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# The potentials of Enlightenment

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'The radical critique of reason exacts a high price for taking leave of modernity', Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), p. 336.

## Introduction: the challenges of the 1990s

The greatest works of political and social theory are often the shortest, and none more so than the text of Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History*, written just over two hundred years ago in 1784: it is all of thirteen pages long, and advances a thesis that should concern us all. In essence, it argues that history can, and to some degree does, move in a progressive direction—one in which the domestic organisation of states on an increasingly legal, constitutional, basis will lead to greater cooperation between states and ultimately to some form of world government. Kant's hope was 'that after many reformative revolutions, a universal cosmopolitan condition, which Nature has as her ultimate purpose, will come into being as the womb wherein all the original capacities of the human race can develop'.[1] There are many readings of Professor Kant, not least when this text is combined with others.[2] Yet to put it in modern terms, not entirely traducing his meaning, his work can be read as envisaging a world of constitutional regimes and liberal democracies, one that will be without war. This is a bold thesis with many unproven assumptions: but it is not entirely implausible, on either theoretical or historical grounds. Abused as it may have been by the twin menaces of a modish post-1989 triumphalism, and a postmodernist pessimism, it nonetheless sets us a goal that can, and should, command attention. Two centuries later, the goals of Enlightenment, and a measured concept of progress, retain an, albeit chastened, validity in international as in domestic affairs.

There has been much creative discussion in recent times of the relationship between international relations and the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, as a broad intellectual process, was not specifically concerned with international issues. Its relevance to the international is as much in the implications of general assumptions as in any particular 'international' arguments that its proponents may have made. Kant's formulation, in *Idea for a Universal History* as in his later *Perpetual*

[1] 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View', in Kant, *On History*, edited by Lewis White Beck (New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 23.

[2] For one astute adjudication see Andrew Hurrell, 'Kant and the Kantian Paradigm in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 16:3, (1990).



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*Peace* has the benefit that, in conjunction with his other general philosophical works, he brings together, in respect of the field of international relations, several of the themes that are associated with the Enlightenment: progress, peace, internationalism, purposive human agency. As a current of thought that was itself transnational, the Enlightenment, in Kant as in his contemporaries, contained much that is of relevance to the international: above all, the belief in the ability of a new scientific outlook to master reality, and history, was reflected in the study of the international field. If the Enlightenment was primarily about human progress in general, its implications for IR are clear enough: universalism of values, peace, and cooperation linked to reason and compromise. In the face of all the urgent problems that we have, we need to recall Kant's argument, that humanity has the capacity to fashion a better, more stable, more democratic, more prosperous international order. We are a long way from it, but the very recognition of that distance should encourage us to face the world with a spirit at once more critical and more determined.

Here one may, in regard to IR, invoke the arguments of three prominent, contrasted, figures of late twentieth century thought, who have argued for a reappraisal but reaffirmation of Enlightenment thinking: from a more contented liberal perspective, Isaiah Berlin; from a Marxist standpoint, Jurgen Habermas; and from a discontented liberal standpoint, Ernest Gellner. All set themselves against the claims, narrative and analysis, of anti-Enlightenment fashion. Postmodernism here, as elsewhere, makes strange bedfellows. While Berlin has defended the 'intellectual power, honest, lucidity, courage and disinterested love' of Enlightenment thinkers,[3] Habermas has, while recognising the 'incomplete' character of modernity, asserted its benefits, as against the backwardness of the pre-Enlightenment, and the confusion of the postmodernist. Their arguments too can, with suitable adjustment, be applied to the international.[4] For his part Gellner is, as ever, brisk: 'What is to be done? *Shto dyelat*? We simply cannot return to the claustrophobic, isolationist relativism which our romantics recommend so blithely; each community back to its own totem pole!'[5]

We are not dealing here with a single univocal set of ideas. The Enlightenment, as much as any other body of thought, contains a plurality of possible interpretations, it allows of no single reading to which a retrospective responsibility can be ascribed; it is contradictory. In general political terms, it can be read as enjoining both the right of individuals, and the primacy of states or *raison d'état*. It can endorse both freedom of identity and expression and the power of collectivities. It can be read as favouring interaction of peoples but also autarchy. The scepticism of Hume runs together with the progressivist determinism of Condorcet. Voltaire made a fool of himself in his admiration of despots, Rousseau in his romanticization of the impoverished shepherds of Corsica. To ring the changes on themes central to IR: the

[3] 'The intellectual power, honesty, lucidity, courage and disinterested love of the most gifted thinkers of the eighteenth century remain to this day without parallel. Their age is one of the best and most hopeful episodes in the life of mankind', quoted in 'Crimes of Reason', *The Economist*, 16 March 1996.

[4] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1985). On Habermas and the international see Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), together with the 'Forum' discussion of Linklater's book in *Review of International Studies*, 25:1 (January 1999) and the review by Nicholas Rengger, *International Affairs*, 74:3 (July 1998). And in a parallel application of Gramsci, Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[5] Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 90.

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Enlightenment can be read as favouring self-determination of states, or, in a scientistic metaphor much beloved of eighteenth thinkers and still with us today, the 'balance of power'. All the forms of political action relevant to domestic *and* international politics can be derived from it: acceptance, reform, revolution. Where the critics see a unity, history has seen a variety.

For this reason alone, we may be suspicious of the critique of the 'Project', itself a hypostatized entity, first cousin of the liberal inquisition. Yet such a critique is very much part of our troubled present, and plays to the very real uncertainties of the post-Cold War epoch. More recently, connections and critiques, drawn from the broader aesthetic and sociological discussion of Enlightenment, have been applied to the international domain.[6] Events of the past few years have, moreover, highlighted the hubris of political commentators and academic analysts alike: a decade after the end of the Cold War, and the proclamation of a new world of peace, democracy and prosperity, the international system finds itself at a point of uncertainty, even crisis. It was said by the Israeli academic and former general Yehoshufat Harkabi that when the Berlin Wall came down this marked the end of two ideologies: in the east, Marxism-Leninism and in the west, political science. The uncertainty of markets, as of security systems, is compounded by an intellectual unease, corrosive both of rational and of democratic endeavour, that pervades the *Zeitgeist*. The fashionable rejection of the 'Enlightenment Project' has, therefore, implications for all areas of human activity, international relations included.

This confusion is evident in the diversity of responses which the events of the late 1980s and 1990s themselves have occasioned.[7] These range from the optimistic, proclaiming a new world order, or an end of history, to analyses in terms of a fragmentation of modern states, a new Middle Ages. Critics on the left emphasise the degree of inequality in the current process of globalization, those on the right the enduring ability of the international system to generate conflict. In several respects these intellectual arguments hark back to those of a century ago. In the 1890s the world lived through the optimism and economic boom of the *belle époque*: a few years later it was plunged into world war, a convulsion from which the further crisis of the twentieth century, World War II and the Cold War, followed. This crisis of the international system was preceded by an unprecedented degree of globalization, in terms of trade, opening of markets, and foreign direct investment. Today that outcome should serve as a warning even if, one may argue, it does not yet set a precedent. Our own *belle époque* has new challenges, not least those of nuclear weapons and environmental catastrophe, but also new forms of knowledge, and political responsibility.

[6] For a range of views see *inter alia*, Linklater, *Transformation* and Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory, New Normative Approaches*, ch. 8, 'Critical and Postmodern International Relations Theory' (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

[7] There is a wide literature on this issue: see, *inter alia*, Daniel Moynihan, *Pandemonium. Ethnicity in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert Harvey, *The Return of the Strong* (London, 1995); Alain Minc, *Le Nouveau Moyen Age* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993); Dieter Senghaas, *Wohin Driftet die Welt?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994); Mariano Aguirre, *Los Dias del Futuro: La Sociedad Internacional en la Era de la Globalizacion* (Icaria: Barcelona, 1995). I have discussed this further in 'The End of the Cold War and International Relations: Some Analytic and Theoretical Conclusions', in Steve Smith and Ken Booth (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), and in chs. 10 and 11 of *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

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**Reassessing the Enlightenment**

In any assessment of the Enlightenment, an important distinction, one insufficiently common in contemporary writing on politics, needs to be made here, that of distinguishing the discursive and the real, i.e. not taking the enunciation of ideas—about states, power, nations—as being a history of these phenomena themselves. The history of the past two centuries is *not* primarily the history of ideas, Enlightenment or other, but of socioeconomic and political processes within which ideas played a certain role. It is therefore as empty to ascribe an emancipatory potential to ideas on their own, as it is to ascribe responsibility for the history of the past two hundred years to these ideas: hence the fallacy of the attack on the 'Enlightenment Project' as being responsible for the crimes of two centuries. The idea as such had no impact. Socialism, nationalism, feminism, democracy mean little without the historical and political context in which they emerged. Here, the insight uneasily expressed by IR realism, linking values and morality to power, can be reformulated in a broader sociological context. Enlightenment is, in this sense, what modernity has made of it.

A critical assessment of Enlightenment requires, therefore, not just a discussion of ideas associated with it, but a location of these ideas within a discussion of modernity. That modernity is at once entrapping and emancipatory, the shifting context within which modern politics and international relations have been played out. In what follows, I shall try to relate this to the international, charting the fate of Professor Kant's prognostication. This will involve analysis of the contradictory character of modernity, a critical assessment of the core political value associated with it, liberal democracy, and an engagement with current challenges, theoretical and political. An element of rational, prospective optimism, an Enlightenment reduced in vision but sturdier in resolve, may eventuate.

What such an engagement requires is a linking of the domains conventionally separate: speculative political theory and historical sociology. Put more practically, it means that projects for change and progress need to be linked to the possibilities of society, national and international, as given. Fatalism in the face of the given is as unnecessary as speculation unhinged from practicality and real movement. We need, in Runciman's judicious phrasing most pertinent to IR, to distinguish the 'improbably possible' from the 'probably impossible'.[8] This involves the double assertion—one intellectual, the other sociological: the intellectual revolves around a reassertion, chastened by history and critique alike, of the values associated with the Enlightenment; the sociological involves an assertion that, within the constraints of the contemporary world, and of that modernity which characterizes it, purposive action, linked to agency by individuals, movements and states alike, is possible.

Any one assertion is, on its own insufficient. To claim of modernity on its own a purposive, let alone emancipatory potential, is to fall back into that determinism which has so marred the past two centuries, to deny the possibility *and need* for choice. The series of iconic emancipatory determinisms is familiar and continuing: in times gone by, God, gods, fate; more recently steam, electricity, industrialization, the aeroplane, medicine; today information technology, the global market place. Without an intellectual framework, that delimits analytic and normative options, there can be no adequate response to such determinism. The most important,

[8] W. G. Runciman, *The Social Animal* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 189.

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repeatedly submerged, response to scientistic determinism is to suppress the human agency which both creates and directs this scientific progress and which can control it.[9] Equally, a focus on values, Enlightenment or other, without regard to the real, social, context of modernity is vacuous. No reader of 'alternative' thinking in the field of IR can fail to note the recurrence of such, in Runciman's terms, 'probably impossible', speculation.

It is in the lack of linkage between these two moments, the philosophical and the real, that lies both the appeal, and weakness, of the critiques to which Enlightenment has been subjected. For conservatives, beginning with de Maistre and Edmund Burke, and continuing through Michael Oakeshott and John Gray, the very appeal to reason does violence to the nature of political life. For troubled or 'agonistic' liberals, with whom contemporary writing is replete, the Enlightenment contains a claim of uniformity and universalism that denies plurality of cultures and normative system. For Marxists, most notably Horkheimer and Adorno, the Enlightenment was in its postulating of a scientific reason, an incipiently totalitarian project.[10] For postmodernists, it represents a claim to a grand narrative, and to a fixity of meaning, that is a product of power and, multiply interpreted, authority.[11]

Each critique converges, even as each claims originality for itself. Each also posits its own alternative, respectively: tradition, pluralism, revolution, anti-foundationalism. Uneasy coconspirators in their positive assertion, these four critiques mask their incompatibility in a shared rejection, linked to the hypostatization of the 'Enlightenment' itself: hence the pertinence of Habermas' warning, echoed by Gellner, that the apparent advance of postmodernism *beyond* Enlightenment all too easily involves support for the irrationalism of the *premodern*—an insight that is sadly evident in the attitudes of many 'critical' political theorists towards religious fundamentalism.

Be it noted, too, that these critiques are hardly novel: they have a history as long as the Enlightenment itself. Perhaps the greatest of many post-1989 conceits is that it is in *this* period alone that the Enlightenment has been questioned. But the crisis of the Enlightenment long predates the end of communism, or the Cold War, or the bacchanalian whirl of postmodernist globalization characteristic of the 1990s. Industrial society in the early nineteenth century, colonial spoliation in the late nineteenth, the collapse of the long peace in 1914, the brutalities of both wars, Auschwitz and Hiroshima—have all been candidates for the end or refutation of the Enlightenment. As Mark Mazower has so brilliantly shown in his history of Europe in the twentieth century, *Dark Continent*, faith in democracy, and in the values of

[9] The contemporary variant of this is the obsession with constantly changing IT, as if this acted separately from the plans and profits of monopolistic firms. Objects 'need upgrading', as if this was autonomous of human action and advantage. A similar determinism was evident in the l970s and l980s with regard to the nuclear arms race: arguments were made about the need to 'update' and 'modernize' nuclear weapons, as if these had a technological life of their own.

[10] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979), especially pp. 3–42 'The Concept of Enlightenment'. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ch. 5, 'The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno'.

[11] The classic statement is Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report in Knowledge* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984), where he famously defines postmodern as 'incredulity toward metanarratives'. For one excellent summary see Gregor McLennan, 'The Enlightenment Project Revisited', in *Modernity and Its Futures*, edited by Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity in association with the Open University, 1992). For a cogent overview of aesthetic, social and theoretical components see Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Post-Modernity* (London: Verso, 1998).

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liberalism and reason, had been virtually extinguished in Europe by the late 1930s.[12] Yet this recognition of repetition is not merely a corrective to antifoundationalist 'presentism', but also suggests a more positive argument: each period of pessimism, and despair, has been overtaken by history, by human agency endeavouring to reconstruct society, and international orders, on rational, Enlightenment, principles. As Walter Benjamin so clearly saw: 'The concept of progress is to be founded in the idea of catastrophe'.[13]

## Modernity and its contradictions

As this argument focuses attention on 'modernity' and in particular what is meant by modernity in the opening moments of the twenty-first century, we may begin by addressing the several meanings of this term. A significant part of the intellectual content of modernity derives from the eighteenth century—rationalism, secularism, equality, progress. Here, however, the intellectual contribution of Kant may be linked to that of the two other thinkers who give the term its most comprehensive formulation even as they drew on that Enlightenment heritage, Karl Marx and Max Weber.[14] Both saw modernity as the product not just of intellectual change but of the industrial revolution and the new society, politics, culture it had created. Both asked the question which is central to any social analysis or political programme—within the realities and constraints of this 'modernity' what degree of choice, what kind of freedom, political and otherwise, is possible? Both were concerned to provide analysis of change that was possible. Equally importantly, both Marx and Weber were keen to exclude answers that were, in their view, not possible. As already noted, the twin dangers of any discussion of modernity are fatalism and voluntarism; on the one hand the denial of possibility of any choice or freedom, and on the other the postulation of strategies that are incapable of realization and which may lead to catastrophe.

For Weber, modernity was an 'iron cage', a set of determinations, internal and international, which, above all through bureaucratization, constrained what individuals, or classes, or states could do. This was particularly so in the field of international relations, where military power meant that individual states could do little to alter their positions relative to others. Weber's views on international relations compel study for several reasons. They seek, within a broad understanding of social science, to establish the relations between international relations and other areas of study—the state, culture, economy. In particular, like Marx, Weber regarded the international relations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as radically different from those which preceded it. While until recently little acknowledged in realist writings of the UK and US variety, Weber's ideas informed many of the early

[12] Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1998), ch. 1, 'The Deserted Temple: Democracy's Rise and Fall'.

[13] Walter Benjamin, *Passages*, vol. 1.

[14] In what follows I draw on Derek Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity. An Excursus on Marx and Weber* (London: Routledge, 1991) and the debate between Perry Anderson, Marshall Berman and Peter Osborne in *New Left Review*, 144 (March-April 1984) and 192 (March-April 1992). I am especially grateful to Justin Rosenberg for drawing this to my attention and, more generally, for his pioneering work in relating the discussion of modernity to IR.

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generation of German-trained realists as well as those of the influential French writer Raymond Aron.

There remain, however, significant problems with his writings, which subsequent history has to some degree brought out—he died in 1920. His belief in nationalism, and in strong, charismatic, leaders was carried to extremes in Nazi Germany: however much he himself can be disassociated from these later developments, the later fate of his theories, like those of Karl Marx, requires reassessment of the theoretical antecedents. Within his theory itself, the very strong argument he makes, on the relation of international conflict to domestic state formation, remains more an assertion than a grounded theory. This problem was to recur when, in the 1970s and 1980s, 'historical sociologists' strongly influenced by Weber were to take further this work on the relation between state formation and international relations. Moreover, while easily recruited by realists in support of their views of international conflict, Weber's stress on the relation of domestic to international politics stands in marked contrast to the attempts by later realists, let alone neorealists, to produce a purely *international* or *systemic* view of relations between states. If Weber remains a classical ancestor of modern international relations, he is one whose very rediscovery by more recent theorists forces us to confront the ambiguities that lie within his theory itself.

Marx, on the other hand, stressed, through his analysis of the development of capitalism, the voluntaristic side of politics and economics. He believed that it was possible for collective human action radically to change history. His conception of modernity rested upon a view of progress within which agency accelerated but could not obviate the transition from one social form to the other, even as this process prepared the basis, at the national and international level, for the supersession of all domination and difference.[15] History must record a contradictory verdict in his case too.

Yet if we can, for present purposes, draw on the two approaches then we can identify the main features of modernity. First, the modern period was a period radically different from the past, a new historical epoch, marked by changes in economics, technology, culture and political life. Secondly, modernity represents a process of change, not only from the old, premodern, to the new, but also within itself: constant change—of technology, values, fashion—is central to modernity. In this sense there is no fixed modernity—no state of economic output, or political institution, or language which, once attained, will be maintained. One of the more curious features of contemporary political life is that of nationalist movements seeking to define a 'true' or 'authentic' identity—as if these could be fixed once and for all in time. Thirdly, modernity is contradictory: for Marx this contradiction was to lead to revolution and a new social order, for Weber it led to enduring and irresolvable conflicts between state and individual, values and reality, sovereignty and peace. Whatever their differences, both accepted that modernity produced conflicts—between classes, nations, other socially constituted groups. Finally, and as part of the novel political and social conditions produced by the arrival of a new era, each stressed the importance of agency within the modern world: for Marx the

[15] I have gone into greater detail on the insights and limits of Marx's view of the international in ch. 6 of *Rethinking International Relations* and in *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

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agent was class, in particular the working class, for Weber it was the new organised force of industrial society, the bureaucracy.

These four ideas—novelty, change, contradiction, agency—were part of the Enlightenment heritage, and were given impetus by the twin revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the political and the industrial.[16] They were central to the idea of modernity as it then emerged in the middle and late nineteenth century. They thereby contributed to the generally optimistic and forward looking outlook of that epoch. Indeed if there is one thing that, in its different forms, sums up the original view of modernity it is teleology, this belief that history is moving in a discernible direction, towards a goal to which historical dynamic and human agency alike will combine to take us: progress. As has been well argued by Nisbet, progress, a vision of the future, was not so much a distinct idea as a pervasive assumption.[17]

## A century of crisis

If we now ask what has happened to this idea of modernity in the ensuing hundred years, where it leaves our discussion for today, we can see how much more complex, how more uncertain, the concept of modernity now is. It is in this practical complexity, one that has evolved over time, not in an abstract and suddenly proclaimed 'anti-foundationalism', that the challenge to Enlightenment lies. Here we can identify some of the ways in which the idea of modernity itself entered into crisis first in the nineteenth century, when modernity transformed Europe and subjugated the rest of the world, and then when it exploded, in war and authoritarian violence, in the twentieth century. For the non-European world the face of the Enlightenment was that of imperial conquest. If the primary failing of modernity was its generation of modern war, its most enduring failing has been the manner in which it has incorporated the non-European world. As recent historical work has so well reasserted, the character of this subjugation was not in spite of, but as a result of, the assumptions of rationalist modernity.[18]

For Europe itself one could say that the twentieth century has been the century of crisis, in marked contrast to the relatively progressive and internationally peaceful nineteenth century. This crisis has indeed come in three phases. First came the buildup to crisis in the explosive contradictions of the *belle époque*, from 1870 onwards, with the rise of industrial imperialism and the militarization of Western society. There then followed what one may term the European civil war of 1914 to 1945, dramatically reflected in two World Wars that engulfed most of the rest of the world, and in the course of which around 80 millions died. This second phase

[16] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).
[17] J. Nisbet, *The Idea of Progress* (New York, 1983).
[18] Mark Cocker, *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold. Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998) links European identity and commercial expansion to the destruction of indigenous peoples; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 1997), in 'Introduction: Slavery and Modernity' (especially p. 4) makes a powerful case for the link between slavery and modernity, showing how, among other things, instrumental rationality, racialized perceptions of identity, market relations and wage labour, consumer society, advertising, even reflexive self-consciousness, all had their origins in the internationalized slave economy.

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produced two very different, authoritarian, interpretations of modernity each of which aspired to impose its own version on the world: one was the authoritarian modernity of the right, in Fascism and its various imitators, which lasted from the 1920s in Italy to Portugal in the 1970s. The other was the left authoritarianism of Communism, arising first in Russia in 1917 and then spreading to encompass about a third of the world. This European civil war ended in 1945, with the defeat of the right authoritarian option in most of Europe, but the conflict between liberal capitalist modernity and Communism was to last another four decades. It has only recently ended. No discussion of modernity, the tensions and alternatives within it, can avoid discussion of the Communist movement.

## A radical modernity: Communism

It may be too early to provide a confident assessment of what Communism, as a political and economic system, was, but it is a question which must influence any discussion of modernity today. Communism was, in its simplest form, a product of the conflicts generated within and between societies by capitalist transformation of the world. That it was ultimately overwhelmed by other forms of modernity in no way detracts from its own genetic origins in capitalism itself.[19] As a political and ideological project, it was, equally, a version of modernity, a dramatic attempt to mobilize peoples for economic and political development, not only to catch up with the developed capitalist states, but to overtake it: it was, therefore a product of modernity, a radical interpretation of the potential in modernity. It achieved many things, both in developed and in developing countries. One does not see in Havana or Santiago de Cuba the social conditions one sees in Rio de Janeiro. However, Communism was a failure, not only for contingent reasons, but of necessity, because its very programme rested upon a set of illusions, about the inevitability of revolution under advanced capitalism on the one hand, and, on the other, about the possibilities of fundamentally transforming society and human nature. Underlying Communism was a crude scientism, about economic planning, or genetic change, which reflected, in a distorted sense, much of the historical optimism of the nineteenth century.

Communism's achievement, and its relation to modernity, can however also be seen in another respect, namely in the impact it had on its opponents, authoritarian and liberal capitalism. Confronted by a Communist challenge from 1917 onwards, capitalist society was forced to change: it was the Soviet Union which played the major role in defeating Nazi Germany and in so doing brought about the end of authoritarian capitalism; equally the modernization of Western capitalism through the welfare state and the spread of universal suffrage owed much to the fear of Communism's appeal to disenfranchised classes. After World War II Communism continued to make its mark: the abrupt collapse of the western European colonial empires in the 1950s and 1960s was, in part, a result of the challenge that Communism posed to colonialism; the impact of the third world revolutions led by Communism or inspired by it—in China, Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria—provoked major

[19] I develop this further in *Revolution and World Politics*.

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political conflicts within the developed countries themselves; and the creation of the Common Market owes as much to the perceived need to compete politically and economically with Communism as to anything else. In the Far East, moreover, no account of the rise of the new industrializing capitalist states should omit the central political dynamic, the fear of Communist revolution—be this in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore or Thailand. Too much analysis of the success of the Far Eastern economies rests on a purely economic analysis: but we are looking at a phenomenon in the field of political economy, and the 'political' in this case was above all the fear of Communism. The conclusion which this suggests is therefore contradictory and in this sense eminently 'modern': Communism was defeated because it failed to compete adequately with capitalism, yet the very success of capitalism owed much to the Communist challenge. Itself a product of modernity, the greatest, and perhaps most enduring, contribution of Communism to the development of modernity was, consequently, the modernization of capitalism. It defeated authoritarian capitalism before itself succumbing to the liberal variant. In so doing it paved the way for the world of peace and prosperity envisioned today, or so, to some, it appears.

## The limits of 'liberal democracy'

We are, therefore, now in a world in which the two authoritarian forms of modernity, fascist or military dictatorship on the right, Communist bureaucratic dictatorship on the left, have been defeated. It is in this context that we now confront the question of what modernity can now mean to us, and what options it provides. Here the focus cannot be only on progress, or regress, in the realm of the international, since the very underpinning of any view of progress at the interstate level presupposes progress at the domestic. The current equation liberal democracy =zone of peace may have much to recommend it: however it can only be sustained with a critical look at the historical, and contemporary, bases of democracy itself. As Kant noted the path to Enlightenment in international relations runs through a reassessment of its domestic, democratic, concomitant. The path to a critical, as distinct from complacent, perspective on modernity similarly entails a questioning, but not rejection, of liberal democratic optimism.

Such an assessment cannot be a simple reassertion of the truths of liberal capitalism, for at least two central reasons. These are the weak links of the liberal optimism of Doyle or Fukuyama. First, there is the need to examine, historically and critically, and within a domestic context, the recipe of liberal capitalism being presented to us today. This can show that, apart from any universal potential or not, this equation of universal suffrage, free market and capitalism is an arbitrary and artificial one; it does not correspond to the history of modernity over the past century and a half. What this examination also reveals is that even within the developed and more established democracies there is no one single model of a 'modern' system. This variety of the modern is evident from an examination of how democracy developed: indeed the question of how we got there is of more than archaeological interest. Such a historicization of democracy is, moreover, linked to its international character. The assumption of most current liberal thinking is that

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teleological, progressivist, democracy is something that has been growing for many centuries, and has usually come about in a relatively benign and peaceful way. Equally narratives of democratization within countries are usually presented as separate from the broader world-historical context in which they occurred. Yet this world history has to be understood both as competition with other states, and as a product of social changes common to a range of societies that were themselves a product of a shared modernity.[20]

The reality is, of course, that no country in the world was democratic at the beginning of this century, and that some countries have only very recently attained it—if effective universal suffrage is a criterion then neither the United States nor Switzerland were democracies in 1965. France, Belgium, Italy and Japan only became so after the Second World War. This should induce in us a certain degree of historical caution, first about how firmly established systems of democracy really are, and about how easy it may be for other countries, where the objective conditions for democratization do not exist, to establish and maintain such systems. It should, equally, focus attention on the international context for democratization: the growth of democracy was a product of competition between states, of in the first instance war, and of the shared pressures for change common to all industrializing states.

This question of historical evolution applies also to our ideas. Today 'democracy', as summed up in the term 'liberal democracy', is a term that covers at least three groups of phenomena—a range of political conditions, including pluralism, universal suffrage, and elected governments; a set of constitutional guarantees, concerning individual rights, and freedom from censorship, arrest and other forms of arbitrary treatment; and a conception of the economy as a 'free market'. The briefest historical review shows that this, far from being some natural or permanent cluster, is a very recent combination. Athenian democracy excluded 80 per cent of the adult population—including all women and slaves. Nineteenth century liberals had, Mill excepted, great difficulties with universal suffrage, for men, let alone women. The growth of political freedoms, in a country such as Britain, was far ahead of that of political conditions for democracy: plenty of cases of relatively mild dictatorship can be observed today.

As for the 'free' market, many liberals have argued that the state should play an interventionist role in the economy, for reasons of national power or social welfare. The particular contemporary equation summarizing the 'liberal' option—political democracy/political rights/free market—is therefore one possible variant on these themes. Nowhere is this more so than in regard to the role of the state in the economy. In many states that are conventionally seen as partaking of the 'Western' model, the state has played, or now plays, a major role in directing the economy, whether through macroeconomic management and direction, or through welfare programmes, or through appropriation of monies through taxation and state expenditure. Japan is an obvious example of state direction of the economy through forms of planning. Conversely, some of the 'free market' economies of recent years

[20] Year of establishment (first attainment) of democracy: *Argentina; Australia, 1903; *Austria, 1918; Belgium, 1948; *Brazil, 1988; *Canada, 1920; *Chile, 1970; Denmark, 1915; *Finland, 1919; France, 1946; *Germany, 1919; *Italy, 1946; Japan, 1952; Netherlands, 1919; New Zealand, 1907; Norway, 1915; Sweden, 1918; *Switzerland, 1971; UK, 1928(Northern Ireland, 1970); USA, c. 1970.
*Note:* *Interrupted (except by foreign occupation). *Source:* Goran Therborn, 'The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy', *New Left Review*, 103: May-June 1977, p. 11.

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have not been democratic—Chile, Singapore, South Korea. The appearance of democracy—as long-established, national, unitary, teleological—has, therefore, to be replaced by a more fluid and varied picture: recent, international, diverse, constantly changing. This need not challenge the claims of liberal democracy: but it does suggest a far greater degree of contingency, and multiplicity of interpretation, within contemporary political life.

In its assumptions for domestic and international society alike, the liberal capitalist model rested upon a model of modernity that was in the end static: industrialized, increasingly homogeneous, and egalitarian societies would be the norm. But industrialization has given way to deindustrialization and to dramatic falls in the percentage of the population employed in manufacturing: if this posed problems for Marxists, it also yielded an employment and social pattern very different from that earlier envisaged by liberal theories. Equally, the developed countries did not, over the longer run, produce more homogeneous or egalitarian societies: indeed the divisions within them, and most dramatically the social and ethnic divisions within the more developed societies themselves, were to grow wider and more violent. Just as the modernity of the first half of the twentieth century produced Communism and Fascism, so that of the late twentieth century is as much in the gang warfare of Los Angeles as in the tranquillity of Sweden or Austria. Ethnicity too, far from being submerged with modern society, has reasserted itself in many forms, old and new.

## The failures of modernity: the international dimension

This brings us to the second broad set of questions about the current model of liberal democracy: its failings at the international level. For if both authoritarian alternatives have been discredited, too much has happened at the international level in the ensuing century to leave this liberal capitalist option unscathed, even assuming we can assume what this model is. In the first place, the optimism of much of nineteenth century thought, including of Auguste Comte, that modernity meant an end to war has proven to be fatally mistaken: the Marxists, and in particular Lenin, were to prove far more correct than mainstream liberal thinkers. The latter believed that industrial society was necessarily peaceful and that only precapitalist societies had an interest in war. On the other hand, the argument about the peaceful character of industrial society implied that this was based on the democratic character of industrial societies: however in 1914, as we have seen, there were virtually no countries in the world which had achieved universal suffrage, and it was to take another half a century for this to be so even in the developed West. Neither of the two maximalist positions on war and modernity were vindicated: instead a contingent relationship emerged, one that may promise a closer association of peace and democracy in the future, but may also presage other, equally modern, phases of war.[21]

[21] I have gone into this in greater detail in 'Europe and the International System: War and Peace', in Stephen Chan and Jarrod Wiener (eds.), *Twentieth Century International History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).

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If the liberal capitalist model has produced a far more contradictory situation within developed societies, it has, equally, done so on the international scale, as is evident in relations between North and South.[22] One of the assumptions of nineteenth century thinking, including that of Marx, was that the economic model of prosperity would be diffused throughout the world: the whole of Asia would, in Marx's view, duplicate the industrialization of Manchester. Marx was right to recognise the transformative character of capitalism, and to see the potential for industrialization and change in other countries. Yet the pattern of global transformation set in train by modernity has led to greater inequality on a global scale. What we have also seen and continue to see is not such a generalization of wealth, nor a static division into a rich oligarchic North and a poor mass South, but a continuing and growing inequality within the system even as it integrates countries more and more into its productive and commercial systems. Much has been said on this already: suffice it to say here that one and a half centuries of capitalist development have left the world more unevenly developed than ever before and with the concentration of wealth greater than at any previous time. If it is simplistic to argue that capitalism is necessarily incapable of achieving a set of goals—democracy, independence, industrialization, land reform—it is also the case that the majority of capitalist countries have not achieved this, despite many attempts to do so. At the international level, the promise of modernity remains largely that.

## New critiques of modernity

These three issues—war, colonial plunder, the widening North-South gap—are what one may term the long-established, or classic, international failures of the liberal democratic variant of modernity. They would, on their own, be enough to raise serious questions about the viability of this model. But the authority of this model has been further undermined over the past few years by other developments, even as the great ideological challenge of the Communist variant of modernity has faded. One, familiar to everyone at the end of the 1990s, is the critique of ecology. Even on the more cautious and moderate evaluations of the ecological crisis challenging humanity, it is evident that the way of life, and the models of development and entitlement, that have dominated our thinking throughout the modern period cannot be sustained. If modernism meant anything it meant a hostility to nature, seen as savage and uncontrolled, even as nature was seen as inexhaustible: we need not surrender to extreme ecological myths, or to ideological variations of how we can reverse modern society, but we have to evolve a new relationship with nature, and a new recognition of the limits to growth and to the environment. We have also to confront, as many ecologists do not confront, the difficulties posed by the

[22] According to the UNDP, there has been a striking growth in price and public consumption: six times since 1950, twice since 1975, to a current total of $23,000bn worldwide. In this sense the promise of capitalism, to deliver greater volumes of good and services, has been realised: but 20 per cent of the world's population account for 86 per cent of total expenditure, while the poorest 20 per cent account for 1.3 per cent. Three-fifths of the 4.4bn people in developing countries lack basic sanitation. (*Financial Times*, 10 September 1998).

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question of population: it is simple-minded to see this as a problem that can be ignored, or as some imperialist conspiracy.

Secondly, the whole model of society that has underpinned modernity, and indeed the whole of Western thought for the past two thousand years, has come under attack from feminism: second wave feminism revealed, as never before demonstrated, the degree to which the political, economic and social systems, indeed often the very language we use, are based on a sexual hierarchy, from which men benefit. It may be that we are living in a world without revolutionary utopias, but the aim, which is comprehensive but not utopian, of ending this age-long differentiation within our societies is as revolutionary as anything else, and is something that, as much as the ecological critique, challenges our view of modernity. As Juliet Mitchell wrote in her classic article nearly four decades ago, this is the *longest* revolution.[23] Fatuous invocations of a postfeminist world, or relativist denials of gendered oppression, only obscure the necessity for such a transformation.

Finally, we encounter a critique of modernity which, far from seeking to revise or develop it, rejects it, whether in the name of a return to traditional values or in the advance into something called a postmodern world: this critique claims to reject not just the nineteenth century construction of modernity but the Enlightenment intellectual legacy as well. There are certain respects in which this critique of modernity, linked to an assessment of social and intellectual trends at the end of the twentieth century, is valid.[24] First, there is no longer a clear, unitary, model of what constitutes the 'modern'—the goal towards which society, thought, art itself are moving. The sense of historical linearity associated with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been eroded—more obviously in the move away from the conventional model of an industrial society. Secondly, the core of this historical optimism, natural science, is more and more contested—from within, by a growing awareness of uncertainty and chance, externally by the erosion of confidence in its ability to resolve physical and social problems. Thirdly, there has been a major shift in the realm of culture—away from a unitary, and homogeneous, modern towards an interest in variety, hybridity, the composite, the playful. This prospective, polyvalent and multicultural redefinition of contemporary culture has been accompanied by a return to concern with tradition, the 'authentic', with heritage. Fourthly, there is a much greater awareness throughout the social sciences of the multiple layers, and sites of power—it is found not just in states and public institutions, but also in families, educational establishments, the media—and of the multiple forms of power, language, symbol, the very denied or repressed being mediations of power as much as money or guns. Finally, in politics as we have seen, the divisions that have defined ideology for the past two centuries have been eroded: the collapse of communism has ended that two centuries of ideological division.

There are, however, substantial difficulties with a postmodernist approach, one that combines a valid identification of shifts in modern society and thought, with exaggerated, and irrational, claims about the nature of the contemporary world. First of all, the postmodernists, for all their talk of a radical break with the politics

[23] Juliet Mitchell, 'Women: The Longest Revolution', *New Left Review*, 40: November-December 1960.

[24] There is a large critical literature on postmodernism, most of it blithely ignored by its proponents within the field of IR. I would refer, *inter alia* to Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), Nicos Mouzelis, 'The Modern and the Postmodern in Social Thought', Department of Sociology, Princeton University, Charles Haar International Sociology Series (Fall 1993), and Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 1986).

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and epistemology of the Enlightenment, are trapped within modernity: on the one hand, they greatly exaggerate the extent to which the phenomena they draw attention to—change, loss of analytic and ethical certainty—are true of the world as a whole. In this sense postmodernism is yet another conceit of metropolitan intellectuals, as Gellner put it, *Sturm und Drang und Tenure*, IR theory as this season's fashion; on the other hand, the changes they rightly identify as part of the modern world, and particularly changing values and identities, and the importance of language and discourse in constituting social power, are very much features of modernity and have been so for a century or more. In particular, the call for contestation and alterity in the 1990s, associated with much 'critical' theory, is detached from the analysis of modern society: it ignores the history of resistance, nationalist and social, above all Communist, that has marked the twentieth century. In the face of gestural and unanchored critique, the achievements, *and* failings, of such mass contestation merit careful attention. Rather than accepting the overblown claims of postmodernity, the term 'incomplete' or 'second' modernity, associated with Habermas, Ulrich Beck and others, would be more accurate.

The return to traditional or non-Western values is another supposed challenge to modernity. It is perhaps most evident in movements of religious reassertion, as in Iran. Much of this critique of modernity is, in contrast to the ecological and feminist critiques, invalid and confused. One reason is that what appear and present themselves as criticisms of modernity are in fact part of it: while the fundamentalism of Khomeini and other Islamic revolutionaries leads them to deny the modern and call for a return to the seventh century, they are nonetheless part of the modern world in several ways—they operate with the instruments of modern political power, they seek to legitimate themselves through the standard appeals of contemporary mass politics (independence, economic development, popular revolution). Their very conceptual system, for all its archaic appearances, is based on modern, mainly populist, political concepts—revolution, anti-imperialism, defence of human rights, republican government, even 'progress'.

As is already clear from the Iranian case, the Islamic revolutionaries are not very good modernists, and this is why their revolution is already in severe difficulties: yet this is because the criteria by which they have sought to challenge the outside world express, as did those of Communism, a particularly distorted and ultimately doomed set of modern standards. It is also rejected by most modernist young people within Iran. But the reason why the fundamentalist movements have been so successful in mobilizing support, and why they may well come to power in a range of countries, is that while they fail to confront them they claim to address the very real, material and political, problems facing these countries—unemployment, corruption in government, external domination, cultural change. They are part of, not an alternative to, modernity. Their vocabulary and world view is, for all its particularistic appearance, constituted by modernity. If this is nowhere more so than in regard to Islamist movements,[25] a similar argument can be made, however, for other supposedly distinct cultural idioms—be they Confucian, Hindu or whatever.

[25] See on this the work of Aziz al-Azmih, *Islam and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993); Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (London: Tauris, 1993); Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People, the State* (London: Routledge, 1989). I have gone into similar arguments in *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996) and *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 1999).

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It is in this context that we encounter another case of the dislocation of political theory and social reality in supposed critiques of the Enlightenment Project: for the effort placed by many liberal thinkers on cultural diversity, and hence on the problems of dialogue between them, presupposes a substantive difference that is not necessarily there. The claim to difference reflects not a genuine variety of philosophical outlooks but an instrumental use, a manipulation, of 'difference' by political elites. The much cited contrast of Michael Walzer's between a universal 'thin' and a communitarian or national 'thick' is by the same token deceptive: the particularist 'thick' appropriates much of what is in fact universal—including such values as national self-determination, sovereignty, claims of economic and political injustice—just as every country seeks to define its difference in universal terms—a flag, a capital city, a national airline, a national soccer team and so forth. Every country has its own flag, and gives a national name to its own parliament: but the objects in question are modular, with the same symbolic significance.

The conclusion to this discussion of the antimodern and postmodern challenges to modernity is therefore that, stripped of their exaggeration and demagogy, they reflect issues that are within modernity and are parasitic on its agenda. Different interpretations of such issues of international contention as entitlement to land, or oil revenues, and variant adjudications of the tension between human rights and state sovereignty are *not* a reflection of different cultural values: they reflect different interests, and positions, within a world of shared discourse. The dialogue is *within* not *between.*[26] All regions of the world, developed and developing, participate in the general debate on modernity and on policies, domestic and international, in the contemporary world. One of the many richnesses of modernity is that it both establishes a general, universal and unavoidable, set of questions for every society, but also promotes diversity within regions and countries. It would be just as mistaken to see the problem of modernity as posed in exactly the same way everywhere in the world, or even in one continent, as it would be to deny the common problems, ideological choices and historic contexts, in which each country finds itself.

What this entails is, however, something central to the contemporary discussion of this concept: modernity is not a fatalism, is not a determined set of options. It is rather a context, historical and global, within which a set of options are available, around which states, nations, political parties can develop practical policies and confront their own particular reality. This is true in all three of modernity's constitutive moments—social, theoretical, aesthetic. There is, for example, no one modern language—we have around 10,000 languages in the world. Each is changing, yet each has its contribution. There is no one, single, modern music—again there is diversity, and change, and mutual interaction. Modernity is not a monistic condition, but rather a context for exploring diversity. That possibility, and the diversity it generates, in culture, as in politics, is one part of the legacy of Enlightenment.

[26] Exaggeration of this issue is recurrent in contemporary Western political thought. See, for example, John Rawls, 'The Law of Peoples', in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (eds.), *On Human Rights* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), and the reply by Jean Elshtain to Andrew Linklater in *Review of International Studies*, 25:1 (January 1999).

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**The end of the Cold War: agency and progress**

It is within this increasingly shared and varied political space, one constituted ideologically and socially by modernity, that human agency has shaped the world over the past two centuries: through movements of nationalism, democratization, revolution, women's emancipation, identity politics on the one hand, and actions of ruling groups, states, and other privileged groups on the other. The battle has been about power and wealth, and has been formulated within, far more than against, the ideas associated with the Enlightenment.

This leads to the question of the contemporary situation, and in particular the international situation after the end of the Cold War. The question that is posed here is how far these major changes have altered our perception of modernity, and indeed the issues that are on the political agenda of countries, developed or developing. My answer, in one phrase, is that the end of cold war has made some changes—above all by removing from the agenda the prospect of a radical, revolutionary, alternative to capitalist modernity. Yet in so doing it has brought us back to the agenda that was central to the discussion of modernity a century or more ago: development, democracy and peace. These are Enlightenment values suffocated by much of modern history, but nonetheless relevant, and practical, in the contemporary situation.

There are many answers possible as to the bearers of agency in the contemporary world: social movements, often overstated by their protagonists, constitute one candidate, as do structural forces, not least markets, with states constituting the longest established option. The discussion of states in IR may be tired or repetitive: it is not avoidable. States remain the focus of political conflict and, under democratic control, the main instruments for human emancipation. Another international focus of any such discussion, combining philosophical aspiration with attention to actually existing mechanisms for emancipation, and with a recognition of a diversity of levels of agency, can be that of the network of institutions, official and nongovernmental, that comprise global governance. In contrast to the ideal of global government, which would propose a single, increasingly centralized, centre of authority, that of governance suggests a set of discrete, overlapping, institutions, which are able, with different competences, to manage the international system. At the core of this system lies, as it has done since 1945, the UN: but even those financial institutions that are formally within the UN system, such as the IMF and the World Bank, act in practice separately from it. The newly created World Trade Organization is not part of the UN system at all, nor are such free-floating but influential bodies as the Bank of International Settlements, or the Group of Seven.

The ideal of global government has, in effect, undergone a triple revision since its initial conception in World War II: first, there is a diffusion of authority, rather than a centralization; secondly, the power of stronger or richer states has become more explicit, be this in the security or the economic spheres; thirdly, the concentration on states alone, characteristic of the UN, has given way to a view of governance, and tentatively of international civil society, in which non-state actors—human rights organizations, multinationals, environmental lobbies, social movements—play a role. The system of global governance that we have today is diverse and constantly changing. Some of it is effective, some is rhetorical, some is outdated. Attempts to

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reform it, as, for example, over the fiftieth anniversary of the UN, have proven next to impossible. But we cannot dispense with it, or take its setbacks—in the economic and security fields—as reasons for abandoning it.

The system of global governance at the end of the twentieth century rests, as has done any project of human improvement at the international level for the past two centuries, upon four identifiable layers of authority and implementation: states, international institutions comprising states, nongovernmental organizations and, at the core, individual citizens. None can function without the other. To take the second layer first: a great deal of effort has gone in recent years into reorganizing and making more effective the system of international organizations. We can see some successes: the trading bloc of the European Union is a striking international success, whatever may be current doubts about monetary union and persistent mass unemployment; Mercosur and APEC are developing their commercial, if not their political and monetary, integration. The WTO is setting new standards of commercial integration. We have seen, in response to the crises of the late 1990s, an unprecedented degree of coordination between old IGOs, notably the IMF and World Bank, and new bodies, such as the Group of Seven, with regard to global financial management. Contemporary discussion of a new 'financial architecture' reflects a recognition, a result of shifts in thinking by policy-makers and academics alike, of the failure of the neoliberal model.

In two other areas we can see significant change: in the field of international humanitarian law, we see not only an increasingly effective set of international standards, but also institutional development with the setting up of an International Criminal Court; in the field of security in Europe, we have a fine, perhaps over elaborate, example of the superimposition of governance institutions—no less than eight bodies responsible for the security and peace of a Europe, that in the case of some such bodies stretches from Vladivostok to Vancouver. The international effort to protect the peoples of Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s—reluctantly embarked on, most imperfectly implemented and maintained—nonetheless marks a practical, and positive, realization of such aspirations. It is ironic that the crowning point of this humanitarian endeavour in 1999 should have been in response to the denial by the Yugoslav state *to its own citizens* of precisely the value which Kant had seen as being the minimum owed to *foreigners*—'Hospitalität'.

All of this is encouraging, up to a point. There are, however, reasons for concern. First, the UN system, of government and governance, has been sorely tested in the post-Cold War world. The major responses to interstate aggression—in Kuwait and Bosnia—have shown the weakened authority of the UN. The Kosovo operation of 1999 had, at best, a tenuous authorization from the Charter and Security Council. It has been the Great Powers, the so-called 'able and willing', who have in the end taken it upon themselves to act, with a loose authorization, perhaps only indulgence, from the UN as a whole. In the absence of a credible UN security role, and of the inability of the Europeans to do anything coherent in the security field, we have fallen back on an improvised recycling of a Cold War institution, NATO, to keep the peace. Secondly, the global governance system has little or nothing to say about what I have identified as the greatest problem of the contemporary world, that of growing inequality. An attempt was made in the l960s and l970s to introduce an institutional reform of the world economy, in the New International Economic order: if one looks back at the goals of that campaign—north-south aid, monetary

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reform, opening of OECD markets to third world exports, investment codes—none has been achieved. It can be argued that another approach, that of neoliberal change and reliance on FDI, has worked: in terms of growth and industrialization, almost inconceivable in the l970s, this has occurred. But this model is no proof of neoliberalism: first, it was never a free market model, but relied heavily on a form of mercantilism, with heavy state intervention in investment, research and education. It too has its weaknesses: they are ones that are all the greater because of the lack of institutional reform for which the NIEO campaigned.

In a third domain, one also unimagined two decades ago, the achievements of global governance are limited, if not illusory: that of the environment. Global awareness is certainly greater, conferences have been held, NGOs have mobilized. However, to a non-scientist broadly convinced of the seriousness of this issue, the response seems grossly inadequate, too little, too late, too liable to political bargaining. If humanity is indeed destroying the physical and atmospheric environment in which we live, then the irresponsibility, born of indulgent populations in the rich countries, and debilitating interstate competition along the north-south axis, is incalculable. No conferences—Rio, Kyoto, Buenos Aires or anywhere else—are halting the world automobile industry, or the oil producers, or all those five billion or so people who aspire to a life-style of greater energy consumption and waste production. I hope I am wrong: my gut feeling is that we are walking backwards into a catastrophe that no political constituency, and no state, is willing adequately to confront.

This leads to the third and fourth layers of the system of global governance, that of NGOs and that of citizens. NGOs have played, and will play, a central role in global governance, in raising new issues, in pressing governments, relating movements across frontiers. They are not, however, nor can they be, a substitute for states, or international organizations, in the furtherance of these goals. On the one hand, not all non-state actors have as their goals peace, democracy, human rights: some are agents of states, some of business interests, some of irrational and antidemocratic political interests, some are criminals. The second most valuable commodity in the world today, after oil, is narcotics. On the other hand, networks of NGOs, within and between countries, like social movements, will continue to depend not only for their context but for their influence on states. This means a continued attention to the traditional work of politics—parties, elections, governments, law. A global civil society of NGOs may be coming into existence on some issues—the environment, women' rights, development. It is far from harmonious, not always effective, and never independent of the world of states.

At the base of this system of global governance, and here Professor Kant would, I hope, agree with me, is the individual. It is citizens who, among other things, pay the taxes, lobby the governments, enlist in the peace-keeping forces, authorize the major decisions that comprise global governance and world politics generally. There need not be an opposition between a national, polity-based, concept of citizenship and an international one: but there will be choices to be made, between a national and an international interest, and, even more so, there will be competition between the time and effort paid to issues of domestic concern and those of international concern. Here, for all the growth in available information and world-wide communication, we may detect in the 1990s a growing gap, between the focus of citizens on domestic issues and that on international issues. Part of this may be a result of the

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receding of palpable military threats, of the Cold War. But part is a result of the very character of social change within developed countries, especially as it affects the media: the populations of the US, Britain and other developed countries are less and less educated, concerned, and, I would argue, responsible about international issues. Democratization, and increased emphasis upon the local, the spontaneous, the immediately meaningful, has been accompanied by a narrowing of focus. This is compounded by the grotesque degeneration of television, now the main source of news and political opinion, and of much of the press, as a result of commercialization: the globalization of Murdoch and Berlusconi is antithetical to that of a responsible national and international citizenry.

There is something rotten, and dangerous, in this process, which, in the longer run, will affect not only the functioning of domestic political systems—as exemplified in falling rates of electoral participation—but also of global governance itself. Whether it be in maintaining support for peacekeeping operations, or in sharing sacrifices to reduce world inequality or the environmental threat, the endemic competitiveness of states will be compounded by the ignorance, and self-regarding logic, of national electorates. Here, in inexorable if slow-moving form, the inherent weaknesses of liberal democracy compromise not only the domestic, but the international, realization of an Enlightenment politics.

## Conclusion

Where does this leave a prospect of world-wide peace, democracy and prosperity, our modern rendering of the vision of Professor Kant in 1784, fused, in a generic way, with the 'incomplete modernity' of Professor Habermas? A long way off, but not unattainable. As Kant wrote in 'What is Enlightenment?': we do not live in an *enlightened age* but we do live in an *age of enlightenment.*[27] Most of the states in the world today are not liberal democracies of an established kind. There is no reason to presume that those democracies that do exist will necessarily endure for ever: like a building, they require maintenance, renovation, proper use. Developed societies have, however, a model of political organization that can work sufficiently well, and which is compatible with, even conducive to, economic success and sustained growth. The argument is not, therefore, about the desirability of this broad model, but rather about two other things, how to generalize it across the world, to give to all of humanity that which is enjoyed by an elite of states; and, closely related, how to choose from within the range of options that comprise liberal democracy and mixed economies, those policies that are most appropriate for the long-term attainment of the goal. Here the broad agenda of Habermas theory may bear restatement: awareness of macrosocial reality and change, location of the possibilities of social agency, definition in contemporary terms of Enlightenment goals, identification of the continuing tasks of modernity.

A belief in purposive state action, backed by social movements and an informed, participatory citizenry, and, not to be forgotten, by education in all its dimensions, distinguishes Enlightenment from its enemies and defectors, as does the emphasis on

[27] *On History*, 'What is Enlightenment?', p. 8.

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a continued state role with regard to national and international economic management. Moreover, the concern with equity, between members of one society, and for humanity as a whole, means more today than it ever did, in the face of world inequality and appalling indices of inequality within societies, developed and developing. Finally, as Professor Kant would want to remind us, we may retain—as critics past and present of the Enlightenment do not—a faith in the ability of reason, individually and collectively, to face and influence the challenges facing humanity. Irrationalism is much *à la mode* at the moment, be this in the form of religious fundamentalism, nationalism, neo-Nietzschean pessimism, or postmodernist self-indulgence. The Enlightenment's defenders, who have much to learn from the abuses of reason, have equally a challenge to face in making it applicable, within a democratic form, to the issues of society, domestic and international, today. Whether, how, when, we can move forward to that triumph of reason in perpetual peace, backed by democracy and prosperity, no-one can tell. It is, nonetheless, a fitting focus for political and academic reflection, not least on the cusp of the third millennium.

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