

Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism: the Philosophical Contours of a Seemingly Unholy Alliance

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Refereed Paper

Abstract:

Many Neoconservatives in the Bush administration trace the lineage of their thinking back to the jurisprudence of Carl Schmitt, the fascist whose philosophies were, more often than not, mediated by the works of more traditional conservative thinkers such as Leo Strauss and Irving Kristol. Both the more conventional and more extreme traditions of conservative thought, however, share an open hostility to political liberalism, which they blame both for a “trivialisation” of political life and for the promotion of a relativistic hedonism and a cult of self-interest. In this light, the active embrace of neoliberal economic policies, most clearly instanced by the set of administrative policies imposed over the nascent regime that was established after the ill-fated war in Iraq, is something that has to be both interrogated and explained. This paper accomplishes this task.

Introduction

This paper interrogates the apparently paradoxical alliance between Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism. The adjective “paradoxical” applies here because Neoconservatives, as Williams (2005: 312) observes, exhibit a notable hostility towards Liberalism in its generality. For the Neocons liberalism has gone astray. The result of this straying include hedonism and a despair in the individual pursuit of self interest: a phenomenon most clearly manifest, for Irving Kristol (1978: 254), in the infinite emptiness of modern art. Moreover, liberalism is seen as destructive of communal ties and values; giving rise to a frenetic consumerism, commodification, and the corruptions of a society lacking any notion of the public good. From this perspective, it would seem paradoxical to embrace the market-based logic of neoliberalism as the economic doctrine situated at the core of neoconservative approaches to policy-making. This paper attempts to shine some light on this “unholy alliance” between these two strands of political theory in both the discourse and practices of the Bush Neocons.

Foucault on Governmentality and Neoliberalism

In his lecture of February 1978, presented at the Collège de France, Foucault begins to speak of ‘governmentality’, which he describes as a new regime of power, deployed most completely in the eighteenth century, with population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instruments. Foucault (2007: 388) argues that governmentality is to the State what techniques of segregation are to psychiatry; techniques of discipline are to the penal system; and techniques of biopolitics are to medical institutions. However, by 1979, this conception of government had been extended beyond the domain of the State itself, to encompass “the way in which one conducts the conduct of others”, thus coming to serve as a theoretical framework for describing all relations of power in their generality. Nevertheless, as Senellart observes (2007: 388; citing Foucault, 2004: 192) when applied specifically to the problem of the state, the concerns of governmentality become those of government proper. Armed with this conceptual principal, Foucault

goes on to trace the development of Neoliberalism from its conceptual source in Classical Liberalism.

Crucially, Foucault reveals how the contemporary Neoliberals have distanced themselves from Classical Liberalism, not least, by abandoning a naturalistic conception of market. For Foucault (2008: 116) the key principle distilled by the Ordoliberals—advocates of the Germano-Austrian version of Neoliberalism—from their analysis of Nazism was the necessity to constitute a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state. In other words, Ordoliberalism, departs from its classical source specifically by raising the question of how the market economy could function as the principle, form, and model for a state: but a state that would nevertheless continue to be profoundly mistrusted due to its potential and actual defects. In responding to this question of trust, Eucken, one of the founding members of the Ordoliberals, and editor of their mouthpiece—the journal *Ordo*—placed more emphasis on competitive and unequal rivalry than on the classical sop of free and equal exchange, for he argued that any privileging of the latter conception could promote the dangerous idea that equality of exchange would readily be accomplished through an avoidance of market distortions and monopolistic powers. Here, as Foucault (2008: 120-1) reveals, Husserl's phenomenological notion of the 'eidetic reduction' played a key role in assisting the Ordoliberals to abandon a naïve interpretation of competition as a mere expression of innate appetites and the instinct to "truck and barter". Instead, markets were best understood by grasping their formal character and recognising it as the expression of an underlying economic logic. Under this rubric, one must govern for the market to come, rather than because of any existing, and thus always imperfect, market. In practice, Eucken endorsed sectoral policies of a somewhat interventionist kind, that were predicated on facilitating population movement, enhancing techniques of production, improving the allocation of property rights, and even modifying the climate, the latter of which are specifically designed to enable certain sectors such as agriculture to function effectively within an open system of market competition (Foucault, 2008: 140-1). Nevertheless, at some length, Foucault explains how both the Ordoliberals and their American counterparts in Chicago shared an aversion to Keynesian policies of demand management and full employment. The Ordoliberals viewed a protected economy, a state unified on Bismarckian principles, an economy characterised by wartime planning, and one featuring Keynesian-style interventions as, individually and, in combination, being allied to an unlimited growth of state power. In contrast, the American Neoliberals harked back to a conception of freedom, nurtured during the War of Independence, for which interventionist policies of a Keynesian variety were very much viewed as the alien and external imposts of a military and imperial state (Foucault, 2008: 217).

Schmitt's Instrumental Position

Carl Schmitt is one of the earliest intellectual contributors to what would become contemporary Neoconservatism. Although Schmitt is usually viewed as a member of the group of "reactionary modernists", it is important to realize that he, along with Leo Strauss, and the Ordoliberals, was powerfully influenced by Max Weber's argument that modern forms of rationality had created an "iron cage" and that parliamentary democracy was merely a cover for interest group politics. For Schmitt, the political solution to the problem of an impotent modernity lay in the person of a dictator who could appeal to the irrational itself, even while making full use of the potential afforded by modern technology (Dyzenhaus, 1999: 15). While Schmitt's position is clearly oriented towards a leader who is willing to muster the technological forces of mass destruction, there is no doubt that it is this very conception of usefulness, which encourages present-day Neocons to form a strange amalgam between, on one hand, the essentially instrumental

and minimalist techniques of neoliberal economic management and, on the other hand, the more expansive and moralizing radical conservative assault on the principles of classical liberalism. Nevertheless, an *instrumentalist* interpretation of this kind only goes part of the way towards explaining the attraction for Neoconservatives of the “living hand” of the market, in comparison to the “dead hand” of government. Far deeper layers of moral and ideological sentiment must be uncovered.

Kristol and the Critique of Realism and Liberalism

For Williams it is Irving Kristol, rather than Leo Strauss or Carl Schmitt, who is clearly the “intellectual godfather” of the Neoconservative movement. Accordingly, Williams (2005: 315) interrogates the complexity of Kristol’s interpretative stance towards Liberalism, highlighting the latter’s call for a re-evaluation of Liberal virtues. Williams notes (1983: 149) that Kristol, in his analysis of the differences between the European and Scottish Enlightenments, emphasizes the latter’s privileging of social mores, individual virtue, and the institutions of civil society. Kristol goes on to suggest that as abstract law came to replace traditional hierarchy it was, nevertheless, the very success of liberalism that helped to undermine these steadfast bourgeois values. As an antidote, Kristol champions republican virtue (Williams, 2005: 316), observing that both the Federalists and Hannah Arendt are united in linking political virtue to Republican Government. For the American Founders, he suggests, individual virtue was seen to be a fundamental part of civic virtue, insofar as Republicanism was deemed responsible for transforming liberal virtue into a public form.

Consistent with this interpretative narrative, Williams (2005: 317) outlines the two-fold strategy adopted by the Neocons. On one hand they attempt both rekindle and re-connect individual to republican virtue. In this endeavour the Founders become iconic figures. On the other hand they replace a backward-looking patriotism and a narrow parochialism of “soil” with a compelling, forward-looking nationalism predicated on a commitment to the ideals of nation, the latter conceived in a heroic sense as both an abstract truth and also a universal and progressive force applicable to all times (Williams, 2005: 318; citing Kristol & Brook, 1997: A17; and Kristol 1983: ix; xiii). This rekindled nationalism culminates in the promotion of a “muscular patriotism” based on “freedom and greatness”, “benevolent hegemony”, and a constructed “harmony” of national interest and moral goals.

For the Neocons, a common culture is seen to underpin family mores, religious conviction, and public interest, which is positioned firmly in opposition to the both the “adversary culture of intellectuals” and that of the “foreign policy elite (Williams, 2005: 319). The notion of the “national interest” plays a crucial role in their efforts to recover both the obscured traditions of Republicanism and those of the Scottish Enlightenment. Williams observes (2005: 321) that it serves to mobilize populist support for boldness in policy (and thus, the ‘character’ of political leadership) through a remarkable synthesis of liberal virtue, free market conservatism, civic responsibility and self-sacrifice, all the while drawing upon the authority and symbolic power of both the Founders and the Federalists. For the Neocons, this conception of the “national interest” also functions as a weapon of attack against both the Realist and the Constructivist traditions within the field of International Relations.

In Kristol’s attack on the Realist tradition, Williams (2005: 322) identifies three reinforcing lines. First, Kristol claims that the Realists are obliged to work with an indeterminate concept of national interest due to their supposed decision to ignore questions of value. Second, they are obliged to fill the resulting moral vacuum with either a collation of narrowly strategic material calculations and pragmatic judgements, or with a pluralism of competing positions. Third, in refusing to adopt a moral stance, in effect, Realists exhibit

a profound lack of realism, which supposedly finds expression in their manifest inability to empathize with the identity of the American people (Kristol and Kagan, 1996: 28). Accordingly, Kristol complains that Realists are, as a result, incapable of garnering the very defence and foreign policy resources that are required to meet their chosen policy objectives. For Kristol, Williams concludes (2005: 323) the resulting impotence can only exacerbate modernity's cynical and entropic tendencies. What is required instead, he suggests, is an active process of "remoralization: that is both universal and enduringly grounded in self-evident truths such that the idea of national interest becomes strategically paramount" (Kristol and Kagan, 1996: 31).

In response to Kristol's dismissal of the Realist tradition, Williams responds with the observation that Realists such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau were deeply immersed in the political debates of Weimar Germany. He specifically comments on the extensive literature on the "hidden dialogue" between Morgenthau and Schmitt (Scheuerman, '99; Koskeniemi, 2001; Williams, 2004). In *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* Morgenthau explicitly complains about the dangers of a decadent liberalism, highlighting the contemporary crisis that plagues technocratic or narrowly pluralist democracies. Nevertheless, he also warns that, although the concept of 'national greatness' can serve as a panacea, there are significant dangers in too radical a conservative response (Williams, 2005: 326). In particular, the intolerant politics promoted by radicalism could threaten democracy's very survival. Moreover, patriotism could easily encourage an "imprudent and crusading foreign policy" or military adventurism, in which moral virtue could cloak an increasingly "aggressive internationalism", thus undermining both the legitimacy and the power of the US, while operating as a barrier to effective criticism and vital debate (Williams, 2005: 327-8).

Leo Strauss and the Neocons

Leo Strauss has also featured as a notable influence over the Bush Neocons. Shadia Drury (2007: 62) finds support for this position in observations that several powerful members of the Bush administration have directly named Strauss as source of inspiration: Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Minister of Defence) is a self-proclaimed follower; while Abram Shulsky (Office of Special Plans) confessed to learning from Strauss that "deception is the norm in political life". Moreover, Irving Kristol identifies Strauss as the main influence on NeoCon thought in general.

In her "hidden doctrine" interpretation of Strauss, Drury (2003) claims that he rarely wrote in his own name. Typically, he would choose a certain persona from the corpus of classical political philosophy as his real mouthpiece. For example, in regard to Plato's dialogues, Strauss spoke through the words of Thrasymachus for whom justice is merely the interest of the stronger over the weaker. For Strauss, she observes, those in power make the rules and call it justice. Nevertheless, there is still the need for secrecy and lies both to spare feelings of people—who won't tolerate the fact that they are intended for subordination and to protect the elite from inevitable reprisals. For there is only one natural right: that of the superior over the inferior, the husband over wife, the master over the slave, and the wise few over vulgar many.

Strauss's acolytes, Drury claims, are the ruling elites and the persecuted few who are obliged to engage in dissembling and deception, but at the heart of the fictitious details they propound lies a profound truth, for only the wise are able to look into the abyss without fear. With the "death of God", there is no longer a rational foundation for morality (although there is irrevocably an independent order of rank). Where philosophers such as Heidegger try to weld an existentialist ethic out a resoluteness in the face of the abyss, instead, Drury claims that Strauss urges the elite to re-invent the Judaeo-Christian God, but live like pagans.

As Drury reads Strauss, the new conservatives must return to Plato's cave where they should manipulate the images (i.e. the media) that bewitch us all. The most important domain of political control however, pertains not to the masses but to the less numerous, but no less influential, ranks of "the gentleman": lovers of honour and glory, bewitched by promises of wealth and pleasure, who are disposed most ingratiatingly towards the conventions and illusions of the cave. Nevertheless, Strauss contends that these lovers of slothfulness and indolence can be made to rise above their otherwise brutish existence through fear of death: this being the principal insight which must guide the covert rule of the wise. For Drury, these Straussian mechanisms of covert rule and open militarism were clearly situated at the heart of the seeming contradictions and occasional tensions evident within the Bush administration. On one hand there was a surface teaching for the "gentlemen", with its emphasis on strong patriotic fervour and nationalism. On the other hand, there was the "nocturnal teaching" for the wise, aimed at securing the nation against both its internal and external enemies.

Lying at the centre of the conservative vision, Drury suggests, is a profound anxiety that the vulgar masses would have us trivialise life by turning it into mere entertainment. This vulgarization, Drury suggests, is the most terrifying spectre for both Strauss and Schmitt. And she adds Kojève to the same grouping due to his similarly voiced concerns over the "animalisation" of man. All three, she warns, understand politics to be a conflict to the death, for only through perpetual war can the empty project of modernity be overturned. For Heidegger, Strauss, Schmitt, and Kojève, it was the very spirit of commerce that was responsible for the softening of manners and the emasculation of man. Drury observes that for this reason, Strauss himself, was accordingly more hostile to liberalism than to democracy. For one thing, it was simply impossible to ignore the masses's sheer power of numbers. Nevertheless, in Strauss's eyes, whatever it took to "bring them (the masses) along" was surely legitimate. Ultimately, she contends, Strauss was a "Nietzschean thinker", yet of her neoconservative critics, only Laurence Lampert was valiant enough to admit it. Others simply deny that this was Strauss's position (even though she notes that certain of her conservative readers evidently delighted in Drury's revelations).

In opposition to Drury's reading, one influential critic, Steven Smith (2007), has insisted that we cannot infer a person's beliefs from those claiming to act in their name, nor can we judge teachers by their disciples (in evidence he cites such couplings of Nietzsche and Hitler or Marx and Stalin). In contrast, he contends (Smith, 2007: 68) that Drury's interpretation of Strauss is based on a simplistic syllogism: a) the NeoCons were the chief architects of Iraq war; b) some studied under Strauss; c) Therefore, Strauss is a NeoCon. In countering this syllogistic reasoning, Smith observes (2007: 69) that Straussians existed long before the NeoCons, and Straussians from an earlier generation wrote books about such political thinkers and activists as Roosevelt, Jefferson, Wilson, Lincoln and Martin Luther-King! On the positive side, Smith demonstrates that Strauss did privilege liberty and human freedom opposing it to the force of "modern tyranny". For Strauss, this privileging of freedom also depends on continued separation of the public (e.g. state bigotry) from the private (e.g. religion) spheres, though arguably, on the down-side, Smith notes (2007: 70) that the successful achievement of such a separation can simply displace racism to the private sphere and the cure of state intervention can end up being worse than the disease itself. Ultimately, Smith claims that Strauss's views are based on a deep skepticism (or *zetetic* liberalism) according to which all political solutions must be acknowledged as partial. Thus, "subjective certainty" must be rejected if we are to avoid a descent into sectarianism, yet this is far from a mere recipe for political quietism.

Smith (2007: 71) complains, in addition, that Drury is immune to the distinction between a “friend” and a “flatterer”, suggesting that Strauss’s reading of Plato is far from being a blueprint for political rule! Rather, he suggests that the Straussian thesis of esotericism, was conceived more as a contribution to the sociology of knowledge rather than a prescription! From this [perspective, it should correctly be viewed as a “weapon of the weak”.

In her review of Smith’s 2007 book on Leo Strauss, Drury responds to these and other of Smith’s criticisms of her own work by examining in detail the basis for Strauss’s critique of political liberalism. In particular, she (Drury, 2007: 9, 183, 15, 107) takes issue with Smith’s (2006) arguments that Strauss was a “friend of liberal democracy” but understood its shortcomings and wished to improve it; did not sanction use of lies in public life; and, did not cultivate secret cabal to subvert US democracy but wanted to save it from “mass democracy” (i.e., his elitism was much like Tocqueville’s version of aristocratic liberalism).

In her detailed analysis of Strauss’s attacks on the claims of liberalism Drury first notes that he rejected the primacy of liberty over other political values on the grounds that it was not a function of the state to impose its own conception of virtue (and needless to say, the notion of a Platonic liberalism was clearly a contradiction in terms!). Second, in regard to the liberal concern for the protection of the rights of the individual over those of the collective, she rejects Smith’s argument that Strauss championed natural rights doctrine over the nihilism of Nietzsche and Heidegger? Instead she claims (2007: 64) that Strauss relied more on Thrasymachus than Socrates (in this regard he was clearly closer to Nietzsche for whom morality was largely a function of power). She observes that Strauss even stooped to defending Israeli policy on religious marriage! Finally, on the liberal stance that the Individual should be the fundamental unit of analysis, she notes that for Strauss, on a fundamental level groups were more than mere collections. Here, she cites Strauss’s admiration for the “Jewish people”, which led him to side with Scholem against Hannah Arendt’s privileging of love for her “friends”. More broadly, she claims that Strauss endorsed the notion that morality was subservient to philosophy as the low was to the high (Drury, 2007: 65; citing Smith, 2006: 14); commended a way of life which “adopts a mask of public deception” (citing Smith, 2006: 165); held to the view that, in war, there were no assignable limits to “just reprisals”; and finally, along Schmittian lines argued that we must suspend certain natural rights in defence against our internal enemies (citing Smith, 2006: 199).

A more nuanced, if not darker, reading of Straussian political theory is to be found in Robert Pippin’s article on “The modern World of Leo Strauss”. Pippin (1992: 449) examines Strauss’s sweeping historical overview of political thought. According to this interpretation of the “problem of modernity”, Strauss hypothesized three major waves of theoretical development and crisis. Initially, there was the Hobbesian instauration of political theory. Subsequently, there was the first crisis diagnosed by Rousseau. The second crisis “of our times” was thought by Nietzsche. From Pippin’s perspective, however, Strauss’s interpretation of the first crisis (to be reviewed below) undervalues Rousseau’s descendents—the German Idealists—by positing them as the source of historicism that intensifies our own (i.e. the second) crisis. For Pippin (1992: 450), Strauss was a pre-modern crank evidenced by his views about natural hierarchy as something clearly opposed to ‘morality as convention’. Pippin surmises that Strauss possessed a “quasi-religious sense of human finitude”, which led him to dwell on the “insolubility of political problems”. His positing of an opposition between the ancients and the moderns was certainly predicated on a view of the former as esoteric: i.e. they do not say what they mean, and this mode of dissemblance was certainly designed to camouflage the true intentions of the rulers. Nevertheless, the major hostility surfacing in

Strauss's work is that obtaining between philosophy and 'the City', for he conceived the polis as reliant upon mere opinion, convention, and religious dogma.

In this light, rather than conceiving of Thrasymachus as the Straussian embodiment of political wisdom, Pippin argues that the central icon was Socrates drinking his hemlock, for Strauss held to a tragic view of political life. In effect it was impossible to call for the sacrifice of the 'many' (who love their own) for the sake of a 'few'. For Strauss (Pippin, 1992: 451), there would always be a conflict between (public) Justice and the (private) Good. Thus Strauss championed virtue in the form of moderation, while vice was conceived as idealism, and folly the promise that philosophy could play a public role. This conception is mirrored by Strauss's daughter, who vehemently rejects the notion that Strauss should be held accountable for the Bush Neocons (Clay, 2003).

As the ancients saw it, the public world of human affairs was a permanent cave and the philosopher must "rule in the dark". For Strauss, (Pippin(1992: 455) it is as if we have dug a pit within the cave, believing that, with our new tools, we have progressed; whereas we are in actuality 'beneath' the natural obstacles of passion and superstition (as recognised by Spinoza). And now our natural experience is distorted both by unphilosophical science and unscientific (poetic) philosophy so that any original meaning is only accessible through a recollection of what philosophy had meant in the past.

The historicism that emerged for the first Kantian Critique, conceived of nature as inert, or at best mechanical, purposeless, and subhuman. Pippin (1992: 458) claims that Strauss viewed the resulting Kantian position as an attack on the entire rationalist *and* empiricist tradition that, in one blow, ended all discussion of 'natural right', which was instead displaced by a transcendental and non-sceptical alternative, thus explaining the indispensability of teleology. With Hegel, came the theme of the modern age as the "realization of freedom". But from Strauss's Nietzschean perspective, this realization was only made possible by a terrifying loss: the fact that "God himself is dead" implies an infinite grief, manifest in political thought by the inevitable vanishing of dogmatic philosophies and natural religion. While Hegel viewed this scenario as a "speculative Good Friday" to be followed by a necessary resurrection (in the form of a realization of human freedom), In contrast, Pippin observes (1992: 459) that, for both Nietzsche and Strauss, modernity was a Good Friday with no Easter Sunday! This freedom obtained at such a high cost, was solely that of "trafficking in goods and money".

According to Pippin (1992: 452), Strauss rejects Rousseau's argument that we can achieve an "'artificial' reconciliation of self with self, others, and the world" through a recognition of freedom as a common capacity, on the grounds that it amounts to a "disastrous promotion of a self-defining subjectivity". Instead Strauss argues that freedom is only one among other competing goods, and definitely not the supreme condition of any other good being a good. Accordingly, he insists that any position linking right with what will legislate, slips into positivism, historicism, relativism, and nihilism. While Strauss observes that early modernity appealed to nature, he complains that this was positioned at too low (i.e. insufficient) and accommodating a level. For Rousseau, the characteristic of humanity resides in overcoming nature so that 'human will can exercise its distinctive function'. Moreover, the social contract is founded on a recognition in others of the same right claimed for ourselves. Schmitt contends that Rousseau's error lay in conflating freedom as a *condition of virtue* with *virtue* itself. In stark contrast, Strauss argues that we must define not just the good but the virtuous life. Pippin (1992: 462-3) draws out four aspects of the Straussian critique of Rousseau. First, Strauss contends that a reliance on "reason" invites "emptiness" and "rigorism" (the very charges that Hegel levelled at Kant). Second, in explaining how a regime of freedom could arise Strauss argues that Rousseau is obliged to appeal to a mysterious and independent historical process, rather than to passion and interest, which results in

a Heideggerian form of 'fatalism' and 'relativism'. Third, as argued above, Strauss warns that freedom should be seen as a condition of virtue rather than a virtue in itself. Fourth, and finally, Strauss argues that Rousseau is forced to rely upon an entirely unmotivated appeal to reason in the absence of any adequate theory of the human good.

Pippin's rebuttal of Strauss is predicated on an interrogation of Rousseau's conception of civic virtue. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau argues that virtue can only arise when we gain insight into the way that our individual egos are bound to others. In this manner we are able to recognise our egoism as the illusory source of all our anomies, fragmentation and chaos. Only then, can we subject ourselves completely to the 'general will'. Pippin contends (1992: 465) that this trajectory is entirely unexplored and, thus, unvalued by Strauss. Pippin contends that the Kantian Critiques sustained the attack on both our rational account of nature and its radically empiricist counterpart, displaced them with what is an almost substantive notion of self-binding to either a universal norm or a self-legislating law. From this Kantian perspective, nevertheless, independence must be seen as a condition for pursuit of any good. Pippin urges his readers to identify and further develop the radical Rousseauian elements within the tradition of German Idealism, that could serve to counter both Kantian transcendentalism and neoconservative political thinking.

Freudian Readings of the Neoconservative and Neoliberal Alliance

Two works stand out in recent efforts to comprehend the ideological contours of the relationship between neo-conservatism and neoliberalism: those of Wendy Brown (2006) and Erin Runions (2007). Brown (2006) draws on the Freudian notion of the dreamwork to grasp what she describes as the incoherent, multiply-sourced, and unsystematic nature of the various powers and rationalities that are woven together in this paradoxical configuration. She argues that both "isms" converge together in a fiercely effective "cannibalisation" of liberal democracy. To this end, neoliberalism is conceived as more than a dismantling of the welfare state through market-based policies such as privatisation, and more than an undermining of democratic sovereignty and autonomy. It is also a political rationality or form of normative political reason, which governs what is sayable and what is truthful, and takes on the ambitiously pursued task of reorganising the social, the subject and the state. In this light, Brown (2006: 696) observes that neoliberalism emerges from a contingent, uneven, and opportunistic convergence of strategies tactics on the part of a diverse grouping of evangelicals, secular Cold Warriors, Jewish Straussians, and conservative feminists. She points out that this group is, nevertheless, united by a conviction that only through war practised by a strong state allied with corporate power, can public spirit and private virtue achieve a meaningful restitution. For this motley group, the very necessity for such restitution, she observes, is revealed and justified by the vulgarity of a low culture and the decadence of a high culture that can only be deplored.

Brown contends (2006: 703) that the "de-democratizing" alliance of neoconservatism with neoliberalism has four major aspects. First, there is a devaluation of political autonomy realized by narrowing the conception of citizenship to that of rational decision-making obliterating, in the process, any conception of what might be of equal interest to all and any sense of participation in self-legislation. Enjoyment is thus restricted to the sphere of private rather than public autonomy. Second, social problems are de-politicized and converted into individual problems that are seen to have market-based solutions. In this way, the boundaries between the public and corporate fields are blurred. Third, citizens are re-conceived as both consumers and entrepreneurs. As "choosing" subjects, however, they are also exposed to authoritarian structures as "governed": subjects. Here, Brown points to Foucault's notion of an amalgamation of an

anatomo-politics of discipline with the biopolitics of population management and policing. Finally, even the State is conceived to operate along the same lines as the firm so that notions of democratic accountability can be displaced by those of good management. For Brown, religious discourse performs the role of political mobilization. Its modes of interpellation facilitate the process of de-democratization because truths become tethered to a declarative modality for which “saying” is equivalent to “doing” and “making” without the need for any reference to facticity. The resulting moral certainty of “truth-from-the-gut” has more purchase over the seeming epistemological and moral relativism those in the opposition. Both the sovereign leader and the individual souls can share in the voice of God and an indifference to intellectual contestation. Fealty to the religious community is valorized over liberal values of tolerance and autonomy. While Neocons are not fascists, Brown suggests (2006: 710) that in valorizing power and statism in combination with a market ethos, this political grouping becomes “fiercely anti-democratic”. Moreover, lacking an independent vision, she suggests that the left opposition falls back on a defence of liberal values, a competing moralism, or the promotion of banal forms of civil libertarianism and anachronistic form of welfarism. Runions (2007) analysis of the resonance between neoconservative thinkers such as Carl Schmitt and the US Theonomists is, perhaps, more profound than a mere “supplement”. Runions initially discusses the Nietzschean perspective of authors such as William E. Connolly (2005), for whom the concept of *ressentiment* informs a discernable resonance between “frontier marketeers” and Christian fundamentalists. For Connolly, *ressentiment* captures both the “will to revenge against mortality, time, and the world” and the fear and indebtedness to a vengeful God. Moreover, it explains both the “ugly campaigns to vilify those whose difference in faith” throws self-confidence into doubt and the (more specifically economic character of the) “compensatory drives for special economic entitlements and comforts in this world”. Nevertheless, behind this *ressentiment*, Runions (2007: 44) detects a more profound *nostalgia* for a time when “men were men” which, in the negative mode, becomes manifest in the form of an acute anxiety about a loss of power. Moreover, political liberalism is blamed for this loss of power. Accordingly, this nostalgia draws together both a respect for preserving both US military hegemony and biblical authority structures.

In summary, Runions (2007: 45-7) contends that both the Neocons and Theonomists advocate necessary exceptions to the law, both raise “law” and “scripture”, respectively, to a transcendental power, and both share in a theological metaphysics. In accordance with this metaphysical stance, Runions suggests that God is the name of a structural position that is both immanent and transcendent and both interior and exterior. This structural positioning is described in terms of the Freudian notions of melancholia and mourning, as discussed below.

In Schmitt’s work, for example, Runions focuses on the notion of the sovereign as one who decides whether to produce or break the law: the Law (as what is inside) is thus applied in disapplying itself (as what is outside). In this capacity it takes on the topology of a Möbius strip. Nevertheless, although Schmitt’s existential conception of ‘decisionism’ could be viewed as arbitrary it also based on notion of “concrete order”, albeit one ultimately grounded in authority of Führer. Similarly, for the Theonomists, Runion (2007: 65) observes that “God’s law should motivate decisions to take a stance against existing civil law; but the biblical laws eventually put in place, they argue, should be structured by some form of U.S. American democracy.” Thus, both the Neocons and the Theonomists arrive at a similar conception of the law predicated on a revalorization of authority (the Bush neocons), virtue (the Straussians), or even the Biblical text itself (the Theonomists).

For Schmitt, all political concepts are 'secularised theology' (Runions, 2007: 66). Similarly, like the state of exception, miracles show that God is both immanent to, and transcendent to the created order. Runions suggest that an unravelling of Schmitt's *genealogy* of this process of secularisation can demonstrate how he adheres to a tragic dialectic of immanence and transcendence. God first appears as simply transcendent (i.e. deistic conceptions of God), and then, as simply immanent (i.e. Hegel). Subsequently, this deistic God becomes detached from the machine of state, while the immanent conception of God becomes transformed into the 'will of people'. Nevertheless, Schmitt mourns for the way in which the crucial decisionist and personal element of sovereignty has ultimately been lost and must be reincarnated (Runions, 2007: 67).

Runions (2007: 72) insists that for Schmitt no less than the Theonomists, the return to hierarchy and decision has the potential to replenish a secularized form of liberalism by both repeating and restoring the previously abandoned role of a transcendent/immanent God. Runions interprets this phenomenon of repetition in Freudian terms, conceiving of the lost love object as something narcissistically "encrypted" within the ego, while continuing to haunt us through an unrelenting sense of melancholia. Nevertheless, she observes that, in reclaiming the Schmittian notion of "decision", the Neocons effectively disavow the scriptural authority of revealed law over positive law by positing as a maxim: "the law eats itself as it interprets itself, without appearing to do so". She concludes, on a self-reflexive note, (Runions, 2007: 73) by suggesting that a refusal to mourn would be a 'double loss' of: on one hand, the by now familiar neoconservative triplet of miracle, male agency, and hierarchy; but on the other hand, the very possibility of a politics without transcendence. Like Wendy Brown, then, Runions acknowledges that the Left's investment in notions of reason, knowledge, truth, and freedom is no longer viable, turning instead to Derrida's conception of 'uncertainty'. In accordance with this Derridean perspective, the notion of decisionism is reframed and conceived in terms of a 'suspense of undecidability' itself, thus serving to deconstruct all assurance of presence, certainty, or even the very criteria of justice itself.

Conclusion

The authors discussed above all, in their own way, have highlighted the alliance between neoconservative thinking and neoliberalism, going on to suggest ways of counteracting the influence of this paradoxical amalgam of political philosophy and normative practices. Williams (2004, 2005) finds what he needs in Morgenthau's Realist critique of radical conservative hubris. For many progressive activists this critique is internally situated within the conservative camp and clearly does not go far enough. For Pippin (1992), the antidote is a reinvigorated Rousseauian conception of freedom based on our capacity for autonomous and altruistic forms of self-transformation. This approach seems to take us back to simplistic late 60s notions of a radical, education-based political revolution (or perhaps, forward, to the late Foucault's conception of transformative "technologies of Self"). Runions (2007), for her part, contends that the left should replace back-footed and moralizing defensive strategies grounded on liberal political doctrine, with the deconstructive Derridean conception of uncertainty, though it is hard to conceive of a robust set of political strategies constructed on the basis of this kind of anti-foundationalist philosophy. Wendy Brown (2006) also urges the left to develop an independent political vision with the capacity to counter the interpellative power of religion, without suggesting from where such a vision might come. It would appear that this paper has identified the ethico-political and philosophical contours of the current regime of conservatism without any clear recommendation as to how progressive forces, themselves, can strategically regroup and move forward. While the Lacanian notion of "interpellation" might have served, in the 1960s, as a useful antidote to what was the then dominant Hegelian-Marxist tradition (e.g. of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir—itself based on an existentialist and, in effect, psychological reading of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic—the resulting approach to ideology critique, actively promoted by the Althusserians was, itself, not immune to criticism¹.

Whatever approach to ideology-critique is decided upon, however, it seems obvious to me that a central political objective must be the restoration of Keynesian policies of full-employment that were the first victim of the Neoliberal ascendancy. The nocturnal doctrines of Neoconservatism are informed by the Neoliberal truth that Keynesianism privileges and empowers workers in negotiating with their capitalist employers. Here, it is the spectre of a certain economic freedom and autonomy rather than of Stalinist central control that undoubtedly affords the greatest degree of anxiety and concern: an autonomy that may well be supported, but not driven, by education along Rousseauian lines.

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¹ Even the Hegelians seem to have moved on from this Kojévian psychology to interpret the Master-Slave dialectic in a more ontological fashion. Here, Paul Redding's 2007 work on Hegel springs to mind. More recent discussions of how a Spinozan form of ideology critique could operate are to be found in McGhee (2010), Schroeder (1997), and Brennan (1992a,b; 1990). Nevertheless, a full treatment of these approaches to "ideology" must remain the goal of future research.

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