition of a well-functioning state that each faction and political interest within society must work with each and every other one, not just now, but in perpetuity. In a recurring game like this it is an unsound strategy to stubbornly demand each and every thing one wants without any openness to the needs and interests of others. "[D]eliberation [is] a matter not of choice, but of necessity," Burke says, as each must coherently put forward their own interests and, in turn, hear and consider the interests of every other if they are going to get anything at all (1993, 35). All parties, therefore, have a vested interest in compromise with one another, which moderates the political decisions made. Over time, the parties internalize this situation. They recognize that compromise and deliberation is a good thing, and that moderation is a desirable end, which in turn produces temperaments within them that prevent the "sore evils of harsh, crude, unqualified reformations" (1993, 35). On Burke's view, the aristocracy embodies these temperaments and qualities. "Steady and moderate conduct in such [political] assemblies," Burke writes, occurs only in those assemblies, "respectably composed, in point of condition of life, of permanent property, of education and such habits as enlarge and liberalize the understanding" (1993, 41). This is the process referred to in *Philosophy*

and Learning from his notebook (1957, 87-8) that refines the passions and produces people capable of acting rightly in ways that extend beyond what rational philosophy can justify and explain. The aristocracy and those of wealth and learning possess salubrious passions and the qualities of a sound temperament, obtained through generations of social intercourse amongst one's similarly elevated peers and time spent in politics that mitigates the temperaments that would otherwise lead to harsh, crude, and unqualified reformations.

In his recent book, Paddy Bullard intertwines these views of political deliberation with Burke's account of the art of rhetoric (2011). Drawing upon the full range of Burke's written work, Bullard describes Burke as, in the first place, an adept philosophical thinker who identified rhetoric as a medium through which the aristocratic class could express their sound temperaments, and also as a tool used by that class in order to convince and cajole their peers to adopt their point of view on public matters. Bullard says that, "In Burke's hands, rhetoric is both something less and something more than a technology for interfering with the convictions of others. It is his theory of government that indicates the most appropriate ways of understanding the sorts of comprehensive strategies we find in Burke's writings and speeches" (2011, 10). Bullard continues to make the case that as Burke's theory developed, he came to believe that the "Taste, talent, and disposition" of the orator are used through rhetoric to convince one's peers, but also, in addition, are imprinted upon the common audience of people in such a way that it elevates them, too (2011, 11). In the second place, then, Burke is not merely a philosopher diagnosing the role of rhetoric, but is also a practitioner who, especially in later works like *Reflections*, employs the tools of

rhetoric as a component of political deliberation that influences and improves the populace as a harmonious whole and leads to good governance.[64]

Burke is not entirely Pollyannish about political deliberation and the refined temperaments of those in exalted positions. Like anyone else, he says, the elite are apt to be "elevated by flattery, arrogance, and self-opinions," and so they must be accordingly "awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust" of society, and that "they are accountable… for the abuse of their trust" (1993, 93). So, on the one hand, the monarchy, aristocracy, and other exalted people are, at base, just people. But, one must not forget that in addition to being people, they are still exalted. They are superior to the mass of other people in society and are superior because they have been subject to the forces of society, culture, and religion that improve character that propitiously places them as political actors.[65] As he puts it in a discussion of religion, manners and other customs passed down through society, especially to those in a higher station in life, "When antient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated… [as] from that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer" (1993, 78). This political knowledge passed down through the generations is combined in what Burke calls the "spirit of gentleman, and the spirit of religion," as the learning that these two groups of people receive from the wealth and status arrogated to them is "paid back… and paid… back with usury, by enlarging their ideas and furnishing their minds" (1993,

[64] After 1771, parliamentary debates were, for the first time, released for public consumption in the press. Burke saw himself as a great beneficiary of this change as it allowed his remarks to reach a greater audience and thereby elevate the common people (Reid 2012, 43). For Burke's execution of this art of rhetoric in *Reflections* to these ends, see (Bullard 2011, 163-73).

[65] Although Corey Robin's book as a whole is rather jaundiced, his diagnosis of conservative thinking as founded upon a preoccupation with the idea of rule, and in particular the rule of the elite and best over the common masses hits the mark here when applied to Burke's thinking: "It [conservatism] begins from a principle – that some are fit, and thus ought, to rule others…" (Robin 2011, 18).

79). So, those of exalted status learn and in turn repay that knowledge and the cost to acquire it by producing new ideas that improve society. These people are the protector of the compass to guide society, and also the mechanic and natural philosopher capable of improving and repairing this compass.

Society's Complexity & Limits Upon Knowledge

Burke's conception of harmonious society is remarkably complex. In the first place, society is complex in its form as composed of numerous competing and cooperating parties. So, for example, early in *Reflections*, he describes the British constitution as preserving "a unity in so great a diversity of its parts," composed, as it is, of "an inheritable crown; inheritable peerage; and an house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors" (1993, 33).[66] Similarly, social, economic, and political structures overlap and interact with one another in complicated ways. Burke refers to the necessity of government revenue on several occasions, but, although this revenue ought to be robust, it also ought not to be odious. Exactly where the line between these two lies is difficult to discern because it depends upon whether the country is at war or is likely to face a belligerent adversary in the near future. It depends upon the condition of the economy and the demands of the populace for tax relief. And it depends upon technological developments that improve efficiency, and those that demand

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[66] Even this can be too much at times, though. In his *Speech on Economical Reform*, for example, Burke complains that in general political complexity "in itself is no desirable thing" and that in the particular case of rule over Wales the multiplications of titles there, including the litany of new duchies, "serve no other purpose than to keep alive corrupt hope and servile dependence" (Burke 1780, 348-9). Fifteen years later Burke would later have to explain away this earlier skepticism of government largess when he received and wanted to keep an endowed title after his retirement (1797, 288-92).

the state invest to catch up with competing economies. There are countless considerations that influence just this one question of appropriate government revenue because societies are complex bodies with often obscure relations of cause and effect within them.

In addition to these considerations, good government is complex because it embodies various conflicting ideals. As Burke says just a few pages before the end of *Reflections*, nothing is easier than establishing a government as all one needs is obedience: "settle the seat of power, teach obedience: and the work is done." And to give freedom, he continues is "still more easy… it is not necessary to guide; it only requires to let go of the rein." The real trick, however, is to form a *free government*, which is far more demanding because it requires that one "temper together these opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, [which] requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind" (1993, 247). Building upon this, society is complex because it does not merely produce obedience to established laws and norms, but it molds those within political office causing them to temper their demands, and also affects the lives of each and every person in society by elevating their morals and manners.

Burke concludes that there can be no single set of principles that establish the terms of social cooperation necessary for a life free from anarchy and war. These terms of social cooperation are the product of a nebulous process of competition, cooperation, and compromise between the various centers of power, influence, culture, and religion in society. Rather than philosophy, the science of constructing a government, Burke says, "is like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*" (1993, 61). Actual and extended interaction with the polity is necessary because of the complexity of the subject. In the first place, the effects of an action or policy decision are not always evident as "that

which in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation" (1993, 61). An incomplete or rushed understanding of the state is likely to lead to misunderstanding and the misidentification of salutary and harmful political decisions. Furthermore, "In states there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first view of little moment, on which a very great part of its prosperity or adversity may most essentially depend" (1993, 61). Causes, then, are often unclear and the effects of these actions are often remote. These effects are often remote in time, but also remote within the current polity, affecting people far from the locus of power and decision-making. Rationalist philosophers with their theories of politics, Burke worries, are often either ignorant of these qualities of the polity, or they purposefully ignore them for the sake of simplicity and argumentative elegance.

Pulling these ideas together Burke concludes that when conducting political theory, "it is better that the whole should be imperfectly and anonymously answered, than that, while some parts are provided for with great exactness, others might be totally neglected, or perhaps materially injured, by the over-care of a favorite member." (1993, 62). As the "nature of man is intricate," and as the objects of society "are of the greatest possible complexity," so too must a theory of politics be complex and intricate (1993, 62). This is no easy task, of course. But, even an incomplete or imperfect theory of politics that covers the whole range of intricacies of humankind and the political communities in which they live will surpass any exact theory of politics that covers only a part of the political system. Indeed, it is worse than this, as any exact theory of limited scope risks "material injur[y]" to those parts of society outside the scope of the theory (1993, 62). After all, if the causes of outcomes are often unknown and the effects of political decisions distant in time and

location, decisions made on a theory of one part could be disastrous for other parts of the polity now, or in the future. These concerns about uncertainty and remote effects of local action are the first real components of Burke's dystopophobic thinking, and they emerge also in the work of Karl Popper.

III. The Ideas Undergirding Burke's Dystopophobia

On the most superficial level, that Burke has an aversion to the worst and is sensitive to the notion that political actions can go terribly awry is transparent in his decision to full-throatily denounce the French Revolutionaries, and this aversion suffuses his writing in *Reflections*. There are times when Burke merely assumes that his reader shares with him an almost natural and unproblematic aversion to bad outcomes and that this is a sufficient defense of the status quo. For example, in a defense of the gross material inequality that characterizes English society he ultimately concludes that the rich and poor tolerate the luxuries of the wealthy, even if the cost is the continued poverty of the lower classes, "not from love of them, but for fear of worse. We tolerate them, because property and liberty, to a degree require that toleration" (1993, 163). So, in one sense, Burke's dystopophobia is immediately palpable and undeniable. That being said, having taken the time to reconstruct Burke's view of society and human nature, we are now in a much better position to appreciate the dystopophobic elements of Burke's thinking, and the organizing and motivating ideas that lead him to this profound aversion to political change and the possibility of radical social decline that he worries change often elicits.

<u>The Advantages of Society</u>

The first thing to repeat is that Burke is acutely sensitive to the advantages that society provides. Whereas Hobbes had a singular focus upon security as the primary benefit that government supplies (with further benefits such as industry, arts, and letters as a secondary consideration), Burke, by contrast, has a far more nebulous and broad conception of the benefits provided by society, including obedient armies, morality and religion, and robust public revenue (1993, 8; 37) that allow people to live lives far better than they otherwise would (1993, 228). Although they can be educated, Hobbes conceives of people as broadly the same both before and after the formation of society, as in each case, people generally pursue their interests as they understand them, which necessitates a powerful sovereign to keep order. By contrast, Burke invokes a perfectionist account of society and citizens in which each is improved by the other. In spite of these differences, however, both Burke and Hobbes believe that the alternative to good government is misery and great suffering. Of course, Hobbes believes that life with government would be a state of nature in which all persons are at war with each other. Burke rejects the idea that one can conceptualize the life of mankind outside of society, but, looking back to defective polities in the past he concludes that "History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries bought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites, which shake the public with… troublous storms… [that] render life unsweet"" (1993, 141). On Burke's view, then, the history of defective polities and the misery they have heaped upon their denizens proves the advantages that good society brings for its members.

Self-Interest, Power, and the Reproduction of Revolutionary Zeal

But, of course, one need not look too far back into history for examples of immiseration. As Burke is at pains to emphasize in his *Letter a Member of the National Assembly*, in contemporary France the revolutionaries cynically use philosophy to consolidate their murderous and expropriative regime, and in "supporting their power and destroying their enemies" (1791a, 616; see also 1993, 82). Burke worries that, even if some portion of the revolutionaries are sincere in their commitments to philosophical ideals like the natural rights of man, not all are. It is often the case that prideful, avaricious, and ambitious individuals, otherwise denied respect and standing by the established aristocratic organization of society, cynically deploy disruptive ideas like the Rights of Man to further their own private ends. These political strivers, Burke claims, "do not commit crimes for their designs; but they form designs that they may commit crimes" (1791a, 614).

Here, though, one might ask, if Burke is right, why is society a fertile ground in which to spread these philosophical designs for corrupt ends? In response to this, Burke notes that the selfish, ambitious, and prideful "causes of evil are permanent" (1993, 142); society will always be filled with such people aspiring for grandeur. Because of this, he continues, "A certain *quantum* of power must always exist in the community, in some hands, and under some appellation," in order to counter these centrifugal forces that threaten to destroy the balance and harmony of society. In a sound society this power is manifest in "religion, morals, laws, prerogatives, privileges, liberties," and the *real* rights of men, under the guidance of "wise men" (1993, 142). In moments of revolutionary zeal, these mechanisms of power are coopted by revolutionaries and turned on the state itself. As he puts this point later in his *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in revolutionary France

"political and civil power is wholly separated from its property of every description" and this newly appropriated money and land is being used by the revolutionaries to buy the support of the peasants to its cause, thereby shifting power from the landed gentry to the revolutionaries (1791b, 233). Power, then, is omnipresent and latent in society; unless it is actively kept in check by a knowledgeable and politically astute elite, the structures of power can be coopted by revolutionaries and so dystopia and social collapse remain an imminent possibility. It is not merely the case, then, that well-functioning societies like that in England are balanced in a harmonious whole. More than this, because power is permanent and latent in society, should the balance of society be knocked off kilter and that power fall into the wrong hands, then a positive feedback loop could take hold that would swiftly threaten the integrity of the entire political and social system.

Troublingly for Burke, this positive feedback loop does not necessarily end when the cynically self-interested revolutionaries lose power. Although their philosophical designs may have been invented in order to commit crimes, these philosophical ideas, specious as they are, nonetheless persist amongst the population with credibility. The French Revolutionaries are particularly malevolent by tearing down existing cultural infrastructures like the theater that mold virtuous character and simultaneously replacing the French system of learning with one based upon the new philosophies. Burke therefore worried that the revolutionary spirit in France would not abate, because the revolutionaries intend to instil in the minds of their young the same uncommon adversity to received notions that Rousseau expresses by educating their children as Rousseau proposes:

> "Instead of forming their young minds to that docility, to that modesty, which are the grace and charm of youth, to an admiration of famous examples, and to an averseness to anything which approaches pride, petulance, and self-conceit (distempers to which that time of life is of itself sufficiently liable,) they artificially foment these evil dispositions, and even form them into springs

of action… The Assembly recommends to its youth a study of the bold experimenters in morality. Everybody knows that there is great dispute amongst their leaders, which of them is the best resemblance of Rousseau. In truth, they all resemble him… Rousseau is their canon of hold writ; in his life he is their canon of Polycletus; he is their standard figure of perfection" (1791a, 614-5).

The outcome of this line of thinking is that Burke is dystopophobic in several ways. Firstly, he worries that self-interested individuals will actively attempt to undermine the good of society for their own corrupt purposes, and, secondly, that this process of corruption will be quick and decisive because of the ability of revolutionaries to employ the tools of political power to their own ends in a positive feedback loop. Finally, these harmful changes can endure far beyond the short-term interests of their criminal progenitors through the destruction of the old systems of learning and the of the indoctrination of future generations into the new philosophical ideologues.

The Value of the Status Quo

To reiterate the previous two points: in the first place, society provides advantages to the people, and these advantages ought to be preserved. In the second place, history provides evidence that self-interest is a strong motivator to the acquisition of political power, and that history is replete with proof that when acquired, political power is usually exercised to the detriment of the majority of society. For these reasons, Burke is fearful of social decay and is sensitive to the extreme costs of such backsliding, which explains his belief that power must reside in the hands of a responsible elite that act in trust for those they represent (1993, 93). But it is not enough only to conclude that society brings about advantages that can be lost, as Burke's particular theory of acculturation entails that life without, or with radically different government, would be particularly bad in a way that is unique to his thought. On this view, people are acculturated to society: they form an identity; they uphold

virtues; their passions are refined; and, they develop skills and abilities suitable to their station in life. The aim of the French Revolution, Burke says in his *Thoughts on French Affairs*, is in "abolishing hereditary name and office… breaking all connexion between territory and dignity, and abolishing every species of nobility, gentry, and church establishments" (1791b, 212) and, in so doing, the revolutionaries destroy precisely this social and political frame of reference that, even if odious, had until now nonetheless constituted the people that live within it.

This idea of acculturation produces a unique reason for the moral and practical importance of the status quo, which in turn sensitizes Burke to the potential disaster and dystopia of radical change. In order to truly recognize the distinctiveness of Burke's claims here, one needs to appreciate how rare it is for political theorists and moral philosophers to attribute any moral standing to the status quo merely because it exists. Consider utilitarianism, for example. On this moral theory, the way the world actually is counts for precisely zero. Instead, in deciding what to do, one ought only to consider the consequences of one's action upon the sum of happiness and unhappiness. To be sure, there are ways in which the status quo might figure into this calculation. People may gain some happiness from consistency in their lives, which provides some indirect moral consideration for the status quo.[67] But, this is an incidental consideration. So too is the idea of the Rights of Man deaf to the value of the status quo. As Burke says, revolutionaries armed with ideas like the rights of man become contemptuous of society and any institutions and norms that are

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[67] Rawls makes a similar partial defense of the status quo when discussing the right of rebellion in *Theory*. There he notes that people form life plans based, in part, upon how society is actually structured. Accordingly, even though society may be unjust in some way, this is sometimes insufficient reason to refuse to obey the law.

incompatible with their political ideals, as against these principles, there can be no compromise, not even with the status quo (1993, 58).

By contrast, Burke presents a far more capacious view of what counts morally and politically when revising society. The status quo counts, and deserves not to be radically altered for two reasons. The first (weaker) reason is that society has been passed down to the present day from one's ancestors, and so, in the same way that one reveres (or has reason to revere) an heirloom or a grandparent, so too ought people to revere society as it has been bequeathed to us. For this reason, society has value independently of whether (as he asks in the preface to *Vindication*) the foundations of society can be justified to each and every person within it (1756, 54). The second reason pertains to this idea of acculturation. People are engaged in a reciprocal process of improving and refining society and social institutions, which, in turn, shapes and molds each of the people within it (1993, 35). Accordingly, all people within society and the institutions of that society are a part and product of that status quo. Each person is a part of an organic whole, and so, if people arrogate any moral standing to themselves and their interests and desires, so too must they arrogate moral standing to the society that made them that way. To do the opposite, and to revise society in a swift and capricious way is to do violence to the real constitution of people as shaped and molded by society, and it is to cast one adrift from the norms and expectations that have oriented one's judgment up until this point. In light of this, the status quo is incredibly important both as an expression of the character of the people within society, and as a means for those people to think through the ends and goals of their lives. So on this view society is a miracle that has moral standing and warrants protection.

The Miracle of Society

Life without minimally competent government is immiserated by the selfish and atomizing actions of factions and individuals in society. Government is therefore absolutely necessary as a first step towards the good life, which explains why Burke stresses the importance of protecting the well-functioning structures and institutions of society. But he also goes much further than this, as Burke is often awed by the fact that although the benefits of society are apparent, *it is incredible that society functions at all* to provide these benefits. Firstly, society is a remarkably complex system firstly because it is composed of varying, often competing interests and parties vying for different ends (1993, 35). Compromise, deliberation, and moderation of demands are the key to the sound functioning of the polity, as they harmonize society into a coherent unit. Secondly, society is complex because it has to uphold and manage opposing interests and values, like the values of liberty and order (1993, 247). Combining these values and interests is achieved through the remarkable efforts of those able to give "much thought, deep reflection, [and apply their] sagacious, powerful, and combining mind[s]" (1993, 247). Importantly, these minds do not fall from the sky like manna from heaven. Instead, they are formed and are improved by precisely those political institutions that these talented few will then improve. As he (channeling Aristotle) puts it at another point in the text, "nothing can secure a steady and moderate conduct in [political] assemblies, but that the body of them should be respectable composed, in point of condition in life, of permanent property, of education, and of such habits as enlarge and liberalize the understanding" (1993, 41).

Burke's conception of political rights and acculturation brings together these themes of complexity and harmony as he says, rights are the advantages one experiences

in society, and, in practice they are a "balance… between differences of good; in compromises between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil" (1993, 62). These rights and the sound functioning of the state are far from guaranteed by *a priori* philosophy. Instead, they are won through the efforts of one's ancestors who secured the advantages now called rights by applying their political skill, and, when the rights were threatened, as they were in the late 1600s, by using a violent force to restore their status. From these considerations Burke is left with, in the first place, an abiding sense of awe that we are fortunate enough to have a polity that functions to even the minimal degree of acceptability, let alone the prosperous freedom that he sees in England and France up until the day. In the second place, he identifies a handful of political processes including compromise and acculturation that ensure the harmonious functioning of society. When put together, these cause Burke to radically raise the standard at which objections to the functioning of the state, including the purported injustice of inequality, are held to be harms warranting amendment. In a telling quotation he says,

> "To avoid therefore the evils of inconstancy and versatility, ten thousand times worse than those of obstinancy and the blindest prejudice, we have consecrated the state, that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution; that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion; that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude." (1993, 96)

Each person ought, then, to revere society and thank their lucky stars that they live in a society that works. A changing state that does not respect the status quo is ten thousand times worse than any harm or inequality actually existing in society. So, presumably, any revision to society must produce an outcome (something of the order of) ten thousand times better than the status quo, in order for the cost-benefit analysis to even out.

Before moving on, consider the analogy used here. If the "faults of the state" are like "wounds to the father" then the state is akin to the human body – a complex organic whole that functions together perfectly to make something that is greater than its parts. The description of the injury is interesting, too. The father suffers "wounds" not disease or a general malady. Wounds, in contrast to diseases, come from external forces and evoke violent imagery of assault against the body of an otherwise healthy being. By contrast, disease is not (always) caused by external forces; unhealthy choices can increase the likelihood of developing fatal diseases like cancer. The use of the word "wounds," has the effect of turning attention to the outside, and thereby excuses the polity from any complicity in producing the conditions that make disease or revolution more rather than less likely.

From these arguments and this imagery Burke concludes that rather than point to the flaws of that society and on these grounds alone demand redress, each citizen ought to look at these flaws as "wounds" deserving of concern and tender care, rather than radical revision. This claim places the cause for Burke's conservatism (and concern that changes to society will likely yield bad outcomes to otherwise be avoided) on the nature of the polity itself, as the state is a miracle that deserves care and protection, rather than revision due to the remarkable and unlikely fact that it is able to secure incredible advantages to citizens at all. This is, then, one set of reasons to preserve society based upon the nature of the polity itself as a complicated miracle that defies all likelihood by existing.

<u>Philosophy & The Limits of Human Insight and Ability</u>

In addition to these dystopophobic considerations, Burke also advances a series of arguments against revising society based upon skepticism of human ability to successfully produce change. On these arguments, it is not just that the qualities of state itself engender reasons for awe and solicitude, but also that all persons should be circumspect in their belief that change will be effective because of the defects in people and their reasoning. A few of these criticisms of philosophy have already been mentioned. First, Burke objects that philosophy's simplistic and two dimensional modeling is incapable of capturing society's complexity without harmful exclusions (1993, 246). Secondly, even if it were able to produce considerable detail about its actual subject matter, philosophy as it is practiced misplaces focus on to misleading concerns instead; philosophers should not analyze abstract rights of man, but instead should take as their object of concern "civil social man" as it actually exists in society as the product of development in society. Accordingly, reformers need to be armed with more than just philosophical principle derived from armchair analysis, but need "a deep knowledge of human nature and human necessities, and of the things which facilitate or obstruct the various ends which are to be pursued by the mechanism of civil institutions" (1993, 60-1).

In addition, Burke's early writing skeptically raises the problem that although rational philosophizing promises access to truth, the ability to reach this end point is limited by the capacity of people to engage in that process of philosophizing, and one's ability to avoid being beguiled by the things in philosophy that can lead one astray. In the first place, rationalist philosophy ought, if it is done correctly, to cause people to replace some set of false beliefs with new correct beliefs. In practice, however, most people do not function

this way. Instead, when confronted with an uncomfortable fact, they "grow doubtful of their own reason," and instead of taking the time to pause and reassess their own beliefs and claims of the speaker they "run along with the speaker, charmed and captivated to find such plentiful harvest of reasoning, where all seemed barren and unpromising" (1756, 53). People's minds have "little restraint from a sense of its own weakness" (1756, 53), and so, all too often, feeble minds are captivated by new and exciting ideas or are befuddled by the specious arguments of sophists, which leads them into a "fairyland of philosophy" that is divorced from truth and real understanding (1756, 53). Most people replace their own reasoning with the authority of another. Accordingly, philosophy is good at producing converts and acolytes, but not the type of careful reasoning that rationalist philosophers claim to be engaged in.

Secondly, Burke notes an asymmetry between truth and falsehood. This asymmetry stems from the fact that the world is complex and so, because truths track reality in some way, truths are often therefore complicated and difficult and only supported by long chains of argumentation. By contrast, because falsehoods do not have to correspond with reality, one can make simple and determinate false claims, even if in reality they are distorting and inaccurate. Going back to Isocrates and the ancient Greeks, Burke says, it has been known that truth is often harder to defend than falsity: "it is far more easy to maintain a wrong cause, and to support paradoxical opinions to the satisfaction of a common auditory, than to establish a doubtful truth by solid and conclusive arguments" (1756, 53). Here there is some overlap with Harry Frankfurt's account of bullshit. The relevant quality of bullshit on Frankfurt's analysis is not that it is a lie, or that bullshit is an attempt to deceive as Burke believes cynical philosophers and revolutionary followers use philosophy. Instead, bullshit

is distinctive as it is produced without any particular concern for truth (Frankfurt 2005, 47-8). But the production of bullshit, like rationalist philosophy, is characterized by an asymmetry as, because of their tenuous relationship with truth, it is possible to make bullshit and philosophical claims backed up by spurious arguments with far greater ease than making doubtful but true claims supported by complicated but sound argument. Because of this, the people – especially those untutored in careful thinking – are more likely to accept specious falsity than to carefully change their view in light of the weight of argument, causing this charmed and captivated audience to endorse and attempt to enact false but satisfying political policies and prescriptions.

Finally, Burke objects to the individualist quality of rationalist philosophy. After all, each and every person has the capacity to reason, and so it is reasonable to conclude that if political structures are to be justified through rational philosophizing, then they must therefore be justified to each and every person in that society. He asks,

> "Even in matters which are, as it were, just within our reach, what would become of the world, if the practice of all moral duties, and the foundations of society, rested upon having their reasons made clear and demonstrative to every individual?" (1756, 54).

Here the concern emerges that, although all can reason, is reason enough? The basest in society lack the refinement and the character of those most educated and refined, so likely lack further qualities like "magnanimity, and liberality, and beneficence, and fortitude, and providence" (1993, 229).

In addition to these early criticisms of rationalist philosophy, his later writings, especially *Letter to a Noble Lord*, written a few years after his retirement from Parliament, contains a further criticism that was first formed in his early notebook, but refined and extended in light of the events in France. Burke says that the greatest source of errors lie

in the passions not in reason, hence the need to refine these passions in the aristocracy (1757, 88). In his later work, Burke starts by drawing a distinction between character and rationalism and bemoans the way in which rationalist philosophizing can *not only* beguile and mislead individuals who might otherwise be guided by their virtue and character, but also that rationalism can *corrupt and displace* the passions and sympathies developed through acculturation. As he curtly puts the point, "Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thorough-bread metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man" (1796, 314-5). The effect of the philosophy is to "eradicate humanity from the human breast" (1796, 315). Because of this replacement of feeling and passion with rationalist thinking, these philosophers become insensitive to the real human impact of their actions. The philosophy becomes the object of concern and its realization the goal, not the well-being of the people over whose lives the philosophy exerts influence.

> "Their imagination is not fatigued, with the contemplation of human suffering thro' the wild waste of centuries added to centuries, of misery and desolation. Their humanity is always on the horizon – and like the horizon, it always flies before them… [In trying to realize their philosophies] Ambition is come upon them suddenly; they are intoxicated with it, and it has rendered them fearless of the danger, which may from thence arise to others or themselves. These philosophers consider men in their experiments, no more than they do mice in an air pump, or a recipient of mephitick gas" (1976, 315).

In the years after the French regicide and Terror, then, Burke deepens and extends his criticism of rationalist philosophy. This philosophy not only misleads, but it also corrupts and desensitizes individuals to suffering. Rationalism permits and encourages fanaticism in adherents in order to realize a philosophy that will always remain on the horizon.

It is for these reasons that Burke objects to democracy as a sound means of social reorganization. The people generally lack the necessary refinements to character required

to engage astutely in politics. Moreover, because of the limits of human rationality, the people are likely to be led astray into the "fairyland of philosophy," or worse. When misled by "degrading and sordid" philosophers, the people become "quite shrunk from their natural dimensions… and fitted for low and vulgar deceptions" (1993, 243). "Writers," Burke notes, "especially when they act in a body, and with one direction, have great influence on the public mind" (1993, 112). When this class of public intellectuals and intellectual trend-setters coordinate to a single end, such as the defamation and destruction of religion, they become "demagogues," marshaling the anger of the populace by shaping public opinion, in order to achieve their own ends (1993, 113). In their attack on religion, for example, Burke claims that these writers are engaged in an "unremitting industry to blacken and discredit in every way, and by every means, all those who did not hold their faction…" (1993, 111). This produces a "violent and malignant zeal" in the minds of the public writers and their followers, which was the cause of a "general fury with which all the landed property of ecclesiastical corporations has been attacked" (1993, 113).

Asymmetry

A couple of forms of asymmetry have been noted so far in this text. Firstly, truth is harder to defend than falsity, which is why false philosophical notions can take root amongst the populace and justify evil acts towards the church and aristocracy. Secondly, because of the miracle of society, Burke claims that the good to be achieved by revision to the polity ought to be ten thousand times greater than the good already produced by the structures of society. Anything less than 10,000-1 is an imprudent gamble. In addition to this, though, thirdly, Burke maintains that that there is an essential *asymmetry* between creation and destruction.

As he puts it, "Rage and phrensy will pull down more in half an hour, than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in a hundred years" (1993, 168). Those social mechanisms of deliberation and moderation that produce the remarkable structures of the state are slow and deliberate, in large part because of the complexity of society and the need to mediate and balance between competing interests and ends. And, because these slow processes are working through such complex and near irreconcilable differences in ends and interests, this process produces faults that are "visible and palpable" (1993, 168). A great threat, then, is the arrogation of power to an aberrant monarchy or zealous philosopher willing to whip the people into rage and "phrensy" at these visible faults. This is so dangerous because in a short time, all the good work of one's contemporaries and ancestors can be undone, and the work to correct the destruction can take generations to be completed. This note about the considerable deleterious impact of rage and phrensy is reinforced by the claims about the abuse of power and positive feedback loop of revolutionary change, that underscores a consistency within Burke's thinking on this point.

IV. Burke's Dystopophobia

Burke is oriented by a sensitivity to the advantages of the state combined with a belief that it is a remarkable achievement to have any functional society at all, even if imperfect. These imperfections rise from the complexity of the state itself and the difficulty in producing harmony through the slow process of deliberation and compromise that characterize the political process. Burke is skeptical that any rationalist political philosophy-based alternative to this slow political process will be effective due to the essential limitations of that approach, not least philosophy's methodological inability to capture the nuance and

complexity of its object of study. Finally, there is an asymmetry between construction and destruction, which explains the need to exercise extreme caution when attempting to revise the institutions of the polity.

These dystopophobic threads in Burke's thinking are tied together in his account of the appropriate way to engage in political reform. He says,

> "The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*… The science of government being therefore so practical in itself, and intended to such practical purposes, a matter which requires experience, and even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however sagacious and observing he may be, it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes." (1993, 61)

Politics is, Burke claims, an experimental science, not an abstract philosophy the tenets of which are distilled from transcendental truths. Politics is a practical endeavor, not a philosophical one, and so it is therefore data and not principle that ought to be the primary means by which one justifies social change. But even when proceeding in this practical way, one must always remain cognizant of the fact that society is far more complex than any one person can comprehend. Accordingly, it is necessary to remain humble when engaging in political matters, which is best done by proceeding with infinite caution in our political endeavors. Moreover, this humility is exercised by a reverent appreciation for the existence of any social "edifice" that has improved the lives of the people who have lived under it, for the chances of replacing it with something better are fairly slim. With these things in mind, then one is likely to contribute to political change with the least chance of producing disastrous unintended consequences.

The Form of Dystopia

As one might expect from such a prolific writer whose philosophy evades reduction to a simple analytical scheme, Burke's dystopophobic theory takes several forms serves several different roles listed in the typology of dystopia from chapter two. While on the face of it, *Reflections* appears a descriptive dystopia, closer analysis reveals that it is best understood as a projective dystopia that extrapolates events in France to England. In addition to this, Burke's account of dystopia is a product of his theory of human development and the influence of political life on human nature, and so also takes a theoretical form.

In the first place one might assume Burke's dystopophobia would be primarily descriptive – designed to bring display to all the full horror of the revolution in France. And there is, indeed, much to describe. In January 1789 Abbé Sieyès claimed in his pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?*, that the French populace had little need for the clergy or the aristocracy. Six months later, the National Assembly was formed to represent the interests of the many millions of French citizens that comprised this vast bulk of French society. Several weeks of political wrangling between the Crown and Assembly culminated in the permanent session of the National Assembly, and the storming of the Bastille on July 14th 1789. On August 4th 1789 the National Assembly voted to abolish the aristocracy, which was swiftly followed on August 26th 1789 with the adoption of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, in which it is asserted that "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights," and that, "the goal of any political association is the conservation of the[se] natural and imprescriptible rights," thereby creating a stark break with the established norms of inherited title that had characterized French political life for generations. Burke penned *Reflections on the Revolution in France* over several frantic weeks in October of 1789. His

subject of analysis was France, but the remarks by Rev. Price on commemorating the 1688 Revolution were the immediate prompt for writing. In his *Discourse on the Love of our Country*, Price contends that precisely this love of country and respect for the achievements of the revolution a hundred years earlier requires radical political reform to massively expand the franchise and boost the power of the House of Commons relative to the House of Lords. What one sees here, then, is the way in which *Reflections* is pulled between the focus on France and Burke's greater interest in the peace and prosperity of Britain.

Burke objected deeply to the "confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter" caused by the revolutionaries that in October culminated with the the storming of the palace of Versailles, the murder of the kings guard, and the royal family's imprisonment in a "Bastile" (1993, 71-2). In drawing attention to these events, Burke shows how revolutionary optimism can lead to harms and crimes, and thereby reveals how dystopia is not abstract and divorced from reality, but can be realized even in otherwise civilized countries and even when the people acting wrongly believe themselves to be acting with the intentions to achieve the best ends. To this limited extent, Burke's account of the Revolution is a descriptive dystopia in the ways outlined in chapter two. That being said, it is notable that the worst of the revolution – the real dystopia – was yet to come. Although Burke describes the imprisonment of the royal family as in a bastille, in reality they were confined to Tuileries Palace, which was the usual residence of the royal family in Paris at the time. It was not until three years after the publication of *Reflections* that the King and Marie Antionette would be beheaded by guillotine and the country would fall under the Reign of Terror, which, as Gregory Claeys portrays in his descriptive dystopian account of the Terror, involved 800 beheadings a month in the capital and, in some towns, "'counter-

revolutionaries' (including women and children) were shot and drowned *en masse*" (2018, 122; 121-8). If Burke's account of the French Revolution were descriptive, then, it would be an oddly premature description of events. Indeed, much of the better accounts of France and the revolution occur in writings much later, for example, part three of his first letter in the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, where he describes why no peace is possible with France because of the particular nature of the French revolutionary state (Burke 1999, 122-52).

Perhaps the prematurity of *Reflections* can be explained away by the fact that the magnitude of the events that have "occupied all men" (1993, 3) warranted a fast and comprehensive response. On these grounds one might want to conclude that an incomplete descriptive dystopia is be better than none what-so-ever, but there certainly are notable inaccuracies in the text. Burke claims, for example, that during the assault on the Palace of Versailles, the sentinel guarding the queen's door cried out for her to flee, only to be "cut down" and killed by the "band of cruel ruffians and assassins" there for the queen (1993, 71). As L. G. Mitchell notes, however, "the sentinel on duty outside Mary Antionette's bedroom had not been murdered, but was regaling English visitors in Paris with tales of his adventures." This error – and others – was "so at odds with the facts of the situation that he [Burke] suffered humiliation and rejection… [in] the hundred or so pamphlets… [that] harped on endlessly on the inaccuracy of [*Reflections'*] details and the overblown hyperbole of the style in which it was written" (Mitchell 1993, viii-ix). Accurate information about the revolution was available to all through the papers, so it is somewhat perplexing that the meticulous Burke – who, as was said above, maintains that politics turns on specific detail and not abstract theory – would make such, apparently, careless errors.

One answer to this problem given by L. G. Mitchell is to emphasize that although France is the topic of debate in *Reflections*, England is the main object of Burke's concern. In writing *Reflections*, Burke was willing to jettison some accuracy if hyperbole elicited a bulwark of English antipathy against the French Revolution and encroaching revolutionary sentiments in the homeland. There is textual evidence that supports this reading of Burke's intentions. Burke says early on that he is "Solicitous chiefly for the peace of my own country," (1993, 10) and later that "the great source of my solicitude is," the fear that French policies of property expropriation would "ever be considered in England as the policy of a state" (1993, 155). He describes the French Revolution as a plague, and concludes that "the precautions of the most severe quarantine ought to be brought against it" (1993, 89),[68] and so one might soundly reinterpret the title of the text – *reflection* – not as a rumination or meditation on the events across the Channel, but instead as a *reflecting mirror* used to bring one's gaze upon radicals like Dr. Price and the Revolution Society that dot the English complexion.

In order to capture the greater focus upon England than France in Burke's writing, it is worth dwelling briefly upon Burke's account of the French Revolution in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*. There, Burke tells the audience "nothing that has not exactly happened, point by point, but twenty-four miles from our own shore" (1796, 314), and in the text he does say in a few words that the revolutionaries want to "reverse fundamentally" the laws of

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[68] For more on this fear of the French Revolution spreading see *Thoughts on French Affairs*, where he describes the revolutionaries as caught up in a nearly religious zeal that inevitably demands the proselytization of others to their dogma (1791b, 208), and that "as long as it exists in France, it will be the interest of the managers there, and it is in the very essence of their plan, to disturb and distract all other governments" requiring that the countries of Europe band together to defeat the French threat before it is exported to their shores (1791b, 236).

France and rescind all titles and nobility (1796, 309). But after this brief prelude, he shifts focus:

> "Such are *their* ideas; such *their* religion; and such *their* law. But as to *our* country and *our* race, as long as the well compacted structure of our church and state, the sanctuary, the holy of holies of that ancient law, defended by reference, defended by power, a fortress at once and a temple, shall stand inviolate on the brow of the British Sion – as long as the British Monarchy, not more limited than fenced by the orders of the State, shall, like the proud Keep of Windsor, rising in the majesty of proportion, and girt with the double belt of it's [sic] kindred and coeval towers, as long as this awful structure shall oversee and guard the subjected land – so long as the mounds and dykes of the low, fat, Bedford level will have nothing to fear from all the pickaxes of all the levelers of France" (1796, 310).

Here are just *two* sentences that are a perfect synecdoche for Burke's asymmetrical focus upon England over France. To be sure, the crisis is France is a concern worthy of understanding for their own ends and purposes alone. But, being only twenty-four miles from England, these events are used by Burke not to better understand France, but instead to better understand and appreciate England and her virtues. In the quotation above, the French condition acts as a half-dozen *word* preamble to a half-dozen *line* paean to England's greatness. It is, then, for these reasons that *Reflections* should be treated as a projective dystopophobic text; Burke's aim in writing is to prevent a (perceived) catastrophe like the French Revolution taking hold in England and threatening English political life. Consequently, *Reflections* is not a descriptive dystopia. Following the typography from chapter two, it is instead a *projective dystopia* that takes events from one place (France) in one moment (1789) and extrapolates them into another time and place, i.e. the minds of the reader applies them to England in the near (and potentially enduring) future.

In addition to its projective form, Burke's account of the French Revolution is a *theoretical dystopia* in that it reflects an important part of his theory of how the world

functions. Burke presents a comprehensive theory of the polity as a complex and harmonious whole that brings about great advantages for its members. The character of the people is formed within the social and civic culture of the polity, and this process of acculturation and refinement of manners and temperament sensitizes people to the diverse set of goods the polity protects, which the most probing and discerning minds can descry and comprehend to a greater degree, but that is, in its totality, beyond the full comprehension of any one person. Rational philosophies (especially those couched in terms of natural rights) both misunderstand and fail to fully capture the nature of the polity and the rights of the people, and, because of the limits rational human faculties, individuals who follow these philosophies are apt to be led into a fairyland of philosophy, rather than to a solid understanding of the polity. As the "real rights of man" are earned through the institutions of society built up and reinforced over time, those philosophers who beguile the people with their rationalist thought schemes in order to have them attack institutions like the Church and property do violence to good institutions and inevitably bring about dystopia. Indeed, it is because dystopia functions within a larger theoretical framework in Burke's thinking that he was able at an early stage to discern the dystopian consequences of the French Revolution well before it descended into the nightmarish Terror.

The Function of Dystopia

In addition to its projective and theoretical form, dystopia plays an educative, analytical, and to a lesser degree, a rhetorical function in Burke's thought. Taking these in order, the educative function of Burke's dystopophobia is notable. Following Jonathan Allen's tripartite account of the educative function of negative morality, Burke's dystopophobia

does 1) educate the reader in the motivations and vices that motivate individuals to act in harmful ways. Here Burke's skepticism of the revolutionary leaders as self-interested, prideful, and avaricious explains their moves to acquire power and the traumatic consequences of this – see, for example, his description of the revolutionaries in his *Letter to William Elliot* (1795, 270). More specifically, though, his account of the acculturation of good values and their corruption by rationalist philosophy is an original contribution that has had a profound influence upon especially the conservative philosophy that it inaugurated. In addition to this, 2) Burke's writing provides a clear account of the distribution of evils in society. In particular, the fact that the aristocracy are spared from the misery and evils of regularly functioning society is explained by reference to their refined virtue through the institutions of society. By contrast, the poor and disempowered are kept in their precarious and miserable station by exactly those same institutional and structural forces that elevate and protect the elite.

Finally, 3) Burke's work elevates the voices of and brings attention to the condition of a set of (rather unsympathetic) victims. Rather than the toiling masses, Burke rises to the defense of the aristocracy, including Marie Antoinette whom, he says, "surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision" (1993, 75).[69] While any beheading is a regrettable tragedy, that Antoinette should receive more concern than the sickly and indigent multitude is startling. The reason for this friction between Burke's focus and those of most contemporary readers stems from the particularity of Burke's thought. In the first place, the reported hardship of the poor is of

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[69] In private correspondence Burke was more critical of specific members of the aristocracy, including Marie Antoinette, whom he claimed lacked good judgment (Burke letter to R. Burke, 13 December 1791 cited in Burke, 1993, 302).

limited epistemological value for Burke as it is the refined elite who best understand society and can comment on it through their years of attunement to the *whole of society* through acculturation to the the civic and social life, rather than being moved mainly by pathetic stories of misery amongst the masses. Secondly, the general reporting of suffering is somewhat beside the point as a) the virtues of government in securing other valuable things like liberty, religion, and property can outweigh the plight of the poor, and b) even if one is attuned to the plight of the poor, one ought not to act upon this data rashly, for fear of damaging the structures of the polity, which would cause further worse problems for both the poor and the elite.

To extend this point further, Burke's diminution of ordinary victims as a voice in the educative function is his dystopophobic scheme is a consequence of the *analytical function* his dystopophobic theory. In regards to this analytical function, Burke's theory does have an aversional component to it – it is the radical reformation of society that is to be avoided as this leads (especially when pursued in accordance with rationalist philosophical principles) to attacks on the Church, property, culture, and the aristocracy that cumulatively secure the "real rights of man" and acculturate the "civil social" members of that society. To be sure, this revolution is a real and live possibility as revolution has happened to England's civilized neighbor, France. That being said, this aversional component to Burke's work does not entail a radical reorganization of English society to protect it from the French threat, and so it does not demand a *critical* reassessment of the social and political structures in England so they can be amended and replaced. Instead, his dystopophobia functions analytically as a *justification* and laudatory approbation of the status quo.

Burke's aim is to implant in his audience right thinking about the the nature and function of society so that, even while also lamenting their largely tormented and anguished station in life, even these most disadvantaged members of society come to tolerate their condition, "not from love of [their condition], but for fear of worse" (1993, 163). And, it is worth noting that Burke is self-conscious about this justificatory role. While reflecting on his aims and contribution to thinking about the French Revolution in England he says in his *Letter to William Elliot* that in the first place he "wished to warn the people against the greatest of all evils" as manifest in the French Revolution in the hopes, he says, "that provident fear might prevent fruitless penitence" (1795, 271). By pointing to the evil in France, Burke hoped it would prevent people in England from too thoroughly criticizing their own functional society, and thereby prevent excessive reforms in England. In explicit dystopophobic language he says, "I hoped to see the surest of all reforms, perhaps the only sure reform, the ceasing of to do ill," which is achieved by providing to the people "the wisdom of knowing how to tolerate a condition which none of their efforts can render much more than tolerable" (1795, 271). The goal, then, is to justify the English political system and reconcile the people to live under this system that is harsh and difficult for most people, but that, that at the very least, enables "them to live to nature, and if they pleased, to live to virtue and honor" (1795, 271).

Having discussed the educative and analytical, it is the final rhetorical function of Burke's dystopophobia is, perhaps, the most surprising. Recall Allison McQueen's account of Machiavelli and Hobbes' use of apocalyptic religious imagery as a rhetorical method to convince their audiences of the veracity of their respective arguments. Steeped in millenarian theology, the invocation of the apocalypse resonated with Machiavelli and

Hobbes' respective audiences, which lent credibility to their claims. And it is true that this occurs in Burke's case as well, but not in such religious terms. The events in France lend credibility to Burke's enduring views about the development of society and bankruptcy of rationalist philosophy. That being said, in spite of their prominence, these dystopian allusions play a remarkably small role in Burke's *rhetorical* scheme, which can be explained by a couple of factors.

Firstly, as a practiced rhetorician, Burke employed a broad range of rhetorical techniques like grand physical gestures and movements that included, even, repeated public crying (Reid 2012, 47) and even fainting fits (Bullard 2011, 20). These affectations were so extreme Christopher Reid reports that Burke "was often taunted into self-justification." He continues, "Rebuked for excessive sentiment or heat, he [Burke] appealed to the occasion (a breach of trust, a crisis of empire, the madness of a king, a revolution) as proof that his words had been fitting" (Reid 2012, 43). Here, then, the the idea of dystopia does heavy lifting for Burke, but for very different reasons than Hobbes, for example. The idea of dystopia and the apocalypse is invoked as part of a rhetorical strategy by Hobbes to evoke religious imagery that makes his arguments resonate with his audience. By contrast, as a seasoned parliamentarian Burke had considerable experience employing rhetorical strategies like crying, sometimes to excess. In order to excuse these extravagances, Burke deferred to the imminent threat of dystopia by the spread of the French Revolution as warranting a hysterical response of the kind he gave. In Burke's case, then, rhetorical flourishes are not used to reinforce the importance of the possible dystopia, instead the possibility of dystopia is used to excuse his rhetorical flourishes.

Secondly, the surprisingly diminished role of dystopia in Burke's rhetoric is explained by reference to Burke's understanding of the proper role of rhetoric that, by the 1770s settled on the idea that his actions and speeches ought to take as their object of improvement Parliament itself. As Paddy Bullard makes the case, by this time Burke "begins to talk of the character of Parliament itself as an expression of national opinions and dispositions" (2011, 110). This "institutional identity" of the parliament is the medium through which the votes and speeches of the House of Commons are mediated, and Burke took it upon himself to improve and refine this "spirit" of the House through his speeches (2011, 118). In order to achieve this end and to have "political consequence" his speeches substantively and rhetorically "had to appeal to general opinion both in and out of doors [the House of Commons]" (2011, 125), and this consideration credibly influences the amount of time he dedicates to dystopia as a rhetorical tool. To be sure, the rise of revolution in France and the threat of dystopia spreading to England is a useful rhetorical tool, but alone it is not sufficient. After invoking external threats to the English order, Burke swiftly and recurrently turns his attention back to the opinions and dispositions of the English people by invoking British values and accomplishments, like the protection of liberty through the restoration in 1688 (1993, 30-33). The threat of dystopia is a start of discussion – the real convincing and the goal of improving the character of the people and parliamentarians is accomplished by dwelling on the nature and qualities of the British people and their political rights and social structures, rather than the threats to these things.

V. Dystopophobia as a Conservative Ideal

In chapter two we covered Michael Goodhart's objection that obvious injustice thinkers are often too conservative. Judith Shklar, Bernard Williams, and those concerned with minimizing forms of clearly evident injustice are, on Goodhart's criticism, too quick to endorse liberalism as the most appropriate political framework to minimize injustice. Although liberalism may be superior to totalitarianism, fascism and other forms of authoritarianism, Goodhart worries that it nonetheless permits considerable suffering and hardship as although individuals in, say, Shklar's case are free from oppression by government, the citizens are not empowered in civil and social life to improve their condition and amend the political and social structures that give them grief. Dystopophobia shares many qualities with obvious injustice theories and (as it is presented here) is influenced by Shklar's work and others. In addition to this, as Burke is taken as a dystopophobic political theorist who thinks through the threat of social collapse, tyranny, and the descent of society into dystopia, then as *the* putative proto-conservative it is worthwhile to end this chapter with a brief reflection on the conservative qualities of dystopophobia to establish whether they are disqualifying (on Goodhart's terms), or whether this conservative strand is illuminating and appropriate, at least to some degree.

On the most skeptical view, Burke and other conservative thinkers are merely reactionaries who, in Corey Robin's telling, have tasted power and seek to defend it. "Politicians and parties," Robin says, "talk of constitution and amendment, natural rights and inherited privileges. But the real subject of their deliberation is the private life of power" (2011, 10). In light of this desire to withhold power, justification of unequal political rule of their class over others becomes the defining quality of their philosophies

(2011, 18). It is certainly true there are some events in Burke's biography that lend some credibility to this interpretation as he came from a wealthy Irish family that held considerable family estates around Limerick, that were "forfeited during the rebellion of 1641" (Bourke 2015, 29). Additionally, this chapter has elaborated upon Burke's conception of rule by elites as this is fundamental to his thinking in the kinds of ways Robin suggests. But, Burke puts forward a far more comprehensive theory than merely rule by elites as a means to preserve elite status. Even if he was psychologically motivated in the first place to defend elitism on purely self-interested grounds, the demands of the task especially in the areas pertinent to dystopophobia take him beyond just a defense of elite rule. Burke produces a theory critical of philosophical reasoning, a theory of the quasi-evolution of organic society, of civil-social identity, and fears of the asymmetry between the difficulty of improvement and the ease of destruction. It might be the case that these ideas serve as a defense of the ruling class, but they also do more than this and can be detached from that limited role and applied more broadly to ask in dystopophobic terms (and for less tendentious reasons) whether and why social change is something that should be feared or embraced. Here, Burke's writing furnishes readers with ideas – including his framing of the nature of society and the limits of reason – that help to parse through these dystopophobic questions, so he has something to offer even if his intentions for writing were self-serving.

Robin's criticism of conservatism comes from a self-consciously American perspective, and Burke became and important conservative figure in the US after about the 1950s as people like Peter Stanlis brought Burke's writings to an American audience. But, of course, Burke was a British parliamentarian for several decades and so before Burke

came to America, as it were, his life work and writings were interpreted in Britain. To understand this, Emily Jones charts the integration of Burke's thinking into British political and philosophical life between 1830 to 1914 in her terrific intellectual history of Burke and his role in the invention of modern conservatism over this period. In the early years (c.1830-70) debates over Burke's philosophy occurred within the framework of contemporary English constitutionalism and were preoccupied with the question of whether Burke's philosophy entails that he should be considered a Tory for his defense of the aristocracy or a Whig for his endorsement of an organic and evolving society according to prescriptive right (2017, 28-43). It is only in later years, and especially with politicization of Burke as an intellectual foundation of the British Conservative Party from around 1885 that Burke's status as a conservative thinker began to consolidate. Indeed, when these questions of philosophical categorization did arise in the time prior to this, Burke was often interpreted as a vague utilitarian who simply wanted society to go well in the way described by Dwar given above (Jones 2017, 82-3). In favor of Burke's conservative status in practice is his commitment to the principles of the 1688 constitution. But, what is interesting for our present purposes is that during the very late 1800s, Burke's elevation as the first and most preeminent conservative thinker was undercut by the recurring objection that his broader political philosophy – including his organic account of society and civil-social identity emphasized in this work – does *not*, in fact, entail robust conservatism of the kind attributed to him. Here, "Burke's strict adherence to the constitution of 1688 was… a problem for Liberal admirers of Burke," as his organic theory of society as an evolving unit suggests that constitutional refinement would not have ended a hundred years before Burke was writing, and two hundred years before these interpreters (2017, 166). This led

later interpreters, such as John MacCunn in his 1913 book, *The Political Philosophy of Burke*, to complain that "Burke was not organic *enough*: his aristocratic bias blinded him to the inevitability of democracy" as a refinement upon the constitution of 1688 (paraphrased by Jones 2017, 176).

This interpretive insight by Jones suggests an answer to Goodhart and to Robin on whether, when applied to dystopophobia, the conservatism in Burke is disqualifying or appropriate and illuminating. The first thing to do is reiterate the claim above that, even if Burke's thinking is conservative to the extent that it attempts to preserve aristocratic power, even if it is is motivated by a conservative commitment to the constitutional principles established in England a century before he was writing, and even though Burke has been quite faithfully adopted by contemporary conservatives, it is nonetheless still the case that in writing so much over a long life that hangs together in a fairly coherent whole, questions of interpretation arise. Burke can therefore be more than *merely* a conservative, as disputes over the implications of his organic theory reveal.

Additionally, by treating dystopophobia as a more-or-less coherent political vision oriented around aversion to bad outcomes, it is possible to extract the relevant ideas put forward by Burke from questions about his psychology, British constitutional history, and methodological and substantive disputes of interpretation in political theory, and then integrate them into a separate dystopophobic theory. This theory is its own object of inquiry that we can subject to analysis through questions of judgment rather than interpretation. We can ask whether the concepts and ideas invoked are clearly articulated, whether the structure of propositions within the theory are internally coherent and rationally consistent, which is to say, we can independently judge the internal dynamics of the idea of

dystopophobia and then assess their fit to the data of the world.[70] When we do this, conservatism is not the end of the discussion sufficient to rebut Shklar and others, but instead it is the point of a departure for debate. The questions at hand are, if one is dystopophobic when is conservatism appropriate, and when is it not; and, to what extent should one be conservative, if conservatism is warranted?

In response to these questions the framework of dystopophobia given at the outset of this work is very useful. It was asserted (see chapter one) that one can be aversional to bad outcomes on two levels. First is the level of society: the rise of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century, for example, was a terrible turn of events that caused almost unfathomable levels of suffering and misery. In light of this, we can ask, what are the general political structures, ideals, and values that prevent *society* from moving towards dystopia. The second level engages with the lives of individuals more directly: how are people's lives going (even in otherwise well-organized societies according to the first level) and what can be done in order to improve their condition? In the case of both Burke and Shklar all the most important dystopophobic arguments are directed at the first level, and not the second and this provides an explanation of why they are conservative, and it points us towards a solution.

Shklar's *Liberalism of Fear* identifies the state as the primary threat to individuals. There is evidence in the historical record that it has been the nation state that has inflicted the most cruelty upon individuals and, therefore, it is necessary to establish a minimum set of liberal rights against the state in order to prevent (per level one) the replacement of

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[70] Here I am following the neo-rationalist account of political judgment put forward by Peter Steinberger in (2015, and 2018, 99-108).

broadly liberal societies with their oppressive and cruel counterparts. After the protections against cruel government have been put in place, however, questions at the second level do not arise for Shklar's *Liberalism of Fear*. Individuals are free of cruelty, and so, according to the anti-cruelty terms that her theory is set upon, individuals have avoided the worst outcome they might otherwise experience and so their lives are going just as well as concerns her theory.

For his part, Burke's *Reflections* is preoccupied with the threat of French revolutionary activity spreading to England, and so his writings here are quite directly pitched at level one. But, that is not the end of the story as he also talks about the well-being of individuals in society, even if it is mainly to excuse the poor condition of the masses against the elite that he wants to preserve. What is important here is that in discussing the well-being of individuals, Burke answers in societal terms at level one. He believes that society is as advanced and refined as close to perfection as it can be, which is why an aim of his theorization is not further liberation and improvement in the lives of the masses, but instead is reconciliation to their position which "none of their efforts [for improvement] can render much more than tolerable" (1795, 271). Improvement in the condition of these worst off people can only be achieved by further refinement of society, but as society is about as refined as it can ever be, little more can be done for these worst off people.

This quality in Shklar and Burke's work makes evident a tension between thinking about avoiding the worst outcomes for people at the level of (first) society and (second) the indiviudal. Concern at level one seems to engender some conservative bias, which is an appropriate bias if one rightly believes that the likely alternative to sound existing

polities is repression and suffering on a massive scale. Thinking at level two, though, may prompt one to want leave open possibilities for social reform and change at level one in order to alleviate suffering. In the case of Burke, his unwillingness to consider even the *possibility* of improving the condition of the worst off is a failure of his theory; the fact that we have been able to improve the general welfare in society proves that his skepticism of improvement is simply false, and so concern on this second level is warranted. In the case of Shklar, we might wonder what else matters in addition to cruelty by the state that might be effectively redressed through changes in policy that supplement and perhaps even replace (some) liberal rights.

It should be said that it is not at all clear that thinking at level two should supersede thinking at level one, and so some conservative bias is likely to remain warranted. For example, it might be possible to raise the welfare of the economically worst off through a scheme of arbitrary wealth expropriation. So, on this poorly-designed scheme the president (or other executive leader) is invested with the power to respond with no oversight to individual claims of economic hardship by unilaterally raising the money to cure this hardship by taking wealth from the rich individuals he or she chooses. This fantastical scheme is obviously flawed as investing the arbitrary power of expropriation in a powerful and unaccountable executive is liable to be abused to punish enemies and to further consolidate power (perhaps promising not to tax some set of rich people in exchange for political support). The unchecked power that this scheme unleashes could further undermine liberal democracy and make more likely a descent into the kinds of illiberal polities that Shklar worries about.

The challenge, then, is to walk this line. The dystopophobic thinker must (level two) remain open to the possibility of the improvement in individual lives in ways that Burke is not, and ought to explore the possibility of improving and replacing liberal democracy if appropriate, as Goodhart would encourage Shklar to do. But, a dystopophobic theorist must nonetheless remain wary (level one) that there are very many ways of organizing the polity that we have seen lead to widespread immiseration, and the aim must be to avoid these dystopias by, for example, upholding the kinds of values and political structures in liberal democracy. I will return to some of these concerns in the conclusion to this text, but, before then, Karl Popper responds to them through his particular epistemological account of social progress, as discussed in the next chapter.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that although Burke's account of dystopia focused predominantly upon the revolution in France, it would be wrong to think of his dystopian thinking only as *descriptive*. Additionally, Burke *projects* this dystopian image to the English context, and recounts all that would be lost through revolution here. In so doing, Burke's dystopian thinking serves to *educate* the reader about the causes that tend to produce dystopia – prominently, the lust for power and the distortions of rationalist philosophy. Burke's dystopia serves a *rhetorical* function by making salient his views about society, and making exigent his calls to resist revolution, thereby *justifying* the status quo in Britain. Whilst drawing out these dystopian themes, the chapter isolates a clear dystopophobic argument at level one – that revolution should be resisted in order to avoid a widespread immiseration in a rationalist dystopia. In addition to this argument, Burke's perfectionist account of

society as refined over time was invoked to suggest that there are the first sprouts of a

dystopophobic argument at level two – that individuals in society can be seen as objects of

political concern who may be lifted up from individual dystopian circumstances.

Chapter Six: Popper

I. Introduction

Unlike Hobbes and Burke whose most recognized and consistent contributions to philosophy were in social and political thought, Karl Popper made his name and is most renowned as a philosopher of science. His first book, *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, put forward a fallibilistic theory of the scientific method. In the years since, Popper's work has had a considerable influence upon philosophy, and it is his epistemological work that has garnered the most interest.[71] Indeed, after a detour of several years into political matters with the publication of *The Open Society*, Popper's wife remarked to him that "this book did not represent my central philosophical interests, for I was not primarily a political philosopher" (Popper 2010, 172). This being said, Popper continued to refine his thinking on political matters up until his death in 1994. Furthermore, he believed that the correct methodology of the natural science was identical with the methodology for social science, and so there is overlap between the two areas. This close connection between Popper's philosophy of science and political philosophy raises a chicken and an egg problem: do Popper's epistemic beliefs have a controlling influence over his political thought, or does the influence run in the other direction? Although Popper's first published works were in the philosophy of science, as Popper recounts in his autobiography he was intensely political from a young age, and these beliefs and political experiences were formative. As further evidence of the preeminence of liberal political beliefs, Alan Ryan argues that Popper's liberal commitments to freedom and openness to experiments in living are exactly

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[71] *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963) and *Objective Knowledge* (1972) are, respectively, the ninth and twentieth most cited philosophy books published since WWII. In spite of the fact that it was published decades earlier, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) is the twenty-second most cited (see Leiter 2017).

the norms of a well-functioning scientific community. "The willingness to challenge accepted theories," Ryan says, "the ability to go out on a limb without undue anxiety, the combination of eager questioning and patience to wait for answers, all seem to require the social training provided in a liberal society" (1985, 100). Ryan goes so far as to say that "it is not so much that [Popper's] philosophy of science supports his liberalism as that it *expresses* it" (1985, 89).

This is a provocative claim to which, Ryan notes, Popper would strenuously object. That being said this chapter demonstrates how the critical, incremental, and evolutionary components of Popper's thinking and the liberal values discussed by Ryan gain particular coherence and force when aversion to regression – dystopophobia – is emphasized in his work. If philosophy of science and liberalism are two mutually reinforcing pillars of Popper's thinking, this chapter contends that we ought to add a third pillar: dystopophobia. Aversion to injustice and more particularly the impetus to Minimize Suffering fundamentally influences Popper's endorsement of specific political intuitions and practices. Moreover, Minimize Suffering – like his philosophy of science and liberalism – is defended on independent and free-standing grounds. We therefore gain a better understanding of Popper's thinking if we foreground his dystopophobia, and in order to achieve this foregrounding the chapter is structured as follows.

Section II details Popper's dystopophobia at the level of society – that is, the choice between open and closed societies. The overlap between his methodology in natural and social science is outlined in order to reproduce a critique of closed societies as epistemically defective on the grounds that they are deaf to new and superior political ideas.

A brief account of the open society as a superior alternative is put forward before ending with a few remarks on the conservative quality of Popper's defense of the open society.

Section III sets the foundation for a discussion of Popper's dystopophobia at the individual level – i.e. Minimize Suffering – through an account of Popper's humanitarian ethics. A Kantian theme is drawn out where the autonomy of humans and ability to choose social policies that can help or immiserate others places considerable responsibility on each of us to choose well. Good open societies are pluralist, tolerant, and preclude tyranny. Section IV puts forward Minimize Suffering as a dystopophobic pillar in Popper's thinking at the individual level. Popper defends this negative utilitarian principle on the grounds that there is an asymmetry between increasing happiness and reducing suffering and that there is an urgency to help those who suffer that is not present when increasing the happiness of those who are already doing well. This dystopophobia reinforces and is supported by Popper's anti-utopianism, fear of unintended consequences of social action, and reinforces his idealized non-violent society comprised of reasonable people.

Section V gives an overview of the form and function of Popper's dystopias at the social and individual level. In both, the *educative function* of dystopia is emphasized, but a tension between the two levels is also identified. At the social level, dystopophobia entails a fairly conservative *justification* of existing liberal countries, but the mandate to Minimize Suffering on the individual level entails a fairly strong *criticism* of (especially laissez-faire) liberal systems for permitting considerable suffering to exist, which is quite progressive. Section VI resurrects Popper's Minimize Suffering from R. N. Smart's world exploding critique of Negative Utilitarianism by interpreting this utilitarianism in person-affecting rather than impersonal terms and reformulating the principle to "Remedy Suffering," rather

than Minimize Suffering, or Eliminate Suffering. This frees Popper's negative utilitarianism for use in a dystopophobic political scheme. The text ends in section VII with a brief conclusion.

II. Dystopophobia at Level of Society

Karl Popper was born in Vienna in the summer of 1902. As one might expect, the years around outbreak of the First Word War were formative; they were, he says, "in every respect decisive for my intellectual development" (2010, 9). This introduction to international conflict between nation states left him critical of accepted political opinions and cynical of strident nationalism. Additionally, the breakdown of Austrian political order in the years after the war left Popper and his family with "little to eat; and as for clothing, most of us could afford only discarded army uniforms, adapted for civilian use" (2010, 31), which impressed upon Popper the effect that national level events can have upon the normal citizens in society. In 1928 Popper received his doctorate and began work on the text that would become *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (2002). By this time, though, political violence in Vienna was intolerable – just the year before he witnessed the police "shoot down scores of peaceful and unarmed social democratic workers and bystanders" (2010, 122) – and the rise of Hitler in Germany over the coming years elevated anti-Semitism in Austria, such that careers for Jewish academics like Popper were impossible. In this context of hostility and violence Popper fled Austria, first on extended visits to England in 1935 and 1936, and then more permanently to New Zealand in 1937.

These early experiences made clear to Popper that proper or malfunctioning government at the national level has a considerable effect upon the lives of citizens. This

helps to explain the focus in Popper's political writings upon the functioning of government and society at the level of the polity – i.e. upon the *open society*. In these writings Popper focuses upon avoiding the same kind of fate that befell Austria, Germany, Russia, and, indeed, Europe more generally over the two World Wars and the rise of totalitarianism. This is why he describes writing *The Open Society* (2013) during the years of the Second World War as part of his "war effort" (2010, 131).

The Shared Methodology of Natural and Social Science

Undergirding *The Open Society* is Popper's belief that the methods of natural science and social science are the same, and that his insights from the philosophy of science ought to be applied to politics. He says the critical method of science ought to be "generalized into… the critical or rational attitude" towards politics (2010, 132).[72] We gain knowledge of the physical world around us, Popper says, through a process of scientific analysis and he puts forward the falsifiability of a theory as a "criterion of demarcation" between science and non-science (2002, 17-20). Scientific theories have to be capable of being proven wrong by experiment or analysis, and so the philosophical problem confronting scientists is to choose between different methods or rules "as will ensure the testability of scientific statements, which is to say, their falsifiability" (2002, 27). On this method conjectures or predictions about about the functioning of the physical world are put forward – e.g. that, per the theory of General Relativity, time and space form a single continuum. These theories have to be capable of producing statements that can be falsified, which requires

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[72] As he also says in *The Poverty of Historicism*: there is a "unity of method" shared between the social and natural sciences, and that the methods shared between the two are "fundamentally the same" (2002b, 120).

the statements to have certain qualities, like observability and that they are stated unambiguously (2002, 95; 116). So, in the case of General Relativity, a testable statement is: very heavy objects will bend light. Tests can then be run to observe whether the test withstands scrutiny, as occurred with the transit of Mercury in 1915 as the predictions of where Mercury would be if light were bent were not disproven; that is, Mercury was where we thought it would be on the theory of General Relativity.

If a theory is falsified by the experiment we do not have reason to despair. As Popper says, "…if we test our conjecture, and succeed in falsifying it, we see very clearly that there was a reality… [and] our falsifications thus indicate the points where we have touched reality, as it were" (1956, 156). In light of this new evidence about reality, new and more sophisticated theories that incorporate the falsifications can now be put forward and then later tested. In principle this process of testing repeats indefinitely, but in all likelihood as theories more closely correspond with reality the theories will pass ever more falsification tests and so, although this does not decisively prove the truth of any theory, it gives considerable credence to the theory.

The aim of science on Popper's philosophy is to replace false beliefs about the world with true beliefs gained through an open process of interrogation (1972, 54). Scientific endeavors function well and achieve this goal when they adopt the scientific practices he endorses. In regards to the social world, then, malfunctioning polities are those that fail to replace false beliefs that endure in the polity and are acted upon by government without any attempt at falsification. These are closed societies.

<u>The Dystopia of the Closed Society</u>

In his autobiography, Popper recounts that shortly before his seventeenth birthday, "shooting broke out during a demonstration by unarmed socialists," which he says left him "horrified and shocked by the brutality of the police." As a Communist committed to antagonizing the state in order to bring about the Communist revolution this prompted Popper to question his own culpability for the shooting. These events, he says, "produced in me a life-long revulsion of feeling," that left him skeptical of comprehensive political ideologies like communism (2010, 32-3, see also 1972b, 275). By the 1940s, the spread of fascism throughout Europe was matched with the spread of violence and repression, and so Popper came to fear that "freedom might become a central problem again, especially under the renewed influence of Marxism and the idea of large scale "planning."" *The Open Society*, he continues, was "meant as a defence of freedom against totalitarian and authoritarian ideas" (2010, 131). Popper connects totalitarianism to epistemology through the doctrine of historicism. In both *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society*, Popper takes aim at the historicist theory that "history is controlled by specific historical or evolutionary laws whose discovery would enable us to prophesy the destiny of man" (2013, 8). The aim of the historicist is to predict trends in human society by "discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history" (2002b, 3).[73] Popper identifies two important practitioners of this epistemology: Plato and Marx. Taking these in order:

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[73] In his account of Popper's political theory, Jeremy Shearmur notes that this focus upon historicism may not resonate with contemporary readers, but, importantly, "the time at which Popper was writing was, in a significant sense, not ours." As evidence Shearmur continues to note that there was a widespread view that "the First World War and its aftermath were to be understood as marking the end of an old era" and, as Louis

Plato's politics is influenced by a historicist commitment as, on Popper's interpretation, Plato aims to escape the "revolution and historical decay" of societies by creating a "state which is so perfect that it does not participate in the general trend of historical development" (2013, 23). Plato's essentialist belief in the perfect Forms of concepts including justice is important here as the belief that there is a singular Form of the perfect society entails that any activity outside of or in contravention with this Form of Justice is therefore unjust and must be curtailed. Substantively, Plato's just society in *The Republic* is memorably comprised of three classes with different roles as rulers, auxiliaries, and producers. Justice, the character of Socrates claims, is for each of these classes to mind their own business (Plato 1991, 112). Here, the (purported) correct view of justice has been identified and at this point a "totalitarian tendency" emerges in Plato's political practice as the people and society are to be organized in accordance with that ideal of justice (Popper 2013, 31). To break away from one's station in life is to cause an injustice, so must be prevented. Accordingly, it is necessary to arrest all political change by maintaining power in the hands of the philosopher kings with the help of the auxiliary class, and by molding the minds of the producing masses to conform to the demands of the system (2013, 83-4). This system is totalitarian by controlling most aspects of people's lives in order to achieve the end of a just state with everyone in their right place. It is a collectivist doctrine that demands conformity to some exogenous – and incorrect – historicist conception of society (2013, 101), a charge that Marx is guilty of, too.

Althussier documents in *The God That Failed*, such historicist "attitudes towards communism… were widely held through that period by those who were sympathetic to it" (1996, 38-9).

"Marx was, I believe, a false prophet," (Popper 2013, 294); Marx's theory of economic development was incorrect and so, on Popper's estimation, Marx and his acolytes have inflicted considerable and avoidable suffering upon people by attempting to organize society under the terms of this false doctrine. At the center of Popper's objection is Marx's contention that the laws of social life and individual psychology are determined by the social experience of individuals, rather than the reverse (2013, 301). On this view, human nature is plastic, and so will adapt to the circumstances it finds itself in. The task confronting the adherents to Marx's philosophy, then, is to bring about those social and economic conditions that most conduce to human freedom and flourishing as descried by the historicist evolution of history. Here, the theory of historical materialism – that the conflict between economic classes drives the reorganization of economic, and, in turn, social and political life – supplies the historicist insight necessary to discern the development of society and to guide it to a better post-capitalist future (2013, 313-5). By treating citizens as, firstly, members of a class, Marx's theory is collectivist in a way analogous to Plato, and with similar oppressive implications. Rather than a new classless socialist society as prophesized by Marx, the victory of the proletariat will, on Popper's assessment, inevitably just bring about a new system of social control under a new class of powerful rulers (2013, 348) – and this phenomenon has begun to manifest in Europe with the push by communist sympathizers to emulate Russia and the dictatorship of the proletariat exercised there (2013, 371-2).

On Popper's view, Plato and Marx describe closed societies that are dystopian by being unfalsifiable. The unfolding of history always remains just ahead on the horizon such that if only the historicist theories were implemented with a little more rigor, then the

prophecies will materialize. In the meantime, many hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people may be harmed or killed in the pursuit of this ideal. At the level of organizing society, then, the institution of any unfalsifiable comprehensive philosophy that is unresponsive to the needs of the citizens in that society will inevitably tend towards totalitarianism and repression.

Of course, Plato and Marx put forward very different theories of how society should be organized, but there are a handful of more general properties shared by closed societies like these. Firstly, they share a view of political activity as utopian engineering where one pursues an aim "consciously and consistently, and determines its means according to this end. To choose the end is therefore the first thing we have to do" (2013, 147). Both Marx and Plato believe in some idealized utopian end: Marx "saw his specific mission in the freeing of socialism from its sentimental, moralist, and visionary back ground… [and instead] based [socialism] on the scientific method of analysing cause and effect" (2013, 295); Plato that "it should be the task and the purpose of the individual to maintain, and to strengthen, the stability of the state" by remaining within their allotted class (2013, 91).

In forming this utopian end for society methodological essentialism often plays a prominent role. Plato's belief in the ideal Forms of justice and other concepts caused him to defer to the insights of philosophers to divine the proper ends for society. For his part, Marx's held the essentialist belief – following Hegel – that all social phenomena had to be reduced "to the underlying essential reality," which in Marx's case is to economic conditions (2013, 317). Here, the reported experiences and concerns of individuals become secondary data to the insight of philosophers and thinkers like Marx who derive their knowledge directly from the development of history. Accordingly, the needs, fears, and

even suffering of citizens are often of lesser concern in these closed societies. This becomes especially apparent in the process of social reconstruction to conform to the utopian end that has been identified by these epistemically privileged leaders. Social reform on this scale is a considerable undertaking, and in this process such utopians are liable to be "deaf to many complaints; in fact, it will be part of his business to suppress unreasonable objections… [and] with it, he must invariably suppress reasonable criticism also" (2013, 150). These closed societies are therefore likely to inflict harm upon citizens in the name of an ideal as they lack (or actively destroy) mechanisms like democracy that may otherwise inform government of the harms being inflicted.

Finally, closed societies often adopt a tribal or collectivist view of society. This is most prominent in "naïve monist" societies that have not yet distinguished between natural laws (like the changing of the seasons) and artificial laws (like those that govern society). Such societies – like those in ancient Greece that preceded Athens, especially before the plural flourishing of ideas in the age of Socrates – treat political norms and laws as inevitable and unchangeable and therefore adopt a tribal attitude of a group living under the same conditions (2013, 57). However, even societies that are "critical dualist" and distinguish between "man-enforced normative laws… and the natural regularities which are beyond his power" (2013, 58) can exhibit analogous collective tendencies that resemble a tribe. Such collectivist societies, like Marx's class-based account of the proletariat vs. bourgeoisie, view their members as "held together by semi-biological ties – kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and distress" (2013, 165). In these cases, the individual is largely evacuated from the moral and political picture,

which eases the way for great atrocities to be inflicted upon people in order to achieve utopian goal for society or the class at a higher level of organization.

The Open Society

In contrast with these qualities of closed societies, open societies reject the tribalist and collectivist view of the polity. Instead, it is the individual that is the locus of moral concern, and per Popper's methodological individualism, any sociological or political theory must be explained by reference to individuals: "all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and . . . we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives'" (2013, 309-10). Open societies are "critical dualist" by recognizing that the laws and norms of society are produced and can be changed by humans – that we are not bound by fate or history to any one end (2013, 59). When they function well, these critical dualist societies subject their inherited traditions and new ideas to probing analysis and improvements to the norms and institutions of society are proposed and either adopted or rejected (1949). By cultivating the capacity of reason and criticism, diversity of opinion is fostered in society, "and the values of freedom of thought and speech, toleration and individualism operate as both a motivation for, and constraint upon, individual behaviour" (Stokes 1998, 56).

Rather than identify in advance a set utopian end to realize, open societies adopt an approach to social change dubbed social engineering. "The social engineer," on Popper's telling,

> "believes that man is the master of his own destiny and that… as opposed to the historicist who believes that intelligent political action is possible only if the future course of history is first

determined, the social engineer believes that a scientific basis of politics would be a very different thing; it would consist of factual information necessary for construction or alteration of social institutions, in accordance with our aims and wishes" (2013, 21).

The social engineer achieves political progress by posing a series of hypothetical imperatives: "If such and such are our aims, is this institution well designed and organized to serve them?" (2013, 22). As Popper is an individualist, ultimately the ends to be pursued reduce down to improving the well-being of individuals in society, and social institutions of society are then judged and changed "wholly according to their appropriateness, efficiency, simplicity, etc." in achieving this end (2013, 22).

One might object here that the open society appears troublingly technocratic. Instead of philosopher kings and economist philosophers, Popper elevates the social engineer as the epistemically superior benevolent dictator who *de facto* rules over others by organizing society according to their best theory of how to improve society. In response to this concern it should be said, firstly, that the social engineer is not a single individual, or even an exclusive class. Popper presents the social engineer as an ideal type worthy of emulation in an open society. Indeed, his emphasis upon individual responsibility for social outcomes (as will be discussed extensively in the next section) entails an inclusive commitment to educate and integrate as much of society as possible into this process of social engineering by: providing insight into how institutions are working and failing "on the ground"; by contributing to theories of how best to improve those institutions; and, by refining the moral and normative theories that animate the project of social improvement. Secondly, because there are expected to be innumerable social engineers in society all contributing to varying degrees, the theories and accounts of how to improve society are plural and changing, rather than monolithic and singular. Social engineering is an iterative process of improvement over time that avoids singular control by a benevolent dictator by

being inclusive of individual contributors and a diversity of ideas of how society ought to be organized.

Another objection presses Popper for presenting an account of the open society that, in effect, merely replicates contemporary liberal societies with only some minor refinements. The dystopophobic aversion to closed societies and subsequent endorsement of liberal polities has led some commentators to identify here a conservative quality in Popper's writing. Geoffrey Stokes, for example, points to Popper's "uncritical attitude towards contemporary liberal democracies" as evidence of Popper's political conservatism (1998, 71).[74] Recall that this is the objection put by Goodhart to Shklar and the other "obvious injustice" thinkers, and it is appropriate to put it to Popper, too. At numerous points Popper endorses liberalism (1946, 127; 1954, 1972), he applauds science for its "liberalizing influence" (1956, 137) and describes his account of the open society that protects the freedom, equality, and life individuals as "fundamentally a liberal theory" (2013, 106). Moreover, Popper self-consciously thought of *The Open Society* and *Poverty*

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[74] Many different thinkers have raised arguments about Popper's conservatism and it seems that just about all of them emphasize different ideas in his writings and conceive of conservatism in different ways. By way of an introduction to this debate: In his piece, "Towards a Rational theory of Tradition" Popper says that "traditions are precious things" (1949, 163) and makes the case that all social thinking must start within the conceptual (and traditional) framework that people find themselves in (1949, 173). When combined with his anti-utopianism, Popper seems to lower the horizon of social change in ways that start to look fairly conservative. Although he also goes on to draw out differences between the two thinkers, Anthony O'Hear notes that Popper's focus upon protecting freedom produces an outcome where "in practice, Popperian openness and Hayekian limited government might look very similar" (2006, 144). Michael Freeman makes the case that Popper is epistemologically conservative by ruling out some utopian ideas as contrary to what is known about science, without also noting that, according to his own theory of scientific discovery, all scientific laws are tentative. Consequently, it is only possible to tentatively rule out utopian ideals, rather than categorically dismiss them as Popper does (1975, 22-3). Jeremy Shearmur draws the conclusion that after he lost his socialist sympathies, Popper began to analyze political ideas that had a conservative tendency, which manifested in his work, but that Popper himself never really recognized (1996, 66). Against the view that Popper is conservative, Michael Lessnoff makes the case that Popper productively drew from conservative sources without endorsing a political philosophy that is in any meaningful way conservative (1980, 111).

of Historicism as part of his "war effort" to beat totalitarianism and thereby rescue liberal democracy in England and the rest of Europe (2010, 131).

That Popper embraced liberalism and liberal values is beyond dispute. Indeed, a defense of liberalism against the encroaching threat of Nazism is an example of the best possible form of conservatism. Exactly how objectionable this conservative quality is depends upon whether he merely reproduces and entrenches liberal political systems with their limits and disagreeable qualities unchanged, or whether the refinements that Popper places upon liberalism through his novel defense of it in the framework of the open society produce something new and superior. As I will detail over the following few sections of this chapter, Popper's emphasis upon iterative improvement in society that follows from his dystopophobic commitment to "minimize suffering" entails a robust account of how to enhance liberal societies that holds considerable promise for improvement and change that – certainly in contradistinction to contemporary U.S. society, and the roll back of welfare state since 1980s – is progressive rather than conservative.

III. Popper's Humanitarian Ethics

The end of science is to form true (i.e. non-falsified) beliefs about the natural world. In the political realm, the account of the closed society in Plato and Marx reveals that the end of forming true belief about the political is important and worthwhile because, in the attempt to make society conform to false and unfalsifiable theories, considerable suffering and repression can be heaped upon the population. This is not, however, the end of the story. In addition to avoiding dystopia at the level of society, Popper makes recurring references to the need to help on the individual level. This is partially because of Popper's

methodological individualism. But it is also because of a preoccupation with avoiding suffering and misery that manifests prominently in Popper's moral and political thinking. Even in otherwise good and open societies, there is, Popper says, a pressing need to "help the weak and the sick, and those who suffer injustice" (1940, 61). Popper lists the "greatest evils" including poverty, slavery, unemployment, rigid class differences, and religious discrimination that ought to be eradicated "remedied, or relieved, by social co-operation" (1956b, 497). In the *Open Society* he describes a core tenet of liberalism as "the recognition of the injustice that does exist in this world, and the resolve to try to help those who are its victims" (2013, 506), and often repeats around the time the *Open Society* was published that the right social end to pursue is "minimize suffering" rather than maximize wellbeing (2013, 390 & 603; 1946, 127; 1947, 158; 1948, 485). These remarks reveal that in addition to concern with dystopia at the social level – the laws and institutions of an open society necessary to protect freedom and rights, and engage in a process of critical rationalism – Popper expresses an abiding concern with how individual lives go and an urgent sense of obligation to rescue individuals in otherwise good and open societies from the dystopian experience of social evils like poverty and sickness. This further dystopophobic commitment on the individual level is explained by Popper's subscription to a set of humanistic moral principles. As Sandra Pralong notes, that Popper believed a particular ethical framework in open societies engendered particular beliefs about right political actions and structures is clear, but "surprisingly, Popper fails to detail the[se] ethical standards" (1999, 128). These ethical presuppositions are analyzed below.

Popper's Meta-Ethics

Popper takes the definitive position that there is a fundamental distinction between facts and values. Facts can be split into two groups. Some facts are alterable through human intervention, such as the size of the national defense budget, the amount of time the average parent spends playing with their children, or the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted into the atmosphere each year. Other facts are unalterable, like the speed of light or the mass of a neutron. If a fact is alterable, then humans can adopt any number of decisions or policies in response to that fact, "such as to alter it; to protect it from those who wish to alter it; not to interfere, etc." (2013, 60). The decisions made will be justified and explained in factual terms (i.e. in response to the specifics of the situation), but also in terms of the values and principles held by the people in society. So, for example, the decision to lower greenhouse gas emissions is dependent upon the alterable fact that there will soon be enough Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere to cause catastrophic climate change. It is also dependent upon the values and moral imperative to protect the well being of our children and future generations. The simple fact that there are high levels of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere is inert. It is only when people bring their values and ideals to this fact that a further set of questions of "*what ought we to do about it?"* start to appear (2010, 226).

The upshot of this account of facts and values is that no norm, principle, moral theory, or value can be derived from facts, and similarly, no principles or values are objective facts in the way that facts of the natural world are facts. It is therefore impossible to derive an "ought" from an "is." This is an important conclusion as it sits at the heart of Popper's critique of tribalist closed societies. These closed societies make no distinction between laws of nature like the changing of the seasons and the norms of culture and

politics (2013, 56). In closed societies, the way people praise God, the distribution of power and property, the conduct of soldiers in war, etc., are all understood as the necessary and inexorable way society *must* be organized, and this belief inevitably frustrates even the conceptualization of other ways of living, let alone the realization of alternative ways of life. The failure to distinguish between nature and convention was eroded, perhaps most substantially, by the "development of sea-communications and commerce… [as] close contact with other tribes is liable to undermine the feeling of necessity with which tribal institutions are viewed" (2013, 168). And this development was important as "once the Greeks had been confronted with plausible evidence of the sustainability of a variety of cultures, they clearly had to adopt a theoretical view of what might be ideally desirable" (Haddock 2008, 11).

Any ideal society, different way of living, and the proof of their superiority or inferiority are not found in nature. Instead societies and their norms are created and justified through human ingenuity and invention, which speaks to the incredible power of humankind to both imagine and to create a political world radically at odds with the one inherited. As Popper puts it, "Man has created new worlds – of language, of music, of poetry, of science; and the most important of these is the world of the moral demands, for equality, for freedom, and for helping the weak" (2013, 62). As with Hobbes, the insight here is that humankind is endowed with the ability to immiserate one another, but also with the ability to solve our collective problems and create social and political worlds in which we live lives far better than otherwise possible. So, although war on Hobbes' view is "necessarily consequent… to the natural passions of men," so too is it "the foresight of their [humankind's] own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby" that leads

these same people to establish a commonwealth to save themselves from that fact (1985, 223). Those societies that have recognized and accepted (to greater or lesser degrees) that norms can be changed according to the needs, values, and principles of the people in society have taken the largest step towards becoming open societies in which the power to improve human life can be exercised.

Human Power and Responsibility

Before sentient humans evolved there were no values, ideals, or principles in the world. There was just matter acting according to the laws of nature, with animals following their instincts. With the advent of modern humans, no longer was all in the animal kingdom driven by the dictates of nature as human beings created values, ideals and our own standards that we imposed upon nature. This is a remarkable and uniquely human achievement and it has granted humanity the power to do more than any other creature ever could; only humankind can master nature and our own destiny. The realization that human beings possess the power to change their social and political world is the most important implication of accepting that laws and convention are not the inevitable outgrowth of the natural world. And this remarkable and unique power has a further implication: it places a tremendous obligation on humanity to act responsibly. If human beings control their own destiny, then they cannot place the responsibility for humanity's ultimate condition on the will of God, and nor can we "shift our responsibility onto history, and thereby onto the play of demoniac powers beyond ourselves" (1940b, 80). Instead, the recognition that "norms and normative laws *can* be made and changed by man… [entails] that it is therefore man who is morally responsible for them" (2013, 59).

In making these claims a strong Kantian theme emerges in Popper's moral thinking. The remarks are Kantian as Popper draws from Kant the belief that natural laws are not intrinsic to the universe, but instead are created by people and then applied to the world (2010, 64). Popper follows Kant in this "Copernican Revolution" that puts humans at the center of the conceptual picture, and he treats moral theories as analogous to scientific theories in this regard. "The fundamental ideal of Kant's ethics," Popper says, "amounts to another Copernican Reolution… for Kant makes man the lawgiver of morality just as he makes him the lawgiver of nature" (1954, 246 see also Mettenheim 1999, 117). In following Kant down this path Popper shares with Kant the belief in the importance of autonomy and its relationship to responsibility. Whenever we are confronted with moral decisions, such as whether to follow the commands of an authority, "it is *our* responsibility to judge whether that command is moral or immoral" (1954, 246).[75] The key point here is that "every man is free; not because he is born free, but because he is born with the burden of responsibility for free decisions" (1954, 248).[76] On this point Popper's meta-ethical and metaphysical beliefs lead him to substantive conclusions about the obligations all persons have:

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[75] These Kantian elements in Popper's thinking appear prominently in the final few lines of the first book of *The Open Society*. Popper says there, "if we shrink from the task of carrying our cross, the cross of humaneness, of reason, of responsibility, if we lose courage and flinch from the strain, then we must try to fortify ourselves with a clear decision before us. We can return to the beasts. But if we wish to remain human, then there is only one way, the way into the open society" (2013, 189). The comparison of a fully human life against the life of a beast echoes Kant's distinction between autonomy and heteronomy as following principles vs appetites. Moreover, the appeal to responsibility – the task of carrying the cross of having to choose – also corresponds with Kant's focus on practical reasoning and responsibility. This Kantian theme in Popper's thinking in both science and politics is a recurring theme in Shearmur and Stokes' recent collection of essays on Popper (see 2016, 55, 69-73, 125-7, 353).

[76] Ian Jarvie and Sandra Pralong identify a third Kantian theme in the fact that Popper's epistemologically oriented philosophy, including *The Open Society*, "seems a response to Kant's call in "What is Enlightenment?", "Sapere Aude!" – Dare to Know!" (1999, 3).

"It is we who impose our standards upon nature, and who in this way introduce morals into the natural world, in spite of the fact that we are part of this world. WE are products of nature, but nature has made us together with our power of altering the world, of foreseeing and of planning for the future, and of making far-reaching decisions for which we are morally responsible" (2013, 59).

From this Popper has a possible response to Hobbes' fool from an earlier chapter. To disregard justice and to instead pursue one's own appetites and interests without regard for others is to misunderstand oneself as a human being capable of projecting values onto the world beyond the circumscribed pursuit of individual advantage. Any animal is capable of pursuing immediate advantage, and does so successfully if it is to survive and reproduce. But human beings are not limited only to that way of living as they are capable of projecting any number of values and ideals more fitting of a unique and remarkable creature like ourselves. And, more deeply than this, it is not just to misunderstand oneself, but to subordinate the interests of all others in the community in the private pursuit of one's selfish interests is a *deeply immoral abrogation of one's responsibility* as a human being with the power to profoundly affect the lives of other people both now and through to future generations. So, then, rather than cynically use powers of reason to offer up *ad hoc* arguments in favor of one's own self-interest, each person has an individual responsibility to deeply consider the norms and laws of the state in which they live in order to determine whether these uphold a sound ethical ideal that treats others with the moral consideration they deserve.

Pluralism

Popper denies that there is any single moral ideal or perfect policy prescription for society that we can definitively point to as superior to all others. This is so because of the pluralist character of human thought and values, and because of his subscription to a fallibilist

scientific and political methodology. That being said, he does put forward a handful of qualities that characterize especially liberal polities, which, he argues, do the best job out of the alternatives to protect and uphold important human values and ideals. These include pluralism, individualism, and equality, which together comprise his humanitarian ethics. The virtue of liberalism can be appreciated by placing it in contrast with many forms of closed societies that are, by Popper's definition, monolithic. In these closed societies tradition is received and passed on to the next generation as an inevitable fact of nature. It is only with the advent of social criticism and the disaggregation of nature and convention that a plurality of ways of living and thinking become possible. When humanity made the leap from closed to open societies, it gained the ability to criticize tradition and inherited norms by thinking about them, and by "ask[ing] ourselves whether we should or accept [them]" (1949, 164). This act of criticism necessarily involves the consideration of a plurality of alternative ways of living, which is the precursor to the profusion plural ideas of potential alternatives to tradition (see also 2013, ch. 5).

Pluralism is a descriptive quality of open societies, but it is an ideal quality, too. Even if there were a single best moral and political ideal, it is unlikely that human beings could know with a high degree of certainty that they had identified it. Instead, what we can say with much more certainty is when our moral and political ideals have gone awry: "Every discovery of a mistake constitutes a real advance in our knowledge… [and] this fundamental insight is, indeed, the basis of all epistemology and methodology; for it gives us a hint of how to learn more systematically, [and] how to advance more quickly…" (2013, 491-2). And the things we learn here overwhelmingly apply to how individuals ought to be treated, for example, that "the reduction of avoidable misery belongs to the

agenda of public policy," and that "cruelty is always 'bad'; that it should be avoided where possible" (2013, 501). Here we have the first sustained hints of dystopophobia in Popper's philosophy at the second level of the individual: the most convincing case against particular values and ideals can be made when they lead to bad outcomes for people in society. Methodologically, a process of critical discussion is necessary for political and moral progress. It is only by experiment – by thinking through the proposals others put forward and by adopting and rejecting them on their merits, and, more especially, on their demerits – that new policies and ideas best suited to our current condition can emerge and be implemented. As in science, "free discussion [is] almost indispensable: we need many new theories so that they can compete in order that we can select the fittest – the most flexible and best adaptable, and the best-adapted ones. We need a pluralism of ideas and of theories; and therefore we need a pluralist society." (1981, 334).

The Principles of Humanitarian Ethics

A pluralist society is good, then, as it is most compatible with open debate over ideals, which in turn makes these societies most propitiously positioned to yield further progress in morals and values within that open society. By consideration of the moral and political errors that humanity has certainly made – most contemporary to Popper, Nazism and Russian Communism – Popper offers an *outline* of a just society that best protects and upholds those things that humanity has reason to value. He lists five qualities of a just society that those "whose general outlook is humanitarian" would endorse:

   (a) an equal distribution of the burden of citizenship, i.e. of those limits of freedom which are necessary in social life;
   (b) equal treatment of the citizens before the law, provided, of course, that

(c) the laws show neither favor nor disfavor towards individual citizens or groups or classes;

(d) impartiality of the course of justice; and

(e) an equal share in the advantages (and not only of the burden) which membership of the state may offer to its citizens (2013, 86)[77]

Popper describes the just society as the one that would be endorsed by those "whose general outlook is humanitarian" (2013, 86), but he does not formally define humanitarianism in the body of the text. Instead, he takes up this task in a footnote to a passage quoted earlier, in which he remarks on the human quality of creating values and ideals: "Man has created new worlds – of language, of music, of poetry, of science; and the most important of these… the moral demands for equality, for freedom, and for helping the weak" (2013, 62). In the corresponding footnote to this claim he lists the following as "the most important principles of humanitarian and equalitarian ethics" (2013, 548):[78]

1) **Tolerance**: "Tolerance towards all who are not intolerant and who do not propagate intolerance." (2013, 548)

2) **Minimize Suffering**: "The recognition that all moral urgency has its basis in the urgency of suffering or pain. I suggest, for this reason, to replace the utilitarian formula… 'Maximize happiness', by the formula 'The least amount of suffering

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[77] This final quality of a just society is a fairly substantive account of egalitarianism. Popper makes clear in his autobiography that in his youth he was attracted to socialist ideas including material equality, and that it "took some time before I recognized this as no more than a beautiful dream; that freedom is more important than equality" (2010, 36). That Popper endorsed substantive egalitarianism in *The Open Society*, suggests that some vestige of this socialist sympathy remained with him in 1942, when the book was written. However, by the time he wrote *Public and Private Values* four years later, Popper had explicitly repudiated this egalitarian view and replaced it with the dystopophobic principle that a humanitarian society ought to fight against social evils, rather than realize equality (1946). This is the view endures for the rest of his life.

[78] One might reasonably draw a distinction between ethics and justice as an action like an extra-marital affair might be unethical without always rising to an issue of justice to be remedied by a just polity. Popper denies that justice has a necessary intrinsic essence, and instead characterizes justice as the product of deliberation over how to organize society that is influenced by ethical and moral considerations. Moreover, Popper describes the second of these ethical principles listed above as one of the "fundamental principles… of public policy," not only of ethics (2013, 548). Popper therefore does not make a strong distinction between ethics and social justice and so it would be a mistake to strongly demarcate between the two. Accordingly, this text treats them as generally interchangeable.

for all', or briefly, 'Minimize suffering'. (2013, 548) As he says later, "demand the elimination of suffering rather than the promotion of happiness" (2013, 603).

3) **No Tyranny**: "The fight against tyranny; or in other words, the attempt to safeguard the other principles by the institutional means of a legislation rather than by the benevolence of persons in power" (2013, 549).

Popper defends each of these principles on the humanitarian grounds that they promote human welfare, but out of the three principles Minimize Suffering is distinct. Not only is it defended and discussed in humanitarian terms, but it also is justified in *The Open Society* and other writings on other grounds that, together, form a constellation of values, concerns, and commitments that constitute a framework for a dystopophobic ethics, *to wit*, ethical considerations that lead to ethical principles aimed at avoiding bad outcomes rather than achieving ideally good ones for individuals. In light of this, the next two sub-sections respectively expound upon the principles Tolerance and No Tyranny as Popper articulates them. The succeeding section (Section IV) explores Minimize Suffering as a foundational dystopophobic principle in more detail.

Tolerance

On Popper's telling there is no need for tolerance in closed societies as, by his definition in closed societies ideas, norms, and values are transmitted from one generation to the next with little critical examination, or plural ideas are subordinated to a single vision, as in Plato's Republic.[39] The corollary of the fact that there are few new and alternative ideas of living is that there is little in society to tolerate as different. Taken to the extreme case seen

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[39] This is not to say that the people in closed societies fail to criticize social norms because of some constitutional deficiency – recall Popper's belief in the fundamental human capacity to think imaginatively create new values. Instead, in closed societies the common belief that social norms are natural and unalterable devalues creative thought as a dangerous departure from what is natural and tends towards the institution of laws and policies designed to curtail this kind of thinking.

in Popper's discussion of Plato's philosopher king, the primary aim of the philosopher king is to police the boundaries between rulers and the ruled, rather than tolerate those who would blur those boundaries, so here is a link between toleration and pluralism. For these reasons, closed societies, especially those ruled by individuals committed to the preservation of a single natural order, lack tolerance as an ideal worthy of support and protection. Beyond this type of society, however – in open societies that characterize the audience of his work – Popper makes the case that tolerance protects against violence, as tolerant people do not stubbornly insist that they are always right. Neither do they press their positions through fraud or violence. Instead – as will be discussed later in relation to Popper's ideal of the reasonable society – tolerant people are more likely to discuss disagreements with those on the other side of the issue at hand and live along side those with whom they disagree, even while they try to convince them of the superiority of their own ideas and values.

On the one side, then, toleration is a valuable ideal as it protects against descent into violent recriminations between mutually intolerant and unreasonable citizens. Further, tolerant societies are not wholly tyrannical and dystopian as they embrace some degree of freedom of thought and the expression of those thoughts. Paradoxically, however, excessive tolerance can set society on a path to violence and, eventually, intolerant tyranny. This is because infinitely tolerant people will not defend society from the intolerant who have no compunction against the use of skullduggery and violence. In order to avoid this dystopian outcome, "we should claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant" (2013, 581). The upshot of this is that for those seeking to avoid dystopia,

toleration towards all who are not intolerant acts as a golden mean between two extremes of dystopia.

No Tyranny

Tyrannies are problematic because power is consolidated in the hands of a few. It is a fact of human nature that all people are fallible, and so, even if the best leaders are selected and endowed with arbitrary decision-making power, it is certain that they will eventually make a misstep. Fortunately, many of these missteps can be caught if several individually fallible people work together to make political decisions, hence the preferability of non-tyrannical systems. As Popper puts it, "we should like to have good rulers, but historical experience shows us that we are not likely to get them. This is why it is of such importance to design institutions which prevent even bad rulers from causing too much damage" (1948b, 463). It is quite probable that in spite of the best efforts of citizens to avoid it, some weak, ineffective, unstable, self-interested, or even malevolent individuals will eventually come to power. Consequently, a proscription against tyranny (including an otherwise agreeable benevolent dictatorship) better protects the polity from disaster and the descent into dystopia.[80] For this reason Popper describes No Tyranny as the "safeguard" of other principles by legislation and law. This focus on safeguards and protections for established principles of humanitarian ethics demonstrates that Popper is focused on avoiding loss or regression in policy, rather than innovation in these institutions in order to bring about

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[80] On this point Popper says in *The Open Society*: "…it is not at all easy to get a government on whose goodness and wisdom one can implicitly rely. If that is granted, then we must ask whether political thought should not face from the beginning the possibility of bad government; whether we should not prepare for the worst, and hope for the best… *How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?*" (2013, 115).

better outcomes. It is evidence that here Popper is manifesting a dystopophobic aversion and the aim of protecting the principles he puts forward rather than achieving some independent utopian ideal.

IV. Dystopophobia at Level of Individual – Minimize Suffering

The idea that we should minimize suffering rather than maximize pleasure, or "negative utilitarianism" as it would come to be called, is a particularly important idea that Popper continued to refine for decades. The earliest forms of it appear in "Ideal and Reality in Society," a paper from 1940. The last reference to it occurs some fifty years later in a public address just a handful of years before he died. There Popper proposes that political parties should declare an interest in "trying to surmount the dominance of ideologies, and [express a] readiness to try to replace them by a straightforward programme of serving the most urgent needs of all" (1991, 390). Within *The Open Society*, negative utilitarianism appears in two endnotes, the first of which lays out the three principles of humanitarian ethics, and the second far later in the text presents further arguments in favor of the principle Minimize Suffering. He returned to these ideas and defended them against critics in an addendum added in 1961, proving his persistent interest in getting this idea right. Minimize Suffering, in full, says:

> The recognition that all moral urgency has its basis in the urgency of suffering or pain. I suggest, for this reason, to replace the utilitarian formula 'Aim at the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number', or briefly, 'Maximize happiness', by the formula 'The least amount of suffering for all', or briefly, 'Minimize Suffering'. Such a simple formula can, I believe, be made one of the fundamental principles (admittedly not the only one) of public policy. (The principle 'Maximize happiness', in contrast, seems to be apt to produce a benevolent dictatorship.) We should realize that from the moral point of view suffering and happiness must not be treated as symmetrical; that is to say, the promotion of happiness is in any case much less urgent than the rendering of help to those who suffer, and the attempt to prevent suffering (2013, 548-9).

This principle has an important and unique place in Popper's philosophy. In the first place, the principle is important as it is one of the three principles listed above that compose Popper's definition of humanitarian ethics and his account of the just society he outlines in *The Open Society* (2013, 82). In addition to this, however, Minimize Suffering is unique as it does not only function as part of Popper's justification for the open humanitarian society that protects the equality, individualism, and freedom of individuals. It is quite clear how No Tyranny and Tolerance uphold the equality, individualism, and the freedom of individuals – these are essentially the same principles endorsed by Kant in the second section of *Theory and Practice*, that follow from his account of autonomy (2011, 74). After all, intolerance and the placement of one person in absolute power over others respectively manifest inequality and disrespect for freedom and the difference between people. Minimize Suffering is different, though, and it is different for two reasons. First, Popper defends the principle not *only* by reference to equality, individualism and freedom that characterize his other humanitarian principles, but also on the independent grounds that there is a further "moral urgency" to minimize suffering that is due to the asymmetry between avoiding bad and bringing about good outcomes. Secondly, and relatedly, the principle is not justified on the second-order grounds that a society with minimized suffering is the most open society and best placed epistemologically to yield further insights into moral and political philosophy. Instead, the justification for Minimize Suffering reaches bedrock quickly: suffering is bad and we have an obligation to help those who suffer, therefore Minimize Suffering.

In light of these considerations, it is appropriate to consider Minimize Suffering as an independent component of Popper's political philosophy. This dystopophobic

commitment is a distinct and concurrent political concern that runs parallel to Popper's humanitarianism. To make this case the remainder of this section first (briefly) outlines in more detail the connection between Minimize Suffering and Popper's humanitarianism, and asserts that Minimize Suffering should replace Popper's fifth quality of the just society listed in *The Open Society* (2013, 82). Then, the text goes on to show how Minimize Suffering fits into the broader framework of Popper's thinking, including: his beliefs about the moral urgency of avoiding suffering; the asymmetry between good and bad; Popper's preoccupation with the likelihood of unintended consequences in the political realm; its compatibility with Popper's anti-utopianism; and his support for an ethos of reasonableness.

Minimize Suffering and Equality, Individualism & Freedom

Minimize Suffering shares a justification with the other two ethical principles Popper puts forward that is based in the (Kantian-informed) humanitarian values of equality, individualism, and freedom. Taking these in order: Minimize Suffering is egalitarian as each and every person is capable of suffering and the suffering of each is to count equally. Secondly, the principle is individualistic as no individual is to be sacrificed to the ends of achieving a utopia for others, or for future generations (which would implicitly value their lives less than the well-being of the other beneficiaries of the public policy). Groups are not to be sacrificed to the pursuit of some utopian ideal on the Minimize Suffering principle, and so, to this extent, the principle is individualistic. What matters is individual suffering, irrespective of power or status in society. Finally, the principle is compatible with freedom by minimizing the chances of benevolent or malevolent dictatorship

occurring. The mandate to increase happiness, "seems apt to produce benevolent dictatorship" (2013, 548-9) as powerful individuals have a ready made justification to arrogate power to themselves in the need to maximize happiness. Presumably recreating society in order to maximize happiness requires great imagination and political power to realize, and so a benevolent dictator with the skill and ability to realize this ideal maximally good society follows (see also 1948b, 465).

So, minimize suffering is a humanistic principle, and it better captures the oeuvre of Popper's writings on humanism and the sound functioning of society than a principle like substantive equality between citizens. It would therefore be in-keeping with Popper's mature moral thinking to replace the fifth principle of a just society, so that rather than equality, the just society works iteratively to reduce and ultimately eliminate suffering (2013, 86, 148). Minimize suffering is a better humanistic principle than "achieve equality" as it captures the view of humanitarianism that Popper later said he was trying to present in *The Open Society*. As he puts the point in a manuscript sent to the journal *Mind* in 1947, "I argue [in *The Open Society*] that the policy of those whom I call 'humanitarians' is to try to eliminate avoidable suffering, by such piecemeal means as hospitals, social insurance, etc." (1947, 158). Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that the principles of a just humanitarian society would include the elimination of avoidable suffering. However, more than just expressing Popper's views on justice and humanitarianism, Minimize Suffering is also justified and explained in terms that cohere with a distinct dystopophobic or aversional *moral and political scheme*.

Asymmetry

The most significant of these dystopophobic moral considerations is the belief that happiness and suffering are asymmetrical. Popper says that, "from the moral point of view suffering and happiness must not be treated as symmetrical" (2013, 549), and, "that there is, from the ethical point of view, no symmetry between suffering and happiness (2013, 602).[81] On a crude aggregative view of utilitarianism one can determine the morality of an action by adding up the total pleasures an action would produce and then subtracting from that number the total amount of suffering caused. If the final number is positive, then the action is minimally morally sound. This ethical framework implicitly accepts that there is a "continuous pleasure pain scale which allows us to treat pain as negative degrees of pleasure" (2013, 602). Popper rejects this framework, claiming "pain cannot be outweighed by pleasure, and especially not one man's pain by another man's pleasure" (2013, 602).

For the dystopophobic political actor there are several political and public policy implications to the fact of asymmetry that gives a sense of what a dystopophobic political program might look like. Firstly, pleasure and pain produce different political obligations. Consequently, an aggregative utilitarian public policy framework is impermissible as it may permit the harm of some in order to achieve greater happiness for others. This reinforces the humanistic ethics that Popper propounds and in particular the individualist requirement that each person ought to be treated as an individual, not as part of some larger group or as a part of a larger whole who can be sacrificed for those ends. Accordingly, the fact of asymmetry places some limits on what government can do.

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[81] Also: "every generation of men, and therefore also the living, have a claim; perhaps not so much a claim to be made happy, for there are no institutional means of making a man happy, but a claim not to be made unhappy, where it can be avoided" (2013, 148).

In addition to *prohibiting* some actions, the asymmetry favors other public policy intervention as, to the extent that the political program is dystopophobic and concerned with minimizing suffering, a dystopophobic politician ought not to focus on making happier the constituents who are already doing well. This is because there is, Popper says, no exigent public obligation to bring about the greater happiness of citizens: "Positive values [like happiness] are private values. The fight against evil is a public affair" (1946, 121). Nor should she focus on doing things that make the miserable and long-suffering any happier, as no source of happiness that can compensate for suffering (and, in any case, such a program of increasing happiness may lead to benevolent dictatorship). Instead, she should identify those things that cause her constituents to suffer and work to remedy those sufferings through things like social insurance and hospitals. The increase in happiness of citizens should be left, in the main, to their private endeavors, which, one imagines is likely to be more successful if those citizens are liberated from the suffering of things like disease or incapacitating poverty.

One upside of focusing on suffering for the dystopophobic politician is that pleasure and pain differ in their salience as pleasures are "less definite and less concrete than evils" (1946, 119). "Evils," he says elsewhere, "are with us here and now. They can be experienced and are being experienced every day by many people who have been and are being made miserable by poverty, unemployment, national oppression, war and disease. Those of us who do not suffer from these miseries meet every day others who can describe them to us. This is what makes the evils concrete. This is why we can get somewhere in arguing about them" (1948, 486). Sufferers can tell us in person "where the shoe pinches" (1949, 178), whereas we only have a vague understanding of ideal goods "from our dreams

and from the dreams of poets and prophets" (1948, 486). "There is," Bryan Magee notes, "a logical asymmetry here: we do not know how to make people happy, but we do know ways of lessening their unhappiness" (1973, 82). This epistemological asymmetry – I am not sure it is exactly a logical asymmetry, as Magee claims – between pleasures and pains raises the likelihood of reasonable agreement about the most acute pains and suffering in society.

Moral Urgency & Moral Demands

Expanding on the account of political obligations above, a focus on solving the problem of suffering comes from the fact that suffering produces moral demands of greater urgency than raising well-being. Popper says that "suffering makes a *direct moral appeal*, namely the appeal to help, while there is no similar call to increase the happiness of a man who is doing well anyway" (2013, 602). What is important here is the *directness* of the moral appeal. So, for example, the person who breaks his leg engenders a duty "of everybody who happens to be on the spot" to help (1946, 121; see also 1948b, 465; 1973, 293). Here is a connection between the sufferer and those who are able to help because they are in close proximity. Of course, in vast modern societies the obligation to help does not merely fall on family or those who are close by as the government is also readily able to help in many cases like poverty or illness through established interventions including subsidized healthcare or elderly pensions. And, if the government is not well-placed to help those who suffer now, then through political choices and through the reallocation of resources, it is possible in our technologically advanced time to position the government so that it is able to help. Whether or not we choose to spend our resources in this way is a collective decision

made by citizens, and in this insight it is possible to begin to bridge the Kantian and negative utilitarian themes in Popper's ethical thinking. The collective decision to deploy or not deploy resources to help the neediest is one for which we can be held morally responsible as autonomous agents cooperating with others. A failure to make a good faith effort to achieve these good dystopophobic ends on the individual level is a moral failure on the Kantian ground of failing to live up to the moral scheme that we (ought to) prescribe for ourselves.

The difference in urgency between well-being and suffering suggests that although individuals can come together politically to advance their *interests*, none are obligated to do so. Citizens may ask one another for help in pursuit of their ends, but to help would be supererogatory. By contrast, in the most acute and immediate cases we each have an obligation to help those who are suffering. At the political level, we must collectively empower the government to help those in a miserable condition through public assistance programs. This strikes a balance between the liberal concern with freedom and the dystopophobic emphasis upon avoiding the bad.

Interestingly, one can construct from this the rudiments of a *political* vision, and not just a moral vision. The insistence that suffering engenders positive moral demands of assistance is a minimal political or ideological platform that can serve as a point of agreement for all citizens. Of course, this is not to say that consent for this political vision will be unanimous, nor that those who agree with the claims about moral demands will interpret them uniformly or reach consensus over who is most deserving of help. That being said, the notion that those who suffer place demands of help upon others in society can form a central plank in a political narrative about who we are as a dystopophobic people,

to wit, a people who respect freedom and the pursuit of happiness in private whilst also asserting a prioritarian commitment to help those in the community with the greatest need.

<u>Optimism About Progress and Change</u>

Lying behind the political and public emphasis upon minimizing suffering rather than bringing about what is good is a particularly modern belief in the inevitability of progress. After all, the dictate to leave the pursuit of the good to private endeavor would be far less attractive if it were espoused in a medieval society with rigid social status and low productivity gains. In this case just about any amount of individual endeavor will fail to manifest change in one's circumstances. Instead, Popper is writing to a modern audience on the cusp of the Trente Glorieuses, where social status was eroding and growth in the economy produced remarkable material abundance.

This is not to say that progress comes easily. Indeed, in describing the "history of our time," Popper asserts that "it is much easier for us to regress than progress" (1956b, 490). But even here, Popper ascribes social regress and lack of progress to political failures and in particular 1) the "misguided moral enthusiasm" of utopians who are overly anxious to better the world we live in, and, 2) the decisions of incompetent rulers. It is the large-scale revolutionary activity of groups like the Communists that are to blame for great misery and regress so, if instead of top-down social planning people were empowered to better their own lives privately in coordination with others, then we should expect real progress and better life outcomes. The upshot of this is that although a dystopophobic political perspective has a rather dire preoccupation with all that is bad and awful in the world that therefore lacks the uplifting idealism of utopianism, this does not mean that

dystopophobia is pessimistic – quite the contrary. Instead, there is in Popper's dystopophobia a fundamental belief in the inevitability of progress – in both economic and social well-being, and progress in the moral and political ideas that justify and articulate these good outcomes – if people are freed from the depravity of social and economic forces including poverty and political forces like oppression.

In addition to these positive tenets of Popper's dystopophobic principle of Minimize Suffering – about the asymmetry between good and bad, the moral urgency to alleviate suffering, and optimism about progress if people are left free to order their own lives – the principle is also dystopophobic because of the things it rejects. In particular, he is staunchly anti-utopian, preoccupied with the problem of unintended consequences, and resolute in his rejection of violence.

Anti-Utopianism

Popper's aversion to utopianism follows several different lines of argument, each of which lends credibility to dystopophobia as a sound alternative to utopian thinking. Utopianism, he says, follows a flawed logic of naïve rationalism according to which, "Any rational action must have a certain aim. It is rational in the same degree as it pursues its aim consciously and consistently… To choose this end is therefore the first thing we have to do if we wish to act rationally" (2013, 147). "Rational political action," he says elsewhere, "must be based upon a more or less clear and detailed description or blueprint of our ideal state, and also upon a plan or blueprint of the historical path that leads towards this goal" (1948, 482; see also 1940, 55). This logic is flawed as even without a comprehensive blueprint of the ideal society, it is still possible to make determinations of better or worse

– especially worse, Popper would note – and therefore make constructive changes to society.[82] Because the logic of utopianism is flawed, an idealized "blueprint" approach is not necessary for rational social change, and so Popper can coherently endorse an incremental approach to improving society as an alternative (2002b, 58-70; 2013, 21-4). This alternative, he says, avoids several further problems with utopianism.

As already mentioned, utopian thinking is liable to dictatorial outcomes as a single person becomes invested with the power necessary to realize the ambitious programs of social reform (2013, 149). In pursuit of this end, dictators are likely to crack down on dissent and disagreement as contestation of the blueprint for society slows down or diverts progress from realization of that blueprint (2013, 150). This need to crack down on dissent is made all the more necessary because disagreement over what the ideal society should look like "cannot always be smoothed out by the method of argument" (1948, 483) – after all, what definitive proof or evidence can be brought in defense of a moral ideal? In light of this, disagreements about the ends of society risk taking on a "character of religious differences" that animate competing groups in society who cannot tolerate one another as dissent detracts from the realization of the blueprint under discussion (1948, 483).

In something of an extension of this insight, Popper sees a quality of "uncompromising radicalism" (2013, 150) in utopianism that stems from the attempt to correct the evil at the core that produced the undesirable society to be remade. For Plato it was the corruption of the Solonic ideal society that had to be corrected; for Marx the capitalist system of production. In both cases, the solution is to "clean the canvas" (1949,

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[82] This criticism of utopianism presages Amartya Sen's criticisms of what he calls the Transcendental Institutionalism in the theories of justice given by Rawls and other ideal theorists (2009).

176), and remake society from the base up, which has two effects. The first is to ignore those in immediate need: in the zeal to wipe the slate clean, reformers and revolutionaries deflect their attention from those in immediate need in order that the new world of tomorrow will correct their suffering. Secondly, this radical reformation of society risks sacrificing the current generation (even those who are free from suffering) in order that utopia can be realized for future generations. Because the human capacity to imagine utopia exceeds our ability to realize it, the failure of leaders to manifest utopia often ends in recriminations against those perceived as holding back the revolutionary effort (think, for example, of the Jacobins), and, because the ideal blueprint of society is presumed to be correct, leaders expend even greater amounts of human time, talent, and, indeed, human life in order to bring that ideal closer to reality. An iterative program of Minimize Suffering avoids these utopian mistakes.

Unintended Consequences

In addition to the above, utopians and other thinkers are guilty of a misapprehension about the nature of society that Popper's dystopophobia emphatically rejects. In her belief that an ideal society can be realized, the utopian places too much confidence in her ability to shape society by wiping the slate clean. Part of this excessive confidence comes from a belief that society is something that is amenable to shaping by powerful political actors. The misapprehension here stems from the fact that society is, in fact, not something that can be easily changed as it is 1) an entity that emerges through unguided bottom-up processes, often by the actions of individuals acting for local reasons, and, 2) even if an individual had the power to make significant changes that counteract these bottom-up

processes, rarely do people effect the change they want without producing unintended consequences that militate against the desired end, or cause further problems that need to be addressed.

Popper explores this idea of unintended consequences in detail through the example of conspiracy theorists. Conspiracy thinking, he says, is the view that "whatever happens in society – including things which people as a rule dislike, such as war, unemployment, poverty, shortages – are the results of direct design by some powerful individuals or groups" (1948b, 459). In its earliest benign iterations conspiracy thinking took the form of explaining the world through Homeric appeal to the will of the Gods that directed individuals and societies below them. In its modern times evil political movements like the Nazis used conspiracy thinking to demonize subaltern groups and to push a program of radical social reform (1949, 165-6). Of course, some people do plan and scheme for their own ends, and some of those people will be quite successful in gaining power and influence necessary to execute their plans. Even so, Popper maintains that society is so contingent and indomitable that it is incredible to think that any plan will succeed entirely as intended or with much potency.

Indeed, Popper goes further than this by calling the very idea of a "social system" a misnomer. "If we wish to speak more clearly," he says, "we can speak instead of the social system, of the unintended consequences or repercussions of human actions" (1973, 290). Each action by individuals and governments have consequences. Some of these consequences will be local and immediate. For example, a city's housing policy that limits rental price increases will have the effect of giving financial relief to existing tenants. The effects do not stop there, however. This policy may also lead to undesirable further

outcomes, including a less dynamic citizenry unwilling to move in order to save their current below market rent. Or, the diminished profitability of rental units, which may constrain housing supply as builders choose to invest in other cities, thereby preventing new residents from moving in and growing the city's economy. The point to take from this example is to say that those who see in high house prices the coordinated actions of money-grubbing elites to squeeze tenants for all they're worth fail to appreciate the diffuse and complicated network of cause and effect that produces unintended consequences in society, including house prices. So, too, do idealist utopians fail to understand that their actions will have analogous unintended consequences that will likely undermine and complicate their aims and actions.

Identification of the fact of unintended consequences produces a second layer to Popper's dystopophobia, which in turn lends greater credibility to his incremental dystopophobic program. As Popper says in the preface to the Italian translation of *The Poverty of Historicism*, "It is hubris if we try to make heaven on earth, and we only succeed in turning it into a hell… but we should not give up attempts to make the world better than it is, even though we should approach this task with humility: we must be satisfied with the task of fighting misery, injustice, oppression and corruption" (1975, 310-1). These remarks capture the familiar dystopophobic concern to solve evils, but, as he goes on to say, in this process of fighting injustice, "we should never forget that there will be unintended, unforeseen and perhaps even unforeseeable consequences of our actions… Clearly it is not enough that our intentions are good: we must constantly watch, in a spirit of self-criticism, their more remote consequences in order to correct in time what we are doing" (1975, 311). In making these further claims Popper enriches his theory of

dystopophobia applying a concern with unintended consequences to a program of dystopophobic change itself (these ideas also appear in his "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition," 1949, 161-182*).* We should concern ourselves with the possibility of bad outcomes at two levels: those that we see around us in the world; and, those that are produced in the attempt to change this world to correct the first kind of bad outcomes.

Anti-Violence and the Ethos of Reasonableness

Popper's dystopophobic thinking contains a final and somewhat contentious component in his defense of and commitment to an ethos of reasonableness in society. Popper comes to advocate for an ethos of reasonableness because of his aversion to violence in politics. At several points Popper emphatically repudiates violence as a legitimate tool to achieve an aim in politics (1947, 159; 1973, 289; 1981, 325). When people disagree there are, "in the main, only two possible ways that disagreement can be resolved: argument (including arguments submitted to arbitration…) and violence. Or, if it is interests that clash, the two alternatives are a reasonable compromise or an attempt to destroy the opposing interest" (1948, 478). If violence is the only alternative when disagreements occur, then as violence is unacceptable, some way must be devised to make disagreement palatable to all parties.

Recall that the problem of disagreement was central to Hobbes political thought and his dystopophobic temperament. Indeed, the preceding quote shares a remarkable similarity with Hobbes' account of the problem of disagreement where he says "when there is a controversie in an account, the parties must… [defer to a] Judge whose sentence they will both stand, or their controversie must either come to blows or be undecided" (1985, 111). The problem as Hobbes conceived it was that a plurality of beliefs and ideals will

eventually lead to disagreement and then violence. Hobbes' response to this dynamic was to elevate the role of violence by arrogating to a sovereign the ultimate authority to use even deadly force to implement its rulings and to crush disagreement. As Allison McQueen contends, Hobbes sees this violent conflict as an opportunity to *redirect* readers in a way that bolsters the credibility of his argument for the sovereign: "[Hobbes offers] a captivating vision of a secular apocalypse in which the terror of the state of nature is the narrative prelude to an enduring commonwealth. Hobbes redirects the stunning visual and rhetorical resources of apocalypticism to secure belief in and obedience to the Leviathan state" (2018, 133). In Hobbes's argument, then, disagreement is so apocalyptic that it warrants absolute deference to a final judge of affairs in the form of the Leviathan. Interestingly, a similar argument structure emerges in Popper's writing. To use McQueen's words, the dystopia of the tribalist and monist closed society operates as a "narrative prelude" that justifies pluralism in thought and freedom in action as the superior alternative. In such pluralist societies disagreements will occur, so it is necessary to establish a way to resolve them. Rather than a particular individual or political office, though, Popper invokes the qualities of scientific inquiry as a judge whose sentence all parties will stand if the alternative is violence and repression. Popper advocates for an "attitude of reasonableness [as] the only alternative to violence" (1948, 478). This attitude of reasonableness, he says,

> "…may be best characterized by a remark like this: 'I think I am right, but I may be wrong and you may be right, and in any case let us discuss it, for in this way we are likely to get nearer to a true understanding than If we merely insist that we are right.'" (1948, 479).

A reasonable person possesses the intellectual humility that comes from an accurate reckoning with the fact that, like all humans, "I may be wrong." Moreover, a reasonable person "would rather be unsuccessful in convincing another man by argument than

successful in crushing him by force, by intimidation and threats, or even by persuasive propaganda" (1948, 478). Violent irrationalism can only be overcome, he says, by implanting in people "the attitude of reasonableness [as] the only alternative to violence" (1948, 478). In order to preserve and foster the pluralism that is produced by the move from a closed to open society Popper endorses an ethos of reasonableness in society instead of an arbitrary Leviathan power. But in spite of this difference, dystopia plays an analogous role in Hobbes and Popper by redirecting fears of disagreement and violent repression to justify a particular rationalist social and political scheme.

While there is coherence to Popper's account of reasonableness, several questions arise about its viability and compatibility with the rest of his thinking. Firstly, although it is true that some people have proven to live and act reasonably in the ways Popper describes, it is not clear that reasonableness is a viable political ideal. As a philosopher of science marveling at the remarkable success of the practitioners in the field to exhibit an attitude of reasonableness and make her case by argument rather than force, he has reason to be optimistic. Reasonableness is clearly, then, not contrary to human nature, even if it is likely to exceed the capabilities of at least some of the people some of the time. But, it would require considerable effort and resources to elicit such a change in the population at large. Secondly, and as an extension of the first point, to implant an ethos to reasonableness in society would be a thoroughgoing change akin to revolutionary wiping the slate clean or instituting a sovereign as in Hobbes' philosophy. Popper even says at one point that history could have been different, and instead of Marxism, a rational, reasonable open society may have emerged after the mid-1850s. But this development could only have occurred, he says, "as the result of a religious movement – the result of the faith in

humanitarianism, combined with a critical use of our reason for the purpose of changing the world" (2013, 402). Even if it were ideal for individuals in society to become more reasonable and thereby less violent, to implement it across society with this kind of religious zeal would require a profound shift actions and beliefs of millions of citizens, and one must reckon with the unintended consequences of this radical change with far more rigor than Popper gives it.

Overall, Minimize Suffering is an independent principle to the extent that it is justified and made plausible by beliefs about the asymmetry between good and bad, the moral urgency to alleviate suffering, and optimism about progress if people are left free to order their own lives. On the other side the principle is dystopophobic because it is anti-utopian, preoccupied with the problem of unintended consequences, and resolute in his rejection of violence. The principle is connected to Popper's humanitarian beliefs and his epistemological beliefs. However, it is also a freestanding principle that can be analyzed and employed separately to Popper's other philosophical and political commitments.

V. The Form and Function of Popper's Dystopia

As this chapter has argued for the importance distinguishing Popper's dystopophobic views into the social and individual levels, it is worth disaggregating the two when articulating the respective form and function of Popper's dystopias. At the social level Popper describes *The Open Society* as part of his war effort and in the book he does engage with some empirical and descriptive accounts of collectivist and closed societies, including the role of Russia in boldly adopting Marx's ideas and the inspiration this has given people in other European societies (2013, 294). The Nazis are not discussed in the text, but Popper does

give some sketchy account of real life in the tribal societies of the Greek Mediterranean in the period before the Periclean age in Athens. So, although there are descriptive elements, Popper's is not exactly a descriptive dystopia. Instead, Popper gives most prominently a *theoretical form to dystopia* that abstracts from specific cases to provide a theory of how societies have been and can be organized on historicist grounds that often immiserate the people. He explains why some individuals find themselves attracted to these historicist doctrines, how these doctrines misunderstand the nature of the polity as an imperfectly controllable entity, and why, therefore, any attempt to impose a comprehensive vision of social order will inevitably lead to violent repression. Accordingly, Popper's dystopia at the social level is part of a war effort by creating a theory of dystopian functioning that threatens to expand into relatively open societies either through war in Europe or the adoption of Marxist and collectivist ideas in these open societies. His dystopia therefore also has a *projective form* that derives its exigency and importance for public discourse from the possibility that the dystopia of the closed society could envelop the world.

The most important function of this dystopia is *educative*. Popper explains how prominent philosophers and political thinkers have come to adopt their closed theories of society in order to inoculate the reader to these arguments and sympathies. He shows what risks being lost in the shift to a closed society, including plural development of different ways of living, individual autonomy, and the realization of fully human capabilities to exercise reason in public deliberation. And Popper explains why qualities of political life, including the inevitability of unintended consequences will frustrate any closed political program at the cost of human life and wellbeing. In addition to the educative, there is a prominent *analytical function* to Popper's dystopia as the rise of the closed society justifies

the status quo in Britain and other countries as examples of open liberal societies that defend freedom and equality. This engenders the concern that Popper can be uncritically conservative in his fawning praise of extant liberal democracies. Moreover, there is a strong aversional quality to Popper's dystopia as the Russian communist model and the collectivism that looks set to be increasingly practiced in Europe is something to be avoided in an open society.

Turning to the level of the individual, the *descriptive qualities of dystopia* become far more prominent. Although Popper often talks in general terms rather than specific anecdotes, he returns again and again to the suffering of people in society from poverty, disease, unemployment, and more. Popper expects his readers to recognize examples of precisely these social evils either in their own past, or in the lives of their family, friends, or even strangers encountered in the street or reported on in the newspaper. This suffering is near, concrete, and animating because of this real quality to it – which is to say that this suffering is emphatically not of a hypothetical form. Additionally, Popper offers a theory of this suffering as a public concern that the state ought to take an active role in remediating due to the obligation to help that suffering produces. This extends into his theory of the open society and defense of negative utilitarianism as a primary policy goal of open societies.

There is an appreciable *rhetorical role* to Popper's remarks on individual suffering. He clearly knows his audience consists of liberals and especially those with humanist sympathies, which is why he pitches his account of the just society as one attractive to those whose outlook is humanitarian. Rather than merely rhetorical, though, Popper writes with an evident conviction that he will be most successful in winning support for his views

through a thorough process of *education* about the distribution of evils in society as falling especially upon the weak and vulnerable, which, in turn, raises the consciousness of the reader. In so doing, Popper elevates the role of victims in political discourse as sources of data who can tell "where the shoe pinches." This process of education and the elevation of victims leaves Popper far more *critical* of liberal societies at the individual than at the social level. It is true that he still endorses liberal-democratic institutions like a free and open press, tolerance, and the rule of law. But liberal societies cannot be dismissively smug in their virtue when one considers their record on alleviating suffering. As part of this criticism, an account of negative utilitarianism is endorsed as an ideal to be adopted prominently as part of public policy that promises far more progressive change and improvement in society than his fairly conservative justification of liberal societies portends in his discussion of dystopophobia at the level of society.

VI. Resurrecting Popper's Negative Utilitarianism

Minimize Suffering plays an important role in Popper's philosophy – and especially in a dystopophobic scheme of thinking on the individual level. In light of this prominence, the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to rescuing Popper's negative utilitarianism and the principle Minimize Suffering from its most influential criticism: R.N. Smart's world exploder refutation (1958). The incredible influence of this paper as the most powerful and enduring reason to dismiss negative utilitarianism cannot be overstated. Consequently, disproving this argument then frees up the principle to be adopted in a dystopophobic aversional theory.

The World-Exploding Critique

As we have seen, in *The Open Society and its Enemies* Karl Popper puts forward Minimize Suffering as an inverted utilitarian principle that ought to function as one of the fundamental principles of public policy (2013, 548). Recall the principle of Minimize Suffering:

> **Minimize Suffering**: "The recognition that all moral urgency has its basis in the urgency of suffering or pain. I suggest, for this reason, to replace the utilitarian formula… 'Maximize happiness', by the formula 'The least amount of suffering for all', or briefly, 'Minimize suffering'. (2013, 548) As he says later, "demand the elimination of suffering rather than the promotion of happiness" (2013, 603). And, in an addendum, "the reduction of avoidable misery belongs to the agenda of public policy… while the maximization of one's happiness should be left to one's private endeavour" (2013, 501).

Although the idea of minimizing suffering has *prima fascia* plausibility, "negative utilitarianism" – as this principle would come to be known – has been dismissed as a sound utilitarian principle due to an early and influential two-page refutation of the theory by R. N. Smart (1958), in which Smart concludes that negative utilitarianism is compatible with destruction of the earth; after all, suffering would be minimized if there were no one who existed that could suffer. In this paper Smart begins by highlighting Popper's claim that we should aspire to the "least amount of suffering for all" and that "we should demand the elimination of suffering" (Popper quoted in Smart, 1958, 542), and it is this term "elimination" that is particularly damning. It is so because elimination of all suffering seems to be perfectly compatible with the elimination of all human beings. To see this, imagine a "benevolent world-exploder" (Smart 1958, 543). This ruler,

> "…controls a weapon capable of instantly and painlessly destroying the human race. Now it is empirically certain that there would be some suffering before all those alive on any proposed destruction day were to die in the natural course of events. Consequently the use of the weapon is bound to diminish suffering, and would be the ruler's duty on NU [negative utilitarian] grounds." (1958, 542)

As any sensible person would "assuredly regard such an action as wicked," then negative utilitarianism must be false by reason of *reductio ad absurdum* (1958, 542). Perhaps because of its vivid imagery and succinctness, this critique has remained the prominent critique of negative utilitarianism for decades. Some twenty years after R. N. Smart's paper, his brother, J. J. C. Smart, relegates negative utilitarianism to a "subordinate rule of thumb" that utilitarians can use in order to bring about the greatest happiness. He asserts that "in most cases we can do most for our fellow men by trying to remove their miseries," which, although he does not elaborate, is likely because of the diminishing returns to increasing happiness (Smart, J. J. C. 2008, 30). More recently, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong at the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry for Consequentialism raises and dismisses negative utilitarianism by reference only to Smart's original world-exploder critique, suggesting that this is sufficient for the introductory reader to adequately appreciate the limitations of the principle (2019). As Roger Chao recently described the situation, the world-exploder argument "is generally used as a knockdown argument to discredit negative utilitarianism…. [and] as a result of this, very little work has been done to show how other forms of negative utilitarianism are not defeated by this argument" (Chao 2012, 57).

In an addendum to *The Open Society* added in 1961 Popper himself concedes that the principle negative utilitarian principle is unsound because it leads to the absurdity Smart outlines above. He says, "I quite agree with those critics of mine who have shown that if used as a *criterion*, the minimum misery principle would have absurd consequences; and I expect the same may be said of any other moral criterion." (2013, 501). In making this claim Popper disputes the role of his principle as the "*criterion of absolute rightness*" to be

used in ethical and political thinking (2013, 501). This is due in large part to his skepticism of the very idea that there could be such a thing as a perfect criterion of ethics to be applied uniformly to all ethical and political problems; any principle applied in such a way would produce absurd outcomes. Instead, he reasserts, the principle should be "[on] the agenda of public policy" as a part of which the principle can help to focus political resources in a moral and efficacious way by helping those in most need.

One can appreciate why Popper makes this retreat, but it is to concede more than he needs to because with some minor amendments to his negative utilitarianism his principle can be rehabilitated and avoid the absurdity that Smart raises. Firstly, by shifting negative utilitarianism from an impersonal to a person-affecting ethical framework, the world-exploding critique loses purchase as people can credibly respond that their own destruction is not good *for them*. Secondly, by rewording the principle from "eliminate suffering" to "remedy suffering" the choice to destroy the world becomes as coherent as curing a splinter in one's finger by holding on to a firecracker. Importantly, both of these changes are compatible with Popper's remarks and articulation of negative utilitarianism in his writings beyond just *The Open Society*. Accordingly, it is not even the case that *other forms* of negative utilitarianism are immune to the world-exploding argument as Chao puts it. Instead, *Popper's own resurrected argument is immune* to Smart's critique.

Person-affecting & Impersonal Utilitarian Theory

Moral philosophy in the years since Smart's critique has advanced by drawing a distinction between two ways of thinking about goodness and badness. On the *impersonal view*, an outcome is good (or better) in utilitarian theory if it increases utility, irrespective of who,

in particular, is the beneficiary of that utility. So, on the classical aggregationist account of utilitarianism, to determine whether an act or policy is good (or better), one ought to add up the total well being within a population and compare that total value with the expected total value of utility after the proposed act or policy. If the latter number is higher, then the action is good (or better than doing nothing), and in this way, the impersonal aggregationist view corresponds with the utilitarian maxim to maximize utility.

By contrast, on *person-affecting views*, an act or policy is not considered good or bad because of its effect upon total utility *simpliciter*, but instead because the changes in utility affect *particular people*. So, for example, a Pareto-optimal act that raises the utility of each person without reducing the utility of anyone is a good act (or better act than doing nothing) as each particular person is now at a higher level of utility. Compare this with an act or policy that doubled the utility of half the population but halved the utility of the remaining half. The impersonal aggregationist utilitarian has a clear position on this act: it is good (or better than nothing) as it raises total utility 25% higher than the baseline. However, this case is not nearly so clear-cut on the person-affecting view of goodness and badness. From the perspective of half the population the act is a good one as it dramatically raises their wellbeing. But for the other half, life is considerably worse. In response to this, a utilitarian thinker adopting a person-affecting view of the goodness of outcomes might conclude that there is some virtue to this act as it raises total utility by 25% by raising the well-being of half the population. Even so, they might nonetheless favor a different course of action that, say, raises total utility by only 20%, but does this without lowering the utility of anyone. In this second case, the top 50% from the first example benefit less than they do initially, and the overall level of utility is lower. In spite of this, the second option might

reasonably be defended not just because it produces greater happiness than the baseline, but because it produces the greatest happiness *of the greatest number*.

Smart's example of a benevolent world-exploder treats suffering in impersonal terms. On his example, there are two possible scenarios:

1) The world exists as it currently does: there are lots of people in it, and there is lots of suffering (along, presumably, with a lot of happiness as well).
2) The world is exploded: there are no people in it and there is no suffering in it (along, certainly, with no happiness either).

In Popper's words, "we demand the elimination of suffering" (Smart 1958, 542; Popper 2013, 603), and so, Smart compares the two possible scenarios to identify the one with the least suffering. As the second scenario has fulfilled the negative utilitarian goal of eliminating suffering – whereas the first contains more than zero suffering – bringing about the second scenario by exploding the world is the right thing to do. As this is absurd, negative utilitarianism should be rejected. The flaw with this argument is that Popper does not hold the *impartial view* about goodness and badness; he supports the *person-affecting view*. Accordingly, when he describes and defends his principle of negative utilitarianism, he does so not to eliminate total suffering because eliminating the total suffering is good in and of itself (or *sub specie aeternitatis*, or from the "moral point of view," 2013, 548). Instead, in accordance with the person-affecting view, he is concerned to eliminate suffering because this removes the suffering of *particular* people who are afflicted by that suffering. Popper's person-affecting view of goodness and badness appears when we consider his defense of negative utilitarianism on the grounds of urgency and moral demands, and in his separate objections to utopian planning.

Popper's Person-Affecting Negative Utilitarianism

From the off Popper asserts that his negative utilitarian principle is required by moral urgency. As he says, "The recognition that all moral urgency has its basis in the urgency of suffering or pain. I suggest, for this reason, to replace the utilitarian formula… 'Maximize happiness', by the formula 'The least amount of suffering for all', or briefly, 'Minimize suffering'" (2013, 548). Here he does not say that we ought to have the least amount of suffering *tout court*. Instead, it is the least amount of suffering *for all* that is his focus, which reflects his concern with the condition of *people* rather than the disembodied total of suffering in the world. Moreover, it is the urgency of suffering that causes the need to switch from positive to negative utilitarianism, and, as he expands on the following page, "the promotion of happiness is… much less urgent than the rendering of help to those who suffer" (2013, 549). This urgency prompts the rendering of help *to those who suffer*, not just, the end of suffering without reference to the people affected by it. In both these cases, it is not that suffering is bad, and therefore ought to end, but instead that people who suffer have an urgent need for help, which is why we ought to help these people by eliminating their (particular) suffering, and then, by extension, reducing (and ideally eliminating) total suffering. Following directly from these considerations of urgency Popper asserts that suffering is distinct from happiness as the former "makes a direct moral appeal, namely, the appeal for help, while there is no similar call to increase the happiness of a man who is doing well" (2013, 602). What is important here is the claim that in the case of suffering, one has an obligation to help due to the appeal for help that comes from particular people who need assistance. The obligation to help does not come from the fact that overall utility

will be increased (or overall suffering decreased), but instead from the fact that particular persons need help and one can provide it.

The most decisive evidence in favor of Popper's subscription to the person-affecting view of badness is found in a 1947 paper on the topic of *Utopia and Violence*. There he asserts plainly that, "Our fellow men have a claim to our help; no generation must be sacrificed for the sake of future generations, for the sake of an ideal of happiness that may never be realized" (1948, 485). The topic of the paper is utopianism and its limits, and so the final qualification that ideals of happiness may never be realized suggests a fairly pragmatic explanation for the refusal to sacrifice people to an ideal, *to wit*, it is possible to break a lot of eggs without making an omelet. That being said, it is the premise of the sentence that occurs before the semi-colon that sets the context for what follows; that what matters is not some ideal that is far away, like Communism or maximized utility, but instead the condition of our "fellow men," and in particular, those "fellow men" that need our help. Accordingly, we ought not to sacrifice them or ourselves in the pursuit of abstract ideals, but instead work to eliminate the discrete sufferings of the persons affected by them *because* these sufferings affect particular people.

The conclusion that Popper holds a person-affecting view of badness has important implications for Smart's argument. Whereas Smart tabulates suffering and chooses the scenario with less, in order to stay true to Popper's theory actions should instead be addressed to individuals instead of scenarios. In order to think through this, one can imagine asking each person in the world, "is bringing about your painless death, which comes with the benefit of eliminating all your suffering as well as preventing any potential future suffering, an attractive option for you?" In response, it seems likely that *some* people

would respond "yes." Those who are in chronic pain with terminal illness might see their lives as not worth living and choose this euthanasia in order to not to prolong their suffering. Most will reject the offer, though, so this is not a *reductio*.

Popper's Negative Utilitarianism (Revised)

Although some would opt for death, the vast preponderance of people would choose to live, even though they can expect some at least some suffering in their life – from toothache to heartbreak. At this point Smart might respond that this proves the limits of negative utilitarianism: if people want to exist in order to experience the good things in life, even if they have to endure some suffering to experience them, then this proves that, at the very least, utility and happiness must count to some degree in the moral calculus (this would be a retreat to a "*Weak* Negative Doctrine," as James Griffin defines it, 1979, 47). There are several non-negative utilitarian principles compatible with this W*eak* Negative Doctrine. For example: increase happiness in a Pareto-optimal way; only cause disutility if this is outweighed for that person by some much larger amount of utility; treat negative utility as a rule of thumb, as J. J. C Smart suggests, but actively maximize happiness where appropriate. Whatever the precise principle, on this critique, one cannot adopt the principle "eliminate suffering" without qualification or supplementation because suffering is not all that matters.

In response to these objections, one can reply that the problem with original principle emerges not from the focus on suffering or axiological beliefs about the greater moral weight given to suffering. The objections instead stem from infelicity in the language used to address suffering: *elimination* of that suffering. To say that suffering should be

eliminated is compatible with world-exploding, as one way to eliminate suffering is to eliminate people. Accordingly, the word elimination should be replaced. H.B. Acton recognizes this problem in his early response to Smart: "…eliminating suffering is not the same thing as reducing it… would not… the destroyer imagined by Smart be making a terrible mistake through failing to notice the difference between eliminating and reducing?" (Acton & Watkins 1963, 84). Although Acton is right to highlight that the dictate to "eliminate" suffering is problematic, his alternative – to reduce suffering – does not solve the problem. Indeed, contrary to Acton's assertion, in the impersonal terms that Smart's argument is framed there is no functional difference between "reduce" and "eliminate" and so the world-exploder would not be making a terrible mistake. Consider the two scenarios again. In the second scenario there are no people and there is no suffering. Compared to the first scenario with people and suffering, the amount of suffering has been reduced, and so world-exploding fulfills the dictates of the proposed principle to reduce suffering. Even if the principle is modified again to make the distinction between reduction and elimination more explicit – reduce without eliminating suffering – this is hardly an improvement as it is compatible with a third scenario in which all but a handful of people are sterilized so the world population (and suffering in the world) drops to a very small number – still a *reductio*.

It is certainly true that Popper uses the term "eliminate" on numerous occasions, including in other works outside *Open Society* (see for example, 1946, 119; 1948, 485).[83]

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[83] It is credible to think that Popper is drawn to the language of "eliminate" and "minimize" because he is consciously inverting the standard utilitarian dictum to maximize utility. Further, in one use of the term he draws a parallel between eliminating suffering and eliminating false theories in the scientific method (2013, 603). In both cases, "eliminate" and "minimize" work best as either an inversion or analogy to another theory, rather than the best expression of Popper's own thinking about negative utilitarianism.

In addition to this he also uses the words "reduce" and "minimize" which also stumble in the same way. However, if one considers a broader range of his writings on this topic then one comes to appreciate that rather than address the issue of suffering through elimination, it is instead more accurate to say that he believes we ought to *correct* or *remedy* this suffering, which is far less clearly compatible with world-exploding. So, for example, at many points Popper talks of suffering and the need to *help*: when discussing the urgency of suffering he says that "the promotion of happiness is in any case much less urgent that the rendering of help to those who suffer" (2013, 549), and on the topic of the duty suffering engenders, he says "human suffering makes a direct moral appeal, namely, the appeal for help…" (2013., 602). In his paper *Ideal and Reality in Society* he describes humankind's most pressing problems as "helping the weak and the sick," along with a list of other palliative and remedial measures including "avoiding unemployment," "equalizing opportunities," and "preventing international crime" (1940, 61). Popper talks of "evils which can be remedied, or relieved" (1956b, 497), and lists nine of these evils including poverty, unemployment, slavery, religious discrimination, and rigid class differences.

Of all the terms that Popper uses to address suffering, however, it is "fight" that he uses most often and consistently: "fight for the elimination of poverty… fight against epidemics and disease… fight illiteracy as you fight criminality…" (1948, 485); that "we must be satisfied with the task of fighting misery, injustice, oppression and corruption"; he talks of the need to "combat the most urgent and real social evils"; "the principle that the fight against avoidable misery should be a recognized aim of public policy," the "method of searching for, and fighting against, the greatest and most urgent evils of society," and the "urgent duty to fight the greatest and most concrete evil" (1975, 311*;* 1948b, 465 &

465; 1940, 55; 1946, 120); and, importantly, of all the terms used, fighting is most awkwardly compatible with the notion of self-annihilation. To explode the world in the fight against suffering is as incoherent as two drunks outside a bar declaring imminent and certain victory in a fight between one another, then simultaneously committing suicide before one punch is thrown. Fighting implies winning or overcoming, whereas (without wanting to impugn those who have served in the military, to whom I am immeasurably grateful) to die in a fight is closer to loss than to victory. So, coming out of these considerations, one might reasonably revise Popper's *Eliminate Suffering* principle to:

> **Remedy Suffering:** Social evils (like poverty, sickness, and pain (1956b, 497), along with possible future suffering) are to be fought against and remedied through concerted public policy.

This reformulation has several attractive qualities. Most importantly it is immune to the world exploding critique put forward by Smart as human extinction is no remedy to suffering.[84] In addition to this, it retains Popper's emphasis upon the moral urgency of helping those who suffer. As Acton summarizes, "those in distress need help more than those who are prospering, so that there must be a greater moral urgency to help the former than the latter" (Watkins and Acton 1963, 93). This insight is important as it motivates later landmark work on the idea of equality (see Nagel's two children thought experiment in the chapter "Equality" in *Mortal Questions* 1979,123-4), which in turn prompts the creation of the ideal of prioritarianism according to which, equality is valuable not as an end in itself,

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[84] In cases where remedy is impossible – for example, people with painful and incurable disease – then one may fall back on to a person-affecting form of Eliminate Suffering. Remedy Suffering would always have lexical priority over Eliminate Suffering, so the latter is only a choice when Remedy is exhausted. This reformulation of *Remedy, Then Eliminate Suffering* can be conceived of as a Wide Negative Utilitarianism, where as *Remedy Suffering* is a Narrow Negative Utilitarianism.

but instead as the effect of fulfilling the moral urgency of helping those in greatest need, which incidentally (often) brings about greater equality (Parfit, 2002). This niggling sense that there is asymmetry between relieving suffering and improving wellbeing – that degrees of pain aren't just "negative degrees of pleasure" (Popper 2013, 602) – has been parsed in some detail by A. D. M. Walker (1974, 424-6) and sits at the heart of contemporary population ethics about moral import of creating life – see especially McMahan on The Asymmetry (2013); Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been* (2008, esp. ch 2); and Bykvist in *The Benefits of Coming Into Existence* (2007). It is therefore to the credit of the revised negative utilitarian principle that it retains this intuition. This means that Remedy Suffering slots into a constellation of philosophical research, which lends a coherentist credibility to the principle.

Popper asserts that negative utilitarianism is a principle of public policy, not individual ethics, or ultimate c*riterion* of right and wrong. Consequently, some of the responses to Popper's negative utilitarianism that go beyond Popper's own theory by treating it as a potential criterion of absolute rightness for all individual ethical decisions and prescriptive of all obligations are not responding to Popper *per se* – see Watkins on his discussion of "my morality" (Acton & Watkins 1963, esp. § II) and Griffin on the obligations of *individuals* to alleviate suffering by acting in trivially difficult ways (1979, 51). There may be value to exploring this possibility, but it is worth noting that Popper is clear in his limitation of the principle as "one of the fundamental (admittedly not the only one) of *public policy*" [emphasis added] (Popper 2013, 548). The restriction of negative utilitarianism to public policy avoids some of the difficult questions of who in each case ought to provide help in each case. It also avoids problem of giving lexical or absolute

priority to negative utilitarianism as other things matter on Popper's view. Remedying suffering ought to rank highly in our list of valuable ends to pursue, but in each case we have to balance the philosophical ends we pursue as best we can within the best traditions, beliefs, and conceptual schemes we have at any one time.

A further benefit of the revised principle is that in practice it is unlikely to be directly self-defeating by producing greater suffering through the unintended consequences of political action to reduce suffering. To see this consider the fact that, of course, it is not just suffering in the moment that matters, but also the suffering of current people in the future, and the suffering of future generations of people. Although Popper sometimes talks of *preventing* the suffering and social evils (2013, 549; 1940, 61), one way to prevent all future suffering (along with all future good) is to explode the world or mandate no procreation, so prevention as the goal must be wrong. Assuming a polity decides to adopt negative utilitarianism as a central principle, there are two ways in which future suffering will occur. The first is through the expected and unforeseen consequences of existing social structures, institutions, norms, culture and such (the "traditions" that create the "order… or something like social structure" of society (Popper 1949, 176) – negative utilitarianism is not an ideology in this way – it is closer to a tool and focus to be employed by social engineers. The other is through the unintended consequences of the actions taken to reduce the suffering of people living within these social traditions.[85] There is reason to think that

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[85] There is the further issue of natural evils of the Rawlsian kind that, "no one deserves his greater natural capacity nor merits a more favorable starting place in society," and that, by extension, no one deserves to be born with limited talents or any number of other congenital infirmities (Rawls 2008, 102). That some people will be born with natural disadvantages is a predictable fact of the human condition, but how we ought to respond to this is not quite so clear in Popper's text. In these works relevant to negative utilitarianism he explicitly focuses on *social* evils like poverty and religious strife. Ill-health is the closest candidate Popper offers of likely natural evil (1956b, 497), but even when he talks of ill health it is in the context of the need for a health system to improve the condition of these people, rather than the intrinsic evil of ill-health itself.

the unintended consequences of negative utilitarianism will be more modest than other approaches to social change. In particular, as Popper notes, "The main troubles of our time… [are mostly due] to our often misguided moral enthusiasm to better the world we live in" according to the dictates of competing political ideologies (1956b 492). In addition to this, social science can help humankind to understand how contemporary traditions function and to better model and anticipate the otherwise unforeseen consequences of actions to fight social evils. As Popper puts the point in the preface to the Italian Poverty of Historicism, "we must constantly watch, in a spirit of self-criticism, [the] more remote consequences [of our actions] in order to correct in time what we are doing…. In the hope of correcting them early, before their unintended consequences have become too big for correction," and it is this spirit of self-criticism that will mitigate and remedy future suffering without leading to world-exploding (1975, 311). Compared then with the open-ended and radically revolutionary utilitarian mandate to increase happiness, remedy suffering is less likely to produce unintended bad outcomes. All of which goes to show that Remedy Suffering is a coherent principle that can be employed in a dystopophobic political theory oriented around avoiding dystopia at the individual level without falling foul of the world-exploding critique.

VII. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Popper's dystopophobia ought to receive central consideration as it has a remarkably prominent role in Popper's political thinking. Firstly, there is the

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As such, even here Popper's focus is on the inadequacies of the polity's institutional traditions, i.e. *social* evils, and so I put the question of predictable natural evils to the side.

titular aversion to closed societies and Popper's defense of tolerant, free, and egalitarian open societies. But, more challenging than this is his negative utilitarian call to Minimize Suffering on an individual level that has considerable progressive implications. Popper defends this principle on free-standing and bedrock moral views that are not founded in his Kantianism (as his philosophy of science and liberalism are). Quite simply, suffering is bad in Popper's thinking and this generates an obligation to help, and for these reasons, this dystopophobia (especially at the individual level) ought to be considered a separate pillar in Popper's thinking. This makes the resurrection of Popper's negative utilitarianism especially important for dystopophobic political schemes.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

I. Introduction

This chapter briefly summarizes the conclusions about the form and function of dystopia in Hobbes, Burke, and Popper, and then, in section III sketches a dystopophobic family resemblance shared between the three. At the core of this resemblance is the identification of an asymmetry between goodness and badness, and a conceptualization of political matters operating at two levels: 1) at level of society and the structures and institutions that organize society and avoid dystopia; and, 2) the level of the individual within society whose life can go better or worse. The following two sections lay out a broad framework of dystopophobia at these two levels, that I have labelled constitutional ideals (section IV) and regulative ideals (section V). This framework serves the end of avoiding dystopian outcomes and is intended to act as a point of departure for further and more rigorous thinking on these matters. The chapter concludes (section VI) with some thoughts on the relationship between conservatism and progressive improvement on this dystopophobic framework.

II. The Form and Function of Dystopia in Hobbes, Burke, and Popper

The three core thinkers analyzed advance three different political theories. At the heart of each is an aversion to dystopia, but dystopia has a different form and function within each. To recapitulate the conclusions drawn about the form and function of dystopia from the previous chapters:

<u>Hobbes</u>

The state of nature in Hobbes' writing is *hypothetical*, albeit a hypothetical dystopia that

he believes most readers will recognize has deep parallels with their lived experience,

hence his dictum "Nosce teipsum." As part of this account of dystopia as an ideal type

Hobbes introduces a *theory* of dystopia that is part of a broader vision of how the world

and the people within it function. It includes a theory of human psychology, motivation,

language, meta-ethics, and more, and by abstracting the actual human condition in

contemporary England to the root causes of civil war and dystopia found in human nature,

Hobbes presents the reader with what has been coined here as *the circumstances of dystopia*

– those qualities of the human and material condition that conduce to conflict and make a

just system of cooperation for mutual advantage (nearly) impossible.

Functionally, Hobbes' account of the state of nature serves a rhetorical role,

although this side of his work is given second billing in this work. Instead, the *educative*

function of Hobbes' work is emphasized, as it manifests in his comprehensive account of

the passions and vices that cause individuals to act in harmful ways. This educative

function reaches right to the core of Hobbes' aims in his philosophy to disabuse individuals

of false beliefs, in order to create consensus about the correct way to organize society, and

to educate and shape the belief, passions, and actions of citizens, so they choose a peaceful,

even if imperfect life (1985, 728; 1998, 7, 14). Finally, dystopia functions as part of an

analytical philosophical argument: there is no "*Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) not *Summum*

Bonum, (Greatest Good,) as is spoke of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers"

(Hobbes 1985, 160). Instead, agreement can only coalesce around the worst outcome to be

avoided, i.e. the state of nature. Because Hobbes conceives of dystopia as an

uncontroversial end to be avoided it functions as a sound premise upon which to build the rest of his political philosophy. The state of nature is the worst end to be avoided, so dystopia plays an *aversional* role in his philosophy, that *justifies* the creation of an all powerful sovereign.

Burke

Burke's most focused writings pertinent to dystopophobia occurred in the wake of the French Revolution, but, rather than interpret him as offering a descriptive account of the events in France, it is more useful to interpret the form of his work as a *projective* dystopia that extrapolates from events in France to England. Of course, Burke does describe many of the events in France, but as he says, he is "Solicitous chiefly for the peace of my own country," (1993, 10) and that "the great source of my solicitude is," the fear that French policies of property expropriation would "ever be considered in England as the policy of a state" (1993, 155). Burke's aim in writing is to prevent a putative catastrophe like the French Revolution taking hold in England and threatening English political life. Further to this projective form, Burke's account of the French Revolution is a *theoretical dystopia* in that it reflects an important part of his theory of how the world functions. On his civil-social view of humankind the character of the people is formed within the social and civic culture of the polity and the "real rights of man" are earned through the institutions of society built up and reinforced over time. It is because of this quality of human and political life that attempts by rationalist philosophers to reorganize society according to philosophical principles would inevitably lead to disaster and great suffering.

Functionally, Burke's account of dystopia is *educative* by presenting a (cynical) account of the motivations of revolutionary leaders as self-interested, prideful, and avaricious that explains their moves to acquire power and the dystopian traumatic consequences of this. Moreover, Burke's writing provides a clear account of the *distribution of evils in society*. In particular, the fact that the aristocracy are spared from the misery and evils of regularly functioning society is explained by reference to their refined virtue through the institutions of society. By contrast, the poor and disempowered are kept in their precarious and miserable station by exactly those same institutional and structural forces that elevate and protect the elite. Burke's work elevates the voices of and brings attention to the condition of a set of (rather unsympathetic) victims. Rather than the toiling masses, Burke rises to the defense of the aristocracy, including Marie Antoinette. Finally, dystopia serves an *analytical* role as an aversional end as it is the radical reformation of society that is to be avoided as this leads (especially when pursued in accordance with rationalist philosophical principles) to attacks on the Church, property, culture, and the aristocracy that cumulatively secure the "real rights of man" and acculturate the "civil social" members of that society. As the obverse of this point, his dystopophobia functions analytically as a *justification* and laudatory approbation of the status quo; Burke writes to justify the English political system and reconcile the people to live under this system that is harsh and difficult for most people, but that, that at the very least, enables "them to live to nature, and if they pleased, to live to virtue and honor" (1795, 271).

Popper

At the social level, Popper's dystopia is most prominently *theoretical*. He explains why some individuals find themselves attracted to historicist doctrines that often immiserate the people, how these doctrines misunderstand the nature of the polity as an imperfectly controllable entity, and why, therefore, any attempt to impose a comprehensive vision of social order will inevitably lead to violent repression. His dystopia also has a *projective form* that derives its exigency and importance for public discourse from the possibility that because of WWII and the spread of Communism, the dystopia of the closed society could envelop the world. Functionally, this dystopia is *educative*. Popper shows what risks being lost in the shift to a closed society, and explains why qualities of political life, including the inevitability of unintended consequences will frustrate any closed political program at the cost of human life and wellbeing. There is also a prominent *analytical function* to Popper's dystopia as the rise of the closed society justifies the status quo in Britain and other countries as examples of open liberal societies that defend freedom and equality, which engenders the concern that Popper can be uncritically conservative in his fawning praise of liberal democracies.

At the level of the individual, the *descriptive qualities of dystopia* are important as he returns again and again to the suffering of people in society from poverty, disease, unemployment, and more. This suffering is near, concrete, and animating because of this real quality to it, and is a public concern that the state ought to take an active role in remediating due to the obligation to help that suffering produces. Additionally, Popper's dystopia is educational as Popper elevates the role of victims in political discourse as sources of data who can tell "where the shoe pinches." This process of education and the

elevation of victims leaves Popper far more *critical* of liberal societies at the individual than at the social level. On this theory, liberal societies ought to be criticized for their record on alleviating suffering. As part of this criticism, an account of negative utilitarianism is endorsed as an ideal to be adopted prominently as part of public policy that promises far more progressive change and improvement in society than his fairly conservative justification of liberal societies portends in his discussion of dystopophobia at the level of society.

III. A Dystopophobic Family Resemblance

This is some overlap in the form and function of dystopia shared between the three theorists, but there is no overdetermination such that shared views about form and function entail considerable agreement over the ends to be avoided and best way to achieve them. The closest to a causal link between the form of dystopia and the substance of the dystopophobic theory is the fact that projective dystopia in Burke and Popper leads in both cases to a fairly conservative defense of the status quo in England. Other areas of disagreement, such as a divide over conception of state of nature or of "civil-social man," take the thinking in different directions. In light of these differences any attempt to synthesize the three into a single tight theory of dystopophobia risks tucking them together into a procrustean bed. Therefore, instead of attempting to derive a formal theory of dystopophobia that takes insights from each thinker without distorting the others, it is better to think of the three as sharing a dystopophobic family resemblance. As an example of this Jan-Werner Muller describes the political ideology of populism as "not anything like a codified doctrine, but it is a set of distinct claims and has what one might call an inner

logic" (2016, 10). By analogy, we can say something similar about dystopophobia as it appears in the work of these three thinkers. The inner logic shared between the three retains enough shared elements to constitute a "particular *moralistic imagination of politics*" (Muller 2016, 19). This imagination places in its center the moral ideal of avoiding bad outcomes at the level of society and at the level of the individual. This is to say that a component of judging the superiority or inferiority of a political system according to this dystopophobic framework is on whether the society is not dystopian in its structures and organization and whether within this otherwise non-dystopian society, individuals are not living lives characterized by great suffering and hardship.

When thinking about the the most extreme dystopias involving the end of human civilization with individuals living in a violent anarchy, one's thoughts often go to discrete catastrophic phenomena, as in the case of asteroid impacts, global warming, pandemic, or nuclear war. These threats may be existential, but they also have an exogenous quality to them – they can be conceived as external threats that buffet society and causes stress and perhaps collapse. It is certainly true that outside pressures like material scarcity may compound the problems facing people and thereby exacerbate tensions. That being said, a striking feature shared by the three thinkers in this text is the role that humans play in their own immiseration. Human deliberation produces fear in the state of nature that provokes rounds of preemptive attack and recrimination. Rationalist philosophies justify destruction of established social and political institutions, and it is the human adherents of these philosophies, like the French Revolutionaries, that do the physical destroying. Moreover, historicist political philosophies and the tenets of the closed society are developed and propagated by people. In light of this human element, the dystopias that humans have

experienced have been dystopias we have created for ourselves. And either intentionally or accidentally, many of the problems that confront humanity like global warming, nuclear arms, and pandemic are problems humans have created.

Humankind has the power to enslave and immiserate its own people, and also to create considerable – even global level – problems that threaten the entire species. But, humans also have a remarkable power to solve many of these problems, too. We can liberate ourselves as much as we can enslave ourselves, and this human dynamic in dystopia plays out in the relationship between two different concepts. First is the *power* humans have to affect each other's well-being. Second is the *responsibility* this power engenders. Taking it as an assumption that there are (in Goodhart's terminology) obvious injustices, or that there is a *summum malum* that ought to be avoided, and that it is in our power to avoid them, then it is incumbent upon humans to work systematically to avoid these bad things. This is not a monist moral view – there are other positive ends to be balanced against. And there will be contention over precisely what is bad and ought to be avoided for individuals and at the level of society. Still, there is on this view a responsibility to organize society to address or avert dystopia. In teasing out a family resemblance, then, one can say the dystopophobic moralistic imagination has two components. The first is a sensitivity to an asymmetry between good and bad that warrants an emphasis upon avoiding bad outcomes rather than producing good outcomes. The second is a framing of political organization at the two levels of society and individual.

Asymmetry Between Badness and Goodness

In their own ways Hobbes, Burke, and Popper identify an asymmetry between goodness and badness that informs their political philosophy and pushes it in a dystopophobic direction. This asymmetry is first manifest early in Hobbes' account of the dangers of philosophy. He notes that when engaging in reflection upon philosophical topics like geometry and mere "intellectual exercises," if mistakes are made, then "no harm is done, all that's lost is time" (1998, 8). This kind of philosophy contains little downside risk. However, when attention is turned to political issues, suddenly the stakes are raised considerably: "But in such subjects which each man should reflect on for the conduct of life, error and even ignorance must necessarily give rise to offenses, quarrels and killing" (1998, 8). The cost of error in political philosophy can be the ultimate cost of war and death. Consequently, he concludes, a heroic effort is needed to correct the errors of others and present the true account of political rights and duties. In making this case for his philosophy Hobbes raises an important *symmetry* here as the benefits of correct political philosophy negates and solves the problem of incorrect philosophy. "It is because," he says, "the damage is so great that a properly expanded doctrine of duties is so Useful" (1998, 8). In light of this, the asymmetry lies not in the fact that the badness of an incorrect philosophy and quarrels caused by it are worse than the benefits gained by a sound philosophy. Instead, the asymmetry lies in the fact that there is on Hobbes' view only one true account of political duties and obligations, whereas there are countless ways in which one can be wrong in their philosophical, political, religious, and other beliefs, as the sorry history of conflict in Europe attests to. When one adds to this the psychological failures of individuals listed in *Behemoth* that dispose the average person to accept false doctrines, the human

condition is one in which we are disposed to fight and quarrel for want of agreement over the correct political doctrine.

Quarrels, fighting, and disagreement are the depressing norm of human life, and salvation from this wretched state the rare and heretofore evasive product of right thinking. Division is many; unity is one. There is, however a second asymmetry between good and evil that gives hope. To be sure, the truth of political duties revealed by Hobbes might be rare and have evaded mankind before his time. Moreover, the truth contained within Leviathan is the product of a complicated chain of reasoning that starts from the most abstruse beginnings in claims about the role of motion in all human cognition and perception. In light of this, we should expect disagreement to be persistent. However, the worst conditions of life have a way of focusing the mind in ways that redound to political agreement. Those living in solitary fear are well positioned to appreciate some bare minimum of a good life, a life free from the worst immiseration of the state of nature. Here, then, a second asymmetry between good and bad appears: there can be agreement about the bad, but not about the good. Accordingly, agreement to form an absolute sovereign that will deliver the people from the worst experiences of the bad is possible in a way that is not for the realization of the ideal good.

Burke, of course, rejects the state of nature as a useful methodological tool or accurate account of the development of society. Society and politics are not something that humanity formed *de novo* at some point in its evolution. Instead, social bonds and forms of political organization have been with us since time immemorial, and these political bonds and the institutions of society have been shaped by humankind and, in turn, have shaped the humans that live within them. This incremental process of political formation

and social organization is an absolute marvel, the full appreciation of which will forever elude the apprehension of rationalist philosophers and revolutionaries. Society is a complex wonder built over centuries that improves the lives of those who live within it. This is not to say that each society is perfect. Indeed, it is possible for the polity to make mistakes and revolutions, such as the Glorious Revolution of 1688 can be necessary to reaffirm the inherited rights of the people. Such drastic action ought to be rare, though, and always ought to be based upon the rights of the people enshrined in the history and institutions of the society (but currently departed from) by the contemporary government. Here, the asymmetry lies in the fact that iterative improvements take a considerable amount of time to accumulate and improve society, but revolution can destroy all that good progress in a short time.

Finally, Popper's account of the asymmetry between goodness and badness is the most fully developed of the three. In especially his footnote on the Minimize Suffering principle, but also throughout his writings over the next decades Popper distinguishes qualitatively between goodness and badness. There is not, he says, "a continuous pleasure pain scale which allows us to treat pain as negative degrees of pleasure" (2013, 602). Instead, pleasure and pain are morally distinct which manifests in the moral urgency and moral obligation that suffering places upon those able to help which is not similarly present in the possibility of realizing or perpetuating great happiness. Practically, goodness and badness are distinct as pleasures are "less definite and less concrete than evils" (Popper 1946, 119), and so it is, he says, easier to identify and act upon aversion to evils rather than the realization of a wandering utopian goodness.

Chapter two raised a handful of concerns about treating pleasure and pain as axiologically asymmetrical. Some positions – like lexical priority of minimizing suffering over improving well-being – are incoherent. However, some of the criticisms lack the strength attributed to them. The world exploding critique is sapped of its strength when applied in a person-affecting framework, which is the one that Popper himself adopts. Moreover, some reinterpretation of his position to remediate or fix suffering, instead of minimize suffering is both consistent with Popper's broader writing and immune to the world exploding critique. Beyond issues in value theory, Popper notes other asymmetries, including the epistemological point that suffering is immediate and apparent, whereas great happiness and the ideal is vague and distant. Moreover, suffering engenders an obligation to help upon those who are near and able, whereas improvements in wellbeing for those who are already doing well do not. Finally, piecemeal improvement by fixing the bad is less likely to degenerate into tyranny or social collapse than pursuit of the ideal. Together the various types of asymmetry noted by Popper, Burke, and Hobbes hang together as part of a political rather than strictly moral account of asymmetry that makes the political pursuit of avoiding the worst more appropriate than pursuit of the ideal good.

Dystopophobia at Level of Society and Individual

By describing the state of nature in stark terms as a place with no industry, arts, or letters, in which people live nasty, brutish, and short lives, Hobbes draws a sharp distinction between anarchy and the polity. In light of the misery of the state of nature, the dystopophobic aim of his text is to extricate people from the state of nature by establishing conditions that conduce to cooperation for mutual benefit, which is achieved, of course,

through the formation of the sovereign. This formation of a commonwealth brings sizable benefits to citizens including industry, arts, letters, and science, but, once the sovereign is established, and gains won by fostering trust and cooperation, social progress are fairly limited (certainly when compared to the jump in well-being in the shift from the state of nature to a commonwealth). The function of the sovereign is, first and foremost, to ensure stability so that society does not disintegrate into a state of nature again, and to protect against foreign forces who would destroy the commonwealth. Accordingly, conflict between sovereign powers remains a persistent feature of the human condition, as does the use of violent punishments to keep order in society. Here, Hobbes puts forward a two-level distinction in dystopophobia: at the first level of the move from dystopia to polity huge gains are made in well-being by moving away from dystopia in the state of nature. Once these gains have been made, though, there is little pause to ask how lives in society go, whether any political and social changes can be made to improve individual well-being and lift the most disfavored individuals and groups from fairly miserable lives. A fear of social disorder prevents any great political re-ordering in order to progress on this second level, and so Hobbes' dystopophobia remains preoccupied with avoiding dystopia at the first level.

A similar two-level dynamic is present in Burke's writing. Whereas Hobbes points to gains won in the move *from* anarchy *to* a sovereign polity, Burke begins from the premise that humans are a civil-social being who are constituted by their existence in the polity, and therefore never lived in the kind of anarchy Hobbes depicts. Accordingly, Burke worries about a drop in well-being caused by the destruction of an otherwise good (or at least functional) polity, rather than the benefits of leaving a pre-existing dystopia. The

French Revolution is the most prominent contemporary example of this act of destruction as revolutionaries there convinced in the truth of their philosophical principles reorganized society in ways that produced unintended consequences, such as the fraying of manners and values that constituted the fabric of the social-civil order. Burke is sensitive to the possibility of dystopia and therefore pitches his philosophy as a justification of the extant political order, and repudiation of the dystopian revolutionary project as a condition to be avoided.

Unlike Hobbes, however, Burke is more optimistic about the improvement and refinement of society. Burke places this power for social change in the hands of especially the elites and aristocrats, who, he says, have learned the skills of compromise, deliberation, and moderation of demands. They have cultivated valuable qualities including public virtue, magnanimity, and liberality, and beneficence, and fortitude (1993, 229). As human beings are a civil-social being, we are a product of society as much as producers of it, and in their elevated status, the aristocracy have been afforded every benefit and insight from religion and culture in civilization and as such are "respectable composed, in point of condition in life, of permanent property, of education, and of such habits as enlarge and liberalize the understanding" (1993, 41). Together, these people are best placed to propose changes to society through laws and legislation that adhere to and respect the principles of English culture and value that produced the society in which they were themselves acculturated. Because of his focus upon the aristocratic elite, strictly speaking, here Burke does not present a dystopophobic view as concern is not placed firstly upon alleviating the misery of the worst off in society. Indeed, there is reason to think on his class-based system that the most disfavored classes will persist indefinitely. But, his progressive and

evolutionary view of improving culture, society, leaves open the possibility of progress at the level of the individual within an otherwise fairly well-ordered society.

Karl Popper, finally, is a thinker who offers and account of dystopophobia at both levels, and on dystopophobic grounds for each. The closed society is the dystopia to be avoided, most especially historicist societies that subjugate vast swaths of the population in order to accord with the development of history as it has been speciously revealed by the despotic elite. In the Hobbesian mold, there is a considerable improvement in the move from the closed to the open society. Moreover, in the Burkean mold, one avoids great loss and suffering by repudiating planning of historicists and utopian thinkers who would wipe away existing structures in order to start the polity afresh and justify grand atrocities against the current generation of people in the name of realizing utopia.

At the second level, Popper recognizes that regress is just as live a possibility as social progress, but puts forward a theory of how to achieve lasting improvements in the lives of the worst off in society. As society is a generally unplanned and remarkably interconnected system that produces considerable unintended consequences if subjected to sweeping change, we should, Popper says, moderate our expectations for radical social progress and instead set our sights on the "task of fighting misery, injustice, oppression and corruption" (1975, 310-1). Discrete examples of suffering, injustice, and dystopian experiences for portions of society are far easier to identify that utopian ends and are to this extent easier to fix. We should pay especial attention to these worst off people within the otherwise well-organized open society so that, over time, this process of reducing misery will have the salutary effect of producing a society far closer to the goal of the utopian, even than a more direct approach would have. The open societies that focus upon

solving problems are most open to the voices and concerns of the worst off in society and are therefore most propitiously placed to see these improvements.

The following two sections will abstract from the particular conclusions of Hobbes, Burke, and Popper and present an account of this two-level view of dystopophobia is fairly general terms. This broad framework is prompted by the dystopophobic recognition that there is an asymmetry between badness and goodness that entails an especial focus upon alleviating suffering and avoiding dystopia. The framework is not endorsed as the sole or primary organizing set of principles for society. But, if one accepts, as emerges at different points in the writings of the thinkers above, that human beings are both the cause of and potential solution to the existence of dystopia and great misery, and if one shares a belief that this entails a responsibility to consciously direct attention, resources, and efforts to alleviate this misery and prevent its spread, then the following loose framework may act as a point of departure for further and more rigorous thinking on these matters.

IV. Dystopophobic Constitutional Ideals

As with Hobbes' creation of the sovereign, we can put forward one set of principles, rights, and duties (shorthand, ideals) to order society on a fundamental, or constitutional level. These are ideals that can be thought of in similar terms to Rawls' account of the basic structure of society, and are put forward as alternatives to dystopia by bringing people out of the circumstances of dystopia so that these new citizens can cooperate productively and peacefully. The ideals are also intended to ensure that society does not collapse into dystopia at some future point. At this foundational level I propose: 1) Liberal Democracy; 2) Existential Risk Protection; 3) Far-Future Policy Thinking.

Liberal Democracy

If used well, the institutions of government can liberate people and carve out a space where citizens can live free and flourishing lives. However, as (at least partially) a system of control, the apparatus of the state is powerful and liable to be corrupted, coopted, and misused. In these circumstances government can operate at the expense of the common people. Abusive government is often dystopian, and there is no shortage of historical examples of these dystopian cases.[86] Because, as Judith Shklar says, "the fear and favor that have always inhibited freedom are overwhelmingly generated by governments, both formal and informal" (1991, 21), Shklar endorses a liberal political system as a bulwark against this type of cruelty by government. As she puts it, "institutions of pluralist order with multiple centers of power and institutionalized rights," along with "institutions of representative democracy and an accessible, fair, and independent judiciary open to appeals" that empowers citizens to "protect and assert one's rights" is a strong means of protection against abuses of power by government (1991, 37). When compared to the alternatives, Shklar is convincing here, and so liberal democracy has virtue as a system self-consciously designed to prevent the dystopian abuse of government.

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[86] As R. J. Rummel makes the case, the murder of citizens by government – *democide* as he names it – was cause of the greatest loss of life in the twentieth century, totaling almost 170 million people (1994, 1-38), later revised up to over a quarter of a billion people (2002). As two examples of government-implicated death: Timothy Snyder's book *Bloodlands* (2010) catalogues the way in Stalin's indifference the plight of the millions of people living in contemporary Ukraine and surrounding areas, combined with ignorance of agriculture and effective farm policy led directly to the deaths of millions over just a few years. Similarly, Amartya Sen's analysis of famine reveals that many the 1.5 million who died during the 1943 Bengal famine did so not exclusively because of a lack of food, but because of social and political decisions to distribute food inequitably. Not all areas of Bengal were equally hit, as urban areas like Calcutta were "substantially insulated from rising food prices by subsidized distribution schemes," whereas rural areas lacked the political coordination to solve the food distribution problem (Sen 1981, 63).

In addition to protecting against abuse, liberal democracy as put forward by Karl Popper is a pluralist system that does a better job than any other form of government at opening avenues for voice and expression of varying ideas and interests. As well-functioning liberal systems uphold important ideals including the rule of law that permits all to act with knowledge of the public rules and without favor to some parties over others, these liberal polities allow different people to cooperate for mutual advantage with (in Hobbesian language) trust in other parties to act in good faith in turn. In this way, liberal polities extricate people from the circumstances of dystopia. Moreover, the equal moral weight given to all interests, along with protections for minority views in society through systems of rights allows government to function in a way analogous to Burke's view of the aristocratic elite; individuals in liberal democracy can see one another as part of a recurring game system so that even if one is unsuccessful in one's political and personal efforts on this one occasion, in the next round things can shake out differently and the opposing party may lose out instead. By managing the disintegrative pressures of disagreement in this way, liberal democracy does a serviceable job at minimizing the likelihood of regress into dystopia, so succeeds well at the first level of dystopophobia.

At the second level of dystopophobia – that is, asking how individual lives go within an otherwise fairly sound political system – liberal democracy has many attractive qualities. In particular, open liberal societies that protect individual rights, whilst also empowering the people to express to those in power "where the shoe pinches," and hold those in power accountable for failing to respond adequately to these protestations are propitiously placed to improve the well-being of the worst off in society. Liberal societies with what Popper describes as a tradition of social criticism, willing to reckon with its

faults, and adopt changes intended to correct for these failures are capable of responding to and addressing the needs of the most disfavored individuals and groups in society who live the most dystopian lives. Indeed, the burgeoning line of research into "epistocracy" – the epistemological virtue of democracy as a source of good public policy – reinforces this insight. Aggregating not only the subjective interests, but also the individual cognitive beliefs of citizens in order to produce policy that responds to their view of the world tends to produce informed policy that responds to their accurate view of the world and the virtues of different public policies.[87] There is good reason on these epistocratic grounds, to prefer liberal democracy to the kind of benevolent dictator that Popper describes, or the Chinese-style meritocratic system of social order endorses by people like Daniel Bell (2015).

At this point one might reasonably object that the account of liberal democracy presented above is excessively Pollyannaish. After all, the world is beset by social, political, economic, and environmental problems that liberal polities have either failed to solve, or, in the worst cases, are implicated in perpetuating. It is an indictment of human actions that atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are higher than at any point in human history, the extinction rate of species is has increased to levels only seen during previous episodes of mass extinction, the oceans are becoming uninhabitable for many corals and sensitive creatures due to acidification (Kolbert 2016), and, in spite of this exigent crisis, progress to reduce carbon emissions is halting and contentious. The cracks within and

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[87] For one of the strongest articulations of this epistocratic view, see Helene Landemore's *Democratic Reason* (2012), where she feels compelled to accept that even contentious decisions like the 2016 "Brexit" vote in Britain may have been the right one on the grounds that it was voted for democratically. For other sympathetic views on epistocracy see Joshua Cohen's "Epistemic Conception of Dem" (1986) and David Estlund's *Democratic Authority* (2008). Melissa Schwartzberg's "Epistemic Democracy and its Challenges" (2015) offers a helpful overview of the literature and problems confronting the epistocratic position. From a libertarian perspective Jason Brennan offers several powerful objection to epistocracy, including on the grounds that citizens have a right to decisions made by a competent electorate (2011; 2016).

failures of liberal democratic order itself have become increasingly salient. Protests against the liberal democratic order have manifest in the 2016 "Brexit" vote, the yellow vest movement in France, and the rise of populist and anti-establishment figures, including Donald Trump. And, of course, this is to say nothing of the long history of bloody colonization, human enslavement, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration perpetrated to varying degrees by putatively liberal political orders.

Karl Popper himself is guilty of excessively enthusiastic paeans to liberalism that ignore the failures and limits of this form of political order. He says, for example, that human thought, ideas, and argument is the revolutionary means by which humanity moved from the closed to the open society in ancient Athens and have (in fits and starts) improved in the open societies of the west. "It is," he says in an addendum to *The Open Society* added in 1961, "the great tradition of Western rationalism to fight our battles with words rather than swords. This is why our Western civilization is an essentially pluralistic one, and why monolithic social ends would mean the death of freedom: of the freedom of thought, of the free search for truth, and with it, of the rationality and dignity of man" (2013, 510). Irrespective of Popper's lofty rhetoric, it is of course also the great tradition of western societies to fight their battles with swords, at a cost of many millions of lives over the millennia since Socrates and the Periclean open society. One ought not to be too sanguine about liberal democracy as a panacea to all social problems and avoiding dystopian outcomes – to do the opposite is irresponsible and thereby contrary to the animating sensibility behind especially Popper's concern with avoiding misery for the worst off.

With these qualifications in mind, one must also be careful not to be too pessimistic, either. Liberal democracy may not prevent all bad outcomes from occurring, and, indeed,

should new and alternative political theories that are superior to liberalism on dystopophobic grounds emerge, then we should not be unduly conservative and welcome the replacement of liberalism as the dominant line of political theorizing and political practice, especially in the West. Before this point, though, we need not throw our hands up in despair and ought to appreciate the virtue of the political order that does exist. At a constitutional level, the liberal democratic order that protects individuals from abuse by government, provides freedom to order one's own life and interact with others on public and equitable terms of cooperation, and offers avenues of public participation is a good system of government on dystopophobic grounds by removing people from the circumstances of dystopia, by protecting against social disintegration, and by remaining open to improvements in the well-being of the most disfavored in society. In addition to this, it is possible to do numerous things at the constitutional level (and level of policy, as will be explored in the next section) in order to further orient liberal democracy around avoiding the worst outcomes at the level of the polity and at the level of the individual.

At the constitutional level the aim must be to establish institutions, practices, and norms that conduce to both identifying and resolving the causes of and particular cases of great misery and suffering. In order to achieve this goal of reducing acute misery, modifications to and novel additions to the constitutional structure of the liberal democracies may be warranted. Taking the United States as an example, it is worthwhile to note that the US Constitution is self-consciously intended to achieve a set number of ends, including to "form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty" (Ball 2003, 545). At the outset, then, it is possible to modify the ends

of the constitution to more specifically define "general Welfare" to include the remediation of acute suffering of the worst off within society. And, in practice, this end could be achieved through several structural modifications to the constitution.

Consider two examples. Firstly, the constitution mandates that members of the House of Representatives be selected every two years. Per *Federalist 52*, representatives in the House ought to have "an immediate dependence on, & an intimate sympathy with the people" (Ball 2003, 256), which regular elections help to secure. However, if politicians and political parties are able to select their constituents through forms of gerrymandering during the redistricting process, then practices of packing and cracking may be used that (purposefully or incidentally) disempower portions of that constituency (McDonald & Best 2015). In order to empower those who suffer most in society and to ensure that these constituents are represented by accountable congresspersons, then impartial redistricting, and even redistricting that amplifies the concerns of the worst off may be warranted.

Secondly, the constitution asserts that the number of representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty thousand (Ball 2003, 546), and this 1:30,000 ratio is justified in *Federalist 56* as necessary to secure "due knowledge of the interests of its constituents" (2003, 273). After ratification the number of districts continued to grow and eventually exceeded the 1:30,00 ratio, but in 1911, the number of House Representatives was set to 435, and the size of districts ballooned subsequently as the population of the country grew. Accordingly, each representative in the House represents on average around three quarters of a million people (Burnett, 2011). Of course, whether due knowledge of the interests of constituents increases inversely with the size of the constituency is a matter for social science to establish. But, assuming with Madison that it is true, then marginalized and

largely overlooked hard suffering individuals may be better represented were the ratio of representatives to citizens recalibrated to more closely approximate the original ratio of 1:30,000, than over twenty five times that amount today.

These previous two examples modify existing constitutional structures, but we need not stop here. In addition to these modifications, it is possible that new forms of representation and new legislative structures could better serve those in a dystopian condition. Alexander Guerrero, for example, worries that democratic systems where representatives are selected by election lacks meaningful accountability as ordinary citizens often are "not engaged in informed monitoring and evaluation of the decisions by their representatives" (2014, 140). As an alternative to this system of elected representation he proposes that the nation's legislative function be "fulfilled by many different *single-issue* legislatures (each one focusing just one issue, for example, Agriculture or Healthcare), rather than by a single, generalist legislature" (2014, 155). The members of these legislatures would, on Guerrero's vision, be selected by a lottery and would "hear from a variety of *experts* on the relevant topic" before crafting legislation (2014, 156).

This is a provocative suggestion from a dystopophobic perspective for three reasons. Firstly, the single-issue legislatures could include traditional areas, like agriculture and health, but also focus on those matters most pertinent to dystopophobia. Some legislatures could focus dystopophobic concerns at the first level, such as on the issue of existential risk (more below), and the ways to prevent the collapse of society into a dystopian nightmare. Some legislatures could focus on concerns at the second level of how individual lives go, by, for example, addressing the issue of child poverty, addiction, or disease; or, if these are treated as parts of larger issues within health care and the economy,

agenda prioritization could be used to ensure that focus falls first upon the needs of those in the most dystopian condition. Secondly, it is quite possible that those in the worst condition within society could be selected by the lottery system, which would give them a powerful voice within the legislature. Though, this is, of course, a mere probabilistic outcome, so cannot be guaranteed on a lottery system. Finally, experts may be used to inform members of the legislature on issues, but so might those directly affected by these issues, especially the worst off who would benefit most by having the worst of their misery and suffering alleviated the legislatures' decisions.

At this preliminary stage these possible amendments to the constitutional structure of the US and the alternative legislative outline given by Guerrero are intended to be suggestive, rather than prescriptive. It is important to be mindful of the possibility of unintended consequences emanating from potentially quite radical changes in the name of avoiding dystopia. But these are, nonetheless, provocative ideas that speak to and reinforce the ways in which liberal democracy has virtue as a desirable alternative to the circumstances of dystopia (level 1), and has a capacity to be amended and improved in order to achieve dystopophobic ends at level 2.

Existential Risk

Human societies face more than just political challenges. At least partially exogenous threats including global pandemic, artificial intelligence, nuclear war, climate change, and technological advance may be destabilizing or devastating enough to either spell the end of humanity, or degrade the condition of the species that it becomes locked in the circumstances of dystopia.

Existential risks of this sort became especially salient with the advent of the nuclear age and the first images from outer space that revealed the precariousness of Earth as a bright blue dot against the hostile hard nothing of space around it. In recent years a number of institutions have been established with a charter to both understand and propose solutions to the problems of existential risk.[88] The attempt of these organizations to curb the risk of events with "the potential to eliminate all of humanity or, at the very least, kill large swaths of the global population, leaving the survivors without sufficient means to rebuild society to current standards of living" patently overlaps with the concerns and focus of dystopophobia at level 1 described above in this text (FLI, 2019). Accordingly, there is good reason on a dystopophobic political scheme to stress the significance of these threats at a foundational and constitutional level.

Some of the potential existential threats humanity faces are fairly well understood and apparent. Atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have been recorded over a period of hundreds of thousands of years, and greenhouse gas emissions for decades; the greenhouse effect mechanism of climate change has also been understood for decades; and, comprehensive modelling and analysis by scientists and independent political bodies has provided clear insight into the likely social, political, and economic effects of dangerous global warming (IPCC, 2018). What is needed to tackle climate change is the political will to decarbonize the most heavily polluting economies and to develop and implement carbon neutral energy sources across the globe. The scale of the problem warrants consideration

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[88] These include *The Future of Humanity Institute* in Oxford University, the *Future of Human Life Institute* in Boston, and parallel research into problems like existential risk at the *Centre for the Study of Existential Risk* at Cambridge University.

as a constitutional commitment of nations to ensure that the globe remains habitable by reorganizing all countries to make them carbon neutral.

There are other existential threats beyond climate change that are far less understood. Accordingly, we lack the knowledge and the tools to adequately respond to these potential risks. We do not know, for example, whether artificial intelligence will be an existential risk, whether it will ultimately be a greater risk than other things like climate change, or whether the need to act to control AI needs to occur now, or decades from now once we know more about the likely shape and dangers of artificial intelligence. In light of these considerations researchers including Toby Ord (2014) and Owen Cotton-Barratt (2015) have made the case that course setting and priority setting are important to furnish societies with the tools needed when they ultimately confront existential risks. A fundamental commitment to movement building is an example of this kind of course setting, so that a growing share of the population both understands what existential risks are and become committed to work towards a solution as problems arise. As these course setting and priority setting choices are made in order to put future people in a position to respond effectively to future existential risks, such course setting choices are best established at the fundamental and constitutional level in order that later higher level policy and governance can occur in a propitious context.

Far-Future Policy: Astropolitics

A curious quality of much of the literature on existential risk is that it is largely conducted within a utilitarian moral framework. This is due in part to the fact that utilitarian theory can clearly model problems within a framework of aggregating utility, and thereby give

precise answers to difficult and vague future problems in areas like population ethics. It is also due, I suspect, to the influence of early papers on existential risk, notably Nick Bostrom's article *Astronomical Waste* (2003). In this text, published two years before he went on to found the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford, Bostrom argues that if one wants to maximize well-being on utilitarian grounds, then one should consider that with future advanced technology, potentially many trillions of happy lives could be sustained across the universe through a process of space colonization. In light of this, Bostrom makes the case that if the human race experiences an existential catastrophe that prevents space colonization, then this would be a much, much worse outcome than if space colonization should only occur hundreds, or even thousands of years in the future; compared to never colonizing space, a delay of a few thousand years is trivial. "For standard utilitarians," he says, "priority number one, two, three and four should consequently be to reduce existential risk. The utilitarian imperative 'Maximize expected aggregate utility!' can be simplified to the maxim 'Minimize existential risk!'" (Bostrom 2003, 310).

The dystopophobic insights gained from this text suggest a potential alternative response to the possibility of space colonization noted by Bostrom. Recall that as a pressing focus of the dystopophobic approach is to avoid dystopia and bad outcomes, rather than achieve good ones, then, when contemplating space colonization, ensuring that we avoid recreating the dystopian elements of terrestrial societies emerges as a primary concern. Unless deeply considered political theory is done now to establish sound and reasonable obligations to future generations of people in space, then colonization of space risks being driven by the pursuit of profit, the attempt to snatch first-mover advantage by economic actors or military powers, or by short-term political expediency. We could bungle our way

into a universe characterized by great asymmetries in power between corporate titans the people who live under their control, or asymmetries between precarious space colonies and Earth. In the worst case one can imagine endless generations of people spread across the inner-Solar System in a condition closely approximating Hobbes' state of nature (Torres, 2018).

In order to avoid the potential dystopian nightmare that space colonization could engender, there is good dystopophobic reason to hash out as many of the likely issues confronting space colonization as possible and only proceed in a careful and trepidatious manner designed to minimize the likelihood of inter-planetary oppression, conflict, and the spread of the circumstances of dystopia. I have made the case elsewhere that what is needed is a *non-comprehensive rationalist astropolitics* (NCRA) that identifies a minimal normative foundation for space colonization that is capacious enough to adapt to changes in circumstances whilst avoiding likely pitfalls that could produce dystopian outcomes.[89] Importantly, because the potential for dystopian strife is so considerable and the possible scale is scarcely imaginable when shifted to outer space, the scale of the potential problem and responsibility upon current generations to avoid that possible outcome warrants that space colonization and similar issues of far future policy receive careful treatment at the constitutional, rather than policy level.

V. Dystopophobic Regulative Ideals

Any number of substantive policies may need to be designed and implemented in order to solve the particular problems that confront society. The specific proposals will depend

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[89] Richards, "Astropolitics: A Political Theory of Space" (available on request).

upon the specific qualities of specific problems in society in light of the particular tools and knowledge available. Accordingly, it is not particularly appropriate to suggest comprehensive proposals and policies in the context of this rather more abstract work of political theory. That being said, it is possible to imagine and suggest a number of second order political structures and organizations that would improve the ability of government to identify the kinds of dystopophobic problems to be addressed and to develop productive solutions.

Incremental Improvement Through Local Experiments

As a first example recall Popper's account of incremental improvement through trial and error in a process of social engineering. In light of his view of society as a system of unintended consequences, Popper repudiates utopian blueprint based planning on the grounds that it will likely engender considerable negative consequences and thereby fail to achieve its own goals. In its stead Popper endorses an incremental approach to change (2002, 58-70; 2013 21-4) whereby problems are identified and trials done on a small scale in a quasi-scientific fashion. On his technocratic model successful responses to problems are then expanded throughout society (1991, 390). Those that fail are replaced with alternatives. This approach is well-suited as part of a response to public issues as they emerge within a liberal democratic framework, like the opioid crisis in the US, for example, or perhaps to develop and propagate best practices in areas like education.

<u>Democratic Empowerment</u>

A recurring theme within this text has been the importance of listening to those who are in the most dystopian position in society as they can tell us "where the shoe pinches," so we know where to focus our efforts. It is, however, exactly this class of people that is often the politically weakest and least empowered in society. If government is to be effectively used to help these individuals as they need help, it is necessary to ensure that government is responsive to the needs of this portion of society. This responsiveness can be achieved by increasing the accountability of representatives to these constituents. One way to do this may be by increasing participation by these groups. Several steps toward this end may be taken by increasing voter registration via same day registration, registration in schools, and at frequently used government-run facilities like the Department of Motor Vehicles or US Post Office. Expansions of early voting, absentee ballots, and voting by mail are also likely to decrease the barrier to participation. Furthermore, increased access may be achieved by removing the physical impediments to voting by increasing the number of polling locations, moving them closer to centers of population, and increasing staffing to reduce wait times.

Beyond mere voting, greater interaction with congressional representatives through more frequent pubic forums, like "town hall" events or "surgeries" within districts, will give greater opportunity for citizens to directly inform representatives of their preferences, concerns, and hardships. More frequent interaction with constituents will likely foster greater "dependence on, & an intimate sympathy with the people" (Ball 2003, 256), thereby producing more sensitive representation. Changes to campaign finance are also likely to help empower those most likely to deserve assistance on a dystopophobic view of society.

As a loose proxy we might assume that those with the lowest income are most likely to be in a dystopian position in society and thereby benefit most from good political representation. An election reform that distributes money specially designated for campaign contributions inversely with increases in income may prompt aspiring representatives to court the financial campaign contributions (and votes) of the least well-off.

Agenda Setting

On a dystopophobic view especial focus attention ought to be given to avoiding dystopia at the societal and individual level. This ought not to be the only end of society as there remains reason to pursue the good life as best we can, and other intellectual and scientific pursuits are of independent value. Still, in this pluralist scheme, avoiding dystopia ought to be salient in the minds of lawmakers and citizens and therefore be high on the political agenda. There is considerable research tracking and demonstrating the way in which media organizations craft public narratives that influence the political agenda. If dystopophobia becomes accepted as a goal for society, then one may hope and expect that the media will play a role in raising prominence of avoiding dystopia in the legislative agenda. But, even beyond the media, responsible parties are effective in sticking to legislative agendas that comports with their expressed values and goals during the campaign (in case of US, see Cox & McCubbins 2005, for Europe see Rasch 2011). Agenda setting is purposefully employed by legislators to preserve a good record on issues that are salient in the minds of voters in order to boost their reelection chances (Cox & McCubbins 2005, 17-37), and this use of the agenda can be modified to push legislators in a dystopophobic direction.

Firstly, congressional committees play an important legislative role in formulating and discussing legislation that eventually comes to the floor of the House and Senate for a vote. Some of these committees cover topics closely related to dystopophobia at first level, like the House Committee on Climate Change, and, on the dystopian condition of individual and groups in society, such as the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. New committees to cover other dystopophobic matters can be established to ensure they receive a full airing. Moreover, committees closely related to dystopophobic concerns, like the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology can either be restructured or supplemented with a subcommittee to tackle dystopophobic concerns like space colonization. Secondly, rule changes that mandate first hearings, debates, and votes on legislation proposed by committees on dystopophobic matters, along with requirements that topics of this kind receive a hearing in the other branch of congress can ensure that these matters are responded to quickly and do not languish. Thirdly, in addition to altering the structure of government to move dystopophobic issues up the agenda, greater party membership and participation by the most disfavored individuals and groups can ensure that the parties internally elevate dystopophobic issues up the agenda, which places an incentive to recreate this emphasis once in government.

Civic and Quasi-Independent Organizations

A problem with limiting interaction with government only to voting is that voting is a fairly atomized process: one person casts one vote for one representative. Many of the proposed amendments or supplements to liberal democracy including fair districting and greater accountability are attractive as they reduce the likelihood that some portions within society

(especially the most disadvantaged) will be systematically ignored and politically marginalized. In addition to these changes otherwise atomized individuals in the worst condition can be united through shared protection and support by civic advocacy groups and quasi-independent government organizations.

There are, of course, numerous advocacy groups in society. The ACLU, for example, is a non-profit, public interest law firm that brings cases against the government when individual rights are violated – especially the rights of extreme and marginalized figures. Through these actions the ACLU acts as a bulwark against creeping government abuse of the kind that concerned Shklar. As another example, the Southern Poverty Law Center engages in litigation and education as part of a mission dedicated to "fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society" (SPLC 2019). One way the organization gives voice and protection to the most vulnerable is by tracking hate groups and hate crimes in the country, so data and a record is available to inform policy and public safety responses.

It is not only charitable and non-profit organizations that can engage in this kind of work. University-affiliated organizations, like the UCSD Global Justice Center, do very good work following the conditions of immigrants and asylum seekers on the border between Tijuana and San Diego. As part of this work they empower the people there to "steward their own development," through a practical and problem-oriented approach designed to "reduce real injustices that so severely plague our world" (Margoni 2011). Finally, government can play a role in these kinds of activities by funding and expanding quasi-independent organizations, like the State Justice Institute, which was created by a 1984 Act and receives federal funds through regular budgetary appropriations in Congress.

The State Justice Institute is tasked with improving the administration of justice on the state level and does this by distributing grants to states for efficiency and other improvements. It also compiles databases of best practices and common problems confronting state justice systems in order that each state can learn from one another. These organizations, and others like it, can be utilized to empower the worst off in society and aggregate their experiences and interests in order to make more salient their experiences and to act as a powerful force advocating for their dystopophobic interests.

Education

As a final regulatory ideal it is worthwhile to stress Johnathan Allen's educative role of negative morality. Placing especial emphasis in political thinking and action upon those things to be avoided brings attention to the distribution of evils in society and elevates victims of harm, misery, injustice, and dystopia as essential to understand the social evils that individuals experience. Several of these points have already been touched on in this account of dystopophobic regulative ideals, such as the role of groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center and UCSD Global Justice Center's role in collecting first hand accounts of dystopian experiences in society. Similar programs to document the experiences of victims can be adopted by government. For example, between 1936 and 1938 the Works Progress Administration collected over "2,300 first-person accounts of slavery and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves." (LOC 2019). This new Deal Program memorialized the experiences of these victims, and this records now kept at the Library of Congress are an invaluable resource for researchers seeking a deeper understanding of life under slavery.

Contemporary projects of this kind are similarly valuable for policy-makers and researchers to ensure that the most vulnerable can tell the world where the shoe pinches. Such insights can be used to create better public policy, and also to inform others in the polity of the condition of the worst off, both in contemporary society and in the past. A fairly early and awfully jaundiced example of the reorientation of the American historical narrative to emphasize the marginalized and dispossessed is Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (2005). More recently, Jill Lepore's *These Truths* does much the same thing with a more even-handed approach by, for example, juxtaposing the collective success of the delegates in producing the US Constitution along side the individual failure of many, like James Madison and George Washington, to live up to their purported ideals (2018, 125, 132).

The goal of these regulative ideals is to orient public thinking and public policy towards the dystopophobic ends of avoiding dystopia at the level of society and the individual. These programs of democratic empowerment, agenda setting, and education take an important stride in this direction.

VI. Conclusion

The broad dystopophobic framework outlined above is not a revolutionary scheme. After all, if one lives in a liberal democratic society the changes proposed are of degree and emphasis, not of kind. Consequently, one may once more reasonably raise questions about the conservative quality of this thinking. Indeed, there are echoes in these pages of Michael Oakeshott's view of politics as the activity of "attending to arrangements" (1991, 44). On this view politics does not begin with a blank slate, but instead from where we are,

enmeshed in a social and political system that does a better or worse job of serving the needs and interests of citizens. Attending to arrangements involves working to improve society by correcting flaws and improving the good, and in his account of this process, Oakeshott even uses some of the same language employed in this text, like responsibility, and in a similar way – for example, when he says that politics is an activity in which "in which every member of the group who is neither a child nor a lunatic has some part and some responsibility" (1991, 44-5).

One ought not push this analogy between Oakeshott's conservatism and dystopophobia too far as there are some important points of divergence. For example, Oakeshott justifies engaging in social change according to "existing traditions of behaviour" (1991, 56), rather than the independent philosophical theory of avoiding dystopia at the social and individual level. Nonetheless, there is a conservative kernel shared between the two in the idea that society, especially liberal democracy, "is not a burden to be carried or an incubus to be thrown off, but is an inheritance to be enjoyed" (1991, 45). Perhaps "infinite caution" as Burke prescribes would be excessive, but from a dystopophobic perspective liberal democracy "has answered… for ages the common purpose of society" (Burke 1993, 61), and so if alternative to liberal democracy is dystopia or the elevated likelihood of the immiseration of many more people then care ought to be taken before tearing down the liberal edifice, and this conclusion is not a bug of the theory, it is a feature; we ought to be careful and respect what we have. That being said, there are a handful of points to make here that reinforce the way in which dystopophobia is not merely a justification of the status quo as it retains a critical edge and provides grounds and justifications for departure from that liberal status quo.

Firstly, Burke and Oakeshott defend the status quo because of its success in serving the needs and interests of citizens. Precisely what form of society has happened to develop is fairly contingent on this view, which is why the Indians and other very different societies on Burke's view should be recognized and respected for their success in serving their people. The dystopophobic view is different, though. One may live in a more-or-less liberal democratic society, but this form of government is not endorsed on the contingent grounds that it happens to be the main game in town, but instead because of the principled emphasis derived from thinkers like Hobbes, Popper, Burke, and Shklar that priority ought to be given to avoiding bad outcomes like dystopia, and liberal democracy is effective in this regard.

Secondly, Michael Goodhart objects that obvious injustice theories are unduly conservative as they end up endorsing the liberal status quo, even though they are justified on attractive grounds of avoiding injustice (2018, 92-3). To some extent the dystopophobic framework given here falls into this same trap by endorsing liberal democracy, but, importantly, this is the start of debate, not the end of debate (as it sometimes appears in the work of people like Bernard Williams and Judith Shklar). By asking how lives go within society the dystopophobic view explored here ends up endorsing many of the things that Goodhart encourages, including democratic revitalization and rigorously integrating the dispossessed and disempowered to contribute to these political fights over justice and public policy (2018, 160-1).

Taking this point further, there is a critical element to dystopophobia that is generated by a tension between the level 1, at society, and level 2 of the individual. On this second level liberal democracy has much to commend it as the condition of the worst off

can be greatly improved within a liberal framework. And liberal democracy does many good things, like permit all to contribute to the polity, which is important on epistemic grounds as a source of knowledge about the distribution of dystopian conditions in society. But, liberal democracy may ultimately be incapable of solving most pressing problems as they emerge, or adequately grapple with historical injustices of the kind identified by Jeff Spinner-Halev (2012). Liberal democracy might foster the kind of widespread malaise Carey McWilliams sees in the plight of "especially young Americans [who] cannot find their country in the land about them… [for whom] boredom and rage walk together; and war, with infinite patience, watches every act" (1974, ix), in which case liberal democracy creeps towards a dystopia for its members. Should this prove to be the case, though, we are not stuck on a dystopophobic framework. At this point we can criticize liberal democracy on the level 2 grounds, and therefore have reason to fundamentally amend or replace liberal democracy, albeit with an abundance of caution for fear of dystopia at level 1.

Although the framework of dystopophobia is not a revolutionary scheme, it has the plasticity and adaptability needed to explain and justify even fundamental political change, albeit with great care and concern to avoid alternative dystopian political disorder. If the probability of slipping into dystopia is high, then a fear of change is an appropriate response to these regrettable circumstances (Gaus 2016, 73). But, under the normal conditions in liberal society, structures and lives can be improved by embracing the responsibility to assist those in conditions that are most dystopian.

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