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Reclaiming the Utopian imaginary in IR theory

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Abstract. This article aims to reinvigorate the utopian imagination as a vital and necessary component in IR theory. Since the First Great Debate between the Realists and the Utopianists (or more accurately, the Liberal-Internationalists) the utopian tradition has been viewed as being both subjective and arbitrary, leading to its dismissal as vain idealism in world politics. This article re-interrogates the arguments of Carr and Morgenthau and finds that they have relevance today only as against closed systems of utopia and have little bearing against the open-dialectical utopianism which is advocated here as a viable alternative to the sterility of realism. The article also examines the historical nexus between realism's dismissal of utopianism and the wider movements in political philosophy via a critical engagement with the works of Popper, Berlin and Arendt. Finally, after exploring the limitations of Booth's idea of 'Utopian Realism', the article argues that utopianism should no longer be assumed to be a blueprint for a future, perfect society, a tradition fraught with the danger of proto-totalisation, but as a critical imaginary that acts as a heuristic device to reveal the fissures in existing reality and as an ideational motivating force for progressive change in world politics.

'For although experience can teach us that something is constituted in such and such a way, it can never prove that it could not possibly be otherwise. . .'

Immanuel Kant[1]

Introduction

Utopianism permeates our political thought as the store of our hopes and dreams, the horizon of political possibility. Utopia has been said to be the *élan vital*, the impulse that lies close to the fundamental motives of all human political activity.[2] In fact, utopian visions are intrinsic to political discourse as all political positions have embedded within them a conception of the 'good life', whether liberal, socialist or even the postmodern.[3] It is also presupposed in any political critique

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[1] Immanuel Kant, 'Review of Herder's Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind', in H.S. Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 212.

[2] Frederic R. White, *Famous Utopias of the Renaissance* (Vermont: Hendricks House, 1981), viii.

[3] Ruth Levitas, 'Looking for the blue: The necessity of utopia', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12:3 (October 2007), p. 298.

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of '*what is*' for the criticism of existing social conditions presupposes a world where that condition is *not* – a latent form of utopianism perhaps, but one that imagines a form of utopia nevertheless. In this article, utopianism is considered both reflective of existing conditions and as a stimulus to motivate change towards something 'better'. It is conceived not as an end-state of perfection *in perpetuum* but as a temporary achievement that varies in form and content between persons, generations and cultures and whose particular ideal, if, or when reached, is reformulated and pursued anew. However, as expressed by Sir Thomas More, echoing Aristotle,[4] the feature common to all utopias is that they are places we may *wish* for rather than *hope* for[5] – a statement which reveals the limitation of utopianism, the disconnect between its visionary promise and its actual capacity to transform society in its own image. Yet, despite this gap between wishing and hoping, this article argues that utopianism can still fulfil an important function in IR theory through the imagination of alternate 'better' worlds, however so conceived.

Utopia has been described as an 'umbrella' term, expressing a *desire* (Levitas) or *vision* (Sargisson) of different and better ways of being.[6] The dominant misconception of utopia as a perfect, static system has long been redundant within Utopian Studies but unfortunately persists in common parlance. The problems of such static 'blueprint utopias' is that they are unnecessarily restrictive and attempt closure on something that should be perceived as a *process* rather than as an *end condition*. Many have insisted on viewing utopia as such an open-ended process, what has been termed *processual utopianism*, a view shared in this article. For example, Sargisson calls utopianism 'transgressive' in that it aims to transgress existing systems and open new conceptual spaces.[7] Similarly, for Jameson, utopia is not an idea but a *vision*; it is not abstract thought but the proving ground for 'utopian activity'.[8] What underpins both these approaches is an emphasis on the creative function of utopian thought; the power of the utopian imagination as a 'suggestive device', a special category of normative political theory that is a useful source for socio-political 'inspiration'.[9]

This article does not aim at a reconstruction of the utopian tradition or offer a summary of its key thinkers.[10] Nor does it suggest which forms of utopianism are to be encapsulated underneath its conceptual umbrella, however wide or narrow, one wishes to cast it. The aim of this article rather, is to highlight the element of *imagination* as the *productive power* of utopianism which, I contend, can play a powerful role in the rejuvenation of IR theory. So while there are different meanings of utopia, from the purely fictitious realms of Wells,[11] to the rebellious

[4] See Aristotle, in J. Warrington (ed. and trans.), *Politics* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1959), Book II.
[5] Sir Thomas More, *Utopia* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997).
[6] Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1–2 and Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hertfordshire: Syracuse University Press, 1990).
[7] Sargisson, pp. 1–2.
[8] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and* Form (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 173.
[9] Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 213, 217, 221.
[10] For reconstructions of the utopian tradition see Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974) and Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey Through Utopia* (London: Freedom Press, 1982) and E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (New York: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979).
[11] See H.G. Wells, *In the Days of the Comet* (London: Ariel Press, 1999).

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parodies of Rabelais,[12] or even the rigidity of set blueprint utopias like Plato's *Republic*,[13] what is under consideration here is not the various *forms* that utopia may take but the act of imagination itself that is prefigured within any given form of utopian thought. To draw an analogy, the spirited slogan espoused by our most famous contemporary liberal ideologue – the 'Yes We Can' campaign of President Barak Obama[14] – is illustrative of this power of imagination. For it is not in giving a detailed blueprint of *what* it is that we can do that is under consideration here – what we *can* do varies with time and space and is reflective only of our material capacities. Whatever this determination may be, the productive aspect of utopianism is the very act of imagination itself and the optimism of possibility that emanates from affirmations such as 'Yes We Can'. It is this power of imagination, the acts that flow from thinking *we can*, that is of crucial significance for movements of change in society and world politics. For without this initial act of imagining, there can be no movement. Imagining that we can change is the precursor to doing so.

Moylan's concept of a 'critical utopia' is paradigmatic in this regard as it suggests that the utopian imagination represents a liberated zone from which anti-hegemonic forces can attack the present and move openly toward an emancipated and radically open future.[15] Viewed in this way, the utopian imagination is part of the historical process and not external to it; it is the thought of that what is not *yet* attained which contributes to the oppositional rejection of that which *is*.[16] This nascent rationalism means that utopianism can not only critically subvert current ways of existence by revealing them as *reductio ad absurdum*[17] but also vindicates the imagination of something better as a productive pre-political act towards change. In other words, it is through the fantasising powers of the imagination that utopianism can oppose the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideologies and become a proto-political act, an 'expression of social change', by envisioning what is *not yet*.[18]

Yet despite these promising features of utopianism, there has existed an unremitting suspicion against the utopian tradition in both political philosophy and IR theory – and Shklar has shown just how widespread the hostility towards utopianism has been historically.[19] Utopianism's detractors have long rejected it as being a mere rationalist construct with an insufficient basis in material reality to warrant its inclusion as part of the proper subject matter of political studies, to be therefore summarily 'dismissed'.[20] Other, more vociferous condemnations have

[12] See Rabelais, 'Abbey of Theleme', in Frederic R. White (ed.), *Famous Utopias of the Renaissance*, 123ff and xvii.
[13] Plato, 'The Republic' in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1974).
[14] President Barack Obama, 'Obama: Victory Speech', (Acceptance Speech of President Elect Barack Hussein Obama), *The New York Times*, 5 November 2008, available at: http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/speeches/obama-victory-speech.html# accessed on 20 January 2009.
[15] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* (New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 28.
[16] Ibid., pp. 24, 26.
[17] Raymond Ruyer, *L'Utopie et les Utopies* (Paris: Presses Universitairies de France, 1950), pp. 4–5.
[18] Moylan, pp. 1, 211, 213.
[19] See Judith N. Shklar, *After Utopia* (Princeton. N.J: Princeton University Press, 1957).
[20] See Frank E. Manuel, 'Introduction', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), viii and Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Culture and Politics in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 158.

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claimed utopianism as heretical and idolatrous,[21] and some have even gone so far as to claim that '[u]topia is dead'.[22] However, I am far less sanguine than these morticians of the discipline who are happy to deaden the political imagination to the possibility of a better future. In agreement with the Kantian premise stated above, that while experience may confirm the ways things *are* that this does not prove that they *could* not be otherwise, this article aims to espouse the theoretical benefits that may flow from reclaiming the utopian imaginary in IR theory. Utopianism should no longer be assumed to be a blueprint for a future society but a critical imaginary that acts as a heuristic device to reveal the fissures in existing reality, an ideational motivating force for progressive change towards 'betterment'. I argue that an *open-dialectical* utopianism that emphasises the capacity of imagination can provide IR theory with the potential to be a more critical, even transformative discipline.

Utopianism and realism in IR theory

'I can't believe THAT!' said Alice.

'Can't you?' the Queen said in a pitying tone. 'Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.'

Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying' she said: 'one CAN'T believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice'' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. . .'

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*[23]

Sometime in the shadowy inter-war years saw the demise of utopianism as a viable aspect of IR theory. E.H. Carr gave the date of utopianism's actual death in the events of 1931,[24] and while that may or may not be accurate, one of the many casualties of World War II was the utopian imaginary and its replacement with what Levitas has described as an 'anti-utopian utopianism' – a political sphere that represses and obscures images of the good life, effectively removing them from consideration.[25] One reason why IR theory has shown only the most sedentary flickers of a transformative capacity is, I contend, because of this dismissal of the utopian tradition near to the discipline's inception in the debates between realism and liberal internationalism. Carr's so-called 'devastating attack' on utopianism contained in the opening salvo of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* has been the widely accepted as the *coup d'état* of all utopian thought in IR.[26] In the aftermath of this First Great Debate, it was the methodology of realism that prevailed having 'irrefutably' discredited its alternative. Since then, like *Alice in Wonderland*, IR

[21] See Thomas Molnar, *Utopia, the Perennial Heresy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967).
[22] Judith Schklar, 'The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. 102ff.
[23] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 174.
[24] All references to Carr are taken from E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939* (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 1–12, 21–27, 41–42, 53, 87, 97.
[25] Levitas, 'Looking for the blue', p. 298.
[26] See Scott Burchill, 'Realism and Neo-Realism', in S. Burchill, A Linklater et al (eds), *Theories of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 67.

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theory has had little practice in imagining what it considers '*impossible things*.' For all its sensibilities, mainstream IR simply cannot see beyond the lens of its own looking-glass, where what is possible is deemed impossible, where what is in principle alterable is cast with permanence. That is, if the dominant approach to the field cannot believe what it considers *impossible* – and the immutability thesis of realism holds that any form of progressive change constitutes such an impossibility[27] – then not only is all imagination of betterment expunged from disciplinary knowledge but so too is any conceptualisation of change at all. In this way, realism asphyxiates thought in IR because of its inability to imagine anything other than what *is*.[28] As shall be seen however, the philosophical grounds on which the forced exile of utopianism from IR was compelled are not as unassailable as is so widely assumed.

Carr dismissed utopianism on the epistemic ground that it was abstract and metaphysical, and on the normative ground that the utopianist's desire for justice and perfection could rupture the ordered fragility of the international *status quo*.[29] In distinction, realism sought to compel IR theorists to reflect only on empirical, non-ideal features of the world system, and to thus constrain the political imagination to present conditions alone. Yet these core realist assumptions suffer from two fatal contradictions. The first is the ontological problem that pertains to the relative position of different actors within the world system that would give different considerations to what is deemed objectively possible and desirable in world politics. What is considered impossible for the realist may be considered possible (and necessary) for peripheral groups who have long-term aims for the transformation of political power and community.[30] The second contradiction relates to the false logic inherent to Carr's assumption of impossibility – any estimation of the possibility or impossibility of utopian transition is not a *prima facie* ground for dismissing utopianism altogether. There can be no logical certainty deducible from a subjective *estimate* of what is considered possible, nor does Carr substantiate what it is exactly that makes utopianism impossible, other than vague references to the superiority of a scientific approach.[31] This view completely excludes the powerful *ideational* role that the utopian imagination can have at the level of *will* formation of agents in inspiring change. Moreover, such an argument only concerns the *probability* of change – and one could contend that the material/productive basis of society today provides far more potential for positive transformations towards utopia than has hitherto existed in history.

Carr's condemnation of utopianism is relatively well-known in the discipline but what receives far less attention is how Carr derived much of his conceptualisation of utopianism from a particular interpretation of Mannheim's seminal work, *Ideology and Utopia*.[32] One fundamental fault was that Carr did not sufficiently express the dialectical relationship between realism and utopianism that was crucial

[27] See Richard Wyn Jones, 'Introduction: Locating Critical International Theory', in *Critical Theory & World Politics* (Boulder CO: Lynne Reiner, 2001), p. 26.
[28] Frederic Jameson, 'Towards Dialectical Criticism', in M. Hardt, K. Weeks (eds), *The Jameson Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 69.
[29] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 30.
[30] Goodwin, Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, p. 214.
[31] Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis'*, pp. 2–3.
[32] All passages from Mannheim are taken from Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) pp. 4,54, 69, 79, 173, 177, 183–4, 196.

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to Mannheim's work and which IR, to its detriment, has since largely forgotten. This resulted in the problematic labelling as 'utopian' of all those theories deemed incongruous with reality[33] which, in turn, enabled the rejection as 'utopian' of a wide range of approaches in IR, from the revolutionary to the merely reformist. For example, it was the 'teleological aspect' regarding the 'desire to prevent war' that allowed Carr to condemn liberal internationalism as 'markedly and frankly utopian'.[34] That is, it was the desire for peace alone that attracted the charge of utopianism to liberal internationalism. The problem with such an expansive notion of what could infract upon the disciplinary boundaries of IR theory, so narrowly conceived, was that it created a ready-made abeyance to any other normative goal considered more improbable than peace. Questions of attaining freedom, liberty, emancipation, or of overcoming injustice, poverty, and inequality – all would be marginalised as thematically utopian to be expunged from the agenda of the discipline altogether.

Part of this problem can be corrected by a closer reading of Mannheim's work. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim makes a distinction between *ideologies*, errors derived from a distorted conceptual apparatus which served to perpetuate the existing order, and, *utopias* which worked 'in opposition to the *status quo*' and served to disintegrate it. It was only those ideas that transcended 'reality' and which 'tended to burst the bonds of the existing order' that were to be referred to as utopian.[35] Mannheim's analysis revealed the ideological function played by those theories that profess to reflect 'reality' and how they act to preserve existing conditions. For example, Mannheim exposed the limitations of the *pragmatic* view in the social sciences, warning us to be mindful of the interrelationship between an alleged intellectual point of view and the social position occupied by it.[36] For Mannheim, knowledge is distorted and ideological when it fails to take into account new realities and when it attempts to conceal such developments by continuing to analyse them in categories that are no longer appropriate.[37] One can see a clear parallel here with contemporary neo-realism which denies that there has been any substantive development in the reality of world politics and thus continues to analyse the world system in categories derived from the Cold War period.[38] Mannheim argued that those who refuse to go beyond the traditions of their discipline merely reflect a defence mechanism which attempts to insure them against the questioning of their own presuppositions. Such traditionalists find it impossible to arrive at a more comprehensive vision made necessary by new conditions.[39]

Mannheim does not, of course, explicitly implicate realism as part of the dominant ideology as his work was not concerned with the field of IR theory specifically. However, by showing that those forms of thought that support the

[33] Ibid., pp. 4, 196.
[34] Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis'*, pp. 11–2.
[35] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 54, pp. 173–84. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 17, 310.
[36] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 69.
[37] Ibid., p. 86.
[38] For example, see Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The Continuity of International Politics', in K. Booth and T. Dunne (eds), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of the Global Order* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
[39] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*. pp. 90–3.

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status quo and which tend to denigrate as 'utopian' any ideas that seek to alter it are 'ideologies', the logical inference can be drawn that realism constitutes such an 'ideology' within Mannheim's typology – a position which the arguments of Cox, Ashley and others in the Third Great Debate support.[40] For Mannheim, what is touted as 'utopian' is that which is judged so by those '*representatives of the given order*' and whether they consider the idea to be unrealisable.[41] So while ideology and utopia are both clearly incongruous with reality, the point to take from Mannheim is that it is the representatives of the given order who serve the privileged function of determining what is considered *utopian* and *ipso facto* possible or impossible in world politics. We can see part of this role being assumed subsequently by specific realist and neo-realist theorists in the discipline – the aptly named 'doorkeepers' to borrow from Blieker[42] – who alone determine what approaches are to be labelled as utopian in the pejorative sense, to be thus excluded from the agenda of IR 'proper'.

Mannheim clearly warned us of the dangers of the dominance of ideologies. For him, such domination would mean the complete disappearance of all 'reality transcending doctrines' from political study and ultimately lead to a 'matter-of-factness', a 'decay of the human will' and a 'static state of affairs'. The paradox would result that while humanity would have achieved a high degree of 'rational mastery' in the world, it would be left without any ideals or the will to 'shape history'.[43] Nevertheless, Mannheim held out hope for the capacity of humanity to become aware of 'the necessity of wilfully choosing our course' and emphasised the need for 'an imperative (a utopia) to drive us onward.' For him, it is only when we know what our 'interests' are and make a transition towards them, that we are in a position to inquire into 'the possibilities of the present situation, and thus to gain our first insight into history'.[44]

When Mannheim is portrayed in this critical light, it dramatically alters the frame of reference for the debate between realism and utopianism in IR. It shifts focus from one centred on the subjectivity of utopianism to one that implicates realism with serving, *in actuality*, the subjective interests of the existing powers. For by making the ontological error that what it considered unrealisable in the given order as if it were unrealisable in any other, realism suppresses the validity of any claims that suggest the possibility of change. By labelling everything that goes beyond the present order utopian, the realist can set at rest the anxiety that may arise from utopias that *would* be realisable in another order.[45] It cannot countenance that the utopianism of today may become the reality of tomorrow.[46] In this context, Mannheim reinforces the importance of the utopian imagination because he seeks to locate where 'transcendent ideas' become active, that is, where they become forces leading to the transformation of existing reality.[47] Mannheim

[40] See Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Theory', *Millennium*, 10 (1981) and Richard Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interests', *International Studies Quarterly*, 25:2 (June 1981).
[41] *My emphasis added.* Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* pp. 176–7.
[42] See Roland Bleiker, 'Forget IR Theory', *Alternatives*, 22:1 (1997), p. 65.
[43] *My emphasis added.* Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 228–30, 236.
[44] Ibid., p. 234.
[45] Ibid., p. 177.
[46] Ibid., p. 183.
[47] Ibid., p. 185.

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goes on to espouse the importance of individual creative power, the 'novel' and unique human mind that can break beyond the bounds of the existing order, though he warns us to not overestimate the prominence of the individual or our abilities to affect such transformations.[48]

Mannheim posits that imaginary imperatives are not absolute but are a part of concrete life processes, they die away when they are outmoded and they can be realised only in given structural situations.[49] As such, Mannheim offers a processual view of utopianism that explicitly refers to the transformative, mobilising nature of utopian ideas. Yet if Mannheim is considered as taking a processual view of utopianism, the question is how concrete does this depiction of utopia have to be? If utopianism can shatter reality only by being an *end-state*, then this would prescribe set blueprint forms of utopia. Alternatively, if utopia is viewed as a *process* (that is, that whatever is 'different' has the potential to shatter reality), then it does not require a telos of any kind. In fact, from this processual view, deterministic blueprint utopian ideas inevitably become ossified ideologies over time. When viewed as a process however, the imaginary of utopia acts as a negative pushing and pulling against reality, a joint process of thought and action (praxis). Utopianism here becomes something *for* agency and something *against* reality that need not be confined to any set form. *The Life of Brian* therefore captures the power of the utopian imagination far better than the rigid rule of Plato's Philosopher Kings. Brian's plea that he 'hates the Romans' is not followed by a detailed plan to be followed by the People's Front of Judea, nor is his imagination fixed on one monist alternative but simply evokes a sense, no matter how vague, of a place somewhere *else*.[50] Rather than lamenting this lack of concreteness, it is being *against* reality, *knowing* the possibility of change and *imagining* something that is *not yet* (no matter how ill-defined or 'fuzzy' the notion may be) that is the power of the utopian imaginary as a process for human agency.

Unfortunately, many IR theorists have failed to fully grapple with Mannheim's ideas and have instead rested on particular, isolated passages taken from Carr's incomplete reading. However, one must be wary to not conflate Mannheim's ideas with Carr's. While Mannheim was undeniably an inspiration, Carr's actual arguments against utopianism depart significantly from Mannheim's approach. That is, Carr argued that the classical liberal view of world politics was 'essentially utopian' because it was not based on the balance of forces, nor on the practical needs of the period, but on rational *a priori* principles which such utopianist's assumed only needed to be *applied* in other contexts to be successful.[51] The problem for Carr was that the teleology of utopianism preceded its analysis, with the result that while utopian rationalism could envision utopia, it could not make it real.[52] Carr thus associated utopianism with the 'initial stage' of an 'infant' science whereby the solutions propounded had no logical connection with the conditions of the problem and were 'the product, not of analysis, but of

[48] Ibid., p. 186.
[49] Ibid., pp. 186, 216.
[50] This should not be misconstrued as implying that utopian imagination only arises in opposition to something. As the reference to the Obama Campaign highlights, utopian imagination can elicit positive affirmations also. Monty Python, *The Life of Brian*, (T. Jones, Director), Python (Monty) Pictures, 1979.
[51] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 27.
[52] Ibid., pp. 8, 27.

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aspiration'.[53] The advent of realism was held to be the endpoint of IR's maturation process and the 'corrective' to the exuberance of utopianism,[54] ushering in the breakdown of such 'visionary projects'.[55]

What has been subsequently overlooked in many realist texts however,[56] is that Carr's criticism of utopianism was directed at the fact that liberal internationalists invested their hopes in an assumed 'harmony of interests' between states and *not* because of their utopian imagination of a 'better' world.[57] Carr indicted the 'harmony of interest' thesis as nothing but subterfuge designed to augment the position of powerful states, a 'cloak' for the vested and privileged interests in the world system.[58] What animated Carr's concern was the 'collapse of the whole structure' of this alleged harmony as professed by the winners of Versailles and not the utopian imaginary at all.[59] Similarly, contemporary IR theory has also largely forgotten Carr's belief that there existed a necessary complementarity between realism and utopianism that echoed Mannheim's dialectical approach.[60] That is, within the very same pages of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that allegedly sounded the death knell of utopianism, Carr openly recognised that the political sciences 'can never wholly emancipate themselves from utopianism' and he discusses, if only briefly, the important dialectic between realism and utopianism suggesting that the latter is needed to counteract the 'barrenness' of the former.[61] So while Carr charged utopianism with naivety, he indicted the realist with something even more insidious: *sterility*.[62] Without the utopian element Carr claimed that realism would fall 'easily to determinism' and become 'impotent to alter the course of events'. To counter this, Carr posited that utopianism was necessary to demonstrate that 'altruism' is not an 'illusion' in the world and to expose the 'naked struggle for power' behind the realist analysis which would make 'international society impossible.[63]

This dialectic between utopianism and realism is of crucial importance. Booth has explored Carr's ambiguity on the relation between these two poles and finds it to be expressive of Carr's uncertainty on this issue.[64] For Booth, Carr was a potential 'utopian realist' because he saw the need to balance realism with utopianism for effective political thinking, a theme which was particularly evident in Carr's plea for extending community beyond national frontiers.[65] To extol either realism or utopianism at the expense of the other would lead to an analytic

[53] *My emphasis added*. Ibid., pp. 5, 8, 7.
[54] See Michael Cox, 'Introduction to Carr' in E.H. Carr (ed.), *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. xxiii.
[55] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 4.
[56] For example, see Hans Rommen, 'Realism and Utopianism in World Affairs', *The Review of Politics*, 6:2 (April 1944), p. 198.
[57] Scott Burchill, 'Introduction', in *Theories of International Relations*, p. 5.
[58] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, ch. 4.
[59] Ibid., pp. 62, 51. It should be noted that elsewhere Carr explores the inter-war period in more detail but without condemning utopianism. See E.H. Carr, *International Relations between the Two World Wars 1919–1939* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1967).
[60] Mearsheimer's portrayal of the 'tragedy' in IR is symptomatic of this trend. See Mearsheimer's 'Bedrock Assumptions' in John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2001), p. 30ff.
[61] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 10.
[62] Ibid., p. 12.
[63] Ibid., pp. 9–13, 97.
[64] Ken Booth, 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', *International Affairs*, 67:3 (July 1991), p. 531.
[65] See Ibid., citing Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis,* pp. 223, 13, 97, 220, 93, 172, 89, 239.

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imbalance; either one would be too constrained by 'reality' to make progressive (utopian) changes, or one would be too idealistic (utopian) to give the foundation necessary to bring about such desired changes in reality. In this realist/utopian dialectic, there is no logical contradiction between the ethical projection of an ideal and the critical analysis of the real but rather, a necessary complementarity.[66] This dialectic involves simultaneous movements between transcendence and immanence, for as argued by Schuler, immanent analysis without utopia is blind and utopia without immanent analysis is empty.[67] Moylan made a similar observation regarding Mannheim's work. He found that the distinction between ideology and utopia should not be reduced to simplistic binary opposites. Instead we must view the relationship between utopia and ideology as being both related and opposed – the utopian impulse operates dialectically by both *sustaining* and *pulling* against reality.[68] Read in this light, Carr and Mannheim suggest the need for some form of dialectical sublation (*aufhebung*) between realism and utopianism to transcend the impasse in contemporary IR theory that has resulted from the dismissal of utopianism.

Jameson offered an insight into how this realist/utopian dialectic works by illustrating how anti-utopian ideas must, sooner or later, reveal themselves to be forms of utopianism in their own right.[69] For example, realism attempts to combat utopianism by evoking a supposedly 'real' account of the world and yet its theory of a self-perpetuating world system is as ahistorical and idealised as any utopian fantasy. The realist's construction of world politics is rendered without much reference to political history or political economy but is derived from 'systemic' features alone, with the result that its account is far removed from reality. To the extent that realism misses out or downplays certain key aspects of world politics it takes on the very characteristics that it condemns as being utopian. Yet, as argued by Ashley, one is not even allowed to ask how such ideas are formed under realism. The subjective process of theory construction is rendered mysterious and is bracketed off from the scope of rational inquiry; realism disallows explorations of these subjective processes even as it depends on them.[70]

It is for this reason that Jameson contended that utopian optimism generates the formation of conservative (dystopian) attitudes of resignation and it is here that utopia and realism merge as two variations on the same theme, one dynamic and optimistic, the other static and pessimistic: one side, conscious and open in the expression of its projected vision of betterment, the other which is made apprehensive by its own inherent normativity and who thus attempts to conceal it. Yet, both nevertheless constitute forms of the utopian mentality and turn against each other by demanding that the other is to correspond with what *it* considers important (the imagination of 'betterment' for the utopian, the objective study of 'reality' for the realist). What each disputes is the relative worldview of the other and each employs a range of arguments to establish how their own worldview, ontology and episteme constitute a more sufficient theoretical position. This is why

[66] Melvin J. Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 593.
[67] Jeanne A. Schuler, 'Reasonable Hope: Kant as Critical Theorist', *History of European Ideas*, 21:4 (July, 1995), p. 531.
[68] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, pp. 18–9.
[69] Jameson, 'Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism', in the *Jameson Reader*, p. 392.
[70] Richard Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interests', pp. 216–7.

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so many of the debates between realism and utopianism revolve around the objective/subjective nexus, with each side claiming that the other has their head in the proverbial sand. Despite the intractability of this dispute, it is this dialectical tension that offers fruitful grounds for a possible synthesis of both approaches, a movement from mere projections of ideal worlds to visions that approximate more closely events transpiring in this world. Utopia and reality are thus distinct, yet equally important planes in world politics.[71] The dialectical contradiction between realism and utopianism heightens the utopian 'intensity'[72] and offers the possibility of sublating both towards a higher understanding of world politics.

Consequently, Carr represents a far more limited attack on utopianism as an *imaginary* than the mass of subsequent realist IR literature has suggested. Not only does Carr offer the utopian imagination a fundamental role to play in world politics so as to counter the banality of realism, his actual objection to utopianism does not centre on liberal internationalism's vision of a 'better', peaceful world, but its assumption of the 'harmony of interests' that masked the designs of powerful states. His argument therefore attacks utopianism at best tangentially, and when coupled with Carr's unambiguous statement that 'any sound political thought must be based on elements of both utopia and reality', does not deny the validity of utopianism but actually endows it with a fundamental role in IR theory. As he affirms, the study of politics is 'not only of what is, but of what ought to be.'[73] Carr openly acknowledged '[t]he wish is father to the thought' and it is the role of the utopian imagination to envision a more just society that is so necessary in world politics today.[74] Carr's legacy therefore suggests that the problem does not lie with utopianism but the fact that there is not enough of its imaginary in contemporary IR theory to balance the sterility that results from the dominance of realism.

The other towering figure and founding father of realism, Hans Morgenthau, would come to dismiss utopianism somewhat differently. In distinction to Carr, Morgenthau's position against utopianism was premised on what Waltz would later call a 'first image' analysis,[75] the range of supposed 'objective laws that have their roots in *human nature*'. For Morgenthau, the negative characteristics of our anthropology precluded the peaceful, moral conduct of international relations that utopianism promised as we were deemed to possess an innate urge for power: *animus dominandi*. He argued that IR theory had to separate itself from naïve utopian rationalism – a view that he considered was mere 'prejudice and wishful thinking' – to instead focus solely on 'what is true objectively.'[76] Morgenthau thus merely repeated the well-worn argument against utopianism as being concerned with the land of 'escape' which threatened the theory's capacity to deal with things as they 'really' are.[77] The utopian hope for a 'science of peace' and, in particular, Marcuse's 'pacification of human existence', were disparaged as nothing but

[71] David Jason Karp, 'The utopia and reality of sovereignty: social reality, normative IR and 'Organised Hypocrisy', *Review of International Studies*, 34:2 (April 2008), pp. 313–37.
[72] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 224–5.
[73] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 5.
[74] Ibid., pp. 3, 21 and 41–2, 87.
[75] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 34.
[76] *My emphasis added*. See Morgenthau's 'First Principle of Political Realism', in Hans. J. Morgenthau (ed.), *Politics Among Nations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), p. 4.
[77] Ibid., pp. 41–9.

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misguided rationalism that could not be applied to a world that was 'complicated, irrational, incalculable'.[78]

What Morgenthau failed to recognise however was the complete arbitrariness that infects spurious forms of philosophical anthropology such as his. Whether Mills' view that 'ordinary human nature is so poor a thing',[79] or Machiavelli's depiction of humankind as 'ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous',[80] such negative depictions are rarely based on anything more substantive than the most vulgar impressions of humanity the author presumes that they can extrapolate across the entire human species. They have little basis outside of the writer's imagination and the Hobbesian account adopted by realism is no less specious merely because it offers a negative rather than positive conception of humanity. This is hardly a basis for 'scientific' scholarship, which, ironically, was Morgenthau's own express objective standard.[81] The problem with any derived conceptualisation of human nature is that they become totalising discourses and the institutions that are believed to result from them become oppressive and unjust.[82] This is because what is usually taken as human nature is merely a (poor) reflection of dominant attitudes at any given period. The result is an ahistorical generality that is washed over the entirety of human diversity, which no theory of human essentialism can ever fully grasp. As stated by Marx, writers who purport to have found the essence of human nature merely transform the relations of particular, historically situated individuals into relations of humankind *as a whole* and thus abandon historical analysis for mere ideological assertions.[83]

The question to be asked of such philosophical anthropologists like Morgenthau is what characterisation of human nature qualifies a work as constituting an 'objective' political treatise and another as utopian fiction? What is the distinguishing ontological feature that renders Hobbes' *Leviathan* and its unverifiable account of a 'brutish and short' pre-societal state of nature to be objective and other, more optimistic accounts, not?[84] While systematic realists would deny the 'utopistic' aspect of their aspiration, their reliance on the Hobbesian imaginary results in an '*unreal* realism' that maintains a deeply flawed anthropology and a reductionist project consistent with Hobbes's nominalism.[85] Yet, one cannot remain a Hobbesian realist without reliance on his problematic anthropological idealism and as expressed by Burchill, such *a priori* assumptions about human nature cannot be tested or verified to any meaningful extent and thus appear as mere dogmatic assertions.[86] So as *Leviathan* was based on the projection of an

[78] Ibid., p. 13.
[79] Crane Brinton, 'Utopia and Democracy', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. 58.
[80] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and other Political Writings*, trans. by S.J. Milner (London: Everyman, 1998), p. 130.
[81] See Mark Chou, 'Being as Chaos in the Tragedy of Hans J. Morgenthau', (paper presented at the Oceanic Conference on International Studies, OCIS, Brisbane, 2–4 July 2008).
[82] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 35–7, 96–107.
[83] Karl Marx, quoted in Cornel West, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxist Thought* (New York, 1991), pp. 82–4.
[84] Buzan shows how realism and the Hobbesian imaginary are connected. See Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, 2 (Sydney: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 37–8.
[85] See Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'On Never Reaching the Coast of Utopia', *International Relations*, 22:2 (2008), pp. 158, 166.
[86] Scott Burchill, 'Realism and Neo-Realism', pp. 77–8.

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ideal rather than being a reflection of reality, realism's primary justification for excluding utopian theory disappears completely.[87] Moreover, even if the realist assertion of human imperfectability could be somehow proven, it would not preclude the benefits of the utopian imagination. Rather, it would make utopian attempts at social change all the more necessary to remove these iniquitous conditions and forms of socialisation that threaten to make life 'brutish and short'.

As with Carr, there has been a neglect of aspects of Morgenthau's analysis within subsequent realist accounts – many of which do not go far beyond his infamous 'six principles of political realism.'[88] What is usually overlooked is that Morgenthau offers a cogent defence of the utopian imaginary that is most visible in his discussions regarding the transcendence of the nation-state. Here Morgenthau expressed a sentiment clearly akin to utopianism when he expressed the necessity of thinking about '*novel structures and types of organization*', including supra-national community and a world government, in order to move beyond the state.[89] In his later years, Morgenthau stressed the need for a form of world government to avoid the dangers that the pursuit of state power in world politics entrenched.[90] Clearly, such a view is not directed against utopianism and its capacity to envision different forms of community but is in fact aimed at making these 'novel' ideas realisable.

One could also point to the work of another of the founding fathers of realism, John Herz, who, after the formation of his own so-called 'realistic liberalism' publicly questioned whether he had ended up advocating an 'idealistic utopianism' himself.[91] For Ashley, it was Herz who added a strong commitment to an emancipatory cognitive interest in the realist dialogue because he blended realism with liberal and utopian ideas. Herz's work encourages us to reflect on the unacknowledged influences that make possible the autonomous and self-directed development of life to improve our control of our objective environment.[92] In this way, Herz moved to a form of idealism that combined the idea of a universal consensus through reason with the interests of technical realism and its concern with survival, which Booth has heralded as a clear example of the attempt to reconcile utopia and reality.[93] As such, we must counsel caution to those who would label classical realism as categorically 'anti-utopian' because passages in Carr, Morgenthau and Herz demonstrate that their aversion was directed to a specific type of idealist thought (that is, liberal internationalism) rather than the utopian imaginary itself. Carr defended a role for utopianism in order to balance against realism's sterility; Morgenthau actively imagined a world order beyond the state-system; and Herz, in the end, moved to a form of idealistic utopianism. All

[87] Goodwin, Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia,* p. 21.
[88] Hans. J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 'Six Principles of Political Realism', pp. 4–18.
[89] *My emphasis added.* Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The Intellectual and Political Functions of Theory', in J. Der Derian, (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 50.
[90] See Francis A. Boyle, *World Politics and International Law* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1985), p. 70ff cited in Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', p. 532.
[91] John H. Herz, 'Letter to the Morgenthau Conference', in C. Hacke, G-K. Kindermann, K. Schellhorn (eds), *The Heritage, Challenge, and Future of Realism. In Memoriam Hans Morgenthau (1904–1980)* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2005), p. 27. See also Christian Hacke, Jana Puglierin, 'John H. Herz: Balancing Utopia and Reality', *International Relations*, 21:3 (2007), p. 367ff.
[92] Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interests', pp. 206, 208–9.
[93] Booth, 'Security in Anarchy:', p. 533.

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of these examples disclose a unique compatibility between realism and utopianism which should open a space for IR theory to (re)explore the potential benefits of the utopian imaginary.

However, this should not be taken to mean that realism possesses no barrier to the re-invocation of utopianism in IR theory. Ironically, it is the idealism that permeates the realist tradition – its immutability thesis that assumes world politics *will be* the same thousands of years hence – that functions as the tangible impediment to utopian theory.[94] And on this point Carr and Morgenthau each provide a powerful supportive role for the preservation of the *status quo* by contributing to the perception that the world is *unchangeable*, either through the constraints imposed by the 'irresistible strength' of existing forces in world politics (Carr) or the defects in 'human nature' (Morgenthau). The litany of realist arguments convey the notion that either state-interests, human nature, or the systemic reproduction of the world order are immutable features that apocryphally preclude all emancipatory approaches. In this way, the realist tradition sets very clear bounds around the kinds of ideas which *it* deems are reasonable to contemplate.[95] Yet such arguments are not diametrically opposed to utopianism but are reflections of its inversion; they embody an idealism of stasis rather than progress, and instead of *Eutopia*, the 'good place', they promise *Kakotopia*, the 'bad place', where war, suffering and inequality are endemic features in a self-perpetuating international system.

Ultimately, what underlies the realist critique of utopianism is the exclamation that '*ought* does not entail *is*'.[96] Yet the problem with this foundational argument is that while realism may not be able to deduce an *is* from an *ought*, neither can it derive a *should not* from a *can not*. And this distinction is fundamental. For even if we think we cannot change towards betterment, this is not an *a priori* ground for concluding that we can never do so. Nor does it parry the normative commitment to change, the belief that we *should* do so. Under the dominance of the realist mantra however, IR theory has become preoccupied with system reproduction – problem-solving theory in Cox's parlance[97] – rather than the possibilities of social transformation. However, to remain idle against the inequity within contemporary global conditions because they are deemed to pervade in a 'realm of recurrence and repetition'[98] merely invites complacency without justification. Such realist attitudes must be labelled immoral because what they indicate can be given up is ultimately rejected in order to preserve the existing states system with all its failings. This realist paradigm has become the accepted knowledge boundary of IR and hence we see even the critical traditions responding to its agenda within the parameters that realism itself has set. The result has been the rejection of the utopian imagination within both realist and critical ontologies. The question to be asked however is why does realism compel us to act and think in ways that are politically apathetic and alienating, in order to pacify us, to blind our

[94] Terry Eagleton, 'Utopia and its Opposites', *Socialist Register*, 36 (2000), p. 31ff.
[95] R.L. Rothstein, 'On the Costs of Realism', in M. Smith et al. (eds), *Perspectives on World Politics* (London, 1981), p. 392.
[96] Robert Hanna, A.W. Moore, 'Reason, Freedom and Kant: An Exchange', *Kantian Review*, 12 (2007), p. 126.
[97] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders'.
[98] Martin Wight, 'Why is there No International Theory?' (1966), reprinted in J. Der Derian (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations* (Basingtoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 15, 25–6.

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vision to the 'city on the hill.' Why does realist IR theory wish for the wishes of the weak to be weak?[99]

Anti-utopianism in political philosophy

'If utopianism is about avoiding the closing off of possibilities, it needs multiple breaking points for stirring things up, for stopping the 'good life' from hardening into forms of oppressive habits and totalitarian tendencies.'

Valerie Fournier[100]

The rejection of utopianism in international relations was paralleled by similar anti-utopian sentiments expressed in political philosophy around the same period, as evident in the works Popper, Berlin, Arendt and Hayek. While otherwise being highly dissimilar theorists, this group argued on essentially the same grounds for the denigration of utopian thought.[101] Both political philosophy and IR theory came to dismiss utopianism on the epistemic grounds that it was arbitrary and 'unscientific,' and yet their normative objections differed. Whereas realism saw in utopia an impossible desire for perfection that could rupture the ordered fragility of world politics, political philosophy identified the so-called 'paradox of utopia': the idyllic vision of a future state of perfection whose actual reality brought about totalitarian domination.[102] These views mutually reinforced each other and banished utopianism to the realm of literary fiction alone. Yet, recent endeavours by Jacoby and others are now beginning to pull-back this shroud, revealing the many problems endemic to this line of thought.[103] The legitimate challenge that these thinkers raised to the utopian project was how to ensure that utopianism would not devolve to totalitarianism, or what Fournier describes above as the '*hardening*' of utopias. However, the shortcomings of such approaches were that they foreclosed on any possible solution to this problem and assumed that utopia must *inevitably* lead to totalitarianism – an assertion without logical foundation or empirical evidence and which can be overcome through an *open-dialectical* utopianism outlined in the final section of this article.

In Popper's view, utopia was to be considered amongst the enemies of the 'open society'[104] because it could be achieved only by crushing 'competing Utopian religions', stamping out all 'memory of them'.[105] Popper based this damnation of utopianism on the bleak historical record of past revolutions which always seemed

[99] This is a satirical extrapolation, a play on words, from a quote taken from Bloch and should not be mistaken for his actual words. See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 13.

[100] Valerie Fournier, 'Utopianism and Grassroots Alternatives', in Shostak (ed.), *Viable Utopian Ideas*, p. 187.

[101] Because Hayek's opposition to utopianism is integrated with his neo-classical economic doctrines, it is far too large a topic to be explored here. For Hayek's views on utopianism see Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1944).

[102] See J.L. Talmon, *Utopianism and Politics* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1957).

[103] Jacoby's excellent criticism of Popper, Berlin and Arendt is the basis for much of this discussion. See Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 50ff.

[104] Karl Popper, *The Open Society* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[105] Karl Popper, 'Utopia and Violence', in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 3 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 360.

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to produce societies very different from those 'desired' by the revolutionaries themselves.[106] Such a description attempted to invert the promise of utopia with its very opposite but the veracity of Popper's critique hinged on the level of substantiation required to establish the logical connectivity within his syllogistic proposition against utopianism – that utopianism's attempt at theoretical 'holism' could *only* result in 'totalitarian intuition'.[107] Popper failed to demonstrate a causal link between the two predicates that would prove why an imagined reconstruction of the whole *must* lead to totalitarian policies. Without this determination, Popper's argument is merely an ideological statement that does not sufficiently implicate utopian imaginaries with totalitarian realities but instead reveals a base ideological assumption posing as objective analysis. While Popper attempted to distinguish between what he considered 'admissible plans for social reform' and 'inadmissible Utopian blueprints',[108] without proffering any normative criteria that would render one 'plan' admissible and the 'blueprint' not, his condemnation of utopianism possesses no *objective* foundation. Moreover, shunning utopianism in this way would seem to devalue what Popper elsewhere upheld as most important in the 'great advances' of science, namely 'critical creativeness' and the need to 'operate freely with speculative theories' – both of which are elements of imagination itself.[109]

Following uncannily similar reasoning to Popper, Berlin argued that utopian schemes were both dogmatic and monist and would ultimately lead to 'inhumanity'[110] because rational argument could not 'conceive what such an earthly paradise [i.e. utopia] could be'.[111] One could easily counter however that a thing is not impossible merely because it is inconceivable in a particular epoch.[112] Moreover, Berlin based much of his dismissal of utopianism via a misappropriation of Kant's famous dictum 'that out of the crooked timber of humanity nothing straight could be made' which appears time and time again in Berlin's essentially repetitious papers on the topic.[113] Yet this is hardly a credible argument, neither anthropologically verifiable nor practically demonstrable in light of humankind's creative potential. Moreover, it would assume that very little was possible in establishing political community, including the acceptance of *plurality*, which is Berlin's ultimate ideal.[114]

Far more problematic is that his extraction does *not* follow the content of Kant's argument but in fact wilfully distorts it.[115] Berlin conveniently overlooks

[106] Karl Popper, 'Reason or Revolution?', in T.W. Adorno et al. (eds), *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. by G. Adey and D. Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 298.
[107] Karl Popper, 'Die 'politische' Biographie', in H. Marcuse and K. Popper, *Revolution oder Reform?* (F. Stark ed.), (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1971), p. 9.
[108] Popper, 'Utopia and Violence', pp. 355–63. See also Popper, 'Reason or Revolution?', p. 291.
[109] Ibid., pp. 293, 295–6, 299.
[110] Isaiah Berlin cited in Martin E. Marty, 'But Even So, Look at That: An Ironic Perspective on Utopias', in E. Rothstein (ed.), *Visions of Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 52.
[111] See Isaiah Berlin, 'The Idea of Pluralism', in W.T. Anderson (ed.), *The Fontana Post-Modernism Reader* (Hammersmith: Fontana Press, 1996), pp. 43, 45.
[112] Lewis Carroll, 'Letter to Daniel Biddle', cited in H. Haughnton, 'Notes to Through the Looking Glass', in Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass,* Op. Cit., pp. 342–3.
[113] See Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, H. Hardy (ed.), (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
[114] For a criticism of Berlin's 'messy pluralism' see Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, p. 64.
[115] The passage is exhumed from *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* in which Kant does *not* reject a perfectionist teleology in nature but in fact posits its radical opposite, the utopia of the Highest Good. See Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan

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Kant's writings that pay homage to utopianism, where Kant argues that it matters little if we cannot realise 'glorious ideals' at once because whilst difficulties obstruct their realisation, the idea of a 'perfect republic' is not impossible merely because it has not been experienced.[116] So while Kant may have been against revolutionary activity to achieve such 'glorious' ideals, he nevertheless supported their construction *in thesi*[117] and did not regard the 'crookedness' of human nature as a delimiting condition to social transformation as Berlin would have us believe. Recalling Plato's rhetorical question whether 'our picture is any the worse drawn because we cannot show how it can be realized in fact?',[118] what Kant suggests is that while we may be uncertain whether we can hope for anything better for humanity, such fears cannot detract from the assumption that progress *is possible*.[119] Uncertainty should neither distract us, nor does it preclude us, from the responsibility to actively work towards realising such ideals. Yet in distinction to the optimism of Kant, Berlin deferred to 'utilitarian solutions'[120] and yet the cultural relativist position he subsequently adopted made little justification for its denial of any alternate 'vision of reality'[121] and became pathetically exculpatory to the inequities of existing society.[122] In effect, by precluding any moment of transcendence within them, Berlin rendered existing social conditions as a perpetual totality that he ostensibly so reviled.

Following similar reasoning, Arendt argued that utopianism suffered from the twin defects of totalitarianism and idealism – an assertion which, unfortunately, was tainted by the same logical deficiency that we have already identified in Popper and Berlin's accounts.[123] The problem surfaced when Arendt made the distinction between 'ideological supersense' (that is, utopianism) which she defined as a 'logical, closed system [...] that issues into mass murder',[124] and the rational notion of 'common sense' which she favoured.[125] As with Popper and Berlin, Arendt did not sufficiently prove the necessary connection between utopianism and the totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin to which her critique was directed. Not only would it be difficult to sustain an argument that these tyrants actually possessed utopian imaginaries of 'better' worlds but the historical validity of Arendt's linkage is dubious as it would be a gross distortion to attribute twentieth century violence to utopianism. For Jacoby, this exposes the intellectual sleight of hand by which

Purpose', in *Kant: Political Writings*, pp. 46 and 51. See Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 232–5 cited in Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, pp. 64–6, and Frank E. Manuel, Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, p. 519.

[116] Immanuel Kant, *On Education*, trans. by A. Churton (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1992), p. 8.

[117] Immanuel Kant, 'On the Common Saying: 'This May be True in Theory, but it Does Not Apply in Practice', in Reiss (ed.), pp. 61–63.

[118] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by D. Less (Penguin Classics, Oxford, 2003), p. 191.

[119] *My emphasis added*. Kant, 'On the Common Saying' in Reiss (ed.), p. 89.

[120] Isaiah Berlin, 'The Pursuit of the Ideal', in H. Hardy (ed.), *The Proper Study of Mankind* (New York: Farrat, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), p. 15.

[121] Berlin, 'The Idea of Pluralism', pp. 46–7.

[122] See Stefan Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 203–4 cited in Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, pp. 68–9.

[123] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2 (New York: World Publishing, 1958), pp. 475, 468–9. See also Hannah Arendt, 'Thoughts on Politics and Revolution – Commentary, in *Crises of the Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 187.

[124] Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, p. 76.

[125] Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), pp. 431–2.

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utopia was to be banished in the name of violence that could be far more justly attributed to other sources (tyrants, bureaucrats, ultra-nationalists, etc.) than to utopian-dreamers.[126] In the words of Levitas, the problem with totalitarianism was its totalitarianism, not its alleged links with utopianism.[127] What is more problematic is the fact that Arendt then championed conformity to 'common-sensical presuppositions' to prevent the emergence of 'ideological supersense'. Here Arendt seemed blind to the idea that common-sense itself can be culturally monistic in the same manner she assumed utopianism to be. Common sense possesses no *prima facie* ethical or normative content other than the fact that it is the widely accepted knowledge of the time and could actually become a form of Arendt's dreaded 'ideological supersense' through its domination of alternative ways of thought and being. Arguably, today's dominant 'ideological suspense' is one that forecloses on any utopian imaginary. However, it is important to note that Arendt's attack was focused on utopian *ideologues* and not on the utopian imagination itself. Arendt actually favoured what she called a "spontaneous" 'people's utopia' – a view consistent with an *open-dialectical* form of utopian imagination posited in this article.[128]

The problem with the anti-utopian arguments of Popper, Berlin and Arendt is that their interpretations rendered utopianism far too didactic – if you believed in the possibility of radical human improvement then your approach could be labelled as unscientific, and if you made a claim to what was deemed a utopian alternative, then you were to be condemned as a totalitarian. Instead of a radical form of self-actualisation and creativity that would emphasise the transformative capacity of the people themselves (something that Arendt in particular should have been mindful of) these thinkers alienated humankind from the ability to be self-determining. Instead of utopian imaginings and movements to 'better' worlds, the ambit of what was considered as humanly possible was narrowed considerably and divested to either 'admissible plans' (Popper), 'utilitarian-solutions' (Berlin) or 'common-sense' (Arendt). The elitism and technocracy offered by Popper and Berlin 'plans' and 'solutions' are fairly obvious but the dull uniformity of Arendt's appeal to 'common-sense' is no less limiting to the radical transformative potential of humankind. Ultimately, by implicating visions of the 'good life' to be at best unrealistic, and at worst as leading to complete socio-political domination, these thinkers silenced imagination as completely and as ruthlessly as any form of totalitarian repression could ever hope to achieve.

The limits of a 'realistic utopia' for IR theory

'Children like it best at someone else's home. They notice soon enough what's wrong there too... They sense early that, here as elsewhere, much could be different.'

Ernst Bloch[129]

[126] Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, pp. 81–2.
[127] See Ruth Levitas, Lucy Sargisson, 'Utopia in Dark Times', in T. Moylan, R. Baccolini (eds), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 13–28.
[128] Arendt, 'Thoughts on Politics and Revolution', pp. 168, 188–90, 187, and 178.
[129] Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, trans. By A.A. Nassar (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), "Mingling", p. 2.

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Despite the disdain of its critics, utopian thought has managed to develop through four discernible phases in IR theory; the post-World War I utopianism of the liberal internationalists; the 'peace' or anti-nuclear utopianism of the 1960s and 1970s; the utopian reaction to the 'planetary crisis' of the late 1970s; and the 'realistic utopianism' of the early 1990s.[130] The utopian tradition has thus gradually widened its ambit from the liberal-peace to include other progressive ends, including emancipation and environmental concerns. While the first form of utopianism has already been discussed, the middle group – the peace and planetary utopianism – focused on the necessity of change, making a stark choice between nuclear annihilation, environmental collapse *or* utopia. For these groups, it was the magnitude of possible calamity to humankind resulting from the planetary wide security dilemma that prescribed utopia.[131] While the contribution of this planetary utopian literature cannot be over-stated, due to considerations of length, this part focuses on 'utopian realism' and will conclude by advocating the need for a new, fifth mode of utopian thought that emphasises the capacity of imagination.

In the early 1990s considerable interest grew for the idea of a realistic utopia championed by Ken Booth.[132] This 'realistic utopianism' hoped to restore balance in the relationship between utopianism and realism that had eluded Carr. Booth explained his approach to be more an attitude of mind than a theory, even though it was to be based on normative (utopian) and empirical (realistic) theories. The normative content of utopian realism was derived from its 'universal appeal, based on reason, to various world order principles and its empirical content sought to go beyond realism to offer a 'fuller' understanding of those forces shaping the globe. Borrowing from Hoffman, Booth labelled his approach as one of 'uplifting politics'.[133] Booth argued that the benefit of utopian thinking was that it was able to 'set goals' that could act as a 'catalyst to action', a process in which humans would no longer merely be the object of historical forces but the subject. Booth explicitly related his approach with processual utopianism which he saw as embodying reformist and practical responses to existing problems.[134]

While I am deeply sympathetic to this project I am also wary of a number of its suppositions which unduly limit what it considers as *possible* in world politics. There is a distinct lack of imagination that 'utopian realism' evokes, concerned as it is more with the traditional aspects of the discipline, particularly war and nuclear disarmament. It fails to fully appreciate, unlike Bloch's children quoted above, that in IR '*much could be different*.' That is, utopian realism is far more realist than utopian and its imagination is relatively muted. Much of its prescriptions are focused on reforming the worst features of the international system, rather than advocating the radical transformation of international political community. So

[130] See Ian Clark, 'World Order Reform and Utopian Thought: A Contemporary Watershed?', *The Review of Politics*, 41:1 (January, 1979), p. 109.

[131] Two key examples of this type of thought were Camilleri and Falk. See Joseph Camilleri, *Civilisation in Crisis: Human Prospects in a Changing World* (Cambridge, 1976), and Richard Falk, *This Endangered Planet* (New York, 1971).

[132] This was based on Giddens 'utopian realism' and Ashley's 'emancipatory realism'. See Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', p. 534.

[133] Ibid., p. 534 citing Stanley Hoffman, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), p. 2.

[134] It should be noted that this limited critique is based only on Booth's earlier work on utopian realism. Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', pp. 534–6.

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while Booth was right to point out that the past has contained many 'radical surprises',[135] I find that an appeal to realistic utopianism does not contain much that is either radical or surprising.

While Booth rightly rejects the ahistoricism of 'end-point' utopias his move to 'process utopias' suffers from how he situates them as mere conservative reforms that render them far too limited as alternative imaginaries of world politics.[136] The problem centres on the epistemological question of what is considered *possible* in the existent conditions of world politics and Booth offers no reasoning as to why the solutions he proposes are to be considered 'realistic' and others not. Booth's attempt to correlate 'process utopianism' as 'practical utopianism' has meant the exclusion of many possibilities from the agenda of reform. These unwarranted restrictions are particularly evident in Booth's conception of emancipation. Booth defines emancipation as 'freeing people from those constraints that stop them carrying out what freely they would choose to do', which implies an expansive notion of emancipation, but which he then dramatically restricts to 'a few' practical measures such as 'war, poverty, oppression and poor education.'[137] Booth justified this mitigation of emancipatory aims by stating that what is 'appropriate' depends on the situation and power of different individuals and groups. For example, for a nuclear superpower he sees 'a process-utopian policy' to be one which involves moving from nuclear pre-emption to minimum deterrent levels.[138] However, one could contend that living with MADness, no matter at what minimum level, is hardly a utopian program and one which is not justified epistemologically by Booth's theory, regardless of the normative concerns we could also raise against it. Instead of imagining a nuclear free world, Booth downgrades utopian hope to minimum nuclear capacities which begs the question what is a minimum level and for whom? Instead of imagining the elimination of nuclear arms we are left only with their minimisation – an end that is now re-cast as utopian. Carr's fear of sterility, impotence and determinism that would flow from the dominance of realism has come full circle.

Others, like Nicholson, have pursued utopian realism by reference to democratic peace postulates and have pointed to gradual moral improvements over time (such as the lessening of slavery) as indicative of such utopianism.[139] Yet this hardly evokes the power of imagination and is in fact contradicted by empirical evidence. References abound as to the growth of *actual* slavery, despite its *formal* prohibition.[140] These two examples from Booth and Nicholson reveal how utopian realism gives far too great a concession to realist parameters so as to ensure that its approach is 'proximately' rather than 'remotely' possible. This need to proximate reality is never ontologically justified in the tradition of utopian realism

[135] Ken Booth, 'International Relations Theory vs. The Future', in K. Booth, S. Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 329.
[136] Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', Ibid., p. 536.
[137] Ibid., p. 539.
[138] Ibid., p. 542.
[139] See Michael Nicholson, 'Realism and Utopianism Revisited', *Review of International Studies*, 24:5 (December 1998), p. 78.
[140] The US Department of State has indicated an increasing number of human-beings trafficked globally. See US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2008* at http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/ accessed on 5 January 2009.

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and has rendered the worst features of world order to remain unopposed by it. So while Booth asks us to 'confront the rigidity that is in our minds' in making his appeal to utopian realism, one could ask the very same of the programmatic aspects of his theory.[141] In distinction to the confines of utopian realism, we must emphasise the need to remove utopian imaginings as far as possible from collaboration with existent dominant ideologies in order to re-appropriate imagination as an instrument of opposition and alterity. I contend that utopian realism does not sufficiently achieve this end and instead encloses political imagination within the confines of a realist agenda.[142]

The problems associated with the project of utopian realism largely stem from its uncritical reliance on aspects of Rawlsian morality.[143] The issue is not only Rawls' dubious references to the international sphere[144] but because the political alternatives that he derives under his veil of ignorance serve only to justify a romanticised form of liberal democracy. For Rawls, a 'realistic utopia' is a condition where the 'great evils' such as unjust war, oppression, religious persecution and slavery (note that inequality, gender and racial discriminations, and environmental problems are downplayed) have been banished through the establishment of 'just' basic institutions[145] – a reductionism of the utopian impulse clearly mirrored in the reformist agendas of Booth and Nicholson. The 'veil of ignorance', even as a tool for ethical abstraction, does not lead Rawls to espouse the right of all to be self-directing and autonomous beings. Rather, Rawls leaves in place the operation of the 'difference principle' and all the iniquitous outcomes that flow from it. All that Rawls imagines is a place where persons have an equal right to 'basic liberties' which is hardly an extension on century's old liberal conceptions regarding rights endowment. Further problems centre on his Eurocentric conception of what constitutes a 'well-ordered society', the penultimate standard of which is the ideal, modern, liberal state – though he does suggest that other forms could also qualify.[146] As such, Rawls' merely validates the existent, bereft of its many possibilities for emancipation. So despite Brown's insistence that 'nothing has been compromised' in Rawls' attempt to balance realism and utopianism,[147] it is obvious that the promise of more radical types of reforms, what Moylan has called the *demand for the impossible*, is completely absent in Rawls' formulaic system. This is reflected in Rawls' own admission that his utopia does not settle for a 'compromise' between power and justice 'but sets limits to the reasonable exercise of power.'[148] What this reveals is the intrinsically negative character of Rawls' 'realistic utopia' in that it seeks to make only 'reasonable' limitations to the exercise of power and therefore precludes the imagination of any alternatives outside that very framework.

[141] Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', p. 545.
[142] See Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, p. 20.
[143] See Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', p. 538.
[144] See Thomas Pogge, 'Recognised and Violated by International Law: The Human Rights of the Global Poor', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 18 (2005), pp. 717–45.
[145] John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 126.
[146] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (revised edition), (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), pp. 52, 60.
[147] Chris Brown, 'The construction of a "realistic utopia" John Rawls and international political theory', *Review of International Studies*, 28:2 (2002), p. 20.
[148] Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 6.

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Towards an open-dialectical utopian imaginary

'Picturing this "good day" is the first step into a modern utopia; then you will have to seek the conditions which can bring about this "good day".'

Bertrand de Jouvenal[149]

As we have seen from the above discussion, the case against utopianism in both realism and political philosophy is relatively weak. The brunt of the realist criticism is applicable only against blueprint utopias, a concept long jettisoned in Utopian Studies, and rather than confirming the irrelevance of utopian thought, reveals a powerful realist/utopian dialectic that affords an important role for the utopian imagination in world politics. Having already illustrated the problems with the anti-utopian thesis, I wish in this final section to highlight the positive aspects of the utopian imagination and how it may serve to widen the ambit of IR theory. While there are certainly limitations to utopian thinking,[150] the vehemence of utopia's critics has meant that they have inadequately reflected on the constructive, ideational role that the utopian imaginary can play. As expressed by de Jouvenal above, picturing the 'good day' is the first step in leading to progressive change and in this way the utopian imagination and the search for the 'real' conditions for their fulfilment are mutually related. It is this fantasising power of imagination that is the productive element of utopianism, its projection of novel solutions to current problems that broadens the horizon of our conceptions of possibility and offers long term goals to our endeavours in world politics. It is in exercising this long-dormant imaginative function that can *envision* the future that is the crucial feature, and benefit, of utopian thought.[151]

In distinction to futurism which extrapolates from the conditions of the present a prognostication for the future (and thus absorbs the stifling conditions of the present),[152] the *open-dialectical utopianism* advocated here, maintains a non-deterministic view of the world. It is characterised by a belief in the possibility of progressive development through the capacity of human reason to help shape social conditions, to *pull* the process of change from in front.[153] In distinction to blueprint utopias, the key benefit of the utopian imaginary is what Kateb has described as its ability in setting the *tone* of what life in utopia *could be*. It crowns Proteus the symbol of utopianism by embodying self-expression, mutability and responsibility to the changing needs of future generations,[154] alongside Prometheus as the elemental figure symbolising the imaginative inventive capacities of

[149] Bertrand de Jouvenal, 'Utopia for Practical Purposes', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. 229.

[150] The dangers include the 'hubris of imagination', how we may sully the future with our own deformed and/or repressed sociality and 'voluntarism', how utopianism may over-estimate the capacity of humankind to actualize change. See Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 234–5; Jameson, 'Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism', in the *Jameson Reader*, p. 385; Goodwin, Taylor, *The Politics of* Utopia, p. 253.

[151] Jameson, 'Introduction/Prospectus', in *Jameson Reader*, p. 363.

[152] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Alo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), pp. 344–7, quoted in Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, p. 203.

[153] Hudson has identified four functions of utopian thought; the *cognitive*, *educative*, *anticipatory*, and *causal*. See W. Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 51. Levitas has added another function, the 'articulation of dissatisfaction'. See Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 101. See also Clark, 'World Order Reform and Utopian Thought', pp. 98–100.

[154] On the symbolism of Proteus see George Kateb, 'Utopia and the Good Life', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, pp. 240, 256.

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humankind. The benefit of such plurality and openness regarding conceptions of utopia is that by hypothesis we can explore the normative content of each claim without the evasiveness, subterfuge and sophistry that typically accompany such debates. Moreover, the benefit of placing imagination as central to theorising is that it requires one to labour on exactly what they are *really* seeking and in so doing reveals the theorists own values and dreams of a 'better world[155] – questions typically camouflaged in mainstream approaches to IR. The ontology of utopianism is thus a theoretical advancement over the value 'shyness' of other approaches as the examination of norms, values and ideals is the central purpose of its philosophical inquiry and it openly confronts such issues discursively. People can respond to the idola of any given representation of utopia – they can accept, reject, contest or modify its ruminations – and through their capacity to react creatively on their environment, develop 'better' ways of life. Without such disclosure, theories would lack an account of their own projections which would make the particular measures or ends that they offer justifiable.[156]

What utopian thought enables is the opening up of debate on choice and possibilities in a world that postmodern thinkers like Derrida and Foucault have correctly described as being 'undecidable'[157] and 'open'.[158] Tillich has labelled this the 'anticipatory inventiveness' of utopianism and describes how it 'opens up' possibilities of human fulfilment that may have otherwise been lost.[159] Tillich's account is important because it sets up a dialectic between the positive and negative meanings of utopia, between truth/untruth, fruitfulness/unfruitfulness and power/impotence. In Tillich's view, to reject utopianism outright would be to reject what human artifice and invention are now capable of.[160] Humankind today can strive for conditions of freedom hitherto unthinkable, yet the perception of the capabilities of our rational faculties has degenerated to such an extent that many approaches tacitly accept the positivist dogma that only that which is objectively verifiable can be considered sufficiently *non-utopian* to be an erstwhile object of human endeavour.[161] This pervasive scepticism unnecessarily limits the possibility of betterment to objective content alone and narrows the horizon of possibility to within the parameters of acceptability set by representatives of the *status quo* themselves.

The question is why the human political imagination is still so impoverished and denies itself the ability to theorise on 'better' conditions, given that it is today potentially so liberated from material constraints?[162] Instead of nihilistic despair or

[155] See Arthur B. Shostak, 'Introduction', in A.R. Shostak (ed.), *Viable Utopian Ideas* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), p. 3 and Bertrand de Jouvenal, 'Utopia for Practical Purposes', in F.E. Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. 221.
[156] Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), pp. 194, 254.
[157] James Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility', in R. Kearney, M. Dooley (eds), *Questioning Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[158] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1984), pp. 56–7.
[159] While I accept this aspect of 'inventiveness' identified by Tillich, I reject his account of a telos within utopianism and his transcendental 'synthesis'. See Paul Tillich, 'Critique and Justification of Utopia', in F.E. Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, pp. 296–302.
[160] Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies*, p. 12.
[161] Kant, 'What is Orientation in Thinking', in Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings,* p. 248.
[162] See Lewis Mumford, 'Utopia, The City and The Machine' in F.E. Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. 10.

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the acceptance of the immutability thesis, the question should be what are *we* now to do with *our* knowledge and power?[163] The problem is that IR theory remains reticent to re-evaluate utopianism based on its earlier rejection of the tradition by classical realism. Such obstinacy has left little room for conceptual movement. Seeing as though anti-utopianism has been a central ideological pillar upholding the existing world order this reticence is hardly unsurprising. Yet, any one of the counterfactuals of the realist position demonstrated in this article should be enough to warrant an urgent reappraisal of the viability of utopian thought in IR. The problem for the future development of world politics is that without imagination and visions of betterment, our conceptualisation of world politics will soon become, as Mumford quipped, 'empty of useful furniture' and the choice will no longer be one between *no place* or a *good place*, but *nothingness*.[164] As such, I posit that we must examine our political imaginations anew and explore utopian ideals that could assist in reconstituting our political landscape towards 'betterment'.

Fortunately, recent developments have shown a resurgent interest in the topic of utopianism. Of note is a new compilation by Hayden and el-Ojeili who have described utopianism as involving the 'triple task' of subjecting the politics of the present to critique, imagining alternative human communities and preventing the foreclosure of political possibilities in the present and future. These writers have posited that globalisation is replete with positive potentials for the fundamental transformation of the world *if* IR theory is able to overcome its 'presently existing limitations of imagination'.[165] Moreover, a recent paper by Ian Hall has argued that IR could yet benefit from the utopian construction of 'imaginary worlds'.[166] These works have been paralleled with recent studies in political philosophy, Marxian studies and even game theory, not to mention the significant developments in Utopian Studies itself.[167] However, while these recent works offer fundamental insights, they do not make central the *imaginative* aspects of the utopian project which, to this writer at least, gives meaning and purpose to the very notion of *Eutopia* as 'no place and a good place'.[168] For example, Hall limits the purview of utopianism to a method of critique through comedic and satirical portrayals of existing socio-political reality rather than defending the potential of utopian imagination to envision the 'good life' as a legitimate aspect of IR theory.[169] A similar problem has arisen in a recent piece by Elshtain which makes some astute observations highlighting the problems associated with realism's

[163] Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, p. 109.
[164] Ibid., pp. 267–9.
[165] Patrick Hayden, Chamsey el-Ojeili, *Globalisation and Utopia*, forthcoming, 1.
[166] Ian Hall, 'The Utopian International Society and its Enemies', (paper presented at International Studies Association, San Francisco, 2008), p. 20.
[167] For examples in political philosophy see Michael Kenny (ed.), 'Special issue: Utopianism in western political ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12:3 (October 2007). For Marxian inspired accounts see Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*. For game theory see Matthew Braham, Frank Steffen, 'Power and Freedom in Utopia: A Parable of a Simple Game', (paper submitted to the Annual Meeting of the European Public Choice Society, Belgirate, Italy, 4–7 April 2002).
[168] See Eva Brann, '"An Exquisite Platform": Utopia', *Interpretation: Journal of Political Philosophy*, 3:1 (Autumn 1972), p. 9.
[169] While all forms of satire imply an alternative world which the author intrinsically ascribes a certain 'betterness' to, to reduce utopianism merely to a satirical literary device would seem to *confine* the role of the utopian imaginary, to render utopianism obsolete and to limit the horizons of political *possibility*. Moreover, satire is thoroughly immanent, it criticises only existing forms and is culturally bound. On its own, satire projects an alternative only implicitly and negatively. Satire can reveal the

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reliance on the Hobbesian imaginary but then seems to call for the re-invention of an Augustinian framework rather than appealing to the utopian imagination as a creative influence in world politics.[170]

Under the approach advocated here, utopianism is not some passive device but an active ideal that makes central the notion that we are *co-creators* of our world who possess the ability to generate the visions and conditions of a remarkably appealing world.[171] Utopia is not considered a closed system where future developments are precluded. Instead, utopianism becomes a 'mental exercise on lateral possibilities'[172] – a process, rather than a framework. However, this form of processual, open-dialectical utopianism does not fall into the false duality between timeless ideals and temporal reality that so troubles utopian blueprints, nor does it suffer from the dubious normative compromises that so infects the tradition of utopian-realism. It escapes the disillusionment that comes from such approaches because it suggests that what is hoped for changes throughout history and need not unduly constrain its imaginary to what others perceive as precluding change. This preserves the spirit of utopia, not its letter.[173] But neither does it fall prey to voluntarism because it remains aware of its embeddedness *in* the world – with all its limiting conditions – and the productive dialectical push and pull that the tension between reality and utopia engenders. This idea follows Oscar Wilde's sentiment of utopianism as the progressive realisation of innumerable *Utopias* which humanity again and again reaches the shores of, and again and again sets sail for something better.[174] The conceptual task is to now make the logical corrective to our definition of utopianism from one of static 'perfection' to one of indefinable limits, open-ended developments and pluralistic values, a utopianism that recognises its provisionality and partiality[175] just as it recognises the need to discuss these openly. Only in this way, can utopianism move with the ever-changing needs of the future, be resistant to theoretical monism, and continue to imagine new possibilities and hope.

Taking this open-dialectical approach, contemporary utopian thought can circumvent its two principle criticisms; that such models create systems of rigid conformity or possess a totalising conception of the 'good life'. In distinction to Plato's attempt to render his *Republic* immune to change, the ceaseless process of self-transformation is placed at the very heart of the utopian project.[176] Similarly,

absurdities in existing socio-political life, but it cannot project an alternative and is therefore bounded negativity.

[170] Elshtain, 'On Never Reaching the Coast of Utopia', p. 163.

[171] Carroy U. Ferguson, 'The Conscious Use of the "Mirror Effect": Co-Creating a Utopian World', in Shostak (ed.), *Viable Utopian Ideas*, p. 84.

[172] Frank E. Manuel, 'Introduction', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. x, citing Raymond Ruyer, *L'Utopie et les utopies*, p. 9.

[173] Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, p. xiv.

[174] This analogy should not be taken seen as defining utopia as a 'beyond' but as something that is strived for and whose concept and content changes anew. Oscar Wilde quoted in Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 5.

[175] Levitas has gone so far as to employ the phrase 'Imaginary Reconstitution of Society' (IROS) to avoid any ideological baggage that surrounds 'utopianism'. Levitas, 'Looking for the blue', pp. 289, 300. There are considerable affinities with Hayden and el-Ojeili's volume which also promotes utopian images that are 'self-reflexive, pluralistic, explicitly politico-normative' and which remain 'committed to the utopian desire for radical social change, human emancipation, and the expansion of possibilities for world-creation.' See Hayden, el-Ojeili, *Globalisation and Utopia*, p. 2.

[176] See Mumford, 'Utopia, The City and The Machine', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*.

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open-dialectical utopianism need not rely on the problematic assumption of a universal harmony of interest that, in the words of Engels, purports to emancipate 'all humanity at once'.[177] It is not concerned with establishing a realm of uniformity set for all time but rather with initiating a self-consciously directed course of dialectical development that forms and re-forms the conditions of human emancipation. Such sentiments are echoed by Geras who provides for a 'modest' platform of utopia that is concerned with a life of free self-development[178] and Fournier, who is concerned with creating the material conditions for the cultivation of possibilities and (re)claiming control over the ways in which we organise our lives; a 'movement of hope'.[179] This open-dialectical utopianism would resist closure around any touted "best" alternative and instead exist in a dialectical tension created by the juxtaposition of multiple possibilities.[180] Pursuing 'betterness' however, should not be taken as limiting the utopian imaginary to mere reformism, or to risk its attenuation by losing sight of the sublime as a possibility.[181] Rather, the term *betterment* should be seen as alluding to the impermanence of change and the ongoing renewal of conceptions of 'betterment' (and of the movements towards it) and not as a limitation on what is considered actually possible.

In similar fashion, Harvey has called utopian imagination the 'signifiers of our desires'[182] – a recurring motif in his attempt to construct a utopianism that is explicitly 'spatiotemporal.' For Harvey, this involves the operation of 'imaginative spatial play' to achieve specific moral and social goals, an endless experimentation with the possibilities of spatial forms that allows for the exploration of alternative and emancipatory strategies.[183] This 'play' does not evoke a static emancipatory process but is a dialectical movement that remains rooted in our present possibilities while at the same time pointing towards different trajectories. Harvey draws much inspiration from Unger's work on utopia which looked to alternatives that emerge out of the critical and practical engagements from within existing institutions. In this way, Harvey and Unger believe that by changing our institutions we can change ourselves; and through the desire to change ourselves, we can alter our institutions. They do not therefore present a picture of a perfect society but instead look towards the potential for the conscious 'redrawing' of our maps of possibility and desirable forms of human association'.[184]

Similarly, Levitas has sought to clarify and provide a new definition of utopia which she frames under the constellation of 'the education of desire'.[185] She finds that while the content, form and function of utopias may change over time that the constant element in utopian thought is the expression of *desire* for better ways of being and living.[186] It is by reflecting on these desires which are left unfulfilled in

[177] Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 48.
[178] Norman Geras, 'Minimum Utopia: Ten Theses', *Socialist Register* (2000), p. 3.
[179] Valerie Fournier, 'Utopianism and Grassroots Alternatives', in Shostak (ed.), *Viable Utopian Ideas*, p. 187. See also Valerie Fournier, in M. Paker (ed.), *Utopia and Organisation* (London: Blackwell, 2002).
[180] Ibid., pp. 182, 187.
[181] Vincent Geohegan, 'Utopia, Religion and Memory', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12:3 (October 2007), p. 263.
[182] David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 195.
[183] He elsewhere labels this as dialectical utopianism. Ibid., p. 182.
[184] Ibid., p. 186.
[185] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 181.
[186] Ibid., p. 196.

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existing conditions that opens the space that utopia occupies.[187] She considers a broad rather than restrictive definition of utopianism to be essential and holds that utopia need not necessarily be immediately possible.[188] Instead, she allows for the freeing up of the 'explorations of desire' so that utopias only have to present transition as being a vaguely defined event – a *possibility* rather than *inevitability*. Moreover, she seeks to avoid imbuing utopia with normative content so that it is not seen as being necessarily oppositional. By changing focus from an understanding of utopia as relating specifically to form to one of desire and imagination, Levitas enables us to explore changes in the form of utopia over time and cultures.[189]

What flows from this emphasis on utopian imagination is the acknowledgement that solutions need to be created – they will not arise automatically from historical and economic developments alone, nor are they precluded by alleged self-perpetuating world systems. This *imagining* of alternate worlds is the productive role that utopianism can play in expanding the focus of IR theory. Its most salient feature is its rejection of historical necessity (including realism's immutability thesis) and its appeal to constructive human thought and agency in emancipating the present and building the future. In this way utopianism can become an instrument of praxis by motivating change and evoking in the imagination *another* place where obstacles to freedom are removed and other freedoms gained.[190] The power of utopia is, like Kierkegaard said of the will, 'the passion of possibility',[191] and it is this key characteristic, found nowhere else in political theory, that underlies the importance of utopianism as the realm of imagination and possibility in IR theory. This does not mean, like Engels remarked, that the theorist has to 'serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolution of the social conflicts which he describes'[192] but it does mean that the vision of utopia that animates the critique of existing society should be made explicit because it remains the underlying motive of the theory whether it is explicitly stated as such or not. The goal is to render alternatives more *vivid* and less *fixed*.[193] Such an approach would emancipate IR theory from its *aporia*, the false duality between political reality and political imagination which condemns political thought to the pillories in which it is transfixed between an inability to think practically or imaginatively about its object or its purpose.

This open-dialectical utopianism evades totalitarianism by being open in its discourse and plural in its imaginings – the *Utopians* of Sir Thomas More, it must be noted, did not assert that theirs was a model amenable to all.[194] This open-dialectical utopianism can remit a myriad of interpretations within it, all of which envisage 'betterness'.[195] In this form, utopianism is a social process in which

[187] Ibid., pp. 2, 7–8.
[188] Ibid., pp. 178–80, 197.
[189] Ibid., pp. 197–8.
[190] Frank E. Manuel, 'Introduction', in F.E. Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. xi, quoting Mucchielli, *Le Mythe de la cite idéale* (Paris: presses universitaires de France, 1961), pp. 7–8.
[191] Søren Kierkegaard quoted in Edward Rothstein, 'Utopia and Its Discontents', in Rothstein (et al.)., *Visions of Utopia*, p. 14.
[192] Frederick Engels, 'Letter to Minna Kautsky', in *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 88.
[193] Margaret Mead, 'Towards More Vivid Utopias', *Science*, 126 (1957), pp. 957–61.
[194] See Ian Hall, 'The Utopian International Society and its Enemies', p. 19.
[195] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the ideal society: A Study of English utopian writing, 1516–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 13.

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we develop our ideas through open, practical dialogue[196] – the point is to ensure that all can and do give voice to their imagination, openly and discursively. As expressed by Jameson, the utopian imaginary does not promise a humanity of perfection but one released from the multiple determinisms of history (economic, political and social), in order to be free to do whatever humanity wants with the intersubjective relationships within it.[197] We must accept the limits of utopianism and openly acknowledge all utopian accounts as transitory, partial, preliminary, ambiguous, something that we can all judge, and to whose finitude we admit.[198] It is this openness that allows the ongoing development of different imaginations of utopia. As we all co-create reality it is through processes of dialogue that both the utopian author and their conception of the 'good life' will change, and in so doing, will open up completely new kinds of political community, new utopian shores.[199]

Conclusion

'With the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history, and therewith his ability to change it.'

Karl Mannheim[200]

While the truism holds that all we can say with certainty about the future is that it will not be same as the present,[201] this does not mean that we cannot imagine and work towards alternative ways of being that are envisioned to be normatively, ethically and materially superior to our current ways of existence. Arguably, present conditions can provide far more fertile grounds than existed for classical conceptions of utopia[202] and yet the old prejudices regarding the perceived limitations to what is considered politically possible hold fast, mooring our minds to the banality of realism. IR theory remains a field of human endeavour in which its dominant theorists collectively deny our ability to imagine and create better conditions for ourselves. To think that what we have now is the very limit of our abilities and that alternatives are impossible or potentially dangerous are both disempowering and ossifying notions that merely safeguard the *status quo*. The point is well made by Nicholson who asks that if we can have hypotheses that are thought to be the basis for a 'better' society in other disciplines, then why can't we do this also in international affairs?[203] Unless we are certain that we have exhausted our abilities to recreate ourselves, then imagination still has a fundamentally important role to play in IR theory.

Today the task is not to erect presupposed and unverifiable barriers to what we can explore but to give expression to our utopian imaginations in a cogent and

[196] Roger Paden, 'Marx's Critique of the Utopian Socialists', *Utopian Studies*, 13:2 (Spring 2002), p. 83 and Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, pp. 133–96.
[197] Jameson, 'World-reduction in Le Guin', in *Jameson Reader*, p. 376.
[198] Tillich, 'Critique and Justification of Utopia', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, pp. 306–7.
[199] See Maureen O'Hara, 'Constructing Emancipatory Realities', in W.T. Anderson (ed.), *The Fontana Post-Modernism Reader* (Hammersmith: Fontana Press, 1996), p. 151.
[200] Mannheim, quoted in Rothstein, 'Utopia and Its Discontents', in *Visions of Utopia*, p. 14.
[201] Manuel, 'Introduction', in Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, p. xiv.
[202] See Mumford, 'Utopia, The City and The Machine', in Ibid., p. 10.
[203] Nicholson, 'Realism and utopianism revisited', p. 77.

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open manner. As Mannheim suggests above, where there are no utopian constructions to open new possibilities, there is the real danger of social stagnation in which the realisation of human possibilities cannot reach fulfilment. Without utopian theory we would remain imprisoned in the present, for the present can be fully alive only in tension between past and future. Utopia is not some *other* place beyond, nor a dormant, pre-designed blueprint of future perfection awaiting discovery on the seas of time. We cannot set sail for it, since it resides most vitally in the now; the now not only gives utopia meaning but is the historical and social preconditions of utopias becoming. Instead, the argument for reclaiming the utopian imagination presupposes a 'weak' ontology of open-ended dialectical development which is at the same time the guiding principle of its normative commitment. It is in this way that the utopian imaginary can retain its critical potential by not drafting an 'idea of the good' over those affected – which Honneth rightly warns us could be misused politically[204] – but by giving creative affectations to the utopian visions of all.

The promise of such utopian imagination is great. As Hegel observed, the one who approaches the frontier has in fact already passed over it[205] – and this is the immanent promise of theories of emancipation imbued with a utopian imaginary, for in their vision of freedom they reach over the frontier of that which is, and push it forward. Utopianism, seen in this light, can help to create an overshoot of normativity that can push forward reality in the dialectical process of emancipation and augment the conditions of human freedom.

[204] See Axel Honneth, 'The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society', in *Disrespect*, trans. by J. Farrell, S. Kattago (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 50.

[205] Hegel quoted in Mieczyslaw Maneli, 'Three Concepts of Freedom: Kant – Hegel – Marx', *Interpretation*, 7:1 (January, 1978), p. 28.

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