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The Western Ideology¹

ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR LEONARD SCHAPIRO, AGED SIX, was on a train journey from Glasgow to Riga, during which a German official entered the carriage and, seeing the nanny chafing the little boy's feet, exclaimed: 'Cold feet, cold feet! Soon all Englishmen will have cold feet!'² The war that was soon to erupt was a war within a civilization, and also a war fought on the German side against the ascendancy of the dominant liberal idea of that civilization, an idea it associated above all with England.

Almost one hundred year later the liberal idea is still supreme. One of the most striking features of our time has been the ascendancy of neoliberalism as the ruling doctrine of international and national politics, an ascendancy that has been accompanied by the apparent disappearance of serious alternatives. Capitalism may be teetering once again on the edge of a terminal crisis, but there are no gravediggers in sight. This time around not only are there no gravediggers, there are no longer any rival economic systems either.

The moment that announced the present era was the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of communist regimes across Eastern and Central Europe and in the Soviet Union itself. These events erupted with a most dramatic suddenness, and very few anticipated them. Leonard Schapiro, acute analyst of Soviet politics though he was, did not foresee it. In his 1984 obituary notice on Schapiro for the British Academy, Peter Reddaway quoted from one of Schapiro's last analyses, written in 1982 just before Brezhnev's death, where he departed from his habitual caution to offer a longer-term prediction about the direction of Soviet politics:

¹ This is the edited text of the *Government and Opposition*/Leonard Schapiro Memorial Lecture 2008 delivered at the PSA Conference, University of Swansea, 1 April 2008.

² Peter Reddaway, 'Leonard Bertram Schapiro', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 71 (1985), p. 515.

The experience of the recent past suggests that there is a strong likelihood that the Politburo, after Brezhnev has gone and the dust of the succession struggle has settled, will contain a strong contingent of members who favour conservatism, consensus, stagnation, tolerance of inefficiency and corruption at home, the continued growth of military might, and a policy of maximum expansion abroad, within the limits imposed by the desire to avoid nuclear collision with the Western powers.

Reddaway, writing in the Chernenko era, two years after this prediction was made, commented that it seemed amply justified.³

The fall of communism led to an outburst of celebration and triumphalism in the West. It vindicated the long struggle and the risks of the Cold War, and the victory when it came appeared complete and unequivocal. The surrender of the Soviet Union was an ideological surrender rather than one forced by military defeat, but it was a surrender nonetheless, and marked the eclipse of the most potent challenger to the liberal world order following the defeats earlier in the century of Germany and Japan. It was hardly surprising therefore that these events should have been the occasion for congratulation. Francis Fukuyama captured the moment with his declaration that Hegel had been right all along, if premature, and that history had now definitely ended; by which he meant amongst other things that the long ideological civil war in the West was over, and that liberalism had won. There was now no alternative to liberal capitalism and democracy, and no serious challenger left.⁴ History, as the authors of *1066 and All That* once put it, in a different context, had come to a full-stop.⁵

The ascendancy of neoliberalism, however, did not begin in 1989. Its roots go much further back, to the revival of the western economy under American leadership after the Second World War. Already in the 1960s Hayek had proclaimed 'It is high time for us to cry from the house tops that the intellectual foundations of socialism have all collapsed,'⁶ and had announced that the socialist century that had begun with the failed revolutions of 1848 had ended in 1948. The 1950s had witnessed its own end of ideology, hailed by many as the

³ Ibid., p. 524.

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1992.

⁵ W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That*, London, Methuen, 1930.

⁶ F. A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, London, Routledge, 1978, p. 305.

reconciliation between capitalism and socialism. The conservatives, it was said, had accepted the welfare state, and the socialists had accepted that further extension of state power carried too many risks to individual freedom.⁷ This compromise was denounced by Hayek as conceding far too much to socialism, and indeed it proved to be premature when hostilities were resumed in the 1970s. The end of communism in Europe, however, had a finality that was hard to dispute, marking the end of an ideological, political and economic schism that had lasted seventy years, and with consequences not just for the struggle between capitalism and communism, but for the deeper struggle between socialism and liberalism.⁸ Democratic government and free market capitalism, said Fukuyama, had been universalized.⁹

Neoliberalism as a term has been most often used by its enemies rather than by its friends, but it has gradually come to be more widely adopted, not least because there is no more satisfactory term, especially given the associations that the term liberal has acquired in the United States, and also in Britain.¹⁰ Neoliberalism stands out among contemporary western ideologies in seemingly being untouched by the swirl of relativism, scepticism and postmodernist doubt that has been such a marked feature of recent political thought. It breathes the confidence and optimism of an older style of western thinking in its attachment to universal values, and sports an uncomplicated belief in truth, objectivity and progress. In this it shows its attachment to the West. But it is also western in another way. It celebrates the liberal global order that has grown up under western and specifically American leadership, regarding these political and economic institutions of the United States as models that the rest of the world should embrace, and which it will have to embrace if it wishes to emulate America.

Neoconservatives have taken this argument further. Although there is a connection between the two doctrines, there are also

⁷ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, London, Heinemann, 1960.

⁸ Perry Anderson, 'The Ends of History', in Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, London, Verso, 1992.

⁹ Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3–18.

¹⁰ Rachel Turner, *Neo-liberal Ideology: History, Concepts and Policies*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

crucial differences. Neoliberals see their project as a confident restatement of the classic foundations and values of liberal civilization in the contemporary era. These values are universal in their reach and in their scope, and express truths about modernity that may have been obscured or lost in the recent past, but are now being recovered. Neoconservatives, in contrast, are steeped in politics and stress the primacy of politics over everything else, including economics. Neoconservatives celebrate the triumph of neoliberalism and the triumph of the West, but they also see it specifically as a triumph for the Anglo-Saxondom that Nietzsche so disliked, and for its leading state, the United States. So closely did the West and the project of the West become identified with America during the Cold War, that the accelerating trends towards globalization that neoliberalism celebrated have been depicted by some neoconservatives as well as opponents of neoliberalism as ‘Anglobalization’, the projection of Anglo-American values, policies, institutions, model of capitalism and military interventions around the world.¹¹ For many critics, neoliberalism expresses the values not of a universal civilization but of American or Anglo-American civilization.¹² It is indissolubly wedded to the power and interests of the world’s leading state, the United States.

The critics of neoliberalism sometimes do not move beyond this characterization, so neoliberalism is used as an all-purpose term of abuse. But neoliberalism is more than just an ideological cloak for the interests of the powerful. Its ascendancy also accurately reflects in important respects the way in which the modern world is ordered. Most political arguments are now conducted within a framework set by it. This does not mean that there is a uniformity of opinion or a uniformity of policy in the western world, still less elsewhere. It is obvious that there remains a great deal of difference and diversity. If we are all neoliberals now, then at least we must concede that neoliberalism has many faces, among them neoconservatism and various forms of social and Christian democracy, not to mention the novel form of democracy that has emerged under Putin in Russia, and the guided democracies of East Asia.

¹¹ James Bennett, *The Anglosphere Challenge: Why the English-Speaking Nations will Lead the Way in the Twenty-First Century*, Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004; Kees van der Pijl, *Global Rivalries from the Cold War to Iraq*, London, Pluto, 2006.

¹² John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, London, Granta, 1988; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-liberalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.

Neoliberalism, however, is not just one standpoint among many in the political marketplace, but in part reflects and justifies the fundamental structures that underpin and circumscribe that marketplace. If neoliberalism were just another doctrine, it would be easier to dismiss it, but it also reflects something much more fundamental in the political economy of modernity – the recognition that there are certain characteristics of modern society, such as the extended division of labour, individual property rights, competition and free exchange, that have to be accepted as givens rather than choices. In this sense the main dispute in political economy in the modern era has been settled, and settled substantially in favour of neoliberalism, with some important qualifications.¹³ This makes many of the critics of neoliberalism apoplectic, but while there certainly remain important choices between alternatives within this neoliberal framework, few any longer make the argument that there are realistic choices between alternative frameworks.

The significance of neoliberalism appears more clearly if it is placed in a larger context, that of the western ideology and liberal modernity. By the western ideology I mean the set of doctrines that have legitimized and promoted the institutions of liberal modernity in the last two hundred years. Since the fall of Rome, ideas of the West became strongly associated with Christianity in its different forms, and Christianity remains a major shaper and signifier of the western ideology, but in the modern era liberalism became its main expression. That did not have to be so. The western ideology from the start has been contested, and there have been fierce disputes over who has the right to define it. These disputes have ultimately been settled by who has come out on top. In this sense the neoconservatives are right. The meaning of both the western ideology and the West itself has been that defined by the leading states of the West. Neoliberalism is the latest variant of the western ideology in a double sense. It is the inheritor of key parts of the liberal tradition and enunciates its truths as universal truths, and at the same time it is a key expression of the worldview of the world's only remaining superpower, the United States.

¹³ Vivien Schmidt, *The Futures of European Capitalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002; Peter Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

MODERNITY AND THE WEST

To understand the western ideology we need to understand the idea of the West, and the role that this idea still plays in our politics. This has never been a simple concept. Its meaning has constantly evolved and been contested, and its geographical location has shifted. At the heart of every conception of the West has been the notion of an East, an opponent or rival that gives the West its unity and identity. The West was always defined against an East of some kind, whether the original Greek distinction between the West of the Greeks and the East of the barbarians, or the distinction between the western and eastern Roman Empire, and the Western Church and Eastern Church or, after the fall of Constantinople, the contest between the Christian West and the Ottoman East.

As Europe became dominant in world affairs, so the notion of a western civilization with a unique mission and status in human history took shape. As the first modern nations, the Europeans claimed innate racial superiority over all other peoples. But within Europe there was no political unity and there were constant struggles between the leading nations for position and power. There was dispute too over where the true centre of western civilization lay, and which nation could lay claim to be the true representative both of the historical West and of the contemporary West and its future. Which of the European nations best understood the nature of modernity, and the new forces that it had unleashed? There was constant conflict over the meaning of the West and which country was at the heart of it.

Christianity powerfully shaped the West and the character of western modernity. But the Christian civilization of the West in the thousand years after the fall of Rome was in world terms a relatively backward civilization. What transformed it into the leading civilization of the contemporary era, borrowing extensively from the more advanced civilizations of the East,¹⁴ was the coming of modernity, shaped by the West but profoundly altering the meaning of the West, although in ways that only evolved slowly.¹⁵ Modernity is the combined result of three slow unfolding revolutions – in political

¹⁴ John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹⁵ Alan Macfarlane, *The Riddle of the Modern World*, London, Macmillan, 2000.

economy, in knowledge and in politics. It is the intersection of these three revolutions, which gave rise to capitalism, science and democracy in their modern forms, that have reshaped the world and ushered in a third and the latest stage of human development.¹⁶ In important respects we are still living in the transitional phase of this great transformation, which has been so uneven in its effects across the planet, making it hard to understand its true character and prospects. It is only now, for example, in 2007 and 2008 that for the first time in human history a majority of humans live in cities rather than on the land.¹⁷ By 2030 it is expected to be 60 per cent. China, which currently still has 60 per cent of its population on the land, is expected to reduce that percentage to 25 per cent in the next twenty years.

The United States drew on all the different national experiences of Europe, combining them, and ultimately transcending them. It outdid all the European nations in its pursuit of liberty, equality and rationality – all touchstones, along with property and Christian faith, of the American creed.¹⁸ Because the United States became the embodiment of modernity in the twentieth century, alternative versions of the West and of the western ideology were displaced, sometimes only after a prolonged struggle. Many of them, even when they had originated within the heart of the West and the western ideology of modernity, were deemed anti-western. America in particular was strongly opposed from its very beginnings to the *anciens régimes* of Europe, and to the values of hierarchy, tradition, authority and inequality that they embodied. But it came to be equally opposed to new ideologies such as socialism and communism, which sought to go beyond liberal versions of the western ideology of modernity, as well as those ideologies such as Nazism and fascism that rejected some of its core values. During the twentieth century America was twice drawn into a global war. It fought against German and Japanese militarism, Nazism and communism, in the course of which it was obliged

¹⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History*, London, Collins Harvill, 1988.

¹⁷ United Nations, 'World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision Population Database', available at www.esa.un.org.

¹⁸ Anatol Lieven *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism*, London, HarperCollins, 2004. The term was first used by Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York, Harper, 1962.

to set out and defend its own conception of a liberal and democratic world order, and seek to realize it through the establishment of international bodies, first and falteringly with the League of Nations, and then after 1945 with the United Nations and the new agencies of multilateral governance.¹⁹ By the middle of the twentieth century every power in Western Europe that might have been a rival to the United States and an alternative centre for the West had either been defeated or subordinated to the United States. By the end of the twentieth century the collapse of communism meant that for the time being there was also no power outside Europe that could contest the dominance of America.

The various historical Wests of the past sometimes made universal claims but had limited capacity and global reach to enforce those claims. What changes with modernity is the development of new capacities to spread and impose western ideas, western institutions, western practices and western values across the whole world. The West's encounter with the rest of the world has been deeply ambiguous in the modern period, and this made attitudes to it deeply ambivalent. On one hand the West has been associated with universal doctrines promising freedom, equality and prosperity and human rights, the end of discrimination whether based on gender, class or race. On the other hand it has been associated with the exercise of power, often legitimized by doctrines of racial and cultural superiority, and therefore with empire, colonialism and many other forms of intervention and domination. Throughout the modern period the West has been a source of both attraction and repulsion for the rest of the world.

One of the key contingencies in modern history has been the outcome of the competitive struggles between the leading nations of the West. These have determined the particular pattern of modernity that has come to hold sway, and in particular the form of the western ideology that justifies it. There was nothing inevitable in this, but the shape of this historical pattern, at least from our vantage point at the beginning of the twenty-first century is clear enough. It is a history of the building of a particular kind of liberal order, under the hegemony first of Britain and later – much more comprehensively and purpo-

¹⁹ Lloyd Gardner, *A Covenant with Power: America and World Order from Wilson to Reagan*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1984.

sively – under the hegemony of the United States.²⁰ The original architects of this order were Britain and France, and they remained the key players throughout the nineteenth century. But France lost its primacy to Britain after the defeat of Napoleon and after Britain's emergence as the first industrial nation. This ensured that the type of global order that would be built would be a commercial one as well as an imperial one. The nation of shopkeepers had triumphed. Relations between Britain and its former colonies in the United States were to remain cool for a century, but ultimately the United States was drawn into the commercial order that Britain did so much to construct, and came to see the preservation of this order and its defence against those nations that sought to overturn it as its paramount national interest. The Anglo-American understanding that developed in the early part of the twentieth century reached its zenith during the Second World War, and the assumption by the United States of the leadership role it had up to then mostly spurned.²¹

Britain was never the leader of a united West as the United States was to become after 1945. It had neither the inclination nor the ideological resources for such a task. It was preoccupied with its territorial empire as much as with its commercial empire, and its universalism was muted. The United States, drawing on its own political tradition – suffused not only with English institutions and constitutional principles but also with the Enlightenment language of French universalism – adopted from the start a very different ideological position in relation to world politics. It proclaimed freedom, universal human rights, the right of self-determination, the end of empire. In the face of the Soviet refusal to join the liberal order that the United States was constructing, the United States organized an Atlantic alliance to defend the values of the West. The willingness of almost all European states outside the Soviet sphere of influence to accept American leadership meant that for forty years the West possessed an exceptional coherence and unity, one that it had never previously had, but one that began to fracture quite rapidly once the Cold War ended.²²

²⁰ Patrick O'Brien, 'The Myth of Anglophone Succession', *New Left Review*, 24 (2003), pp. 113–34.

²¹ Donald Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

²² Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York, Atlantic Books, 2003.

It is in this context that the emergence of neoliberalism as the latest variant of the western ideology should be understood. It is inseparably connected with the continued dominance of the United States in world affairs. The meaning of the western ideology in any era has always been a question of power as well as ideology, and, as already noted, the ascendancy of the liberal version of the western ideology has been far from assured. It was also subject to severe challenges in the form of states that disputed the ascendancy of first England and then the United States as the leading states of modernity. It was subject to ferocious internal criticisms, from conservatives, nationalists, nihilists, socialists, communists and radicals of all kinds. The liberals themselves have hardly been united. The western ideology accordingly has covered a wide spectrum of ideas and beliefs, and as a result at times has seemed quite incoherent. But despite many vicissitudes western liberalism has proved remarkably resilient as an intellectual as well as a political project, and has now re-emerged to define once again the core of the western ideology.

LIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

From this perspective, what marks out the liberal variant of the western ideology is its political economy on the one hand and its association predominantly with the English-speaking states on the other. In terms of political economy, what is most significant is the commitment to an open rather than a closed economic system. Globalization on this account is not a new perspective, it is not a new discourse, and it does not represent a new stage in the development of the global economy. There are particular features about contemporary globalization that are different,²³ but the promotion of openness has always been a central concern of liberal political economy, and the adoption of this perspective first by Britain and later by the United States was crucial to its success. It means that after the three titanic struggles of the twentieth century, the major challenges to this liberal order have been defeated and its unity preserved and extended. Many fought to prevent this from happening, but they did not prevail.

²³ David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalisation/AntiGlobalisation: Beyond the Great Divide*, Cambridge, Polity, 2007.

The consequences for how we think about the western ideology run deep. Rejecting the triumphalism of the end of history, John Gray has argued that the ascendancy of neoliberalism, far from being the liberation from totalitarianism that it itself proclaims, is in fact only the latest example of a rationalist, interventionist, monist creed, the latest Enlightenment project that is doing every bit as much damage as Marxism did, because it seeks to impose one truth, one universal model, rather than recognizing the irredeemable incommensurability and incompatibility of values expressed in different cultures and political communities. For Gray it is in the nature of any Enlightenment project that it leads to its attempted imposition by force. 'Post-Christian cults' such as Marxism and neoliberalism present a false hope of unity and harmony when we should be limiting our hopes and learning to live with conflict.²⁴

Gray has been much criticized for his view of the Enlightenment, on the grounds that it was never the kind of uniform 'project' that he suggests.²⁵ Many Enlightenment thinkers were highly sceptical about the capacity of reason to reorder the world, doubtful about the prospects for human progress, and they emphasized other values, such as tolerance and consent. But what certainly did emerge during that passage in European thinking that has become known as the Enlightenment was an idea of the future as being different from the past, and a new awareness of the economy as a factor in politics. This last insight became one of the seminal ideas for the thinkers of the nineteenth century, because it addressed one of the central aspects of modernity, the consequences of the trends towards global division of labour for all territorial jurisdictions, including multinational empires and nation-states.

Liberals have always concerned themselves with a wide range of questions other than economic ones, and many have deliberately set their face against reducing everything to economics, most famously perhaps when John Stuart Mill (temporarily) found to his consternation that utilitarianism, the foundation of modern economics and a vital part of his intellectual formation, no longer had any value for

²⁴ John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*, London, Faber, 2003, p. 104.

²⁵ Norman Geras and Robert Wokler (eds), *The Enlightenment and Modernity*, London, Macmillan, 2000.

him.²⁶ But the dominant forms of liberalism have still been profoundly shaped by the conception of economic life that the new study of political economy put forward, and this has affected the trajectory of liberalism ever since. Isaiah Berlin's influential restatement of negative liberty as the essential meaning that liberals attached to liberty, and his rejection of positive liberty as a path that led towards totalitarianism, restated the classic liberal view of Paley and Sidgwick, among others,²⁷ that freedom had to be understood first and foremost as the protection of a private sphere of free action and non-interference. Crucial to such a sphere are private property rights, and in this way the separation of private and public, and the acceptance of the sphere of private exchange as the main source of dynamism, innovation and creativity in modern society became established. The understanding of politics through political economy is one of the most essential features of the western ideology. It has been severely contested by rival theories, but in practical terms it has always survived and has become inseparable from how modernity is experienced and understood.

CRITIQUES OF THE WESTERN IDEOLOGY

The liberal version of the western ideology has also been subjected to numerous critiques. The thinkers loosely grouped under the heading of the Counter-Enlightenment questioned the faith in reason and progress, and emphasized the intense attachments of national identity and culture against desiccated cosmopolitanism and abstract universalism. The Romantic revolt that played such an important part in the development of modern national consciousness and the construction of modern nationalisms was in part nostalgia for what was being lost in the transition to a modern society and in part a defiant resistance to the dominance of the liberal doctrines of free trade, universal rights and progress in defining the new society that was coming into being. The German distinction between *Kultur* and Civilization contrasted the shallow universalism

²⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1958.

²⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

of the French and the narrow-minded utilitarianism of the English on the one hand, and the deep spiritual inner engagement of the Germans on the other.

The Counter-Enlightenment also gave rise to conservative defences of the various *anciens régimes* of Europe, including the British state, which delayed – in some cases for decades – the progress of liberalism and secularism and the adoption of liberal institutions. The majority of the *anciens régimes* that survived or were restored after the French Revolution were still in existence at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. For Lord Salisbury and many other Conservatives delay was life, the task of the Conservative being to provide shelter in our time.²⁸ Such a modest ambition never satisfied nationalists, who wanted not just to delay the progress of liberalism but to subvert it altogether and to establish a quite different meaning of the West. Conservatives wanted to apply the brakes on liberal progress, but nationalists wanted a different direction, one centred upon the nation. Both nationalism and Conservatism became central influences on modern politics, but the Conservatives could not reverse liberal modernity, and the nationalists in the end could not subvert it.

Socialism represents a different case. It too launched a major critique of liberal modernity, often incorporating elements of romantic and even conservative thinking. But the key aim of socialism, and in particular its more radical Marxist variant, was not to halt or destroy liberal modernity but to complete it. Liberal modernity fell short of its own ideals of liberty and equality and lacked the capacity to achieve them, because of its reliance on institutions such as private property, which were the cause of inequality. Socialism offered a different version of modernity, one that went beyond liberalism and fulfilled its promise. Socialists accepted the liberal belief in progress but thought that there was a stage beyond the political and economic forms that liberalism promoted. Liberal modernity was the first step towards a much more complete emancipation of the human species.

These dreams of a society beyond capitalism, based on a socialist political economy, and on a political community beyond the liberal representative state, offering a much more intense form of

²⁸ Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *The Political Thought of Lord Salisbury, 1854–1868*, London, Constable, 1967.

participation, gave socialism in all its forms its hold on the political imagination through two centuries. The disillusion that has accompanied the failure of the practical attempts to move beyond liberal modernity both in the form of the various communist regimes, and in the abandonment of transformative politics by the established social democratic parties of the West have seemingly left no alternative to liberal modernity.²⁹ The position of liberals and socialists on progress has been reversed. Socialists fear it, neoliberals celebrate it.

A final critique of liberal modernity is not associated with particular political movements or political alternatives to liberalism, but with an intellectual stance, that of postmodernism, which questions the ground on which liberals claim authority for their beliefs. The rejection of ideas of truth and objectivity, and of the existence of universal values and universal truths, of any validity in the ideas of progress, has been a strong current in western thinking in the modern era. Nietzsche's critique of the foundations of western thinking shaped all later accounts, with its emphasis on the dependence of truth upon perspective.³⁰ The consequences of such an approach within the western tradition have been profound, and have contributed to the rise of value pluralism, postmodernism, and relativism. So immersed in scepticism about everything has the contemporary western academy and culture become, and so addicted to pluralism, that it is a shock to hear again the strident certainties of the western ideology being set out by neoliberalism, which seem completely impervious to postmodern strictures. Whatever the cultural and academic fashions of the moment, the western ideology articulates something that is reproduced daily in the lives of everyone living in this global economy and the forms of rule and knowledge that sustain it. Postmodernism in its different forms is an important cultural critique of modernity in the West,³¹ but for the great majority of people living on this planet, the idea of postmodernity, as a stage of human development beyond modernity, seems premature. Far from having transcended the stage of modernity, most human societies are still in transition to full modernity.³²

²⁹ Anderson, 'The Ends of History'.

³⁰ Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, London, Routledge, 1996.

³¹ Alan Finlayson and Jeremy Valentine, *Politics and Post-Structuralism*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2002.

³² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990.

THE FUTURE OF THE WESTERN IDEOLOGY

This does not mean that we should seek refuge once again in questionable philosophies of history which supply historicist or determinist readings of the past that few find convincing any more. It is rather that we cannot easily dispense with narratives of historical development. We need such a narrative if we are to make sense of where we have come from and where we might be going. Without such narratives, politics in the way in which it has been understood in the modern era becomes impossible. Historical development is not predetermined, its meaning has been continually contested, and has been shaped by many contingencies and choices and unintended consequences, the cumulative effect of which has been to produce the unmistakable pattern of institutions and relationships that characterize the modern era. We need to come to grips with the elusive concept of modernity, and enquire how it has been promoted, and by whom, whether there are many modernities or only one, whether modernity is inescapably western, and what implications that has for other cultures and states outside the West, whether liberalism – particularly in the form of neoliberalism – supplies the horizon of possibility of our current political imagination, and whether the only conceivable version of this western ideology is the one that finds favour with the dominant power in the contemporary world, the United States.

Part of the disquiet with neoliberalism is that it seems such a narrowing of the potential of western civilization. This extraordinarily diverse tradition can surely not be summed up by a single doctrine. The extinguishing of alternatives to neoliberalism has created a generalized mood of despair among its critics. This has led some to denote all regimes whether left or right, democratic or authoritarian as neoliberal, since all have to operate within the constraints that neoliberalism prescribes. In Europe, for example, this means that not only the regimes headed by Blair, Schroeder and Chirac, and now by Brown, Merkel, and Sarkozy are indistinguishable, but also those of China, Japan, Brazil and South Africa. There are no real differences between models of capitalism, only one uniform capitalist policy that is a neoliberal policy and laid down through the key international agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, reflecting American priorities.

A contrasting view is that the days of the western ideology are themselves limited. The extraordinary unity that was achieved under US leadership during the Cold War can no longer be preserved. The United States has become increasingly impatient with many of its allies, and its policy more unilateralist, now that its position as the sole superpower is unchallenged. Since the end of the Cold War, and particularly during the presidency of George W. Bush, doctrines of American primacy replaced multilateralist doctrines. In many areas the United States appeared unwilling any longer to act as a hegemonic power within a system of international rules and agreements.³³ If the unity of the West can no longer be preserved, the western ideology will appear more and more an instrument legitimizing the role of the United States and its allies, rather than as a set of universalist prescriptions independent of any state.

Critics of the western ideology and the role of the United States point out that the capacity of the United States to remake the world in its own image is declining, and that the world is characterized by increasing differentiation of cultures and political systems. There is no necessary convergence on American capitalism and American democracy.³⁴ The 1990s on this view may have been the high point for liberalism. From now on the fragility of the foundations of liberalism will be exposed, and the challenges to liberal order will grow. Rising powers such as China and India will increasingly develop their own perspectives and their own modernities, based on their own civilizations and their own values. They will not feel obliged to copy the West, and they will no longer be forced to do so.

A third view is that the western ideology has narrowed to an unacceptable extent, but that it can still be rescued, by releasing it from its moorings in an exclusively western tradition, and too close an association with the United States. This is the view of cosmopolitan liberals of various kinds, who wish to revive and continue key aspects of Enlightenment thinking, in particular Kant's programme for perpetual peace, the gradual translation of moral norms into legal norms, and the juridification of relationships between states, to cover not just security relationships, but economic and environmental

³³ John Ikenberry, 'Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age', *Review of International Studies*, 30 (2004), pp. 609–30.

³⁴ John Gray, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions*, London, Granta, 2004.

relationships as well.³⁵ A great deal of effort has gone into elaborating the arguments for global justice on cosmopolitan principles, and in analysing the potential for new forms of governance, such as the European Union.³⁶

Cosmopolitanism has many detractors, as it always has done since Kant first enunciated some of its key principles. There are powerful realist, nationalist and conservative objections to its feasibility and its desirability. It also has the big problem of whether it is simply offering a new version of the western ideology, one that since it does not change the underlying liberal political economy amounts to little more than a more humane variant of the western ideology rather than any kind of replacement for it.

There is, however, at least the possibility that cosmopolitanism may be more than just another version of the western ideology. The objections to it have considerable practical force, but decreasing intellectual force. That is because cosmopolitan arguments do address the key problem of our time, the mismatch between the challenges thrown up by the increasing global economic and ecological interdependence of the planet, and the political capacities of our governance arrangements, including the international state system. These challenges are not imaginary, and the scale of them is clearly growing. Two of them, nuclear weapons and global warming, pose fundamental threats to the existence of the human species.³⁷ Others include nuclear proliferation, environmental change, new technologies such as nanotechnology, new diseases, genetic modification of the human species, and global poverty and inequality.³⁸ All these problems are transnational rather than national in their scope and require transnational solutions, and therefore a huge increase in the collective ability of the human species to reach agreements to tackle these problems.

None of these problems are a product of liberal modernity. It is the particular intersection of capitalism, science and democracy that has given rise to an ever-expanding global market, an ever-increasing

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, Cambridge, Polity, 2006.

³⁶ Mario Telo, *A Civilian Power? European Union, Global Governance, and World Order*, London, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006.

³⁷ Furio Cerutti, *Global Challenges for Leviathan: A Political Philosophy of Nuclear Weapons and Global Warming*, Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.

³⁸ Martin Rees, *Our Final Century: Will the Human Race Survive the Twenty-First Century?*, London, Arrow, 2004.

rate of technological change, and an ever-rising demand for individual rights and political self-determination. The solutions cannot be simply technical or market solutions, they have first to be political solutions. To solve them would require at the very least new global public spaces for deliberation, new transnational agencies, acceptance of new international laws binding national governments, and new global public realm where differences could be accommodated and the basis for consensus and legitimacy for transnational action could be created.

Kant rejected the case for a single world government, wisely it might be thought in view of the history of the last two hundred years. A world government still appears a utopian prospect. Kant favoured instead the building of a league of nation-states, composed of republican states able to trust one another and committed to a set of universal principles that would allow the gradual subjection of international relations to the rule of law. He anticipated the later realist argument derived from Hobbes that for any such project to work it would first be necessary to remove the security fears each nation entertained about its neighbours. Once nations no longer feared they might be attacked, they might be prepared to cooperate on other issues.

Some progress has been made towards a Kantian international order, particularly in the last sixty years, but not very much, and certainly not enough in relation to the dangers that the world now faces. Modernity is only just getting into full stride with the entry of India and China into the global economy fully for the first time. The implications of this change, and the additional strain that will be placed on all support systems of the planet will be intense. The idea that these problems can be wished away or that somehow the vast inequalities and imbalances of the planet that liberal modernity has created can be solved either by US leadership alone, by reliance on the global market or by retreat into national enclaves or regional blocs is fanciful.

It may also be fanciful to think that they can be addressed by adopting cosmopolitan principles. But notwithstanding the difficulties it would seem our best hope, perhaps our only hope. A realistic cosmopolitanism accepts the continued existence of nation-states as the fundamental source of political legitimacy and identity, but seeks to supplement them with a range of new institutions and public spaces at regional and global levels. It also seeks a fundamental

renegotiation of the terms of the western ideology, to create the basis for a dialogue between all cultures and all civilizations. The way forward is not to impose a version of the western ideology on everybody else and oblige everyone to become western. What is needed is to distinguish between the genuinely universal aspects of the western ideology, those that need to be accepted as the common basis for all societies that make the transition to modernity, and those aspects that are related to particular historical features of European societies. Different cultures have no problem in discussing basic human values and in agreeing what are the most important ones. Such a universalist perspective has been explicit in the United Nations Charter from the beginning. What is proving much harder is moving to the next stage.

Gareth Stedman Jones, contributing to a symposium on the end of history, listed the problems that remained unsolved, such as global poverty, fundamentalist religion, atavistic nationalism and looming environmental catastrophe, and concluded: 'Any good Hegelian must fervently hope that the World Spirit will take another step forward as quickly as possible.'³⁹ It is not just Englishmen today who risk getting cold feet.

³⁹ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The End of History?', *Marxism Today*, November 1989, p. 33.