The Sleeplessness of Vigilance

An Introductory Essay
On the Concept of Political Insomnia

By
Benjamin Lozano

Abstract
The liberal Enlightenment project speaks in the language of “awakenings”, often thought of as a definitive break from the “mind-forged-manacles” of the myths and superstitions of tradition, of coming-to-enlightenment. Contemporary expressions of it emphasize the maintenance of a hyper-vigilant political disposition in order to preempt the recurrence of the evils of the past. But what happens when one is chronically awake?

It is argued here that insofar as the “awakening” or coming-to-awareness of one’s history and context is premised on the necessity of maintaining a hyper-vigilant political disposition, far from arriving at the expected outcome articulated by its proponents, on the contrary, insomnia and its subsequent degenerative psychic corollaries (i.e. a general loss of reality, memory, and identity, etc.) is the result.

And so, one inquires, what would it look like to begin to think about insomnia politically? Of course one need not seek far for the ideological counterpart to the phenomenon of chronic insomnia: our liberal-democratic human rights culture and recent war on terror provide the most profound attempt at incessant vigilance that takes on insomniac-like features.

Constitutionally, theories of transitional justice, liberal cosmopolitanism, political philosopher Judith Shklar’s liberalism of fear, and now a post 9/11 world all share a common maxim -the identical theme running throughout their logic requires a staid vigilance, the incessant sleeplessness of a night-watchman, ever-prepared and distrustful of the future, fearful of the evils of the past. For transitional justice, this theme is expressed in an emphasis on preventing the recurrence of past (non-liberal) evils; for cosmopolitanism, in remembering to forget one’s cultural particularity and (national) identity; for Shklar this manifests in the fear of fear itself; and now, America’s “war on terror” provides the fullest expression of the long-term effects of chronic vigilance. It is this common theme –of the necessity of a fear-requiring-vigilance- that runs through the liberal political disposition. And it is the psychic origins of this theme that requires explanation.

This essay is devoted to articulating the general theme of these features, as they are expressed in the literature of the liberal-democratic human rights project, as well as the psychic roots of this hyper-vigilant political disposition.
The Sleeplessness of Vigilance

An Introduction to the Concept of Political Insomnia

I. Original Fear
   A. On Human Nature
   B. On the Human Condition
   C. On the Social Body

II. Fantasmatic Fear
   A. Fantasy and the State
   B. The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the Social Contract
   C. Desire, Aggression, Identification
   D. Real Fear

III. Fear and the Concept of Political Insomnia
   A. Liberal Fear Today
   B. On the Concept of Political Insomnia
A brief passage from Gabriel García Márquez’s epic novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, tells of a plague of insomnia descending upon the town of Macondo, a nascent adobe-house village built on the bank of a river in Mexico. Upon initially hearing news of the imminence of widespread insomnia, the general response by the village is one of deft ambivalence:

“‘if we don’t ever sleep again, so much the better,’” José Arcadio Buendía said in good humor. “‘That way we can get more out of life.’” But the Indian woman explained that the most fearsome part of the sickness of insomnia was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its more inexorable evolution toward a more critical manifestation: the loss of memory. She meant that when the sick person became used to his state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past.  

Even in the immediate aftermath of the first stage of insomnia no one was alarmed, nor did they complain, but were rather somewhat relieved to experience such resilient

---

1 Márquez pg. 52
sleeplessness. For who, upon superficial reflection, would not be enthusiastic about the prospect of what could be accomplished without the physical burdens of the necessity of sleep? Yet, as the debilitating effects of insomnia evolved in the town of Macondo a general loss of ability to recollect the names and functions of everyday objects set in; despite futile attempts to inscribe the identities and utility on the objects themselves, the town’s population ultimately began to forget the values of the very letters constituting the words which described these objects. Moreover, although ‘in all the houses keys to memorizing objects and feelings had been written…the system demanded so much vigilance and moral strength that many succumbed to the spell of an imaginary reality, one invented by themselves, which was less practical for them but more comforting.\(^2\)

Though fictional, Marquez’s depiction of the physical ailments often associated with chronic insomnia is in fact medically quite accurate. The National Center on Sleep Disorders Research’s (NCSDR)\(^3\) recent report on insomnia outlines its three basic grades:

*transient insomnia – short-term insomnia lasting for only a few nights or weeks of restless or poor sleep.
*intermittent insomnia – an on/off inability to sleep well or even to fall asleep; the experience of transient insomnia from time to time.
*chronic insomnia – a far more complex phenomenon that typically has several overlapping physiological and/or psychic factors, usually lasting more than a month.

While transient and intermittent insomnia generally occur in those individuals temporarily experiencing emotional and/or mental anxiety or stress, environmental noise,

\(^2\) Ibid pg. 53  
\(^3\) The NCSDR is a subsidiary within the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI).
rapid changes in environment, jet lag, and medication side effects, chronic insomnia ‘is more complex and often results from a combination of factors, including underlying physical or mental disorders’. Researchers have discovered that people suffering from chronic insomnia have a far higher risk of developing psychiatric problems.

In fact, though not posted in the report itself, the medical community further delineates the experience of chronic insomnia into “primary” and “secondary” categories: while primary insomnia maintains little apparent association with either stress or a diagnosable medical problem, secondary insomnia ‘is caused by symptoms that accompany a medical condition such as anxiety, depression, or pain’. Moreover, an interesting observation can be made, from the description of primary and secondary insomnia, that perhaps expresses a feature unique to the occurrence of chronic insomnia more generally –namely, unlike restless-leg syndrome, narcolepsy, sleep apnea, or any other sleep disorder, insomnia is not the specific cause of sleeplessness, per se, but is merely a symptom of deeper, underlying, and often surreptitious psychic and/or psychophysiological forces.

Although it is commonly known that one is “out cold” in the stage of sleep known as REM (rapid-eye-movement), and so by inference there is “a lot going on”, less often is it realized that only in REM does the brain dream and is thus engaged in a high level of mental and physical activity. Scientists regard the best sleep as the proper mix between REM and non-REM sleep, which can only occur within the parameters of a full-night’s sleep. There are of course those who disregard these medical facts. The famous morning newscaster, Bryant Gumball, once made the claim, similar to the townspeople of

---

4 NCSDR Report pg. 2
5 http://www.helioshealth.com/sleep/sleep_04.html
Macondo, that we really don’t need that much sleep, and at any rate, there is just far too much life to be lived to be sleeping it away. However, results taken from a survey by The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) indicate that ‘those who said they had trouble getting enough sleep reported a greater difficulty concentrating, accomplishing required tasks and handling minor irritations. Overall, [extended] sleep loss has been found to impair the ability to perform tasks involving memory, learning, and logical reasoning’.⁶

And so although it is commonly held that sleep is a mere intermission in one’s daily life, the necessary hiatus between awakenings when the mind enjoys a moment of repose from the vigilance required to adequately cope with the stresses of everyday living, in fact it is to the contrary; it is precisely in the hiatus of sleep that one’s mind is actively accomplishing both the reprocessing of the multiplicity of events constitutive of the day’s continuity, as well as the integration of those most recent events with the totality of past occurrences of one’s life. And it is thus sleep itself that functions as a vanishing mediator (to use the precise Hegelian term) in one’s sense of perception of time and space, of one’s essential grasp on reality.

To speak of a general loss of one’s memory, reality, and socio-historical context admittingly initially sounds strange to one familiar with the powerful metaphors of the (liberal) Enlightenment project, whose proponents speak of “awakenings”, often thought of as a definitive break from the “mind-forged-manacles” of the myths and superstitions of tradition, of coming-to-enlightenment. Today, contemporary (liberal) expressions of Enlightenment logic emphasize the maintenance of a hyper-vigilant political disposition in order to preempt the recurrence of the evils of the past. But, one inquires, what happens when one is chronically awake?

⁶ http://www.sleepfoundation.org/publications/ZZZs.html
For indeed, for the modern day insomniac as well as Marquez’s Macondo townspeople, it’s not that to lose one’s memory is in itself such a bad thing, a priori; for what person, village, or nation-state, would not prefer to distanciate its collective historical consciousness from the unpleasantries and deplorable aspects of their past? Rather, perhaps the most degenerative by-product of sleeplessness is rather that one subsequently begins to lose grasp and proper perception of one’s historical time and space. But what would it look like to begin to lose one’s historical and spatial coordinates?

Transposing this logic back into our contemporary (liberal) political disposition, we can readily observe at least two distinct categories, albeit with necessarily overlapping psychic features, to the concept of insomnia, when moving from its general form, as we have just described, to its political logic: one the one hand, that of an emphasis on “forgetting” or effecting a general loss of memory; and on the other hand (and not coincidentally, as we shall see), the necessity of maintaining a vigilant disposition, required to preemptively safeguard against the recurrence of the traumas associative of the evils of history. Overall, there seems to be a systematic oscillation in the liberal political disposition between “forgetting” and “vigilance”, with fear as the mediating term between the two.

For example, a general loss of memory or process of “forgiving and forgetting” is a prevalent position among contemporary liberal proponents of post-traumatic
transitional justice,\textsuperscript{7} which speaks in the language of closure as a definitive break with the past. Moreover, the internal logic driving the universal maxims of “never again”-marked of a post-Holocaust world- as well as its contemporary counterpart of “never forget”-marked of a post-9/11 world- implicitly diagnosis the inevitable necessity of “forgetting” (past) identities and interests. Many proponents of liberal cosmopolitanism maintain this,\textsuperscript{8} which is perhaps best captured in Jason Hill’s guide text to \textit{Becoming a Cosmopolitan}, wherein he writes that ‘if the goal is to fight for a new self-interpretation, then one has to learn to forget the old and familiar’.\textsuperscript{9}

Of course one must add here that if methods of transitional justice and theories of liberal universal cosmopolitanism are concerned with the dissolution of memory it is only insofar as the fundamental goal is to prevent the past’s recurrence; and of this ubiquitous potential proponents of the liberal human rights culture remain both fearful and vigilantly aware.

Thomas Hobbes’ \textit{Leviathan} perhaps inaugurated the idea -followed afterwards by a host of liberal social contract theorists- that (the fantasy of) the \textit{fear} of the loss of body or property was \textit{the} psychic impetus for the existence of a strong, centralized, sovereign state. By consolidating the totality of the social body’s power into a single sovereign who purports to take on the duty of maintaining the hypervigilance otherwise required by natural man in a state of nature the fear of the potential harm inflicted on body or property is allayed.


\textsuperscript{8} For examples of this, see Bruce Robbins’ “Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation}, ed. Cheah and Robbins; Avishai Margolit’s \textit{The Ethics of Memory}. These texts provide the most profound contemporary attempt to theorize the transcendence of past identities and interests.

\textsuperscript{9} Hill pg. 95
Today this preventative vigilance theme is nicely expressed by Harvard political philosopher Judith Shklar, whose conception of liberalism as the “fear of fear itself” seeks to emancipate humanity from the politics of fear. As Shklar elucidates, ‘liberalism’s deepest grounding is in place from the first, in the conviction of the earliest defenders of toleration, born in horror, that cruelty is an absolute evil…It is out of that tradition that the political liberalism of fear arose and continues amid the terror of our time to have relevance’.\textsuperscript{10} And indeed, at the closing of a century that has witnessed two devastating world wars, a cold war responsible for several other wars, genocide, and countless politically-motivated and unnecessary deaths, this position is, if not warranted, at least definitely understandable. Given what cruel and evil “terrors” to which history has born witness, is not a fear-requiring-vigilance the necessary political disposition?

Of course, when analyzing the relation between terror and fear, one no longer need merely understand Shklar’s use of the word “terror”, here, in its more general and perhaps superficial sense, as the fear of extreme cruelty. For indeed, in the aftermath of 9/11 and the attacks on the dual symbols of western economic prosperity and military might, the liberal democratic nations of the world have come to a near consensus that the

\textsuperscript{10} Shklar pg. 23
new and imminent threat of global terrorism\textsuperscript{11} requires a renewed international hypervigilance.\textsuperscript{12}

It thus appears that, constitutionally, theories of transitional justice, liberal cosmopolitanism, Shklar’s liberalism of fear, and now a post 9/11 world all share a common maxim -the identical theme running throughout their logic requires a staid vigilance, the incessant sleeplessness of a night-watchman, ever-prepared and distrustful of the future, fearful of the evils of the past. For transitional justice, this theme is expressed in an explicit emphasis on preventing the recurrence of past (non-liberal) evils; for cosmopolitanism, in remembering to forget one’s cultural particularity and (national) identity; for Shklar this manifests in the fear of fear itself; and now, America’s “war on terror” provides the fullest expression of the long-term effects of chronic vigilance.\textsuperscript{13} It is this common theme –of the necessity of a fear-requiring-vigilance- that runs through the

\textsuperscript{11} In spite of its sloppy rhetorical usage, as it politically suits its user, there has been some debate over how precisely to define contemporary versions of “global terrorism”. For purposes of clarity, in this paper I identify my use of “terrorism” here with Alex Schmid’s definition of it as ‘an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi)clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby –in contrast to assassination- the direct targets of violence are not the main targets’ {See Schmid and Crelinstein’s “The Response Problem as a Definition Problem” in Western Responses to Terrorism }. Insofar as the attacks (on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon) on 9/11 were symbolic of US economic prosperity and military strength, our analysis should focus on doing a symptomology of the new war on global terror.

\textsuperscript{12} Section 3 of the official document of The National Security Strategy of the United States puts it this way: ‘Freedom and fear are at war, and there will be no quick or easy end to the conflict. In leading the campaign against terrorism, we are forging new, productive international relationships and redefining existing one’s in ways that meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.’ (my emphasis)

We may also note, here, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain’s March 19\textsuperscript{th} consensus over the proposal for the appointment of an official EU tsar to lead the war on terror.

\textsuperscript{13} Robert Keohane has recently described Shklar’s conception of fear in light of our newfound War on Terror. He argues, “Shklar looked to the state as the chief threat. “No liberal”, she declared, “ever forgets that governments are coercive.” In this respect, the “liberalism of fear” shares a blind spot with the most popular theories of world politics, including realism, institutionalism, and some forms of constructivism. All of these share a common fault: they do not sufficiently take account of how globalization facilitates the agency of non-state entities and networks. After September 11\textsuperscript{th}, no liberal should be able to forget that non-state actors, operating within the borders of liberal states, can be as coercive and fear inducing as states (my emphasis) {Robert Keohane, “The Globalization of Informal Violence” in Understanding September 11\textsuperscript{th}, eds. Calhoun, Price, Timmer}. 
liberal political disposition. And it is the *psychic origins* of this theme that requires explanation.

But, again, like the Indian woman’s sober reply to Jose Arcadia Buendía’s enthusiastic embrace of his sleeplessness, one finds it necessary to further explore the long-term, concrete effects of the liberal human rights culture’s sleeplessness of vigilance. On the one hand, what is at stake, politically, here? What are the sustained effects of incessant vigilance? What would it look like to begin to lose grasp and proper perception of one’s historical time and space? What does it mean to experience the loss of one’s sense of (historical) reality, such as chronic insomnia tends to effect? But on the other hand, and perhaps more imperative for our present concern, our immediate task here is to trace the psychic sources and origins of this hypervigilance itself. What are the psychic forces at work in the political disposition of insomnia? What are the conditions of possibility for a “war on terror”? And what is their necessary correlative psycho-political disposition?

Upon a closer survey of the liberal human rights literature, one observes several common political positions that accompany a sleeplessness-like-vigilance, and the subsequent effects on one’s grasp of reality. It is my thesis that a closer look at these phenomena, as well as the exposition of their psychic origins, will locate the hidden political (psychic) content behind the insomnia of our contemporary liberal human rights culture; and it then follows that an in-depth explication of the philosophical roots of its political dynamics, in social contract theory, will reveal the psychic foundations of the liberal political disposition that so hegemonizes our political horizon today.
I. Original Fear

‘...the impression made by such things as we desire, or fear, is strong, and permanent, or (if it cease for a time), of quick return: so strong it is sometimes, as to hinder and break our sleep.’
- Leviathan pg. 9

Barry Glassner has argued in his book, *The Culture of Fear*\(^{14}\), that, through an overload of mass media and other institutional organizations, the pathological fears of society proliferate. From advocacy groups that over-exaggerate the dangers and prevalence of a particular disease in order to secure financial contributions, to politicians who seek to garner support for their policies by heightening public anxieties of the spread of drugs and crime (even as they are declining), to the news media networks that manipulate our perception of the frequency or likelihood of horrific events, Glassner maps the various expressions of these fears, as well as the psychic impetuses giving birth to them. And while Glassner’s analysis proves an interesting read, insofar as he aptly traces the variety

\(^{14}\) *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Thing* (1999)
of psychopathological expressions of fear constitutive of the underbelly of society’s historical consciousness, there exists a troubling implication to his analysis, an implication one might just as appropriately place as a presupposition to his argument than as an inferred conclusion from his case studies. It is, namely, that were society not already naturally predisposed to react in a pliable, even hysterical manner to the anxieties realized through the proliferation of media (or otherwise) induced fears, the latter would not effect them as such. But inasmuch as society is so persuasively swayed by these overblown and often obviously false projections of fear, humans must have been endowed, not unlike animals, with a natural (albeit more sophisticated) propensity for fear.

Indeed, when anthropologists examine so-called “primitive” societies, they carefully attend to the traditions and festivals, the myths and superstitions, which constitute that particular society’s cultural-historical makeup, as a way of gaining a basic understanding of their psychic life-world. It should not surprise us if, inasmuch as the predominate form of our institutions today are permeated through and through by a liberal political disposition, we can trace back the particular characteristics we have been teasing out in the concept of political insomnia (fear, chronic vigilance, etc.) to both the philosophical foundations and psychic constitution of this (liberal) tradition itself, as it is rooted in our own myths, and superstitions, etc. It is therefore here that we turn to social contract theory, and more particularly, to Thomas Hobbes, as an early but unmistakably explicit expression of the psychic dimensions at root in the (contemporary) liberal political disposition.
Leo Strauss has written that insofar as Thomas Hobbes articulates an “ideal of civilization” to such a degree that it even surpasses Bacon, we may regard the former as the founder of liberalism. The idea of procuring security over body and property as a fundamental and inalienable human right provided the foundation for the (liberal) codification of an itemized, abstract, “human rights”, if indeed, it did not presuppose the future construction of the entire edifice of the liberal Human Rights culture itself.

However, Strauss continues, one may today continue to regard Hobbes as the superior theorist to the liberal thinkers following him; for Hobbes differed ‘from developed liberalism only, but certainly, by his knowing and seeing against what the liberal ideal of civilization has to be persistently fought for: not merely against rotten institutions, against the evil will of a ruling class, but against the natural evil of man.’

While we may certainly agree (or not) with Strauss that for Hobbes is reserved the special status of the most profound expression of the liberal psychic constitution (which will certainly be explored here), we have empirical reasons to reject Strauss’ assertion that subsequent liberal political theory has, either implicitly or explicitly, failed to premise their thought on the fear of man’s natural inclination toward evil; in fact it is this philosophical premise that is at the very heart of the liberal psyche today.

---

15 Strauss, Leo, “Notes on Carl Schmitt: The Concept of the Political” pg. 91, from *The Concept of the Political*.

16 In the first edition of *The Concept of the Political*, even Carl Schmitt ironically but not coincidentally echoes Strauss’s appraisal of the novelty of Hobbes, calling him ‘by far the greatest and perhaps sole truly systematic thinker’ (Schmitt, pg. 92).

17 Strauss in postface to *The Concept of the Political* pg. 92

18 Moreover, we are not obliged to restrict humanity’s primal fear merely to the domain of the “natural evil of man”, such as Strauss’ strict understanding of it denotes. For, as we will see in the case of Hobbes, liberal Enlightenment “fear” extends to all realms of *that which one knows not*. As Jan Blits argues, contra Strauss’ reading of Hobbes, ‘the most basic fear…is not the fear of other men, nor the fear of God or spirits, but a deeper, more radical fear that precedes and underlies those two fears….Hobbesian fear is best understood as a primal, indeterminate fear of the unknown’ (pg. 418).
For instance, moral philosopher and historian Jonathan Glover has aptly documented the great evils of the 20th century: the Final Solution, the Gulag, the Great Leap Forward, Year Zero, Rwanda, Hiroshima and Nagasaki –these events are unrivaled in the intensity and widespread suffering inflicted on their victims. It is this human capacity for cruelty and barbarism that leads Glover to implore his willing readers to ‘look hard and clearly at some of the monsters inside us as ‘part of the project of caging and taming them.’

This self-reflective anxiety over humanity’s inherent capacity for evil perhaps finds its fullest expression in the contemporary Human Rights literature. Journalist and Human Rights advocate, Michael Ignatieff, has recently articulated this point nicely, when he argues that ‘we cannot build a foundation for human rights on natural human pity or solidarity. For the idea that these propensities are natural implies that they are innate and universally distributed among all individuals. The reality –as the Holocaust and countless other examples of atrocity make clear- is otherwise. We must work out a belief in human rights on the basis of human beings as they are, working on the assumptions about the worst we can do, instead of hopeful expectations of the best…we build on the testimony of fear, rather than on the expectations of hope.’

Indeed, as early as 1959 Isaiah Berlin anticipated this systematic (liberal) disposition when he argued that a post-Holocaust world was utterly marked by an acute awareness that moral law would no longer attempt to root itself in a belief in reason, but

---

19 Glover pg.
20 See The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years and Beyond, eds. Danieli, Stamatopoulou, and Dias; The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent, Johannes Morsink; and War Crimes: Brutality, Genocide, Terror, and the Struggle for Justice, Aryeh Neier.
21 Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry pg. 80 (my emphasis)
in the memory of the great horrors of the past. It is this notion of liberalism as born in
the memory of the “horrors” of cruelty that Judith Shklar takes as the starting point for
her “liberalism of fear”, further arguing that this (liberal human rights) project, today,
amounts to a deeply embedded fear, providing the psychic impetus for a sort of “damage
control”.  

Before elucidating the political status of this psychic impetus, however, we must
first turn to a more in-depth analysis of the Hobbesian version of the social contract, in
order to better assess exactly what is constitutive of this supposed inherent proclivity for
evil.

On Human Nature

For Hobbes, the nature of humanity is its fundamental predicament. Without a detailed
retracing and somewhat superfluous reiteration of Hobbesian philosophical platitudes, we
may at least say this: according to Hobbes, humans never succeed in attaining the final
satisfaction of their desires. To be human, for Hobbes, is to be in ceaseless pursuit of the
satisfaction of desire. And yet while relentlessly concerned with the acquisition of those
objects of one’s desire, true success in this pursuit lies also in executing the assurance
that one may readily acquire what will be desired in the future. Such success Hobbes calls
Felicity; and the means by which humans seek to obtain this success is called their

---

23 Shklar pg. 27
24 Hobbes defines the quality particular to desire, in distinguishing between desire and love: ‘That which
men Desire, they are also said to Love: and to Hate those things for which they have Aversion. So that
Desire, and Love, are the same thing; save that by Desire we always signify the Absence of the Object’ [my
emphasis] (Leviathan pg. 23-24). The full psychic status of this assertion will be comprehensively
elucidated later.
25 ‘Continuall successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say,
continuall prospering, is that men call Felicity; I mean the Felicity for this life’ (Leviathan pg. 29).
Power. It is, for Hobbes, these two irreducible features of human existence—Felicity and Power—that effectively thwart any potential for attaining ‘Tranquility of mind, while we live here’; because Life is but Motion and can never be without Desire\(^{26}\), and because Power is the sine qua non of Felicity, Life itself is humanity’s eternal and restive pursuit of Power; an incessant vigilance is therein required.

One should note briefly here that for Hobbes there are certain habits or “abilities” of the mind that can aid one in their pursuit of Felicity, and these are called Virtues. When these habits hinder Felicity’s pursuit, they are regarded as perversions, and are called Defects. For Hobbes there is a sort of psychic oscillation between Virtues and Virtues’ perversion into Defects: for whereas, for instance, on the one hand Glory (as warranted confidence) is the proper estimation of one’s power to procure Felicity, on the other hand Pride, as Glory’s perversion, is a false estimation of one’s powers, and is thus a catalyst for certain failure. Or, to cite another example, Prudence (as a sort of attunement towards the future), in a given situation, tells a man that he may die; and so by taking action on his Prudence man may escape a foreseeable death\(^{27}\). And yet while Prudence appears to be an obvious Virtue, its perversion of being too prudent, ‘prompted by fear and want’\(^{28}\) becomes Crooked Wisdom, or Craft. It seems, then, that Hobbes was already aware of the potential psychic problems associated with too much prudence, with too much anxiety for the future, of too much vigilance. For just as Pride, Vanity, and

\(^{26}\) *Leviathan* pg. 29

\(^{27}\) For Hobbes, ‘Prudence is a presumption of the Future contracted from the Experience of the Past’ (pg. 11), and is therefore ‘born of experience’ and can be potentially conjectural; Prudence in this respect differs from Reason, which is not only born from experience, but additionally uses Sense and knowledge of Consequences to arrive at Science.

\(^{28}\) Ibid. pg. 34
Vainglory are perversions, or defects, of Glory, so one may also regard the hyper-vigilance of fear to be an ultimate perversion of Prudence.

Prudence is, in fact, for Hobbes, a feature that helps distinguish what is peculiar in the human species from animals.\(^{29}\) As a conjectural foresight of what could potentially occur in a given situation in the future, based on experience, the most immediate psychic effect of the vigilance of Prudence is to relieve the fear and anxious attunement one has towards the future. But Prudence is ultimately insufficient, and proves to be a mere temporary assuage to human fear, for the domain of Prudence is limited to experience and thus falls short of knowing the future with certainty (as in the realm of Science).

Prudence, it seems, thus has the dual, sequential effect of, one the one hand, momentarily abating the human fear of an unknown future—one can in certain circumstances predict and therefore preempt the occurrence of a foreseeable and preventable future; and on the other hand, in limiting or restricting the area of what is known (as founded on past experience), Prudence actually augments the original fear of that which is unknown, of that which is to be feared. Having some capacity for foresight,\(^{30}\) humans are all that much more predisposed for the return of (increased) fear, since this capacity is incomplete and subject to the limitations of that which can be known.\(^{31}\)


\(^{30}\) Hobbes Leviathan, ch. 12: Hobbes argues that ‘for want of observation and memory of the order, consequence and dependence of things they see… [animals have] little or no foresight of things to come.’

\(^{31}\) Michael Oakeshott has eloquently articulated this predicament, specific to humanity in his “Introduction to Leviathan”, in *Rationalism and Politics and Other Essays*; Oakeshott argues further that ‘Animals, having little or no foresight, suffer only the lesser evil of its absence, not the greater of its limitations’ (pg. 251).
It is this fear, moreover, that, for Hobbes, gives birth to the necessity of the role filled by religion. As the sublimation and subsequent worship of that which is unknown and thus feared by humanity, the institutionalization of religion provides a symbolization of the real fear of humanity. Or as Hobbes argues,

‘this perpetual fear always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the Dark, must needs have for object something. And therefore when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good, or their evil fortune, but some Power or Invisible Agent. In which sense perhaps it was…that the Gods were first created by human Fear.’

And so, fear, as the vanishing mediator of the coming-into-being of religion, seeks an object on which to attach itself: this object is called God. Thus, in primitive man, for Hobbes, the institution of religion itself provides the symbolic point of reference for real (and yet ultimately unknown) fear. For the powers of foresight and reason, on the one hand, serve to allay fear in humanity (Prudence); and yet, on the other hand, the recognition of these limitations to foresight and reason simultaneously produces more fear, a fear of that which lies outside the capacity of foresight and reason to discern. Fear is, thus, for Hobbes, the essential element both resisted and produced in the process of its symbolization (i.e. in the institutionalization of religion).

---

32 Ibid ch. 11
33 Leviathan pg. 52.
34 Political philosopher Jan Blits has argued further that the general effect of the Enlightenment project is precisely an increased fear of that which one knows not, insofar as the process of coming-to-Enlightenment consist in the coming-to-awareness that there are things of which one can have no scientific knowledge (such as what the future will ultimately bring). Blits argues: ‘Hobbes’ liberal political theory rests on removing the fear of “the power of [other] men”. This transformation is not possible without enlightenment which must teach men to forget about their souls and care only about their goods in this world, in particular their bodily goods…’ And so, ‘as Hobbesian enlightenment reveals the unilluminable nature of the world, it necessarily heightens man’s fear of the unknown. What diminishes the most pernicious social effect also increases the primary psychological source of fear. Far from diminishing the fear, enlightenment only increases it….’ (pg. 428).
On the Human Condition

When an abstract assessment of humanity’s proclivity for Felicity is reinserted into the social world, a ‘perpetual contention for Honour, Riches, and Authority’ is for Hobbes the necessary outcome. The state of nature is the “war of all against all”, the inherently conflictual terrain wherein different Felicities meet in pursuit of the same desired objects. The natural condition for Hobbes, then, is an ongoing competition between (near) equals for objects of Felicity. And it is this ongoing competition that induces in humanity the recognition of both a common nature and mutual fear of one another.

However, while the (potentially discordant) existence of others is something to be feared and safeguarded against, it is no less a necessary condition for the satisfaction of Felicity. For without the existence of others there is no recognition of one’s relative superiority over them, and thus no grounds for notable Felicity. For indeed, most of the satisfactions constitutive of Felicity are precisely related to what one may procure from others, insofar as that which one seeks often requires bargaining with others for its acquisition. It is this paradoxical hard kernel to humanity’s social world that is both produced and resisted in its symbolization. There is an irreducible conflict between human nature and the human condition: what the latter urges –the satisfaction of desire—the other makes impossible, thus inducing vigilance.  

And so, in response to the fear of the failure to procure the satisfaction of desire, humans may choose to recognize the mutual necessity of each other as an other, and also to recognize that an other is as oneself. Hobbes arrives at this irreducible fact via an easily recognized (golden rule) formula: “do not that to another which thou wouldest not have done to thyself”. Or, to translate this into more contemporary (psychoanalytical)
terms: “*imagine the worst thing you fear another could do to you; now imagine yourself doing that thing to another; now establish a contract to preempt its realization*”.  

And so for Hobbes, in the competition of the war of all against all, the only way to prevent the incessant fear, chronic hypervigilance, and subsequent self-consumption of the social body itself, is to construct and implement an agreement between all concerned parties. However, Hobbes is quick to remind us that an *unmediated*, mere informal contract, while intended to increase the certainty of the satisfaction of desires, when taken alone, as standing on its own authority, has no real power to safeguard its arbitrary violation by one of the competing parties, and thus is permeated through and through with uncertainty; in short, these types of informal agreements are always at risk of imploding under the weight of their own competitive hostility. And so, in actuality one does not ultimately exhaust the *fear-requiring-vigilance* of the state of nature by constructing an unmediated contract between all relevant and concerned parties -for fear and uncertainty transcend this informal, unmediated agreement. But what could supplement this lack? What are the proper conditions for the security of body and property? What is the necessary order of things such that it could lead to a cessation of

---

36 This same self-reflective paranoia provides the foundation for the original position in the work of the liberal social contract theorist, John Rawls (See “Justice as Fairness”). As a social contract theorist, Rawls need not reproduce the fantasy narrative of the state of nature that subsequently culminates in the concrete existence of the State; he already presupposes both the existence of the State (a warranted presupposition, since it does indeed exist) and the same (liberal) Hobbesian logic that warrants its necessity.

My point here is neither to obliterate otherwise ineliminable differences between various narratives constitutive of social contract theory, as if to conflate all differences under the same said reason or justification for the consolidation of power in the event of the social contract. Rather, my aim here is to locate the same underlying psychic logic threading itself through all liberal Enlightenment contract theory – that of the intended avoidance of fear-requiring-vigilance by displacing it on to an external Other (whether the State itself or an international institution for the preservation of human rights) who, it is proposed, will alleviate this primal fear.

37 Or as Hobbes puts it in *De Cive*: ‘The origin of all great and lasting societies consisted not in the mutual good will men had towards each other, but in the mutual fear they had of one another.’
the chronic hypervigilance founded on the (fantasmatic) fear of what the other(s) might do to me (or my property)?

It is these very real concerns that drive the logic of the abdication and consolidation of power in the social contract, symbolized and brought into being in the figure of the sovereign, in the Leviathan, in the state. It is thus the fantasy of a state of nature, wherein a war of all against all threatens humanity and places it in a state of fear-requiring-vigilance against the loss of body and property, that effectively warrants the social contract. And it is this common (fantasmatic) motive that brings into being an imposing sovereign, now authorized and empowered by all contracting parties to exercise its total sovereignty over its subjects, themselves now purportedly free from the fear-requiring-vigilance of the condition of the war of all against all. This new condition Hobbes calls the Commonwealth, or civitas.

But what are the powers and rights of the sovereign, and how do they bear on the powers and rights of the (civil) subject?

*The Rights of the Sovereign:

Beyond the supreme and autonomous authority to legislate—administering, repealing, interpreting, and enforcing laws—the sovereign maintains the judicial capacity to deem what is necessary for the security of its subjects, with respect to any potential threat on

---

38 Although Hobbes prefers the use of the term “covenant” to “contract”, I have retained the more colloquial latter term, since no one today refers to liberal contract theory as “covenant theory”.
39 See De Cive ch. 2
40 Although obviously not thinking of social contract theory or the state of nature as a permanent “state of exception”, the emphasis placed by Agambem in his Homo Sacer on the Jewish concentration camps as representing a permanent state of emergency, locates the same logic providing the psychic impetus for the necessity of a ubiquitous vigilance.
their well-being coming from either within or without the social body itself.\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, the sovereign holds the sole power and right to declare and negotiate war and peace, to levy taxes in times of war, and to raise an army from its subjects for these purposes as it sees fit. The sovereign thus constitutes the executive, judicial, and legislative branch of government, and as well is the commander-in-chief of the military –i.e. what is today understood as the total body of the state. In short, the Hobbesian sovereign is what psychoanalysts might call the “master-signifier” of the social body: that entity which requires no positive claim about its existence, and is responsible for imposing the symbolic, normative order of affairs.

*The Rights of the (Civil) Subject:

Civil subjects, through an uncoerced, mutual agreement, have consented to abdicate their right to self-governance to a sovereign entity (i.e. the state). Each civil subject has agreed to bind his or her conduct, in advance, to both one another as well as to the sovereign and its will.

But what then is freedom, for civil subjects? Can they be understood as “free” in the Commonwealth? For Hobbes, Freedom, or Liberty, is the absence of any external impediment to intended movement. A human is said to be free when, ‘in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to’.\textsuperscript{42} Now, civil subjects, by this definition, do not appear to be “free” in the Hobbesian sense, insofar as there is, according to their own consent, a sovereign with the legitimate authority to provide or act as an external impediment to one’s intended movement.

\textsuperscript{41} Hobbes terms what I have been calling “the social body” the Commonwealth.

\textsuperscript{42} Leviathan pg. 108
However, one must reiterate, this construction of an obstruction to their actions (i.e. the sovereign) is of the subjects’ own free will. While their reasons for choosing this state of affairs may have been solely in response to the fantasy of the fear-requiring-vigilance of the state of nature, or indeed, may not have even been their deliberate choice at any time, this by no means nullifies the contract; nor does it mean that this abdication of power over self-governance is any less of a free act. For indeed, it is the abdication of one’s primary or unmediated freedom (in the war of all against all) that allows the subject to enjoy that which Hobbes calls “true freedom”: the possibility of the pursuit of Felicity and the subsequent security over body and property, of which is only secured in the instantiation of the contract and the transfer of power to the sovereign.

However, here we encounter an unaccounted-for frayed edge to the neat delineation of the relative domains of power and rights exacted in the construction of the social contract. There remains a sort of awkward leftover that resists the circumscribed jurisdiction of the sovereign’s capacity to placate the fear of its subjects by ensuring their security over body and property. For although the subject cannot retract his/her abdicated authority over the exercise of power once it has been given, Hobbes states that the subject does, in fact, retain the safeguard right to protect his body and property in the event that the sovereign is no longer able.43

But one wonders, here, why would Hobbes need to add this clause to the social contract, if the sovereign purports to guarantee the final procurement of security for its subjects? Hobbes explains this by comparing the health of the social body to that of an organic, human body, and its proclivity for the plagues of internal disease. If the sovereign loses its grasp of power on the social body, and the latter subsequently

43 Ibid. pg. 170
dissolves, Hobbes, argues, it is merely the degenerative result of imperfect institutions, and thus a consequence of the detrimental effects of internal disease on the Commonwealth. While this point appears self-evidently true, one cannot but inquire here further into the psychic dimensions to this leftover, or remainder, both produced by and resisting the symbolization of fear in the social contract. Let us, then, briefly recap, prior to more fully exploring this point.

**On the Social Body**

For Hobbes, the conditions of possibility for security over body and property, of deliverance from fear-requiring-vigilance, is an effect of the construction of a Covenant, or contract, wherein “as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner”.\(^4\) Or, again, to translate this out of Hobbeses and into psychoanalytical terms, in order to better expose its underlying psychic dynamic: “as if every man should say to every man, I will symbolize my fear if you symbolize yours...I will abdicate my fantasy of what you might do to me, if you will abdicate your own fantasy”.\(^5\)

And so, humanity’s consolidation and abdication of power to a sovereign as legibus solutus (the unconditional authority to make or repeal laws), is based on the premise that this act would finally extinguish the fear-requiring-vigilance necessary to

---

\(^4\) Ibid. pg. 87

\(^5\) This (psychoanalytical) reading of the social contract must necessarily be coupled with the truth of its inverted form, commonly called “projective identification”, wherein one simultaneously denies and projects their desire to kill precisely by articulating their fear of being killed; (as will be further argued later) it seems, then, that both for psychoanalysis and Hobbes, desire is articulated through fantasy; it is through fantasy that we learn how to desire.
secure body and property in the war of all against all, that this sleeplessness of vigilance would now cease. But one wonders whether the fear that was supposedly transferred to the sovereign in the event of the social contract has truly been effectively exhausted, or whether this fear has now been merely displaced on to another, perhaps more surreptitious dimension of the social body? Is there not still some basic antagonism premised on the concept of fear at the very locus of our social field?46

It seems, then, that this basic antagonism, irreducibly embedded in the social body, is split with the (imaginary) event of the consolidation of power in the social contract and the fantasy of the coming-into-being of the State. On the one hand, humanity voluntarily replaces its compulsive mutual fear of each other by the, again, compulsive fear of a (purportedly neutral) third power—the state. But on the other hand, humanity must continue to fear that jurisdiction over which the state has no monopoly.

One branch of liberal thought—marked a post-World War II/Holocaust world, and perhaps best represented in the work Judith Shklar47 and R.J Rummel48—responds to this fear by maintaining a hypervigilant distrust of unlimited government. As Shklar is quick to remind us, ‘the fear of fear does not require any further justification, because it is irreducible. It can be both the beginning and end of political institutions, such as rights.’49

---

46 It is this now displaced, basic antagonism—in the Real of fear—that, I argue, continues to permeate post-Hobbesian liberal thought (from Hobbes to Rawls to Shklar to the recent war on terror).
47 See Ordinary Vices and “The Liberalism of Fear” in Liberalism and the Moral Life. For a recent multicultural application of Shklar’s thought at the level of international relations, see Jacob Levy’s The Multiculturalism of Fear.
48 See Death by Government. Rummel makes a good historical case that government is the greatest megamurderer in history, with the state being responsible, in this century alone, for the premature death of 170 million people. Moreover, one cannot resist mentioning here in passing the language of Doug Bandow’s remarks, from the Cato Institute, when reviewing the book. He notes, ‘the case for limited government has never been made more effectively than by this fearsome book.’
49 Ordinary Vices pg. 237
And in his *Death by Government*, Rummel echoes this fear when he argues that government is the greatest megamurderer in history, with the state being responsible, in this century alone, for the premature death of 170 million people—and so, implicitly, it is the state that is to be the entity most feared today.

The ideological counterpart to the latter position is expressed in the fear of a whole host of extra-state elements—of potentially hostile objects and/or forces that fall outside the circumscribed boundaries of state jurisdiction, and thus continue to threaten humanity and give it reason to remain vigilant and fearful for body and property. In ancient times—as Hobbes reminds us—this fear (of extra-institutional forces) was typically conflated with the mysteries of Nature (i.e. floods, famines, disease, and other natural catastrophes) and/or God(s). In a post-Enlightenment world, these same fears are projected in pop-culture’s fetish with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic film. And indeed, today the fullest expression of extra-state fear is manifested in the War on Terror. As George Bush recently asserted: ‘The gravest danger to our freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic technology—when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking out these terrible weapons.’

How then can we make sense of the splitting of this basic antagonism into, on the one hand, the figure of the sovereign, who we must now (no less) fear; and on the other

---

50 President Bush in a speech at West Point, New York, June 1st 2002.
hand, the continuation of extra-institutional fear as that which falls outside the formal capacities of the state?51

II. Fantasmatic Fear

Fantasy and the State

A whole tradition of political theorists have argued that, since Hobbes, it is tacitly understood as self-evident that humans need and desire the existence and health of the state, insofar as their pain/pleasure calculus greatly favors it. Some have gone so far to assert that Hobbes’ *Leviathan* provides the genesis of a new tradition in political philosophy, as a direct move away from *honor as principle*—so markedly characteristic of Ancient thought—*to fear of violent death* as the fundamental point of departure.52 Given such widespread interest in Hobbes’ (fantasmatic) narrative of the specific impetus for the genesis of the state, it strikes one as somewhat odd, then, that so many post-Hobbesian analyses of social contract theory emphasize the special role of the concept of fear in light of the sovereignty, legitimation, and justification for the existence of the state, while neglecting to trace the nature and degree to which this fantasy has transcended into the entire liberal Enlightenment discourse, and continues to surreptitiously permeate post-Hobbesian theories of the psychic status of “fear” as (the

51 Liberal political philosopher George Kateb succinctly articulates both these positions in his essay, “On Political Evil”, when he argues that ‘much of political evil on a large scale is intimately connected to deep belief in the group and identity. By group I especially mean the armed national group in a world of armed groups, but also the armed revolutionary group or the armed and dominant group that victimizes other groups in its society’ (*The Inner Ocean* pg. 203).
52 Strauss pg. 129
fantasy construction) providing the impetus for the consolidation of power in the social contract.  

However, one should note that the Hobbesian narrative (or any version, for that matter) of the coming-into-being of the state, as well as the specific reasons for its necessary existence, is not a story that expressly proposes to map the real, concrete, historical development of the state. For who, today, would so erroneously fall back on an empirically “developmental” account as capable of providing a totalizing, factual theory for the origin of the state? Hobbes’ account of the transition from the war of all against all to the consolidation of power in the state is simply a constructed (fantasmatic) narrative, and nothing more. However, as is the case with all fantasy constructions, the Hobbesian narrative is an expression of, and thus a testament to the kind of psychic constitution (filled with desire, paranoia and fear, etc.) that would warrant the necessary existence of the state.

Our interest, here, is then to map the (Hobbesian) psychic disposition that narrates the fantasy of the origin of the state under the same logic that permeates our contemporary liberal political disposition. It is for this reason that one finds it warranted to refer to the language of psychoanalysis, and more particularly, the theoretical paradigm of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, as a way of elucidating the fantasmatic structure of this (liberal) narrative.

Of course, there will be those who might initially resist the fundamental role of fantasy as a key factor in the actualization of the state, and would thus also be disinclined to accept as valid the explanatory capacity of the Lacanian paradigm. But in fact

---

theoretical usage of the concept of fantasy is neither unique to Lacan, nor in general to psychoanalysis as a field. Indeed, one need look no further than the works of more traditional political theorists, such as Eric Hobbsbawm’s or Benedict Anderson’s elucidation of the psychic status of fantasmatic narrative constructions in the fabrication of a nation’s collective identity, and its function in the subsequent consolidation of state legitimation over power. Our reasons for referring to Lacan, here, is then not to merely reproduce a Hobbesian explanation of our social condition by utilizing Lacanian terms, as if to merely satisfy ourselves with a logic of recognition. Rather, the Lacanian register contributes to our reading of Hobbes a mode of (psycho)analysis that provides a more sophisticated theory of human subjectivity, which we might consider here to be latent, yet not directly explicated in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.

Moreover, my specific reason for preferring Lacan’s theory of the psychic role of fantasy to Hobbsbawm’s or Anderson’s is simply that the former gives a fuller account of the special role of fantasy in the construction of a collective identity. In part, this is due to the fact that, for Lacan, the standard employment of fantasy, conceived as “an imagined scenario representing the satisfaction of a desire”, is undertheorized; rather, for Lacan it is precisely the fantasy-scenario itself that remains incessantly desired, i.e. unsatisfied; it is through fantasy that we learn how to desire. And in this sense Lacan clarifies the function of fantasy: it plays the paradoxical dual role of both constructing our objects of desire, and at the same time preempting their satisfaction. One can additionally observe

---

54 See Hobbsbawm’s *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, pg. 80-100; Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*; F. O’Toole’s *Imagining Scotland*; and Jacqueline Rose’s *States of Fantasy*.
55 See the preface of Slavoj Zizek’s *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (1991).
56 On this point, we can invoke Slavoj Zizek’s explanation of the way fantasy, as the introduction of a lack, relates to our very perception of reality. He argues: ‘What we experience as reality discloses itself against
here that this is the precise sense in which Hobbes defines desire: ‘by Desire we always signify the Absence of the Object’; and so, for Hobbes also, desire is articulated through fantasy, through the construction of an imagined scenario, wherein one fantasizes that another desires the same object as oneself. This mutual desire and the mutually exclusive equal satisfaction of each other’s desire is recognized by oneself, setting in motion the fantasy of the potential harm befalling body or property.

A closer look at the Lacanian register will elucidate the psychic structure particular to the Hobbesian expression of our liberal, hyper-vigilant, political disposition, in response to the traumatic experience of fear now permeating the entirety of our liberal political horizon.

Again, the intention of using Lacan, here, is not in order to merely replicate a Lacanian reading of the social contract; nor do I intend to simply “plug in” Lacanian terms where they might relevantly, theoretically fit. Rather, the overall reason for using Lacan is due to the fact that our projects strategically coincide: the same “reversal of fortune” Lacan accomplishes with the interconnecting concepts of “the Imaginary”, “the Symbolic”, and “the Real” mirrors our own “reversal of fortune” of the supposed “awakening” the (liberal) Enlightenment project deduces as a remedy to our socio-political predicament. That is, the “reversal of fortune” strategy employed by Lacan (wherein all colloquial, or conventional uses of the terms “the Imaginary”, “the Symbolic”, and “the Real” come to acquire their opposite, or counterintuitive, meaning) is the same gesture this paper attempts to execute with the liberal Enlightenment project, which speaks in the language of “awakenings”, often thought of as a definitive break

---

57 Leviathan pg. 23-24
from the “mind-forged-manacles” of the myths and superstitions of tradition, of coming-to-enlightenment. However, “awakening” is, here, no longer thought of as a definitive break from the “mind-forged-manacles” of the myths and superstitions of tradition, of coming-to-enlightenment. Rather, I argue here that insofar as the “awakening” or coming-to-awareness of one’s history and context is premised on the fear-requiring-vigilance of the symbolic order, far from arriving at the specifically expected outcome articulated by its proponents, on the contrary, **insomnia** and its subsequent degenerative psychic correlatives (i.e. a general loss of reality, memory, and identity, etc.) is the result. It is therefore precisely by utilizing the Lacanian nomenclature that we can then expose the psychic dynamics behind this somewhat rather unexpected inversion. A brief explication of this lexicon, then, is here in order:

**The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the Social Contract**

In a 1953 lecture Lacan rhetorically asks: ‘We are told that man is the measure of all things. But where is his own measure? Is it to be found in himself?’ According to (both) Lacan (and, as we will see, Hobbes) the answer is, definitively, “no”. The question posed by Lacan was indeed rhetorical, for as far back as 1936, at the 14th International Psychoanalytical Congress, Lacan had answered his own query in a lecture entitled “The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I”\(^{58}\); here, Lacan begins to circumscribe the boundaries of the *imaginary* status of the human ego, and its relation to the *symbolic* order.

According to Lacan, there is a time between the sixth and eighteen month of an infant’s life when it will stand before a mirror, and in this reflected image, for the first

\(^{58}\) *Ecrits* pg. 1-7
time, grasp its body as a definitive, completed whole. This act of mirrored self-recognition of the infant’s own body gives it a sense of previously lacking unity, transforming its otherwise jumbled and fragmented experiences into an *imaginary*, spatially fixed identity, a sort of “snapshot” of identity. Although initially jubilant with its newfound image, conceived as a totality, eventually this joyous experience of *imagined* identity gives way to renewed frustration- the infant realizes that far from a totalizing, unified identity, it continues to experience its existence in fragmentation (i.e. the uncoordinated slips and falls so common to infancy, bodily functions, communicative deficiencies, etc.). The infant’s own body thus remains alienated from itself, caught between a fixed, imaginary identity, and the lack in this incomplete identity, made realizable in this very (imaginary) unity itself.

As Lacan states: ‘The fact is that the total form of the body which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his powers is given to him only as a Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted…Thus, this Gestalt, by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the “I”, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the “I” with the statue in which the man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion’. 60

---

59 Although Lacan’s initial articulation of the imaginary order, as defined in the “Mirror Phase” lecture appears to give an explicitly developmental model of human behavior, it is the explanatory capacity of mirror phase as a purely *social analogue* that is emphasized by Lacan throughout the rest of his life. On this point, see “The Two Narcissisms” pg. 125, and “The Concept of Analysis” pg. 282 in *Seminar I; Seminar II* pg. 166; and more generally, in *Ecrits*: “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, and “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud”.

60 “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I” in *Ecrits* pg. 2-3
It is not coincidental that Lacan later associates this imaginary relation -of one’s self to their specular “other”- with (narcissistic) aggressivity originally realized in the mirror stage. For, after the initial jubilance or satisfaction achieved by the ego at the moment of imaginary unity, one’s newfound image becomes a source of aggression, insofar as this very imaginary identification with the other becomes a rival for it\textsuperscript{61}. That is, the ego encounters a being like himself (say, one pursuing their own Felicity in the in the acquisition of a desired object), and is thus ‘mediated through rivalry, through the exacerbation of the relation to the rival….man’s desire is the desire of the other.’\textsuperscript{62}

Perhaps in order to give some philosophical context to this relation –of the similar status of desire in Lacan and Hobbes- we may here invoke the Hegelian notion of desire.\textsuperscript{63} For Hegel, desire is an irreducible quality to human beings that ultimately will culminate in a struggle between various desires: desire is always the desire for desire; and this desire is essentially a desire to be desired by another. So when Lacan says that ‘an apprehended, desired object, its either he or I who will get it…and when the other gets it, its because it belongs to me,’\textsuperscript{64} we should recognize that in order for it to be an object desired by oneself, that object must be already desired by another. We are thus back to Hobbes’ fantasmatic construction of the conflictual terrain of the state of nature, wherein inevitably one’s pursuit of Felicity, one’s desire for an object, encounters the other’s desire for the same object (albeit both desires are ultimately aimed at recognition, or as

\textsuperscript{61} Lacan here is following Freud’s articulation of the relation between narcissism and aggression in his 1957 essay, “On Narcissism: An Introduction”

\textsuperscript{62} “The Fluctuations of the Libido” pg. 176-177 in Seminar I, on this point, Lacan further argues, ‘at the limit, virtually, aggressivity turns into aggression. But aggression has nothing to do with the vital reality, it is an existential act linked to an imaginary order’ (pg. 177).

\textsuperscript{63} See Hegel ‘s dialect of lordship and bondage in the Phenomenology of Spirit.

\textsuperscript{64} Seminar II pg. 51
Hobbes calls it, a “perpetual contention for Honour, Riches, and Authority”).⁶⁵ One expects as the necessary outcome, here, the depiction of a scene somewhat akin to Hegel’s master/slave struggle (to the death) for recognition—the actualization of the war of all against all, wherein one’s pursuit of Felicity, in an attempt to procure the satisfaction of desire, is raised up above the mere desire for the preservation of life. But as we will see, for Hobbes there is another way out of this predicament, a backdoor exit or “line of flight”, as Deleuze would call it, from the forced choice of either a potentially violent death, or servility under the master. For Hobbes, this third way is the consolidation of power in the sovereign as the “master-signifier” —the structuring term around which the symbolic order is constructed.

And so, it is this initial thesis of the mirror phase—of the simultaneous self-constructive and self-alienating experience marked by aggressivity at the level of imaginary and symbolic identification—that Lacan continues to think through and sophisticate, as an analytical concept, throughout the next twenty-five years of his life. And it is the relation between these orders of “the imaginary” and “the symbolic” that concerns us throughout the duration of this paper, with respect to our analysis of the psychic dynamics specific to the liberal (Hobbesian) social contract.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ In his 1948 essay, “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis” Lacan argues, “There is a sort of structural crossroads here to which we must accommodate our thinking if we are to understand the nature of aggressivity in man and its relation with the formalism of his ego and his objects. It is in this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego is based…This form will crystallize in the subject’s internal conflictual tension, which determines the awakening of his desire for the object of the other’s desire: here the primordial coming together is precipitated into the aggressive competitiveness, from which develops the triad of others, the ego and the object.” (pg. 19).

⁶⁶ Of course at first glance the Hobbesian use of “the imaginary”, or that which is produced in the imagination, would appear to differ greatly from its Lacanian overtones (i.e. whereas Hobbes was an empiricist, Lacan maintains a Cartesian distrust of the imagination, and therefore proceeds according to more rationalist impulses, etc.)—and indeed, Hobbes never intended the application of psychic intensities to his use of the imaginary, in the (contemporary) psychoanalytical sense. However, upon a bit closer and
Desire, Aggression, Identification

For Lacan, then, the mind holds no privileged agency over the imagination; the imaginary, rather, is a phenomenon or process that structures the experiences of the mind; it is what in the first instance even makes experience intelligible, insofar as it gives psychic organization, or formal laws (of projection, introjection, displacement, repression, etc.), to the multiplicity of our experiences. Therefore we should observe here that, in the Lacanian register, the imaginary has nothing to do with a “false” or conjured reality, and in this respect goes well beyond the Freudian view that the realm of the imaginary, along with hallucinations, are merely false representations of a distorted reality; for Lacan, even these “false” representations only stand behind a structurally secondary system of meaning, which is itself conditioned by the imaginary order. Stated generally, then, the realm of the imaginary is at least the order of ostensible, surface phenomena -that which is readily observed, and yet simultaneously conceals a more surreptitious, underlying set of phenomena.

For Lacan, moreover, it is humanity’s unique capacity for imaginary experience – as that which ushers in the formation of desire- that constitutes the irreducible quality peculiar to their existence, and ultimately differentiates them from animals. In his 1953 Seminar I, for instance, Lacan argues that, ‘For the animal, there is a limited number of pre-established correspondences between its imaginary structure and whatever interests it in its Umwelt…In man, by contrast, the reflection in the mirror indicates an original noetic possibility, and introduces a secondary narcissism. Its fundamental pattern is

more modern reading of Hobbes, we will observe that the differences between the two uses of the imaginary are not, after all, as clear as was first thought.

67 See “The Topic of the Imaginary Order” pg. 76-78 in Seminar I.
immediately the relation to the other’. And insofar as this relation to the other is, for Lacan, essentially desire itself, the order of the imaginary is therefore, that which mediates this desire.

Hobbes also distinguishes the novelty of human life from animal life, according to the crucial role played by the imaginary in the instantiation of desire. In chapter six of Leviathan, “Of the Interior Beginnings of Voluntary Motions Commonly Called the Passions and the Speeches by Which They Are Expressed”, Hobbes asserts:

*There be in Animals, two sorts of Motions peculiar to them: One called Vital; begun in generation, and continued without interruption through their whole life; such are the course of the Blood, the Pulse, the Breathing, the Concoction, Nutrition, Excretion, etc.; to which Motions there needs no help of Imagination: The other is Animal motion, otherwise called Voluntary motion; as to go, to speak, to move any of our limbs, in such a manner as is first fancied in the mind*. What the novelty of human faculties adds to this capacity, and ultimately distinguishes humans from animals, is “the Imagination”, as the ‘internal beginning of all internal motion’; this gives rise to Endeavor, and, ‘when it is toward something which causes it, is called Appetite, or Desire’.

Moreover, one should additionally observe here the special function performed by the imagination in Hobbes’ own methodology. Following Galileo’s theoretical mental exercise -of “imagining” simple motions, or forces, which, when logically followed to

---

68 “The Two Narcissisms” pg. 125 in Seminar I
69 In “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, Lacan argues, ‘man’s desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other’ (Ecrits pg. 58).
70 Leviathan pg. 23
71 Ibid pg. 23
their natural conclusion, produce a causal explanation for a more complex phenomenon requiring explanation- Hobbes sought to enlist the imagination (i.e. fantasy constructions) in the service of “civil philosophy” (or “political science”, as it would be understood today). From simple, self-evident propositions (imagined) about human nature were deduced inexorably more complex propositions, necessary to explain society and its constitutive forces. This was essentially the genius of the Hobbesian application of the (Enlightenment) scientific process to the socio-political sphere: if all human action could purportedly be reduced to more elementary motions of the body and mind, the scientist should be able to take this whole and decode it into its constitutive parts; or inversely, he should be able to take its constitutive parts, and draw more sophisticated conclusions about its general nature.

Hobbes practices this method in at least two places in *Leviathan*: The first we have already described in our elucidation of the irreducible psychic dimension to the social contract -the golden rule formula: *by imagining what (evil deeds) I am capable of in my pursuit of Felicity, in the pursuit of the satisfaction of my desires, I can then extend this imaginary anticipation to the whole of the social body, in the form of a (fantasmatic) fear of what they might do to me, insofar as I am like them, and they like me*72. And secondly, as Hobbes explains in the Introduction to the *Leviathan*, his intent is ‘to teach us, that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of whosoever looketh into himself,

---

72 In “The Jouissance of Transgression” Lacan argues, ‘We retreat from what? From assaulting the image of the other, because it was the image on which we were formed as an ego….We are in effect, at one with everything that depends on the image of the other as our fellow man, on the similarity we have to our own ego and to everything that situates us in the imaginary register. What is the question I am raising here, when it seems obvious that the very foundation of the law “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” is to be found there? It is indeed the same other that is concerned here. Yet one only has to stop for a moment to see how obvious and striking the practical contradictions are –individual, inner contradictions as well as social ones- of the idealization expressed relative to the respect that I formulated for the image of the other’ *(The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* pg. 195-196).
and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, etc., and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon like occasions'. And so again: by imagining what I am doing when I think, reason, fear, etc., I can infer that others do the same when they think, reason, fear, etc.

It is both this golden rule formula, as well as the above-quoted passage, that can be read as the Hobbesian version of Lacan’s mirror phase. For indeed, this is the precise sense in which Lacan articulates the differences between imaginary identification (ideal-ego) and symbolic identification (ego-ideal). For Hobbes (as we saw in Lacan), in order for humanity to grasp its undifferentiated and unified identity –i.e. as a potentially aggressive being in pursuit of Felicity- one must project, or symbolize, one’s worst fears (of the loss of body and property) on to an external other. It is to this fundamental point that we now turn.

The imaginary order is, for Lacan, the level of illusive, imagined entities whose consistency is the effect of a kind of mirror stage –it matters not whether this unified existence has any empirical facticity, since it is a mere structural effect. That is, for Lacan, in order to even achieve self-identity, it is necessary for one to identify with an imaginary other; one must alienate oneself precisely by putting one’s identity outside oneself, into the image of another as one’s double. And yet this necessary gesture already introduces an element of aggressivity into the relation. Identification with the

---

73 *Leviathan* pg. 2
74 In “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis” Lacan argues, ‘the statement, ”I’m a man”…at most can mean no more than, “I’m like he whom I recognize to be a man, and so recognize myself as being such.” In the last resort, these various formulas are to be understood only in reference to the truth of “I is an other”, an observation that is less astonishing to the intuition of the poet than obvious to the gaze of the psychoanalyst’ (pg. 23 *Ecrits*).
75 *Sublime Object* pg. 104
other tends to result, for Lacan, in an aggressive relation to this doubled other. In “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis”, Lacan argues that as one comes to identify with others, one begins to take on their desires, producing a rivalry between oneself and the other for the desired object. And it is the fear of what the other might do to oneself in the competition for the satisfaction of desire that awakens one to this aggressive rivalry.\(^7\)

While Lacan articulates the relation between the imaginary and symbolic orders through his description of the mirror phase (i.e. the infant’s identification with a unified mirror image), Hobbes uses the original fear of the state of nature and the golden rule, to express this same phenomenon. Hobbes begins with the moment of imaginary identification, insofar as he isolates the specific nature of humanity –that of in a ceaseless pursuit of Felicity (i.e. to be human is to desire)- precisely by constructing a fantasy narrative that sets desire in motion. The moment of symbolic identification –the recognition that an other is like oneself, that the other is also in pursuit of the procurement of Felicity- introduces a rivalry, or aggressive disposition, toward the other; one’s security over body and property is now threatened by the other on the basis (of the fantasy) of the golden rule: *I imagine the worst thing another could do to me in pursuit of their Felicity ...I identify with this other just as they identify with my potential to do the same thing to them I fear they might do to me.*

And yet, although Lacan and Hobbes then express similar psychic dynamics constitutive of the acquisition of social identity, we need the former to clarify what is confused in the latter -namely, the essential tension between the imaginary and symbolic orders. For as Lacan makes clear, whereas *imaginary identification*, on the one hand, requires that one imitate the other at the level of resemblance –that is, one identifies with

\(^7\) *Ecrits* pg. 22
the image of the other insofar as one regards oneself as “like” the other (as in one pursuing Felicity in the state of nature)- in *symbolic identification*, on the other hand, one identifies with the other inasmuch as they *elude* any resemblance to oneself, inasmuch as one feels threatened by (and thus fears the aggression of, as well as takes a position of aggressivity toward) the other.\(^7^7\) Moreover, for Lacan, imaginary identification is always already subordinated to some form of symbolic identification. It is precisely *what* occurs at the level of symbolic identification -the place from which one is observed- that ultimately determines the (imaginary) image, in which one appears to oneself as “like” the other. One must not overlook the essential Lacanian point here, with respect to Hobbes: imaginary identification always occurs as identification in response to a certain gaze in the other. It is this very tension existing between imaginary and symbolic identification, under the dominance of symbolic identification, that constitutes the way in which one gets integrated into a socio-symbolic order (i.e. the social body/Commonwealth) –the way one comes to assume certain mandates, and is thus even in a position to, as Althusser would say “hail” the call of the other.\(^7^8\)

The consequence for both Hobbes and Lacan is, here, such that in this oscillating movement and tension between symbolic and imaginary identification there is always a certain leftover, or lack, simultaneously produced and resisted from representation at the symbolic level. This is what Lacan calls *the impossibility* of symbolic identification –it never results in the absence of any remainder. As we will see, just as Lacan’s infant at the mirror stage is caught up in the inimitable impossibility of its own image -between it’s imagined identity and the leftover resisting its symbolization- so does the Hobbesian

\(^7^7\) *Sublime Object* pg. 109
\(^7^8\) See Althusser’s *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*
subject also encounter this same impossibility in the transition from the war of all against all in the state of nature to the consolidation of power in the figure of the sovereign constitutive of the social contract. For this impossibility is reserved the term of “the Real”.

**Real Fear**

Lacan’s use of the third term in the triad of the Imaginary-the Symbolic-the Real consistently follows his previously mentioned logic of inversion. When one colloquially speaks of “the real”, it is often conventionally understood as the true or hidden meaning behind the apparent image of its superficial perception. Likewise, in the history of philosophy does the invocation of “the real” intend to denote “true” reality, a sort Platonic Ideal lurking in the background and concealed by the empirical phenomena of everyday life. And yet for Lacan, just as “the Imaginary”, typically regarded as having no explicit relation to the facticity of experience, is shown to condition the reality of our very experiences themselves; and just as “the Symbolic”, so often thought of as the most ephemeral dimension to reality, capable only of pointing to another, more concrete level of representation, is shown to be the only level of representation; and finally, just as “the Real” is thought to refer to “reality”, that essential sphere behind the order of appearances, so it is in the Lacanian register that which can never appear, can never be revealed behind the order of (symbolic) appearances. Whereas the symbolic is a set of differentiated signifiers which produces a gap in the imaginary order at the moment of symbolization, for Lacan, there is nothing lacking in the Real. The Real is the undifferentiated and impossible hard kernel that both resists symbolization, and produces
it as a necessity. The Real is precisely that which is impossible to integrate into the order of the symbolic, which is why Lacan says that *what gets foreclosed in the symbolic returns in the real*. But how does this relate to the (Hobbesian) social contract?

When the logic of the Real is translated back into the social field, Lacan says that there is always a leftover which opens the space for desire, making the Other (i.e. the sovereign/symbolic order) inconsistent; fantasy provides an attempt to conceal this inconsistency, this insurmountable gap in the Other. And so it is in Hobbes, that despite the consolidation and transfer of power to the sovereign as that Other who now constructs the symbolic order (i.e. what is doable, sayable, legal, etc.) for its subjects, there remains a basic antagonism to our social field that, far from now being satisfied or finally foreclosed in the social contract, *is now merely displaced* on to another plane; that is, humanity’s fear-requiring-vigilance somehow escapes this sovereign-imposed symbolic order, somehow persists. *For, indeed, this Real fear is now doubly transcribed:* On the one hand, there is now the sovereign, who may at any time arbitrarily violate the terms of the contract, turning on the social body of civil subjects themselves; and on the other hand, as well, there still remains the extra-state elements -those who enjoy the privilege of refusing to play by the sovereign’s rules and thus fall outside state jurisdiction (i.e. violent criminals, terrorists, natural catastrophes, disease, other hostile states, etc.).

Again, (and at these two opposite political poles, we can see that) this is the precise sense in which Lacan says that *what gets foreclosed in the symbolic returns in the Real*. And it is thus this very *fear*, as the irreducible and fundamental antagonism to the liberal political disposition, that is the impossibility preventing society from achieving its fully completed, unified identity as a homogeneous totality.
It is not only, therefore, the subject of identity that, according to the Lacanian
register, is split from within; it is the social body itself that remains internally split. And
far from it being the case that the construction of a social contract is the necessary
condition for the amelioration of this fear, the act of humanity’s collective conscription to
this contract in fact *splits and doubles* this fear. Just as the act of cutting up a starfish, as a
vain attempt at ending its life, only inadvertently leads to its proliferation, so the
consolidation of power in the social contract, as a vain attempt to end the fear-requiring-
vigilance so marked of the state of nature, in reality multiplies, intensifies the original
fear of the our life-world.

II. Fear and the Concept of Political Insomnia

Liberal Fear Today

Given what Hobbes demonstrates and understands as the necessarily aggressive nature
and behavior of humanity in society –in that of a ceaseless and potentially violent pursuit
of the satisfaction of desire- it is quite natural for him to fantasize and subsequently fear
that, were all restraint, otherwise placed on the social body by the sovereign, removed
from it, all of humanity would be in constant and open fear of violent invasion of their
body and property. All civilized life would, for Hobbes, be impossible; and any life at all,
for that matter, would be risky. In this respect, Hobbes falls perfectly in line with
contemporary articulations of what, precisely, is at stake in the recent global war on
terrorism. Today, there is the underlying fear that, in the event of the disassembly or
implosion of the social contract and the subsequent loss of security (purportedly) guaranteed with existence of the state, there would be ‘no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof uncertain, and consequently no Culture of Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no Commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time, no Arts, no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’ {my emphasis}—in short, it would result in the end of civilization as we know it.

It is this same return of the real of fear that today continues to permeate our liberal political disposition. For is not this same fear symbolized in the collective historical conscious-ness of contemporary society continually expressed today in pop-culture film? Beyond the proliferation of 1950s science fiction movies of invasions from outerspace by aliens who care nothing for our (human) rights over body and property, and beyond the 1970s cult classics, such as Planet of the Apes, wherein humanity has turned on itself to the point of its own annihilation, today one encounters a multiplicity of new and inventive ways for the manifestation of the re-instantiation of the Hobbesian fantasy of the state of nature, wherein neither one’s body nor property enjoys the security of the sovereign ruler —i.e. the state.

Moreover, as if in anticipation of the liberal logic of today’s war on terror, Hobbes notes in the essential chapter 14 of Leviathan, On Natural Laws and of Contracts, that ‘to make Covenant with bruít Beasts is impossible; because not understanding our

79 Leviathan pg. 62
speech, they understand not, nor accept of any translation of Right; nor can translate any right to another: and without mutual acceptation, there is no Covenant’.\textsuperscript{81} One can, of course, observe this same logic at work today –of the impossibility of Covenant with the ugly other who enjoys the freedom to reject the (human) rights of others- in the standard narrative so often used to characterize the mentality of a terrorist (‘These people work according to a completely different logic!’ and so on)\textsuperscript{82}. Or as Section 5 of \textit{The National Security Strategy of The United States of America} has recently put it: ‘[They] brutalize their own people and squander their national resources for the personal gain of rulers…display no regard for international law, threaten their neighbors, and callously violate international treaties to which they are party….reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands’.

\textbf{On the Concept of Political Insomnia}

The concept of political insomnia proposes to diagnose the logic of contemporary political liberalism and its corresponding roots in the Enlightenment project. Political liberalism is regarded as a set of social and cultural phenomena distinct from other manifestations of liberalism (legal, economic, etc.) insofar as it exercises a specific moral logic, that of a staid political vigilance, the nature and final implications of which could beyond the present analysis be elaborated at length.

When the logic of political liberalism is artificially delineated from its other forms, such as has been done here, that is not to say that any relation between, for

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Leviathan} pg. 69
\textsuperscript{82} This point is most boldly made by Fukuyama’s \textit{Clash of Civilizations}, wherein he argues that there are those who are simply our (i.e. the West’s) polar opposites, and with which we are therefore engaged in a final showdown. It is not coincidental that Fukuyama’s political philosophy has been so embraced by the current Bush Administration’s policy on the special status of Islam in the war on terror.
instance, the logic of economic liberalism and that of political liberalism is denied; in fact, as stated at the outset of our analysis, this paper presumes transitional law and postmodern cosmopolitanism, for example, as expressions of the same liberal political logic. Therefore, the categorical demarcation of political liberalism from its familial manifestations serves a conceptually useful function of elucidating the liberal psychic disposition, a disposition specific to the political incarnation of liberalism.

It has been asserted that an analysis of the liberal political disposition of hyper-vigilance will illuminate its corresponding psychic investment. In this sense the concept of political insomnia is more than a mere literary analogy for the liberal political disposition, a useful heuristic device for expounding its particular dynamics; rather, we argue here, that grasping the somatic dimensions to political liberalism grants us access to the psychic and cognitive implications therein, converting the concept of political insomnia from a fun yet theoretically latent metaphor into a rigorous analytical tool. In short, the intention of our meditation here on the psycho-political analogue to the phenomena of insomnia is precisely that it allows us to continue to think with and through the unconscious when analyzing the psychic features of our contemporary collective consciousness.

There seems to be an often unspoken and implicit sense among the progressive left today that with the onset of a “war on terror” and, more generally, the globalization of informal violence, one is increasingly burdened with the immediacy of the age-old inquiry first stolen by Lenin, “What, then, is to be done?” The analytical virtue of the concept of political insomnia intends to take a step back from this obviously important,
and indeed, perhaps the question pressing us most today: prior to addressing “what needs to be done”, or “what the nature of our political predicament requires”, we are burdened with the preliminary quandary of the determination of the reality of the order of (current) affairs, and hence must first inquire precisely what has occurred (psychically, politically, historically) such that it has engendered the development of the specific nature of our political predicament itself. In this sense, then, the concept of political insomnia locates itself within the history of those analyses that propose to execute a transcendental deduction of our life-world. What are the conditions of possibility for a war on terror? What is the necessary collective psychic disposition such that a war on terror and political insomnia is even possible? It is these fundamental inquiries that are so often occluded in the analyses of political scientists, when attempting to grasp the (political) nature of our contemporary life-world, and it is this gap in its literature that the analytical capacity of the concept of political insomnia intends to fill.
Bibliography

Books


Danieli, Stamatopoulou, and Dias (eds.), The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years and Beyond, Baywood Publishing, New York, 1999


--- Human Nature IX, 18, English Works vol. 4

--- De Cive (1651)
http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hobbes/hobbes1

---- “The Elements of Law Natural and Politic”, 1640
http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hobbes/elelaw


*The National Security Strategy of the United States*


Schmid, Alex, and Crelinstein, Ronald (eds.) *Western Responses to Terrorism*, F Cass, Portland, 1993


---*Mapping Ideology* (ed.) Verso, New York, 1993


---*Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993

---*The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, Verso, 1999

**Articles**


President Bush in a speech at West Point, New York, June 1st 2000


Robbins, Bruce, “Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Cheah and Robbins, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1998

**Internet Sources**

ABC’s of ZZZ’s  
http://www.sleepfoundation.org/publications/ZZZs.html