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**CONTENDING LIBERALISMS:
PAST AND PRESENT**

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ABSTRACT

The claim that the ending of the Cold War signifies the triumph of Western liberalism—irrespective of whether this is celebrated or deplored—overlooks the extent to which the liberal tradition, as commonly understood, incorporated radical differences within it. These often shaped the major political cleavages of the time: between Whigs and radicals, Girondins and Jacobins, the liberalism of privilege versus the liberalism of egalitarian democracy. Similar tensions can be identified today: between the liberalisms of 'globalisation from above' and 'globalisation from below', the liberalism of international business and finance and that of radical social movements, the liberalism of privilege and that of human rights in the full sense. Not all these espouse the same liberal principles, but they can be seen as contending over which of the rival liberalisms should be accorded legitimacy in the post-Cold War world.

CONTENDING LIBERALISMS: PAST AND PRESENT

James L. Richardson

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Since the end of the Cold War the view that there is no effective, global challenge to liberalism, understood as contemporary Western-style democracy and market-oriented capitalism, has come to be widely shared—whether it is celebrated along the lines of Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History' or viewed with foreboding by those who, like Rajni Kothari, perceive the dark shadows of 'A World Without [1] Liberalism, in this sense, is actively promoted by Western, and especially American, governments, commentators and theorists. This paper will address the question whether it is able to provide a broadly acceptable legitimising ideology for the kind of world order—the structures of power and influence—which is being constructed in post-Cold War international relations. Is contemporary liberalism potentially a hegemonial ideology—one which not only reinforces the power of the main beneficiaries of the new order, but also offers a prospect of a general diffusion of benefits?[2] Or is it no more than an ideology of the dominant, privileged sectors of this order?

It will be argued that the image of a future without alternatives, shared by liberal optimists and radical pessimists alike, may well be proved incorrect, and sooner rather than later. This is not to say that we should expect a 'return of history' in the form of the reassertion of 'realism'—power politics as usual. While this cannot be ruled out in certain regions, it remains unlikely, on balance, that international politics will continue to be dominated by the hegemonic conflicts and wars of the great powers, as in the past five centuries.[3] The 'great powers'

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, no.16 (1989), pp.3–18; Rajni Kothari, 'The Yawning Vacuum: A World Without Alternatives', *Alternatives*, vol.18 (1993), pp.119–39. The accent here is on the term 'global': there are local and regional challenges, but no alternative conceptions of *global* order which enjoy substantial support.

[2] For this concept of hegemony, employed in international relations by Robert W. Cox, see for example, his 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[3] This is argued in James L. Richardson, 'The End of Geopolitics?', in Richard Leaver and James L. Richardson (eds), *Charting the Post-Cold War Order* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1993).

themselves, or the 'super powers' (the uncertainty over terminology reveals ambivalence over precisely what roles are being ascribed to precisely which actors) convey increasingly an impression akin to that of the dinosaur—awkward and ill-at-ease in an unfamiliar environment, 'globalisation'. The dinosaurs may yet fight to the death, destroying that environment in the process, but if they prove capable of observing that minimal level of prudential rationality which was observed by the super powers throughout the Cold War, this worst-case prognosis will not be realised.

While there are good reasons for not expecting a return to power politics as usual, there is no doubt that international liberalism in the form that has been associated with Woodrow Wilson is very far from having triumphed. The world is not governed by the rule of law, and states have not committed themselves to fulfilling the arduous demands of collective security. Violence, aggression and even genocide are more prevalent than for many decades. Yet even so, they are relatively local, and do not pose a threat to the international system as a whole. It is not from this quarter that a global challenge to the prevailing norms of liberal democracy and the market is likely to emerge.

The hypothesis that such a challenge could take the form of cultural conflict, in particular the promotion of an alternative vision of world order based on one of the great non-Western civilisations, became a topic of international debate sparked off by Samuel Huntington's provocative essay, 'The Clash of Civilizations?'.[4] While few have endorsed Huntington's specific arguments, the fundamental issues which it raises have been insufficiently explored. Liberalism, whatever its claims to universality, remains indisputably 'Western', and its very claim to universality promotes resistance in a multi-cultural world. Tensions stemming from cultural differences may well become more salient in the coming decades.

This paper, however, will explore a different set of tensions—those within liberalism. To what extent may the challenge to the incipient order come from within—from differing liberal conceptions of that order? On the one hand, there is the familiar optimism of the liberal 'establishment'—of those who perceive the benefits of economic growth, interdependence, democratisation and increasing respect for human rights—in effect, the triumph of 'Western values'. What is seen here is not a clash of civilisations but the inexorable success of Western civilisation in penetrating all others. On the other hand, there is the pessimism and anger of those appalled by the human costs of the ruling mode of development, the incidence of acute deprivation, the disregard for distributive justice, and the denial of the most basic human rights in the economic and social domain as much as in the

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[4]   Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.72 (1993), pp.22–49.

political; and of those concerned over the ecological risks which increase so long as the policies of governments and international financial institutions on major environmental issues remain little more than token.

The latter, pessimistic of responses by no means entail a rejection of liberalism. They are widely expressed in Western societies, and indeed the centrality of the issue of justice has been proclaimed by the foremost contemporary liberal theorist, John Rawls. Moreover, the broadening of the conception of human rights to include basic economic and social rights is advocated by Western human rights theorists whose general views place them squarely within the liberal tradition.[5] Within liberalism, then, we may distinguish two widely divergent strands: that which endorses the prevailing patterns of political and economic organisation, including the massive privileges which they confer on the advantaged; and that which finds these patterns and privileges unacceptable and contrary to its understanding of liberal values.

The question whether liberalism can generate a broadly acceptable legitimising ideology for the emerging 'globalising' international order would appear to depend on whether and how these fundamental tensions within liberalism are resolved. The paper will approach the question by first reviewing the history of liberal thought from this perspective—that is to say, tensions between competing strands, with radically different social and political implications. Second, it will note similar tensions with respect to liberalism in international relations theory, in particular. The third section will look more closely at current tensions within liberalism, and the fourth and final section will consider the implications for liberalism as a legitimising ideology.

Three centuries of contention

Liberalism resists sharp definition: 'it is hardly less a habit of mind than a body of doctrine', or even 'often a matter of broad cultural allegiance and not of politics at [6] Yet there is broad agreement on identifying a cluster of values which has characterised liberalism as a political ideology since its inceptions. John Dunn sums them up as 'political rationalism, hostility to autocracy, cultural distaste for conservatism and for tradition in general, tolerance, and...individualism'.[7] For John

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[5]   John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); R.J. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jack Donnelly*, Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[6]   Harold J. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), p.15; John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Canto edition, 1993), p.30.

[7]   Ibid., p.33.

Gray the distinctive liberal values are individualism, egalitarianism, universalism and meliorism.[8] And Anthony Arblaster lists them as freedom, tolerance, privacy, constitutionalism and the rule of law, reason, science and property, but also maintains that individualism is the 'metaphysical and ontological core'.[9]

For some historians, liberalism does not emerge until the eighteenth century; more precisely, their narratives begin with the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 and the publication in 1690 of John Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government*.[10] However, as others have shown, political movements propounding liberal values first appeared in the mid-seventeenth century, when the characteristic liberal themes and debates were first articulated in the English Revolution.[11] The origins of these ideas, needless to say, can be traced back much further, at least to the Renaissance and the Reformation, and their philosophical underpinnings are open to a variety of interpretations. This cluster of ideas—to which the name 'liberalism' came to be applied only in the early nineteenth century—was distinctively European. Some have identified it with capitalism, others with modernity, but characterisations of this kind are necessarily interpretations, open to debate.

The interpretation proposed here—accentuating one of the sub-themes in Arblaster, and also in Louis Hartz[12]—is that the history of this ideology is essentially one of contending liberalisms. For long periods one strand may have been predominant, smothering its potential rivals but never wholly extinguishing them. The Whiggery of the privileged order in eighteenth century England appeared beyond challenge, but provoked the radicalism of universal rights and claims. Radicalism in its pure form has never achieved this kind of hegemony, but a

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8   John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.x. Gray spells these out as: 'the moral primacy of the person', as against the collectivity; the equal moral status of all persons; the moral unity of the human species, as against according priority to historical or cultural norms; and the improvability of all social and political institutions.

9   Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp.55–91. Arblaster argues that a definition requires something more than a listing of values—'to uncover and describe the theory of man and society which supports the political values of liberalism, and to elucidate those values' (p.18). This kind of inquiry into philosophical underpinnings, however, requires that the values (ideas, symbols) to be elucidated have already been identified, historically. Thus a listing of a widely recognised cluster of values may serve as a definition, in that it identifies what is to be examined.

10   See, for example, Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927); E.K. Bramsted and K.J. Melhuish, *Western Liberalism: A History in Documents from Locke to Croce* (London: Longman, 1978).

11   For Example, Laski, *Rise of European Liberalism*, pp.104–18; Arblaster, *Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, pp.146–61.

12   Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955).

moderated, compromising radical strand—derided by critics at the time of its ascendancy, but lauded in retrospect—has done so for substantial periods. At times, most notably in the case of the classic English utilitarians, the contest between the liberalism of privilege and that of universal claims has been fought out within a single school of thought, and even in the minds of individual thinkers—a Jeremy Bentham or a John Stuart Mill.

The English Revolution witnessed John Milton's classic statement of the principle of freedom of speech and the first modern debate over political principles waged in the public forum. At the heart of the debate, writes Arblaster:

> ...lies a hard issue which is central to liberalism: the question of the relations between freedom and property. It was increasingly asserted and accepted that a man may do what he will with his own...'every free subject of this realm hath a fundamental property in his goods and a fundamental liberty of his person'. But who counted as a free subject? This was a subject of much dispute, but in the end it was the property-owners who triumphed. It was accepted that they had the right, not only to do as they pleased with 'their own', but also to control the state itself.[13]

The levellers waged a losing battle for the principle that 'the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he' and 'is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under'.[14] The power was with Cromwell, scoffing at the notion that '"men that have no interest but the interest of breathing" should have a voice in government', and with Ireton, claiming that 'no person hath a right to an interest in the disposing of the affairs of the Kingdom...that hath not a permanent fixed interest in the Kingdom...that is, the persons in whom all land lies, and those in corporations in whom all trading lies'.[15] It was the Whig principle of rule by the propertied which was to triumph after 1688. Locke, read in this sense, was the culmination of the first great liberal debate, not the original founder of liberalism.

The ambiguities in Locke's discussion of individual rights and property rights, however, left his texts open to varied readings, as was English political practice in the eighteenth century. If England's freedom, tolerance and rule of law were celebrated by the *philosophes*, as by the Whig historians, today's commentators are more impressed by the limits to toleration and freedom of speech, the harshness of the law, and its manipulation to accumulate further advantages for the privileged.[16]

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[13]   Arblaster, *Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, p.150.

[14]   Ibid., p.158.

[15]   Ibid.

[16]   For example, Arblaster notes that the Game Laws of 1670 made it an offence for all but the very rich to kill birds and animals even on their own property. Wild animals were thus treated as the property of large landowners, and some of the traditional rights of the poor were redefined as crimes, such as poaching. Ibid., p.171.

In America, on the other hand, where 'the Federalists and the Whigs, in their love of capitalism and their fear of democracy, duplicate at virtually every point the European pattern of bourgeois thought',[17] the privileged were unable to prevail, giving way to that American democracy which de Tocqueville was able to observe in the 1830s. This democratic understanding of the Lockean principles was assisted by a social structure in which landed property was widely diffused and the opportunities for individual advancement were sufficient to remove the sense of threat from below which was so strong in Europe in the generations after the French Revolution. Differences in American politics came to be argued within a narrow ideological spectrum:

> ...a society which begins with Locke, and thus transforms him, stays by Locke...and becomes as indifferent to the challenge of socialism in the later era as it was unfamiliar with the heritage of feudalism in the earlier one. It has within it, as it were, a kind of self-completing modernism, which insures the universality of the liberal idea.[18]

In the terminology of later thinkers, liberalism amounted to a true paradigm for American political thought, characterised by closure towards other intellectual frameworks.

The themes of the eighteenth-century French *philosophes*—reason, science, intellectual and political freedom, education, happiness, and utility—were characteristically liberal, as were their unquestioned assumptions concerning property rights and the undercurrent of fear of the 'mob'. Unexamined tensions in their attitudes foreshadowed the split after 1789 between the moderates, the Girondins, and the radical adherents of the universal rights of man, the Jacobins. The classic statement of the latter concept, Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, was by an English author, but Burke's rejection of the French Revolution was far more influential in England at the time, and English political reform for long amounted to no more than an extension of the franchise to a somewhat more extensive sector of property holders. Hostility to democracy was even stronger in French liberalism up to 1848, where the leading figures—Benjamin Constant and François Guizot—emphasised individual freedoms and property rights but rejected universal suffrage, while more radical thinkers turned to exploring a variety of approaches to socialist theory.[19]

Utilitarianism, breaking with the natural rights tradition, offered a new foundation for English liberalism, potentially more radical insofar as the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number might point to political democracy.

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[17]   Hartz, *Liberal Tradition in America*, p.90.

[18]   Ibid., p.6.

[19]   For French liberalism in this period, see Bramsted and Melhuish, *Western Liberalism*, pp.52–64, 259–64, 269–70, 335–6; de Ruggiero, European Liberalism, pp.158–91.

21   Arblaster, *Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, pp.277–82.

22   Ibid., p.252.

23   Ibid., p.246.

24   Ibid., pp.248–9; Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* (4th edn, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972, pp.92–6.

which figured prominently in middle-class society at the time. Indeed, and not for the last time, the liberalism of the market was at odds with the liberalism of social and institutional reform.

The 'new liberalism' of T.H. Green in the 1880s was a response partly to this tension but mainly to the incremental spread of state intervention in the economy and to the challenge of socialism in European political thought. Green broke not only with utilitarianism but with the whole English tradition which equated liberalism with 'negative freedom'—freedom from control by the state. Instead, he drew on a European tradition stemming from Hegel, which has been traced back, to Spinoza, which advanced a 'positive' concept of reason and freedom—in Green's words, 'the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good...the ideal of true freedom is the maximum of power for all members of human society to make the best of themselves'. [25] This remained liberal in that it was the development of the potential of each individual which was the supreme political value, but it also opened up a much more expansive view of the role of the state, amounting to a major departure from classical liberalism, one which many liberals were unwilling to follow.

This development within liberalism had a certain parallel in Germany, where the 'social liberalism' of Brentano and Schulze Gaevernitz looked to trade unionism rather than the state to moderate the dehumanising tendencies of unrestrained capitalism.[26] Here, more explicitly than in Green, economic and social rights were accorded a standing in liberal thought alongside, though in no way down-grading, the classical political rights and freedoms. These developments found little resonance in France and none at all in the United States, where the open continent and the massive industrial development of the later nineteenth century offered unrivalled opportunities for individual material advancement, and class conflicts along European lines never crystallised. It was the optimism of Adam Smith rather than the bleak doctrines of Malthus and Riccardo which underpinned the continuing confidence in the limited state in what Hartz terms the era of Horatio Alger, which persisted until the Great Depression.[27]

Liberal responses to the Great Depression were to bring the 'new liberalism' to ideological hegemony in the Western world, albeit under diverse labels—the New Deal, the welfare state, 'embedded liberalism'—but this was not evident during the tumultuous political battles of the 1930s. John Maynard Keynes, the key intellectual figure, was undoubtedly a liberal, placing the highest value on

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[25] Bramsted and Melhuish, *Western Liberalism*, p.653.

[26] De Ruggiero, *European Liberalism*, pp.265–70.

[27] Hartz, *Liberal Tradition in America*, pp.203–27. Alger was a popular nineteenth-century writer who expressed the ideal of individual opportunity, the 'American

individual cultural pursuits, rejecting Marxism and having little interest in class conflict, sharing the liberal confidence in science and—ultimately—in progress, and finding inspiration in certain of the classical political economists.[28] At the same time, his anger and his polemics were directed against the crippling economic orthodoxies of the day, their rationalisations, their acquiescence in mass unemployment, their blindness to new issues which challenged their models, their refusal to struggle for new models adequate to new situations. From Keynes' struggles emerged his model of the macro-economy, his proposals for demand management by the state, and later his ideas for reforming the international financial system.

John Ruggie's concept of embedded liberalism—the approach which seeks to preserve the capitalist order through limiting the 'free' working of the market in the interests of social balance and full employment—summed up the new orthodoxy, the hegemonic idea in the West from 1945 until the 1970s.[29] While this might be seen as the triumph of the 'new liberalism' of T.H. Green's generation, neither of its two major variants acknowledged such an origin. In Europe and Australasia, the approach was identified with social democracy and the welfare state. The pragmatic American variant, the extension of the New Deal, remained nameless until termed 'liberal' by its adversaries. In the absence of a socialist tradition, there was no intellectual challenge to Hartz's prevailing 'Lockean' political culture, and every reason to avoid formulating doctrines which would have been vulnerable to attack within that culture, with its commitment to the limited state. Nonetheless, for a time the 'new liberalism' appeared to have become entrenched in modern Western society. In the 1960s Kenneth Minogue could write that the characteristic sensibility of modern liberalism was compassion, the imperative to minimise suffering.[30]

Within a few years of this comment, however, there emerged the first signs of a challenge from a rejuvenated classical liberalism, in which several distinct political and intellectual currents came together: the political New Right, the philosophical libertarians, the public choice theorists, the managerialists, and the neo-classical economists, newly ascendant in policy-making in many of the Western democracies.

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[28] Arblaster, *Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, pp.292–5; Robert Skidelsky*, John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour, 1920–1937* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.405–30 and passim). While Keynes might be seen as having a broad affinity with Green, he was much more conscious of his differences with the Oxford-based Hegelian liberals. Ibid., p.224.

[29] John G. Ruggie, 'International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order', *International Organization* vol.3, no.2 (1982), pp.379–415.

[30] K.R. Minogue, *The Liberal Mind* (London: Methuen, 1963), pp.6–13.

This contemporary phase of the liberal dialectic will be taken up in the third section of the paper.

The complex pattern that emerges from this outline of the history of contending liberalisms defies clear-cut summary. Arguably, however, the division could be traced to the question which of the core liberal values was, in the last analysis, to be accorded priority: negative freedom or equal rights—the defence of the individual against arbitrary or oppressive state power, or the universal rights/moral equality of human individuals?

The former version of liberalism, which treated the defence of property rights and the limiting of state power as unconditional principles, and was later reinforced by the economic doctrine of the evils of state intervention in the economy, was consistent with the liberalism of privilege, and normally led to silence towards, or outright rejection of, the doctrine of equal rights. Only in the exceptionally favourable ecological and socio-economic setting of the nineteenth-century United States could the two strands of liberalism be combined with minimal tension. The effects of industrialism in nineteenth-century Europe introduced a new kind of setting in which the implementation of ideas of equal rights and opportunities became more feasible, but only if the state were accorded a more positive role than in classical liberal theory. The idea of checks and balances against arbitrary power was retained, but the scope of state action was expanded, and the effects of the Great Depression appeared to lead to the general acceptance of this approach throughout the Western world.

Liberalism and International Relations

Historians of liberalism tacitly endorse Stanley Hoffmann's comment that, although it was more than an afterthought, 'the international dimension of liberalism was little more than the projection of domestic liberalism on a world scale'.[31] While this may be true at the level of fundamental values, international relations raise complex issues for liberalism which the historians have been happy to set aside.[32] Among the most characteristic themes of international liberalism are support for the following: liberal (later democratic) movements against authoritarian rule; national self-determination; free trade; non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states; disarmament; the strengthening of international law; and the development of international organisation. Most of these themes came into prominence during the first half of the nineteenth century, and except for greatly

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[31]   Stanley Hoffmann, 'The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism', *Foreign Policy* 98, Spring 1995, p.160.

[32]   This is true of the works cited above, with the partial exception of Bramsted and Melhuish, who have a brief section on 'the belief in international harmony', and nine documents, out of a total of 123 (*Western Liberalism*, pp.278–87, 352–83).

increased interest in international organisation during the twentieth century, they have undergone little change. Nonetheless, it is possible to discern a similar tension between liberalism as a liberating force, tending to promote equality of rights, and liberalism as a bulwark of established order, legitimising its privileges and inequalities.

Early nineteenth-century liberal movements presented their struggles with conservative monarchies in terms of liberation and progress *versus* oppression and reaction. They supported one another, and sought moral and political support (and more than that) from liberal governments. As we have seen, however, European liberalism at this time was far from demanding equality of rights: the old aristocratic regimes were to be broadened to include the new elites—those leading Europe's industrial and commercial development. The freedoms invoked by the artists and poets suggested something more radical, but the political movement amounted essentially to a broadening of privilege.

Similar, but more complex ambiguities have characterised the principle of national self-determination, not initially an explicit liberal doctrine, but an approach which emerged incrementally, in response to particular situations. The Greek struggle for independence, the unification of Italy and the short-lived Hungarian nationalist revolution of 1848–49 enjoyed widespread liberal support; in the latter two cases, this was assisted by the strongly liberal character of the nationalist movements. This was also true of early German nationalism, but by the time of German unification under Bismarck, liberal attitudes throughout Europe, as in Germany, were divided, even though the right to self-determination was, in effect, accepted. Other monarchies which established their independence, with the agreement of the great powers—such as Serbia, Roumania and Bulgaria—did not enjoy the same credentials as those deriving from a popular (liberal) nationalist movement. There was liberal sympathy for Polish nationalism, but no effective demand for Polish independence; in the case of Ireland, English liberals moved hesitantly towards accepting the case for 'home rule'. On the other hand, despite some questioning of the value of colonies, there was no suggestion that they too enjoyed a right to self-determination. John Stuart Mill, for example, was remarkably frank in stating his reasons why they did not.[33]

If these examples might suggest that national self-determination was fraught with problems, Woodrow Wilson's elevation of intermittent liberal practice into a foundational principle of liberal internationalism soon brought some of these problems to the surface. Most acutely, there was the problem of national minorities, the problem of overlapping 'peoples'. Second, there was the problem that governments claiming to represent the people of a nation might not observe the

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[33]   John Stuart Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention' (1859), cited in ibid., pp.367–8.

norms of liberalism or democracy, yet enjoyed rights and privileges as governments of recognised nation-states. This problem arose acutely in the case of many of the former colonies, where liberalism had first been a liberating force, and nationalist movements had been able to turn liberal principles against the colonial rulers, undermining their legitimacy. When they or their successors adopted highly authoritarian modes of government, however, they could rely on the liberal norm of non-intervention, now enshrined in the United Nations Charter, to protect their position and that of the newly privileged local elites.

Non-intervention had become a major principle of liberal thinking on foreign policy by the mid-nineteenth century, in the first instance as a reaction against the practice of the conservative powers of intervening to maintain conservative minorities in power, often against liberal oppositions. Such interventions negated the basic liberal norm that government should rest on the consent of the people—however narrowly the people might be defined in a particular case. Liberal thinking did not, however, support intervention on behalf of liberal movements, but offered a variety of reasons for proclaiming non-intervention as a general principle: the consequences of intervention, and the chances of success, were too uncertain, but its costs were usually heavy; a government installed by force was likely to remain dependent on external support; and true political freedom could only be achieved by the people concerned.[34] Liberals were also hostile to the traditional practices of power politics, to the chauvinistic attitudes which they engendered, and to those who sought to perpetuate them. A firm principle of non-intervention was a step towards placing international relations on a new footing.

The early liberals were not international relations theorists, but the elements of a new theory were present, *inter alia* in Cobden's critique of the balance of power, in Bright's disparagement of diplomacy and in the general liberal concern over the cost of armaments.[35] Similar attitudes inspired American foreign policy from an earlier date—a rejection of traditional European diplomacy and 'entangling alliances', a policy of non-intervention which made a virtue of geopolitical constraints, proclaiming the United States as the model of a new free society which others were encouraged to achieve by their own efforts. That non-intervention could also serve to support oppression and the abuse of privilege became evident only later—but even in such cases, liberals would be sensitive to the costs and

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[34] Ibid., pp.354–6, 359–70, excerpts from Richard Cobden, John Bright, Emile de Girardin and John Stuart Mill.

[35] For Bright's comment that British foreign policy was 'nothing more or less than a gigantic system of outdoor relief for the aristocracy', see ibid., p.279. For Cobden, see Richard Cobden, 'The Balance of Power', in Moorhead Wright (ed.), *Theory and Practice of the Balance of Power, 1486–-1914: Selected European Writings* (London: Dent, 1975), pp.108–16.

uncertainties of intervention, as well as the ulterior motives of many would-be interveners.

It was to free trade that the nineteenth-century liberals looked for the foundations of a new kind of international order. Free trade would not only enhance the prosperity of one's own country—an article of faith of political economy—it would also promote cooperation and friendship among nations, opening the way to peaceful relations. The greater the mutual gains from trade, the greater the incentive to refrain from war. For Cobden, 'commerce is the grand panacea, which, like a beneficent medical discovery, will serve to inoculate with the healthy and saving taste for civilisation all the nations of the world...not a merchant visits our seats of manufacturing industry, but he returns to his own country the missionary of freedom, peace and good government'.[36] And even Palmerston could echo the theme, enumerating as reasons for free trade: 'It is that the exchange of commodities may be accompanied by the extension and diffusion of knowledge—by the interchange of mutual benefit engendering mutual kind feelings...It is that commerce may freely go forth, leading civilisation with one hand, and peace with the other, to render mankind happier, wiser, better'.[37]

Even though, it has been suggested, Cobden was aware that free trade 'conveniently suited...the commercial supremacy of Great Britain in mid-century',[38] there was never a hint of acknowledgement of the 'imperialism of free trade', never a suggestion that trade among countries at unequal stages of development might serve to establish relations of dominance, or might eliminate traditional industries without bringing countervailing benefit to the societies affected. Yet such examples soon became apparent.[39] Liberal thought was, and largely remains, silent on the darker side of free trade, its integral association with power relationships. Whereas on other issues, such as non-intervention, problems are acknowledged and addressed, in the case of free trade they are passed over.

The rejection of traditional power politics, and the aspiration to reconstruct international relations along new, peaceful lines is most clearly expressed in the final cluster of liberal internationalist commitments—to disarmament, the 'rule of

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[36] Richard Cobden, 'England, Ireland and America' (1835), in Bramsted and Melhuish, *Western Liberalism*, p.356.

[37] Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830–1902* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.255.

[38] Ibid., p.84.

[39] John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 6 (no.1), 1953. For discussion of Britain's dominant position in Argentina, and the disruption caused by British commerce in China and the Ottoman Empire, see Tony Smith*, The Pattern of Imperialism: The United States, Great Britain and the Late-Industrializing World Since 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.21–35.

law', arbitration and later to international organisation. If the classic statement of many of these ideas is in Kant, they were developed with varying emphases in the nineteenth century.[40] Although liberals were not, for the most part, pacifists they were critical of many of the accepted justifications for the use of force; the evils and inhumanity of war, its questionable benefit, and the heavy burden of armaments, were recurring themes. The idea of using legal means to resolve international disputes attracted interest around mid-century; for a time arbitration became the focus of liberal proposals, its feasibility being a major issue in contention. Towards the end of the century the focus shifted to international organisation, perhaps a parallel movement to the acceptance of a greater role for the state in domestic politics in that period.[41]

The relationship of these strands of international liberalism to the basic principles of liberal thought was taken for granted, rather than argued explicitly. The magnitude of individual suffering in war, even in the nineteenth century, provided motivation to seek new ways of regulating international relations; the traditional practices of war were, self-evidently it seems, at odds with liberal confidence in the supremacy of reason and the progress of civilisation. Liberal internationalist attitudes, the belief in the feasibility of a better ordering of things, and the view that the same general principles which had led to the transformation of political life internally should also be applied externally, were a natural expression of basic liberal values.[42] From a liberal perspective, up to 1914 their acceptance appeared to be a matter of time and effort.

The idea that international organisation might become a bulwark of privilege, a way of preserving the established order by other means, was expressed in the interwar period by the dissatisfied, 'revisionist' powers, and critics of liberalism such as E.H. Carr were quick to challenge the moral pretensions of the powers upholding the League of Nations.[43] The defence of the *status quo* in the name of peace was not necessarily more legitimate than challenging it in the name of justice. This idea, of course, was not new: it was evident that existing international law,

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[40] Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, is available *inter alia* in M.G. Forsyth, H.M.A. Keens-Super, and P. Savigear (eds), *The Theory of International Relations: Selected Texts from Gentili to Treitschke* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp.200–44. For a sample of nineteenth-century views, see Bramsted and Melhuish, *Western Liberalism*, pp.370–83.

[41] This phase is discussed in F.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp.114–49.

[42] For a general discussion of this theme, see Michael Joseph Smith, 'Liberalism and International Reform', in Terry Nardin and David A. Mapel (eds), *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[43] E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (2nd edn, London: Macmillan, 1946), pp.75–88.

existing treaties, favoured some states more than others, or at the expense of others. Debates over the two 'faces' of international organisation—an innovative way of resolving international disputes by recourse to universally accepted norms, or a new, updated mechanism for securing great-power domination—have become familiar throughout the history of the United Nations.

Liberalism and globalisation

The distance between the contending liberalisms, and the intensity of opposition between them, has varied over time. It has not been so salient in international liberalism, especially in issues concerning war and peace, as in the debates over the extent of political rights and the role of the state in the economy. The present discussion will not further examine the liberal approach to international security, which is extensively discussed elsewhere,[44] but will turn to issues relating to the global political economy which, like the early phases of the industrial revolution in Europe, provides a setting of maximum polarisation between the liberalism of the privileged and that of universal rights. On the one hand there is the liberalism of what Richard Falk has termed 'globalisation from above', on the other the aspirations of those asserting the claims of the peoples affected by the pressures of globalisation to make their own choices, not to have them predetermined by the 'global managers'.[45] Not all these aspirations are liberal, but many are in line with the liberalism that takes seriously the claims of universal human rights or of the moral equality of humankind.

The liberalism of privilege does not, of course, present itself as such, but rather as liberalism *per se*. It is the liberalism of the international establishment—of governments, of international financial institutions, of economists and likeminded commentators, and might be termed 'official liberalism'; but it is also the political culture of the 'international business civilisation'.[46] Its first priority is the promotion of market-driven economic growth, its second priority support for human rights and democratic political institutions, both narrowly defined. The subordination of the latter is a point of tension within establishment liberalism, but on balance the priorities hold.

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[44]   See inter alia Richardson, 'The End of Geopolitics?'; Hoffmann, 'The Crisis of Liberal

[45]   Richard Falk, 'The Making of Global Citizenship', in Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs and Jill Cutler (eds), *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).

[46]   For the international business civilisation, see Susan Strange, 'The Name of the Game', in N.X. Rizopoulos (ed.), *Sea Changes: American Foreign Policy in a World Transformed* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1990).

The liberalism of privilege extols the benefits of the present 'deregulated' global political-economic order. Its supporters can point to the unprecedented economic growth of the market-oriented economies in the relatively open global trading system since World War II, and if the recent record has been more patchy, they can acclaim the especially remarkable growth in East Asia in recent decades. Japan has become the second largest economic power, and countries like South Korea and Taiwan, as well as city-states like Singapore and Hong Kong, have moved in a generation from 'third world' to 'developed country' status, with others such as Malaysia and Thailand appearing as their potential successors. The steady advance of Indonesia and the surging growth of China since its economic reforms suggest that a liberal model of open market-oriented development offers hope even for countries of massive population, an example which India has recently begun to follow.

It is with respect to East Asia that the claims of the liberal establishment are at their strongest. The level of material well-being has been greatly enhanced in countries until recently subject to the constraints imposed by mass poverty, and new horizons and opportunities have opened up for many millions.

Liberals of the second school, which we may term 'radical', however, are concerned as much—or more—with losers as with winners in the present global economy. There are many losers, above all those who are excluded altogether or have been displaced from their traditional environment and are unable to gain a livelihood in the modernising economy. Many of these experience extremes of deprivation. Many in the most marginalised economies, especially in Africa, since the 1970s, have suffered a decline in already depressed living standards. Unemployment is at high levels in most third-world societies, and even in those with fast growing economies, vast disparities and dislocations create tension, and pressures leading to social evils such as the levels of prostitution for which Thailand has become notorious.

The plight of the 'losers' in the industrialised world is less stark, but even though basic rights to subsistence are not so crudely violated, the capacity to exercise rights, and to develop individual potentialities, is greatly restricted. High levels of youth unemployment, and long-term unemployment at all ages, amount to serious personal deprivation, the social costs of which are not yet clear. No stratum of society is free from the new insecurity, which can afflict managers and bureaucrats, the skilled as well as the unskilled, even though its incidence is especially high amongst the latter.

The response of official liberalism varies according to the situation—industrialised, 'new industrialising' or marginalised societies—but is underpinned in each case by a minimalist view of the role of the state. In the industrialised world the state may support upgrading the skills of displaced workers, but beyond this it

is assumed that state 'intervention' in the labour market is futile and the expansion of public sector employment is not entertained as an option. In effect, the main response is silence or fatalistic acceptance of the dictates of the market. In the case of the fast growing, new industrialising countries, when there is not simply silence in the face of economic and social abuses, there is the assumption that before long the benefits growth will 'trickle down' to those at present disadvantaged.

It is in the case of the marginalised societies and those where poverty is most endemic that the response of official liberalism is most activist. Here, where the conditions for economic development—the infrastructure, human resources and administrative capacity—are the least favourable, and in consequence there is a high level of dependence on external support, a condition for such support since the early 1980s has been the acceptance of policies required by the international financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Initially, a standard policy of 'structural adjustment' was prescribed for all cases—a remedy based on a combination of financial orthodoxy and a highly selective reading of the East Asian experience. Thus, irrespective of particular circumstances, the policy was one of reducing state expenditure, deregulation, privatisation, reduction/removal of protection, devaluation and the repayment of debt.[47]

No doubt some elements of this package were needed to correct imbalances which had become acute, and radical economic, political and administrative reforms would be required if states in this position were to overcome the massive obstacles to a transition to rapid economic growth. But the assumption that the structural adjustment programs could be the key to such a transformation was soon shown to be incorrect. The policies aroused political opposition and were rarely implemented wholeheartedly, and even so they tended to weaken fragile infrastructures and curtail health and education programs, weakening the 'human resources' needed for development. From the mid-1980s these and other problems were sometimes acknowledged by the World Bank, but it failed to formulate an alternative strategy for promoting development in countries in this situation.[48] This appears to have

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[47] For an overview, see Thomas J. Biersteker, 'Reducing the Role of the State in the Economy: A Conceptual Exploration of IMF and World Bank Prescriptions', *International Studies Quarterly* vol.34, no.4, December 1990, pp.477–92. The reading of East Asian experience overlooks the historical circumstances which favoured the initiation of rapid growth, and the voluminous case study evidence of the role of the state in promoting it. This evidence is reviewed in Trevor Matthews and John Ravenhill, *The Neo-Classical Ascendancy: The Australian Economic Policy Community and Northeast Asian Economic Growth*, Working Paper 1995/4, Department of International Relations, Australian National University.

[48] John Ravenhill, 'A Second Decade of Adjustment: Greater Complexity, Greater Uncertainty', and Reginald Herbold Green, 'The IMF and the World Bank in Africa: How Much Learning?' both in Thomas M. Callaghy and John Ravenhill (eds), *Hemmed In: Responses to Africa's Economic Decline* (New York: Columbia University Press,

been for two reasons. First, the Western governments were unwilling to provide the level of financial assistance which would be required to underpin these, or any other radical reform policies. And second, influential sections of the bank remained committed to the narrow orthodoxies of the early 1980s, reaffirming the merits of the structured adjustment programs as if these alone were sufficient to promote development.[49]

Can there be coherent assumptions underlying these diverse responses—silence in the face of mounting structural unemployment in the industrialised world, complacency that growth will resolve all problems in the successfully expanding economies, and a doctrinaire approach to development which, at best, makes a limited contribution, and at worst is counterproductive? The latter response is analogous to the faith in traditional economic and financial orthodoxies against which Keynes had to struggle, in seeking to convince his generation of economists of the need to respect evidence that favoured models were no longer in accord with changing realities, and to construct new models accordingly.[50] Perhaps the major obstacle to the search for more relevant models, then as now, was the bias within economics in favour of the 'free' working of markets, the assumption that state 'intervention' is counterproductive, and the ensuing veto against any extension of its role.

To the radical liberal, all these responses are the rationalisations which are characteristic of an ideology of the privileged. Both their silences in the face of social evils and their postulate of the necessary laws of development serve to legitimise the rule of the present global elites. There is, however, no clear radical program which can be contrasted with that of the liberal establishment. This is partly because many reject the prescription of a general formula, but rather seek to tailor policies to the specific circumstances of the case; and many look to local initiatives to advance the interests of local communities, rather than to generalised development strategies.[51] To those who see a need for a broader framework, however, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offers pointers towards an alternative to the established orthodoxy.

1993). The volume provides a comprehensive and sobering examination of the problems facing economic development in Africa.

[49] Ravenhill, 'A Second Decade of Adjustment', pp.19–20, discusses one such report, in 1989, which disregarded the findings of a major Bank report of the previous year. A similar pattern arose in the 1990s. Despite the Banks' apparent shift towards a broader development agenda early in the decade, a major 1994 report on African adjustment returns to reaffirming the success of the adjustment programs within a narrow framework. See review article by Christopher Adams, 'Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead', *The World Economy*, vol.18 (1995), pp.729–35.

[50] Skidelsky, *John Meynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour*, pp.410–22, and passim.

[51] See, for example, the contributions to Brecher, Childs and Cutler (eds), *Global Visions*.

Since 1990 the UNDP has articulated a concept of human development which denotes 'both the *process* of widening people's choices and the *level* of their achieved well-being,[52] and has constructed a multi-dimensional Human Development Index (HDI) as a more satisfactory measure of development, and criterion for assessing it, than the conventional indices based on per capita income.[53] The components of the HDI are life expectancy, education—measured in terms of literacy and years of schooling—and income adjusted for purchasing power parity. It is acknowledged that these are crude measures, reflecting the constraint imposed by the absence of data for more refined indices.

For example, an index modified to take account of income distribution and/or gender disparities is more instructive, but a great many countries cannot be included at the present time. Even so, even when only the basic HDI is used, with its rough measures of levels of health and education, as well as per capita income, the important conclusion emerges that this makes for major differences in the ranking of countries, compared with per capita income alone.[54] Subsequent *Human Development Reports*, since 1990, have focused on particular aspects of the broad agenda for development, e.g., political freedom (1992), political participation (1993) and gender imbalances (1995).

The UNDP offers a general conception of development, but not a universal strategy for achieving it. Nonetheless, by drawing attention to the achievement of relatively high levels of development in societies with widely differing institutions and approaches, including state/market relationships, it implicitly rejects the ruling orthodoxy, and endorses the need for much greater attention to the specific local and historical conditions of each particular case.

Closely associated with the divergence between the two liberalisms on political economy is a similar divergence concerning human rights. The rights which have figured prominently in the rhetoric of Western governments since the 1970s are essentially the classic liberal civil and political rights, enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; nothing is heard of the parallel International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Even within the former category the approach is highly selective. Human rights abuses in certain countries are singled out for condemnation, while those elsewhere are overlooked. Moreover, it is only a limited range even of flagrant abuses which are highlighted, those which are deemed to be politically salient: the maltreatment,

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[52]   United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.10.

[53]   Ibid. pp.11–16, and for a later discussion of the Index, see *Human Development Report 1993*, pp.10–18, 100–14.

[54]   *Human Development Report 1990*, pp.14–16, 128–9; *Human Development Report 1993*, pp.11–18, 136–7.

torture or execution of political activists, for example, or the public, violent suppression of opposition. Arbitrary acts of violence against the underprivileged, or acts of omission such as the dispossession without restitution of those who inconveniently stand in the way of 'development', are passed over in silence.

It is a misnomer to term this the Western approach to human rights. The leading Western scholars on the subject reject a conception which excludes economic and social rights, and in particular there is wide support for the claim that the right to subsistence must be included in any definition of basic rights, since its denial is as unacceptable as threats to the physical security and survival of individuals.[55] Beyond this basic minimum, radical liberals are concerned with denials of rights of all kinds: the rights of the displaced and dispossessed, the illiterate, indigenous peoples, those suffering acute malnutrition. These are, typically, 'minorities', but they comprise a far higher fraction of humanity than the high-profile human rights cases which capture the attention of governments, the media and liberal commentators. Such officially neglected cases may come to the attention of international NGOs, which occasionally succeed in attracting high-level political attention.

Its silences on human rights, as on political economy, provide clues to the political character of the liberalism of privilege at the present time—the ideology of globalisation from above. Whereas in the past this strand of liberalism was overtly anti-democratic, it is now silent concerning many of the values associated with democracy.

Critical analysts of globalisation have drawn attention to the lack of accountability of major actors in the system. Governments make little attempt to control actors whose choices increasingly affect the fortunes of the majority of the world's people: the global corporations and financial institutions. Even in institutions where formal processes of accountability exist, such as the European Parliament in the case of the European Union, they are perceived to be relatively ineffective: the 'democratic deficit' remains a recurring theme of commentators on the EU.

The problems of accountability are illustrated by the case of the World Bank, where there are frequent complaints that its directors—representing the governments of donors and recipients, are denied the information which would enable them to exercise control over the Bank's operations.[56] From the perspective

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[55] See, for example, Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations*; Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. In this context, the case for priority for subsistence rights was first advanced by Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence and US Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[56] For expressions of this view, see Bruce Rich, *Mortgaging the Earth: The World Bank, Environmental Impoverishment, and the Crisis of Development* (Boston: Beacon Press,

of an electorate this would be the absolute minimum of accountability, but even this is tenuous. Insofar as the Bank's President is chosen by the American government, and the US Congress conducts occasional hearings on issues raised by the Bank's critics, and votes on its funding, there is a degree of accountability to one member-state, but not to the rest of the international community. In general, to the extent that actors other than governments now play increasingly important roles in the global system, accountability is declining, and with it the relevance of democratic political institutions to the lives of those nominally under their rule.

The prevailing conception of democracy, in turn, is a minimalist one, its norm of accountability so attenuated as to recall Rousseau's barbed comment that the people of England were free only at the time of elections. According to a typical definition, liberal democracies are states whose governments are elected by the majority of the people, in a contest in which political oppositions can compete freely with the incumbent government.[57] This is essentially Joseph Schumpeter's conception, according to which most of the classical ideas associated with democracy—government by the people, popular sovereignty and the like—have become irrelevant: the essential feature of modern democracy is that governments are chosen through free competition among political elites.[58] It is true that, even thus understood, democracies differ radically from authoritarian, monarchical, or military governments, but a mechanical conception of this kind leaves out those features of democracy which impressed de Tocqueville, for example, or which have rendered 'democracy' so powerful a symbol in opposition to twentieth-century totalitarianism.

An alternative tradition of democratic thought highlights the values associated with participation, citizenship, equality and the rights of those affected by decisions to have a voice in making them, and acknowledges that education and free, wide-ranging debate are prerequisites for the citizen to make informed choices.[59] Liberal concerns over the rights of minorities have their place in this tradition; if these were originally voiced on behalf of cultural or intellectual minorities, they are now equally or even more relevant to the under-privileged—to all those who have limited access to resources to exert leverage over the elected Leviathan. The elitist

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1994), pp.64–7, 224, 249. The relationship between the Bank's President and the executive directors is discussed in Edward S. Mason and Robert E. Asher, *The World Bank Since Bretton Woods* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1973), pp.87–102, who also draw attention to the limitations on the influence of the latter.

[57] See, for example, Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp.14–16.

[58] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943).

[59] See, for example, Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), esp. pp.1–44.

structures firmly in place in most contemporary democracies severely constrain political debate and limit the scope of citizen participation to the activities of well organised interest groups and occasional grassroots protest: contemporary Schumpeterian democracy may be regarded as the political embodiment of the liberalism of privilege.

Again, there is no single, well-defined alternative conception, but rather a plurality of ideas, many of them focusing on political struggle at the local level, or on the efforts of under-privileged groups to secure their rights.[60] Some authors highlight equality as a core value, others the respect for differences. 'Radical democracy demands that we acknowledge difference—the particular, the multiple the heterogeneous—in effect, everything that had been excluded by the concept of Man in the abstract. Universalism is not rejected but particularized.'[61] What is lacking in such discussions is a parallel concern for the erosion of democratic political culture at the level where it is supposedly entrenched—national government, especially in the case of the established Western democracies. Here the narrowing down of political debate to issues of economic management, on the one hand, and its shallowness imposed by the time-constraints of television, on the other, and the sense that the issues of greatest concern are neglected or addressed demagogically, and that major choices are avoided, not defined—all this creates an unsurprising disillusionment and cynicism towards politics and politicians. For the Schumpeterian understanding of democracy these may be secondary concerns, but for the rival tradition they are not only major concerns in themselves, but indications of the erosion of the legitimacy of contemporary democracy itself.

Rival legitimising ideas

Historically, until about the 1970s, it appeared that the liberalism of privilege, however strongly it had been established in particular socio-economic settings, was unable to maintain its legitimacy in the long run, in the face of the appeal of universal rights.[62] The political monopoly of propertied elites, seemingly

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[60] See, for example, Evalina Dagnino, 'An Alternative World Order and the Meaning of Democracy', in Brecher, Childs and Cutler (eds), *Global Visions*.

[61] Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), p.13. The chapter title, 'Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?' indicates the influence of post-modernist thought with its insistence on respect for difference. Here is a potential conflict with the universalism of the liberal tradition; on the other hand, it is in accordance with one of the core liberal values, toleration.

[62] 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all man are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.' The American formulation is no different, in essential, to the French: 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights…These rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression', Bramsted and Melhuish, *Western Liberalism*, pp.225, 228. With the major addition of gender these

impregnable in eighteenth-century England and early nineteenth-century Europe, gave way as the claims of democracy, strengthened by the gradual diffusion of property and education, eventually proved irresistible. This took place by different routes. The process was relatively straightforward in the United States, where the diffusion of landholding made for an early transition to democracy. In Europe, on the other hand, the excesses of the French Revolution were held up as a warning against the dangers of democracy and its doctrine of equal rights. The transition to democracy was at best slow and painful, at worst punctuated by revolution, protracted internal conflict or phases of authoritarian or even totalitarian rule.

In political economy, likewise, America and Europe followed contrasting routes. Until the 1930s, favourable conditions for the American economy legitimised *laissez-faire* liberalism, which remained compatible with the 'American dream' of the opportunity for individual advancement for all. The benefits offered by the economy were highly unequal, but were nonetheless widely diffused. In Europe industrialism generated such extremes of poverty and inequality as to provoke the major normative and political challenge of socialism, initially revolutionary, only later democratic. Neither of the standard justifications for *laissez-faire*—that the hidden hand really served the best interests of all, or that existing conditions were the inevitable outcome of the working of natural laws—carried conviction beyond the ranks of the fortunate and privileged. In response to the socialist challenge, the 'new liberalism' conceded part of the socialist case, but retained the liberal commitment to individualism. Individual rights were extended to include social and economic rights, but the harsher, revolutionary version of class conflict was rejected in favour of the positive view of the state's role in social integration, a foreshadowing of the welfare state and the American response to the paralysis of the hidden hand in the 1930s, the New Deal.

The contemporary setting, the 'globalising' economy, resembles the nineteenth-century European rather than the American situation at that time. Although the benefits which accrue to the privileged are diffused in some measure, especially in the fast-growing new industrialising economies, the disadvantaged are diverse and numerous: those suffering absolute deprivation, the excluded and marginalised, the unemployed, and the insecure. To the extent that the work environment in the global economy is characterised by constant technological change, hyper-competitiveness and high levels of unemployment, acute insecurity of employment may well become the norm, in all societies except those few which are active importers of labour. As before, neither the claim that the market is serving the

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formulations, however much debated and refined, have remained basic to western ideas of political legitimacy since their articulation in the late eighteenth century.

interests of all, nor the contention that existing conditions are the product of inexorable laws, are convincing.

The search for an alternative, however, a 'model' of social organisation around which a conception of legitimacy might crystallise, confronts two obstacles. First, the failed Soviet model is held up, like the French Revolution, as a warning of the dangers of seeking any form of radical alternative to the present order, and the privileges that accrue within it. And second, the economics profession is all too ready to extend its condemnation of the command economy to all forms of 'intervention' in the working of the market. As a consequence, while the existing global economic order enjoys only weak legitimacy, despite the tireless promotional efforts made on its behalf, there is no focus around which an alternative conception of legitimacy, based on universality of rights, might crystallise.

In this, too, the situation resembles early nineteenth-century Europe. In the short run, the forces maintaining the liberalism of privilege are ascendant. Yet in the long run the lack of a convincing body of ideas to sustain their legitimacy in the face of the claims of universal rights is likely to prove a fatal weakness. Much the same can be said of present elitist (Schumpeterian) democracy and of the ruling Western governmental conception of human rights. Whatever the differences among those who engage in the theoretical debates on human rights, they arrive at broader and more coherent conceptions than those promoted officially—conceptions which challenge existing assumptions and practices, at home as well as abroad. And the many dissatisfactions with contemporary democratic institutions can be related, for the most part, to latent or silenced values present in liberal and democratic political traditions—concerns over responsiveness, participation, the larger public interest, genuine debate, minority rights, privacy, the 'excluded', to name a few.

To identify a range of ills in the globalising political and economic order, and ensuing problems of legitimation which may be construed in terms of the tensions within liberalism historically, is not to predict that there will once again be a movement forward from the tenuous legitimacy of the liberalism of privilege to a more broad-based legitimacy based on the liberalism of universal human rights. A period of political and normative discord can be safely predicted; the outcome cannot.

The conclusion that may be drawn from the analysis is that, whatever other tensions may be present in the ensuing period—between West and non-West, North and South, rising and declining great powers, forces of 'order' and 'disorder', integration and fragmentation—there is also likely to be tension between contending versions of liberalism, between the tradition from which the managers of globalisation from above draw in seeking to legitimise an emerging order, and that from which numerous others draw different ideas in seeking to render that order

more humane and equitable. Here, potentially, is a positive source of normative change in the forthcoming period.

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