

“Terminological Inexactitudes”: Except from an Etiquette Manual for Deceit

By [Dr. T. P. Wilkinson](#)

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Falsehood and delusion are allowed in no case whatever: But, as in the exercise of all the virtues, there is an œconomy of truth. It is a sort of temperance, by which a man speaks truth with measure that he may speak it the longer. Edmund Burke, Letters on a Regicide Peace (1796)

Truth is the most valuable thing we have. Let us economize it. Mark Twain, Following the Equator (1897)

The conditions of the Transvaal ordinance ... cannot in the opinion of His Majesty's Government be classified as slavery; at least, that word in its full sense could not be applied without a risk of terminological inexactitude. Winston Churchill, as Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Commons speech, 22 February 1906

In the closing scene of Robert di Niro's film *The Good Shepherd* (2006), the protagonist Edward and his colleague and fellow Bonesman Richard enter the new CIA building.[1] They both stop in the foyer and take note of a biblical text emblazoned on the wall.

“And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” John VIII-XXXII

Edward, whose career has been based on the establishment of counter-intelligence, asks Richard whose idea that was? The professional paranoid whose primary qualities throughout the film are emotional detachment and the inability to make either statement or gesture with discernable sincerity betrays his lack of imagination or even sense of humour and finds the citation merely odd. Richard treats it as sarcasm and cynicism. He at least sees the irony of an unofficial motto for an organisation of professional liars.

If we are to even begin to grasp the extent to which empire is based upon lies, we have to ask a more fundamental question—what do we mean by “truth”? Unfortunately to give a useful answer to this question here it is necessary to condense centuries of speculation and offer a deliberately brief answer in this essay. For this purpose I will confine this argument to an examination of what constitutes a lie and above all what is political language?

Again to save time I would like to repeat an anecdote from an unappreciated scholar of Victorian literature with whom I was fortunate to study many years ago. Morse Peckham was a contemporary of the more famous Thomas S. Kuhn whom Peckham had met at Princeton.[2] Kuhn's renown derived from his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

(1962) in which he argued that scientific theories were not disproved but abandoned by scientific consensus in what he called “paradigm shifts”.

Peckham’s parable is about an encounter by one of his academic contemporaries, Wayne Booth, when he enters a restaurant.[3] The question Peckham wants to raise is “what is interpretation?”

I mean rather a theory of what we are doing when we interpret an utterance, any utterance, whether spoken or written. It comes down to this. It is idle of Miller and Booth, and Abrams too, to talk about the methodology of interpreting complex literary texts before they have determined what interpretational behaviour is in ordinary, mundane, routine verbal interaction. The explanation for this statement lies in the logical and historical subsumption of literary written texts by all written texts, in the subsumption of written texts by spoken verbal behaviour, in the subsumption of spoken verbal behaviour by semiotic behaviour, and in the subsumption of semiotic behaviour by whatever it is we are responding to when we use the word “meaning”.

If Professor Booth goes into his usual coffee shop to get his morning coffee, and says to the waiter, “I’d like a cup of coffee, please,” and the waiter brings it to him, what has happened? What is the methodology of the waiter? It is not absurd to ask why the waiter does not bring the America Cup filled to the brim with unroasted coffee beans, nor why Professor Booth does not say, “I asked you for a cup of coffee, but you have brought me a cup of mostly hot water.” Moreover if Professor Booth searches the literature of linguistics and of psychology in order to locate those studies and experiments, which will tell him about the methodology of the waiter, he will find very little. The original program of linguistics set forth a hierarchy of investigation beginning with phonemics, and going on through morphemics, syntactics, semantics, to pragmatics. But as yet very little has been accomplished above syntactics. Psychologists, at least of the typical academic breed, seem to be unaware of the problem...

Let us return to the waiter. I believe that something can be said about his methodology. In going for a cup of coffee in response to Professor Booth’s request, his behaviour can be characterised as dependent upon his perceptual disengagement of an analogically determined recurrent semiotic pattern from an analogically determined series of semiotic matrices. A request for coffee can be made in a variety of verbal formulations, but the waiter responds to all of them in the same way. He has determined that the analogies among those patterns are sufficient to justify his responding to them with the same behaviour. However, if Professor Booth meets the waiter at the beach, when both of them are on vacation and taking sunbaths, and if Professor Booth repeats his request for coffee, it is quite unlikely that he would get it. For the waiter would determine that the analogical resemblances between the beach and the restaurant are not sufficient for him to obey Professor Booth’s instructions. In the restaurant he has analogically determined that the customer-waiter-restaurant matrix is analogically similar enough to the hundreds of such matrices in which he has successfully performed so that he ought to get Professor Booth’s coffee.[4]

In Peckham’s principal theoretical work, *Explanation and Power* (1988), he argues that all interpretation involves verbal behaviour and more importantly it is control over behaviour. The attempt to determine what something means, whether an utterance or an act, is always an attempt to determine what behaviour is the appropriate response, whether verbal or non-verbal, to that utterance or act.

An important underlying principle in Peckham's argument is that the meaning of any sign (an utterance or act to which a response is sought) is the response to that sign. From this it follows that all behaviour is ultimately interpretational—that is to say the search for an appropriate response. His parable of Professor Booth deliberately takes an academic and shows that there is no substantive difference between his behaviour as a literary scholar and his behaviour in any other situation. Professor Booth is engaged in interpretation and control of his behaviour. Moreover Booth is subject to conventions which he has learned, more or less well, about how to interpret and how to behave but these conventions are in no way inherent in his situation or in the words and signs to which he may respond.

I have cited this passage at length because if we can say anything obvious about political language it is that it is about controlling behaviour, because this is what all language does. The first thing we can say about a *lie* is that it involves utterances, utterances that elicit responses and hence require interpretations. The very possibility of uttering a lie is inherent in the virtually infinite range of responses that can be made to any utterance. What we interpret to be a lie is not in fact the absence of some "truth" but the judgement—usually after the fact—that our response to an utterance was in some very unpleasant way inappropriate. That inappropriateness is unpleasant because of the judgement that our response might have been somehow different had we known something—interpreted the utterance—to require a different response than the one we in fact gave.

To judge that a statement is a lie first of all is to interpret it as a statement to which we ought not to have responded in a given matrix or context to which we have been accustomed to assign it. In political language this means that, based upon our particular political assumptions, our response to a statement will be controlled by the matrix including appropriate responses to any given utterance. Furthermore it means that the person producing the utterance was aware of both the assumptions prevailing and the conventional responses that such an utterance would elicit.

In Peter Seller's last film, *Being There* (1979), he plays a gardener who has been displaced by the death of his wealthy employer. Mr Chance has spent his entire life, as long as he can remember, living on the estate of his employer with no other occupations than gardening and watching television. Thrown into the real world he lacks any orientation except his experience gardening and the images of life depicted in the television shows he has watched. Walking through what appears to be the Black quarter of Washington he realises that he is hungry. An older black woman passes him on the sidewalk. He stops her—he is dressed in a suit, Chesterfield, and homburg, carries an umbrella and a suitcase left to him by the dead man—and after saying he is hungry, asks if she would make him lunch.

Not unlike the waiter in Peckham's anecdote, Chance sees a black woman as a housekeeper and concludes that she is the right person to ask for a meal. The woman is shocked and rejects his request, certainly convinced that he is mad at best. In the course of the film, Chance meets people of increasing political importance who attempt to identify him and find themselves bewildered by his apparent inability/ unwillingness to say anything that reveals who he is. At the same time because his conversation is restricted entirely to his experience as a gardener and TV addict, the simplicity of his statements are soon treated as great wisdom. The political leaders interpret his statements as aphorisms or metaphors for profound ideas and judgement. Mr Chance does not even know what a lie is. His audience interprets all his statements in terms of political assumptions of which Mr Chance has not the slightest clue.

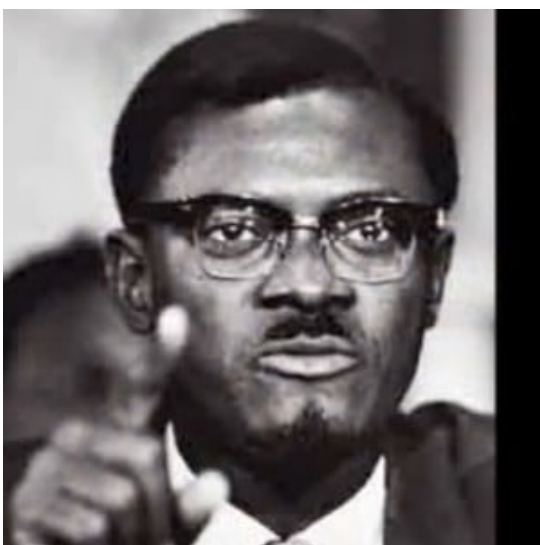
It becomes clear from the behaviour of Mr Chance's "audience" that they share a set of political assumptions that govern their interpretation of Chance's utterances, no matter how fantastic they may be. Occasionally sceptics appear who challenge the credulity of his statements or the appropriateness of his new patrons' responses—to no avail. In fact the film concludes with Chance established as a senior advisor and guru to the group of powerful people who have adopted him.

In order to explain a lie or its technical opposite the "truth", it is insufficient to look whether there are some underlying facts to be revealed or to submit correct data. A lie is not simply an utterance but includes the response to it. In short there can be no lie without a liar and someone who responds to the utterance. Here it is useful to quote Peckham again:

The value of semiotic transformation into a verbal semiotic mode, especially when explanation is superimposed, is that it makes negation of a perceptually disengaged sign pattern possible. Animals can refuse, but only a man can negate, for negation is an attribute of verbalisation.[5]

Moreover a lie, as a component of political language, is always embedded in the particular political assumptions of the person(s) to be deceived. An old adage among Germans in the annexed former GDR is that "everything they told us about socialism was false, but everything they said about capitalism was true." It was a common place in the Soviet Union and the GDR that the government and the media did not tell the truth or at best were to be treated with great scepticism. The government was aware of this as was clear from the statement attributed to a Soviet journalist visiting the US who wondered how it was possible to travel from coast to coast and hear or read the same news and opinions everywhere—when even with censorship and strict policing such consensus was unenforceable in the USSR.

To this date one can read interminable complaints that the US and UK governments lied about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein prior to launching the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Aside from the question of whether the war would have been legal and supported had the "facts been known", what does the accusation of official deceit by the US and UK governments really mean?



In 1960 Patrice Lumumba was elected the first prime minister of the newly independent Republic of the Congo. Within eleven months he was not only deposed but also murdered. He was decried in Washington and Brussels as well as

throughout the West as a “communist”. Not only did Lumumba deny this, there was never any evidence produced to establish that he was. Decades later the official and largely unchallenged viewpoint is that in the Cold War it was logical that the US would consider Lumumba a communist—even if he was not. More disturbing however, are the replies that it was wrong to kill Lumumba because he was *not* a communist. The political assumption apparently held even by some of his supporters is that had he been a communist some kind of executive action (deposing, imprisoning or executing him) would have been at least understandable. In other words the lie was not simply that Lumumba was a communist but the unstated assumption that communists may not be elected to public office and they can be killed.

This is also the unstated assumption of all those who insisted that Saddam Hussein no longer had the alleged weapons of mass destruction and therefore the US invasion was wrong. Today there are many people who claim to oppose the destruction of Libya but virtually none of them are able to admit that Gaddafi’s murder was inappropriate or unacceptable.[6] The same condition applies to Syria. It is almost impossible to find anyone who will say that President Assad is the legitimate ruler of Syria and that no external government has the right to depose him. Instead the debate is focussed upon how to restore peace and stability to Syria as if the US and its vassals were not waging war against Syria (and its ally Iran). Allegations made by US and NATO officials against the Assad government are rarely questioned—although those officials have lied demonstrably in the past to justify waging war.

While it seems easy enough to establish how often and how seriously the NATO powers have lied, there appears to be no general incredulity toward subsequent statements and representations. The most common explanations for this defect is that these imperial officials occasionally lie but the mass media does not report the lies or that these governments are so successful at manipulating the populace that people believe whatever lies they are told. Neither of these arguments explains the persistence and recurrence of the deceit or the surprise with which every lie discovered is then greeted.

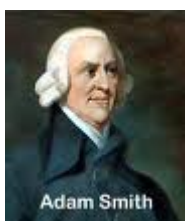
One has to ask why liars exposed are still believed the day after or why liars suffer no consequences for their lies? This is not simply a matter of daily propaganda and repression—although both can be found. The problem is that lies are not just words. They are behaviour. In political language a lie is a political utterance and an act. Liars exert control over the people to whom they lie. Those who ingest the lie also do something—they exercise control over their own behaviour through the interpretive act. That interpretive act involves both overt and covert behaviour. The reader/ viewer/ listener does not simply respond to an isolated statement. Instead the response involves at least a covert verbal control on the part of the target, which involves organising a battery of potential responses—a repertory—from the entire scope of political experience. The challenge of political warfare is not simply to sell a falsehood but to manipulate the entire political context, the political assumptions within which the recipient’s behavioural repertory are embedded.[7]

Since the manipulation of this political context is the real target of lies in political language, the disclosure of a lie—a falsehood—usually has little impact. The same applies to the threat and atrocity reporting common in the so-called Left media. Investigative journalism, practically a cliché in a world where five multinational corporations own practically the entire mass media of all types, rarely leads to more than an occasional resignation or farcical press statement. At best it delivers the alibi for token measures against those least

able to claim sovereign or corporate immunity.

Therefore if there is to be any realistic chance of penetrating the cerebellum of the sympathetic media consumer, there has to be a proper understanding of the political assumptions within which her or his potential responses are embedded. This leads to the question whether those assumptions support any of the response options that a political opponent—and here let us be clear we mean opposition to the prevailing empire and its ideology—might find compatible with the struggle.[8]

Along with the West's most enduring piece of science fiction and theatrical paraphernalia, two ideas of books have probably done more to structure the political assumptions prevailing among the vast majority of the Anglo-American Empire's white subjects. These are the idea of Adam Smith and the idea of Charles Darwin. Together the vulgarised forms of their respective theories have been extremely powerful—creationists notwithstanding.

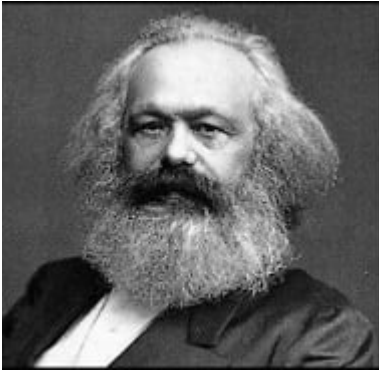


Adam Smith is best remembered for “the invisible hand” although he explicitly warned that businessmen always conspire to fix prices and rig so-called free markets. The “invisible hand” is turned into the theory of general economic equilibrium most valiantly proselytised by what Paul Samuelson called the “neo-classical synthesis” in economics. Samuelson's and Friedman's “invisible hands” are mailed fists that are supposed to keep popular politics out of supposedly rational business and macro-economic policy. Adam Smith was not a “scientist” but a moral philosopher. His *Wealth of Nations* is full of speculative exercises that have no basis in reality.[9] That has not reduced the devotion to markets and adventurism (the earlier term for capitalism).

Charles Darwin's renown or infamy is based on his attempt to explain the incidence of new species.[10] However the distortion of Darwin is even greater than that of Smith. Although “social Darwinism” is a term describing ideas introduced by Herbert Spencer (*Social Statics*, 1851), by attributing the maxim “survival of the fittest” to Darwin, the political theory borrows its legitimacy from supposedly objective biology. Darwin did not propose the “survival of the fittest”. In fact his argument was that in the course of generations within a plant or animal community, the least adapted to the prevailing environment might be better equipped to survive changes in that environment, whether gradual or sudden. Yet it is the Darwinism influenced by Spencer that has prevailed. The most obvious example of this view can be found when white Americans explain the subordination and destruction of the Native American population. In fact, the unstated premise of Euro-American domination is that the US and its European vassals to a lesser extent constitute the highest stage of human and political development to which all other peoples and cultures naturally must aspire.

The ideological fictions of the “invisible hand”, the “market” and “survival of the fittest” are essential tenets of Liberalism and the peculiar form of it found in the Anglo-American Empire identified as “Left”.

Again to simplify my argument I will dispense with such useless terms as “left”, “democratic socialism”, “neo-conservatism” or “neo-liberalism”. These are just words that elaborate—and thus conceal—the same ideology, *capitalism*.



When Marx wrote *Capital* he was not proposing an economic theory at all. Marx undertook to analyse the seemingly impersonal processes by which a class of people created institutions to control labour—labouring people. “Political economy” was political language—not scientific—it was the language of power that was replacing theology. Today that theology is called simply “economics”.

As a counter to this attempt to analyse the pseudo-science of empire, the ruling class created a language which together with the application of brute force shaped a horror scenario by which any attempt to alter imperial power relations became a violation of nature, a violence against self-evident truths—ostensibly against scientific truth. The “spectre of communism”, which the young Marx called the political challenge of the working classes to the owners of property, was articulated by the ruling class as a synthetic narrative where all the supposed virtues of the ruling class were negated and this negation became the “spectre” that prevailed until “communism” was deemed obsolete in 1989.[11] Communism was in fact a very broad and differentiated approach to reorganising human relations and thus altering world. It was never a monolithic ideology—even in the states that later attempted to enforce doctrinal orthodoxy. However, the “communism” of the ruling class was monolithic: it comprised every conceivable degree of opposition that could not be controlled by the regime.

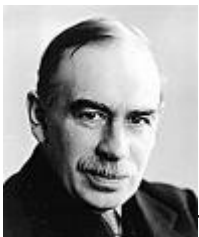
This was the identical synthetic approach taken by Pope Innocent III when he declared that anyone who did not confess and practice according to the dictates of the Roman pontiff was a heretic and worthy of annihilation.[12] In other words, like heresy in the Middle Ages, communism was not defined as a specific set of positive political positions but as the term subsuming any deviation from imperial ideology, doctrine and practice. Furthermore, a communist was merely anyone who had been judged to be a threat to the ruling class if this threat could not be integrated or co-opted into the system of domination.[13]

The attempts of reformers to mitigate the wanton greed and gratuitous brutality of the ruling classes have all absorbed these assumptions while inventing and using language to challenge the symptoms but almost never the causes of the malaise itself. The problem of class domination was overcome in the same way the Reformers imagined when they renounced papal supremacy. Instead of a single capitalist—the days of so-called “robber barons”—the capitalist reformation introduced a scientific tyranny of capital, subject to regulation.

This transformation occurred in two stages. The first was at the end of the 19th century with the emergence of social democracy in Germany, Fabianism in Great Britain, and Progressivism in the US. All three reform movements borrow the critical language that emerged in class struggle but synthesise the opposition to the ruling class into a positivist doctrine.[14] Positivism is best characterised as a religion of science. However in contrast to science as means and methods of producing human knowledge, positivist science returns to

the medieval notion of natural laws (divine laws) that are disclosed by human activity or revelation. The validity or “truth” of those discoveries relies on the correct (appropriate) application of rigorous methods. The methods are not arbitrary—they are the tools of engineering, the creation of instruments like machines with which capitalists exert their power over labour and the natural environment.

Whereas Marx was an analytic thinker whose writing addressed incoherence and hence human struggles, the Reformers were committed to the fundamental coherence of ruling class ideology. Communists of all sorts were aware that knowledge and power were specific to the form of social organisation. Positivists aiming to reform capitalism (cosmetically modify the appearance and specific techniques of ruling class domination to make them more palatable) consistently defended the prevailing system as given and naturally inevitable, the result of natural law. The Reformist task was to discover or reveal the as yet unknown rules and techniques that would make the system work better. The principal of gradualism only makes sense if one accepts the prevailing order as inspired. The field of social action no longer embraces a belief in the fundamental malleability of human social organisation. There can be no revolution. Moreover there ought not to be one. Social movements, like organised labour or opposition to slavery and colonialism, are not supposed to change capitalism. Their purpose is to accelerate the movement toward a more serene capitalism that functions better because the as yet undiscovered laws are thus revealed, allowing the faithful to more closely approach the salvation that the one, true empire promises, just like the one, true Church did in the Middle Ages.[15]



The second, although relatively short-lived, Reformist tendency is that associated with economist, politician and eugenicist, John Maynard Keynes. After the failure to suppress the 1917 Russian Revolution and the outbreak of the Great Depression in 1929, Keynes published his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). He argued that unemployment was due to under-consumption (one could call this poverty or destitution) in turn due to lack of investment which reduced both the rate of profit and the rate of spending in the economy by multipliers that increased the negative impact disproportionately. Since the ruling class had no opportunities to obtain adequately massive profits, there was no propensity to invest. If the State was to avoid the instability that spiralling unemployment and poverty could cause it was necessary to intervene in the supposedly natural course of things and stimulate consumption and investment so that employment would result. Keynes arguments were more detailed and complex than what can be presented here. Nonetheless political pressure in the US and UK resulted in modest state intervention to create jobs and thus stimulate consumption. These measures were supposed to motivate private capitalists to invest in the promise of more profits from sales to consumers. Although the most reactionary factions in the ruling class fought these policies tooth and nail, calling it among other things communism, it became the new theory of the social democratic sect. Keynes in this context constituted something like the heresy of the “poverty of Christ”.[16] The mere suggestion that capitalism must include a theology of full employment and consumption was (and is) infamous heresy for the orthodox Church, the fact of Keynes solid capitalist credentials notwithstanding. The central heresy is not that consumption is necessary for capitalist growth and therefore should be stimulated, e.g. by

incomes policy. Rather the central heresy is that at least in principle, *popular politics (as opposed to Business) could/ should be used to direct economic policy.*

Keynes was merely analysing the problem that arose when massively subsidised capitalist war production became redundant with the peace. As long as the Great War was raging, factory output was being destroyed as soon as it was replaced. Armaments manufacturers, bankers and troop outfitters reaped extortionate profits. Several million surplus consumers had been annihilated on the front. Now those factories were no longer needed and there was nothing as profitable to replace the war. The command economy was also a great time for employers since workers had a simple choice, e.g. the pit or the trench. It took the mobilisation of the Second World War for Keynesian economic policy to be fully implemented. However, that was the point: there is no higher rate of consumption, investment and employment than during war. The best thing about war is that everything produced can be endlessly destroyed, including the workers and their families, only profit remains.

When WWII ended, the ruling class was faced with a return to labour unrest, mass unemployment and a fall in the rate of institutionalised plunder. Thus in the US Empire the permanent war economy was introduced, made even more profitable by the destruction or severe weakening of its main competitors.[17] The trade-off among Reformists was again (as in 1914) war against the rest of the world in return for high domestic employment and relative labour peace. The unexpected survival of the Soviet Union, combined with those countries it was allowed to occupy under the Yalta Agreement, posed a dual challenge to liberal reformers. On the one hand it was necessary to loot the former colonies of the competition (euphemistically called “open door policy”, esp. in China) to feed the domestic profit machine. On the other the Soviet Union, which was in the process of rebuilding after the West’s almost twenty-year attempt to destroy it, had to be neutralised to prevent it from recovering either as a trade competitor or an ideological alternative.

What I would call World War III has been labelled euphemistically the “Cold War”. [18] Almost immediately after the surrender of the Axis in Europe, the Anglo-American Empire began its crusades against heresy—meaning any resistance to economic and political subordination to the US—by waging war against Greek nationalists. The combination of covert action, military assistance to reactionary regimes and terror became known as the Truman Doctrine. This would only be the first campaign in a continuous war against non-whites and nationalists who took the UN Charter seriously. By the official end of this Cold War—the collapse of the Soviet Union—probably 15 - 20 million people had been murdered either directly by US military and economic terror or by that performed on the behalf of its ruling class through local terror organisations (with or without the State).

While the Soviet Union was inhibited in its ability to develop its own economy because of the US atomic arsenal and its constant first (and second strike) threat, newly independent countries were denied any assistance from the West—except in return for a kind of “sharecropping” relationship. The constant wars also disrupted trade between the former colonies that still relied on primary commodity exports and the industrialised economies in what was called the “Socialist Bloc”, although the terms of trade were generally more favourable to developing nations than those offered by the West.

The US atomic arsenal was applied as blackmail to restrain the Soviet Union from engaging in normal trade relations and implicitly to threaten Asians with mass annihilation should they resist the revival of Manifest Destiny and the “Open Door” in the Pacific.[19] Alone in

Asia the US regime murdered over six million people between 1945 and 1975—two hundred thousand annually, if one only counts the invasion of Korea and the occupation of Vietnam. That is sort of like wiping out a city like Des Moines, Richmond or Fayetteville every year for three decades. This does not count the destruction of the infrastructure and poisoning of the environment.

All of this was supported by Liberals in both the orthodox and reformed factions. Orthodox Liberals were the party of Manifest Destiny in the US; they want(ed) to continue where the US regime left off in 1910. Reformed Liberals followed in the cloak of Keynesian militarism—while regretting the injury done to those non-whites, the integration of the empire was still paramount. Aid to aspiring dictatorships was good for employment and profits as long as they followed Washington's guidelines.

By the late 1960s the Reform faction was split by the intensification of domestic revolt. The Cold War myth had been built upon a "white consensus". However since 1957 Black Americans had seen the arrival of Black African national governments—something inconceivable since the Haitian Revolution. The isolation of Black Americans from the African Diaspora was momentarily broken. Black nationalism also returned to the US. Caribbean islands with large or majority Black populations were also becoming independent. The Reform faction had been willing to make gradual concessions to what they called the Civil Rights movement. When Malcolm X began to speak the same language as Nkrumah, the civil rights movement threatened to become a human rights movement—one for liberation and not amelioration. Emergent Black Nationalism in the US and tenacious resistance by the Vietnamese to US occupation and war posed a serious risk to the white Liberal consensus that had prevailed since WWII. The result was a Liberal "counter-reformation"—not unlike Luther's decision to side with the ruling class in the Peasant Revolts. Luther was deeply opposed to a class war in which the position of the clergy itself was at risk. Reformed Liberals recognised that Black Nationalism and the Native American movement (e.g. Black Panthers and AIM) could destroy the white regime internally—or at least believed they could.

As a result the primary political warfare instruments, the CIA, FBI, corporate mass media, and "organised crime" (better understood as covert business) were mobilised.[20] White differences were buried and every measure was taken to avert race or class struggle in the US. For a brief period concessions were made to the Black middle class. However the "war on poverty" was the mirror of the counter-insurgency waged in Vietnam at the same time. While administered benefit systems were introduced to control the poor, especially Blacks, the covert warfare arms suppressed the regimes opponents by assassination or incarceration—where they could not be bought or simply discredited by propaganda measures.[21]

The war against African independence had not prevented Kwame Nkrumah from becoming prime minister of Ghana. However the political warriors succeeded in crushing Congolese independence in 1961, only a few months after Patrice Lumumba had been elected. The war against Black Nationalism was also waged in the Caribbean basin. Closer to the US and its Black population, these countries were potentially more threatening examples. Covert operations in Latin American were established practice. However manipulating territories that had been under British rule was more sensitive, not least because it could excite intra-elite rivalries. The countless wars being waged simultaneously by the US regime were expensive. In fact the cost of invading Vietnam was creating a serious financial problem for the US whose currency value had been tied to a USD 35 gold exchange rate.

The US had become the world's depository for reserve bullion after WWII and the monetary rules had been agreed at Bretton Woods to assure the US dollar as a reserve currency. To avoid a run on the gold held in US vaults, the white consensus POTUS Richard Nixon abrogated the Bretton Woods fixing—but not without creating the *petrodollar* by agreement with Saudi Arabia. Another way of describing this sequence of events is that the US regime transferred the costs of its wars onto all of those forced to import oil, not only its European competitors but also all its imperial targets—i.e. newly independent countries in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.[22] This was aided enormously by the fact that the penultimate beneficiaries were the Anglo-American oil cartel, aka as the “Seven Sisters”, who already owned the house of ibn Saud.[23]

As the controlling shareholder of the Bretton Woods multilateral extortion apparatus (aka World Bank and IMF), the US regime first imposed massive debts/ balance of payments deficits on its enemies and competitors, it also could use the multilateral banking system to reset the balance of trade in any given country to feed the US Empire cheap or free labour and raw materials.

Although there are a few survivors of the Vietnam generation who condemn Richard Nixon for domestic felonies and together with Henry Kissinger for war crimes, the Nixon years formed the basis of the white Liberal reconciliation that reached its zenith in the canonisation of Ronald Reagan. In fact for those who bothered to listen or read carefully Barack Obama's campaign speeches in 2008, it should have been clear that Obama was the distillation of the white Liberal counter-reformation that arrived to return the US Empire—and the world it has dominated since 1989—to the pure orthodoxy of Liberalism that prevailed in 1914.[24]

This pure Liberalism is not incompatible with the gradualist, scientific adjustments imagined by 19th century progressives and Fabians. Quite the contrary, the objective of Progressivism was to prevent revolution and obliterate class struggle—ultimately to discover and recover the natural laws of capitalism that would allow exploitation for the insatiable to proceed again. There are some sects within the Reform faction that claim pure liberalism is dysfunctional and demand a return to what Samuelson called “depression economics”. [25] However their adherents miss the point: Capitalism is not an economic system based on scientific laws. It is not an engineering project, like building a bridge. The purpose of capitalism is not to guarantee under conditions of private ownership and free enterprise a rational economy with coherent processes for allocating resources.

It is and always has been a religion. In fact I would argue that capitalism is an outgrowth of Roman Catholicism, Max Weber (1930) and R H Tawney (1926) notwithstanding. The Greco-Roman sect that seized control of the Roman imperial bureaucracy shortly after 313 A D, absorbed the institutions of Roman power and endowed them with the bureaucratic ideology called Roman Catholicism. The focus of imperial Catholic power was the Roman pontiff, the pope. An absolute ruler, who claimed both divine and secular authority, the pope was elected from the enormous European bureaucracy that the Church created. Its central institutions, the clergy, the mendicant orders, and the Inquisition established a reign of terror throughout Europe and wherever Europeans went. It stole everything that has made the Church and European ruling class so obscenely wealthy and vicious—along with their American cousins.

Ironically in 1913 the US Congress adopted the *Federal Reserve Act*. [26] Sixteen hundred

years after the *Edict of Milan*, the US regime constitutes what might be termed a college of cardinals, banking prelates, who select the chief financial bureaucrat with the nominal authority to reign over the petrodollar. Only tiny cells of confused opposition actually dispute the legitimacy of central banking, capitalism's equivalent of papal supremacy.

This religion, this Church, relies not only on overt force to compel obedience. It can draw on centuries of bureaucratic technology for monitoring and policing the souls of the subjugated. Auricular confession holds only a fraction of the potential of the credit rating today. Although Joseph Ratzinger's Inquisition appears to have had only a bishop and a few murdered clerics to its credit and no longer burns heretics at the stake, the political warfare institutions descended from it—the national security state—which is in fact an international Inquisition to punish heretics condemned by the cardinals of central banking—could surely dye the vestments of every Roman prelate since Innocent III with the blood that has been spilled.[27] Capitalism is a religion for dominating labour (and the unemployed) and nature for the enrichment of a tiny class of psychopaths.

There is no rational, scientific argument against capitalism; any more than there is a definitively rational, scientific argument against Christianity and its virulence, whether Catholic or Protestant. Karl Marx was sober enough to recognise that there were no natural processes, no divine laws (not even history) by which human society can be permanently organised. He described in great detail the form of organisation of social power and domination in the West and anticipated the consequences of this peculiar organisational form. The organisational form—the Church of Capitalism—is the instrument that has formulated and instilled the political assumptions that underlie our semiotic matrices. We find ourselves—to the extent that we do not grasp the root of those assumptions—always able to deceive ourselves. In fact these cheap deceptions, whether they be the readiness to accept WMD and a pretext for war or police murders of non-whites or the lies and manipulations of our employers, supervisors and colleagues, are part of the cycle that allows us to confess and be absolved for our trespasses.

Burke and Twain, one serious while the other sarcastic, both understood that what we call “truth” is really a product of our religious economy. In some cases it is a commodity that can be traded like an indulgence. But in fact “truth” in religion is really nothing more than the refusal to call something a lie and then act upon that admission. Eternal demands for the “truth” about the Kennedys or the truth about “9-11” or the “truth” about the US war against Syria, are part of the economy of faith and integral to the lies that shock but are soon forgotten, like the promise in the confessional after the fifth Ave Maria. The journalistic exposure of “lies” among the faithful cannot dilute the holy water at Lourdes—nor does it change social organisation and social power. George Carlin declaimed before he died that he had given up on the human race. There was no malice in his voice as he said he had “no more interest in the outcome”. Rather he said humans were a remarkable species with unimaginable potential—who sold out to high priests and merchants.[28] In the Middle Ages one could identify the high priests by their clothes. Today the high priests and merchants all dress alike—well maybe it's because they are really the same.

Notes

[1] *The Good Shepherd* is billed as a story about the beginnings of the CIA. The main character is tapped for the Yale senior society, Skull & Bones, to which many of his later contacts and some colleagues in the CIA also belong. Although there is no corporate connection between the CIA and Skull & Bones, members of this society permeate the class that founded the CIA. See Burton Hersh,

The Old Boys: the American Elite and the Origins of the CIA (1992)

[2] Morse Peckham (1914 – 1993), MA (Rochester) PhD (Princeton); Professor of English Literature: 1950 – 1966 (U Pennsylvania), 1967 – 1980 (U South Carolina). Peckham began his published research with a variorum edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. His first major theoretical contribution was in *Man's Rage for Chaos: Biology, Behavior and the Arts* (1967) where he argues that art is not a pursuit of order but an adaptation mechanism for humans to violate or transgress an order that may be dysfunctional or even dangerous. Peckham modified this theory considerably between 1967 and 1980 when *Explanation and Power* was first published.

[3] At the time this article was published, Hillis Miller was a professor of literature at Yale, Wayne Booth was professor at the University of Chicago and M H Abrams.

[4] Morse Peckham, "The Infinitude of Pluralism", *Critical Inquiry* v. 3 n. 4 (Summer 1977), pp. 803-16.

[5] Morse Peckham, op. cit. p. 815.

[6] Muammar Muhammed Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi (b. ca. 1942) Gaddafi was murdered by US-backed assassins on 20 October 2011. For years he was held responsible for the so-called La Belle bombing in Berlin, despite the fact that German criminal investigations established that the Libyan government had nothing to do with the bombing. The fact that testimony to Libya's involvement in the Lockerbie bombing of a civilian airliner was also discredited had no effect on the intensity of accusations that Gaddafi was the terrorist behind this incident in which the CIA was at least implicated.

[7] See

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/disclosure-and-deceit-secrecy-as-the-manipulation-of-history-not-its-concealment/24886>

[8] The problem I raise here was addressed at least implicitly by Marx (with his analysis of "commodity fetishism") and later by Lukács (*History and Class Consciousness*, 1923). It was examined explicitly by Sartre (*Critique of Dialectical Reason* in 1960), and Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952, *Wretched of the Earth* in 1961), and Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 where he uses the term *conscientização*/ conscientization), too.

[9] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Paul Samuelson *Economics* (1948), Milton Friedman *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962). A more sane view of post-war economic theory can be found in the out-of-print Lorie Tarshis *Elements of Economics* (1947), effectively banned in the US. David Graeber in *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011) explicitly debunks Smith's explanation of credit as a transition from barter to money economies; also by showing that Smith's anthropological examples are empirically false.

[10] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859)

[11] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels opened their *Communist Manifesto* (1848) with the words "spectre of communism".

[12] Innocent III, pope from 1198 – 1216, was probably the most powerful Roman pontiff in Church history—at a time when the pope essentially claimed to be the emperor of Europe. Among his accomplishments were the decree forbidding the laity from possessing the Bible, draconian laws against heresy, war against the Eastern Church and numerous crusades, e.g. to exterminate the Albigensians (Catharers) and drive the Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula and the "Holy Land". See Henry Charles Lea, *History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages* (1887), v. 1. for more detailed accounts of the brotherly love exercised by this pope.

[13] This policy was made quite explicit in the CIA's Phoenix Program first conceptualised in Vietnam and then generalised as the US model for political warfare: "If you don't do what I want, you're VC. (Viet Cong = communist)" See Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (re-released as e-book in 2014), also reviewed by this author.

[14] See Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857) who presented a "stages of development model" of human society where natural sciences (as opposed to natural philosophy) constituted the methodology of

the highest stage of development. This “stages” theory was again popularised in W W Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth* (1962). Positivism extended to a scientific plan for the organisation of society. In fact as a religious movement it formed the basis for military-technocratic governments in the 20th century, e.g. Brazil.

[15] “To put it inadequately, until the 19th century the overwhelmingly dominant ideological tradition was synthetic. And by that I mean the effort to establish and stabilise an all-subsuming ideology, one that would settle eternally the ascription of value to individuals, since that ascription is always and necessarily unstable. The Fall – Redemption pattern has been the most redundant mode of such an ideology.” Morse Peckham, *op cit.* p. 815.

[16] See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, 1980. The accumulating wealth of the Roman pontiff and clergy produced a reaction within the Church by those who asserted that Christ had preached poverty and this was at complete odds with the development of the Church as a wealthy corporation. The people who pled the “poverty of Christ” were condemned as heretics.

[17] This was the essence of George F. Kennan’s argument and the secret policy adopted in NSC 68, only declassified in the late 1970s.

[18] The first public use of the term is attributed to the racist South Carolina investment banker and political manipulator Bernard Baruch. “Let us not be deceived; We are today in the midst of a Cold War. Our enemies are to be found abroad and at home. Let us never forget: Our unrest is the heart of their success.” 16 April 1947 to the SC House of Representatives.

[19] See Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea* (2009) for an extensive discussion of the persistence of Manifest Destiny in US policy and volume 2 of his *Origins of the Korean War* (1991).

[20] For a discussion of the intimate links between the national security state and “organised crime” see Douglas Valentine, *The Strength of the Wolf* (2006) and *The Strength of the Pack* (2010). Valentine provides the dramatis personae in the late “China Lobby”, the “French Connection” and the long line of criminal activities operated by the CIA, FBI, and the DEA (including its predecessor organisations). Burton Hersch also covers some of this in his book *Bobby and J Edgar* (2007).

[21] The domestic US version of Phoenix included the FBI’s Cointelpro.

[22] Michael Manley, twice prime minister of Jamaica, explains the effects of US petrodollar/ IMF policies in Stephanie Black’s film *Life and Debt* (2001). Current vice chairman of the US Federal Reserve and former governor of the Israel central bank, Stanley Fisher, is featured detailing the IMF’s attitude toward former colonies. Elevated to a “cardinal” of capitalism, and prince of central banking, Fisher embodies the bureaucratic viciousness of finance capital as well as the continuity within the regime.

[23] See John M. Blair, *The Control of Oil* (1976).

[24] Barack Obama repeatedly praised Ronald Reagan during his campaign.

[25] Paul Samuelson, *op. cit.*

[26] In November 1910, the secret “council” was held at the Jekyll Island Club on the eponymous Georgia sea island where much of the US ruling class had been accustomed to spending vacations. It was attended by representatives of the US banking elite and its political officials in the Treasury and the Congress: Nelson Aldrich, A. Platt Andrew (members of the National Monetary Commission), Paul Warburg of Kuhn, Loeb & Co.; Frank Vanderlip, National City Bank of New York; Henry P. Davison, J P Morgan & Co.; and Charles Norton of the First National Bank of New York. Together they drafted what was called the Aldrich Plan. The Aldrich Plan in turn formed the basis for the *Federal Reserve Act of 1913*.

[27] Oscar Romero, bishop of San Salvador was murdered by a death squad while saying mass on 24 March 1980. Although Joseph Ratzinger only became head of the Inquisition (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) in 1981, he became known for his adamant suppression of Liberation Theology in Latin America. The Church took no action even once the role of Catholic members of the Salvadoran ARENA party (in conjunction with US secret services) who were involved in the bishop’s

murder and in later murders of priests, nuns, and lay workers became known. Instead he forced clergy in left-wing governments to resign or face defrocking. Essentially he pursued the same policies of Pius XII toward fascist regimes. For a discussion of Pius XII's ignominy see Karlheinz Deschner, *God and the Fascists* (2013).

[28] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9CjBtv7j78>

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