

Phantom Promises: Progress, Pessimism, and Globalization

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Abstract: While explanations of globalization have come from such varied perspectives as Marxism, constructivism, and post-modernism, the vast majority of the literature on globalization equates the process with liberalization. Noted globalization scholar Jan Aart Scholte has argued that “liberalism has unquestionably ranked as the principal orthodox account of globalization.” With this liberal conception of globalization in mind, this essay has three goals. The first is to outline the optimistic origins of liberal and neoliberal theories of political and economic globalization and to demonstrate that these theories either implicitly or explicitly promise an “end of history” characterized by global peace and prosperity. The second goal is to demonstrate the inherent dangers in assuming that a teleological, utopic “end of history” exists and to show that an active and interventionist promotion of these principles is in fact a realist rather than an optimistic policy. Finally, a pessimistic response to liberalism and neoliberalism is presented as an alternative perspective on globalization. A pessimistic response to neoliberal notions of globalization argues that neoliberals have fallen prey to the rationalist fallacy of the identification of control with knowledge. Rather than envision an end-stage of history that must be attained at all costs, pessimists propose a realistic outlook on the future by stressing that attention must be paid to the challenges posed by an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Pessimists also argue that individual freedoms and liberties should not be suspended for the purposes of attaining the theoretical telos implicit within neoliberal accounts of globalization.

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Introduction

This essay has three goals. The first is to outline the optimistic origins of liberal and neoliberal theories of political and economic globalization and to demonstrate that these theories either implicitly or explicitly promise an “end of history” characterized by global peace and prosperity. The second goal is to demonstrate the inherent dangers in assuming that a teleological, utopic “end of history” exists and to show that an active and interventionist promotion of these principles is in fact a realist rather than an optimistic policy. Finally, a pessimistic response to liberalism and neoliberalism is presented as an alternative perspective on globalization. It should be noted that in this essay “pessimism” is not intended to mean that this is the worst of all possible worlds or to imply that humanity is moving in a direction that will ultimately end in disaster. As Joshua Dienstag stresses, pessimism should not be equated with “skepticism, fatalism, millenarianism, nihilism, and general gloominess,” nor should it be viewed as a “psychological disposition somehow linked to depression or contrariness.”¹ Rather, as realist scholar Kenneth Waltz has argued, a pessimistic interpretation of globalization merely implies that a peaceful, problem free world is an impossibility, and, in fact, can function as a negative force in human affairs.²

While explanations of globalization have come from such varied perspectives as Marxism, constructivism, and post-modernism, the vast majority of the literature on globalization equates the process with liberalization. Jan Aart Scholte claims that “liberalism has unquestionably ranked as the principal orthodox account of globalization.”³ Liberal explanations of globalization tend to see the process as a market-led extension of modernization. This approach is generally supported by those who are

¹ Joshua Foa Dienstag, “The Pessimistic Spirit” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 25 (1999): 71.

² Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 19.

³ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 125.

interested in maximizing human progress through the pursuit of currently dominant models of development, with an emphasis on economic growth and liberal democracy.⁴ Neoliberalism, the modern revived form of economic liberalism, builds on the *laissez-faire* convictions of classical liberalism, which promises that unconstrained market forces will naturally bring wealth, liberty, democracy, and peace to society.⁵ According to neoliberal theory, the spread of free-market capitalism and democracy throughout the world eventually will result in a community of prosperous and homogenous nation-states that forgo war and violent conflict in favor of trade. Hence, implicit within neoliberal theory is the promise of progress and of a final solution to conflict. Its proponents assume that a final stage exists as the endpoint to which human history is directed. Neoliberalism's assumptions and analysis of globalization are, therefore, both optimistic and teleological.

Neoliberals believe they have determined the universal course of political development and a single formula for national economic growth. Having uncovered mankind's final destination, the only question for neoliberal theory to answer is: What are to be the mechanisms of change? How are “modern” and “developed” nations to go about arriving at perpetual peace and prosperity? Is change to arise naturally and organically from within individual nations and cultures? Or is it necessary for liberal nations to adopt a more active and interventionist approach?

The neoliberal notion of linear progress towards an idyllic end-point is intrinsically enticing. As Romanian philosopher and essayist E.M Cioran points out “the more heavily an idea is burdened with immediate promises, the greater the likelihood it

⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁵ Ibid., 38.

has of triumphing.”⁶ Furthermore, as Albert Camus noted, ideologies infused with the notion of progress serve a practical purpose because “everything that makes man work and get excited utilizes hope.”⁷ Modern day proponents of a liberal theory of globalization have constructed an appealing vision of perpetual peace within a zone of democracy and prosperity that is inherently attractive. However, is the “end of history” neoliberal theorists have predicted an outcome based on hope rather than on fact? Is the neoliberal “impatience to institute paradise as soon as possible, in the immediate future, a kind of stationary duration, an immobilized possible, a counterfeit of the eternal present?”⁸ Pessimists argue that neoliberals tend to see globalization as the continuation of a master narrative with its beginnings in modernity.⁹ A pessimistic response to neoliberal notions of globalization claims that neoliberals have fallen prey to the rationalist fallacy of the identification of control with knowledge. Rather than envision a final solution that must be attained at all costs, pessimists propose a realistic outlook on the future stressing that attention must be paid to the challenges posed by an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

⁶ E.M. Cioran, *Utopia and History* (New York: Seaver Books, 1987), 91.

⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin Publishing, 2000), 51.

⁸ Cioran, *Utopia and History*, 104.

⁹ Martin Albrow, *The Global Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 98.

Globalization and the Promise of a Liberal Utopia

*Each generation lives in the absolute: it behaves as if it had reached the apex if not the end of history.*¹⁰

- E.M Cioran

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept of globalization has come to dominate a large portion of the international relations discourse. While globalization is a problematic term due to the vast array of processes that fall under its heading, it is generally understood to be a long-term and multi-pronged process characterized by: 1) The economic integration of nation-states as a result of increased trade and capital flows 2) The erosion of national sovereignty and state power as a result of the growing role of international organizations and treaties 3) Sweeping advances in telecommunications and information technology and, as a result, the increased speed and volume of information flows and widespread access to information 4) An experience of “territorial compression” or “annihilation of distance” caused by innovations in transportation which have enabled people from all sectors of the planet to travel to other regions relatively cheaply and rapidly.¹¹

A large body of the literature on globalization is characterized by what Waltz describes as a “new optimism”¹² that has arisen from the ideological triumph of liberal democracy over the Soviet Union's variant of communism. Waltz claims that this new optimism is “strikingly similar in content to the old”¹³ in that it associates interdependence with peace and peace with democracy.¹⁴ Waltz's observation describes the predictions of an imminent democratic peace and economic boom made by a wide

¹⁰ E.M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 125.

¹¹ Ian Clark, *Globalization and International Relations Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹² Kenneth Waltz, “Globalization and Governance,” in *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, eds. Robert Art and Robert Jervis (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 352.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

array of contemporary scholars whose work with respect to globalization is influenced by liberal principles similar to those that motivated the Wilsonian idealists following World War I.¹⁵

As Waltz points out, the globalization discourse is dominated by theories that have a firm foundation in the Western liberal tradition. Liberal ideals including the goal of economic efficiency and the growth of international institutions are rooted in the belief that societal convergence should be built around the common recognition of the benefits of markets and liberal democracy.¹⁶ Liberal proponents of globalization often present the current changes that nation-states are undergoing as the result of dynamic processes in which “no one is in charge.”¹⁷ For these scholars, Adam Smith's invisible hand is at work on a global scale and globalization is viewed as a natural, decentralized process, driven by market forces. For example, according to Thomas Friedman, “globalization isn't a choice, it's a reality.”¹⁸ Furthermore, many liberal proponents of globalization view the dominance of global capitalism and the rise of liberal democracy as the final stage in mankind's historical development. In this sense, globalization is the process by which the world transforms into a system of nation-states that each exhibits the same political and economic structure. For these scholars, the eventual conversion of all states into capitalist, liberal democracies represents “the end of history”, marked by the cessation of conflict between political ideologies. Implicit within this prediction is also a promise of enduring peace and prosperity.

The argument that the “end of history” has arrived was famously postulated in the contemporary era by Francis Fukuyama in his book *The End of History and the Last*

¹⁵ For example see Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12.3(1983): 205-235.

¹⁶ Audrey Hurrell and Nancy Woods, “Globalization and Inequality”, *Millennium* 24 (1995): 449.

¹⁷ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2000), 112.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Man. In the book, Fukuyama presents the latest in a series of Enlightenment grand narratives purporting to outline a universal civilization and a common destiny for humanity. Viewing his work as an extension of Kant and Hegel, Fukuyama claims that it is possible to write a “universal history of mankind” – in other words to attempt to find a meaningful pattern in the overall development of human societies.¹⁹ By claiming that history had ended, Fukuyama argues that the principles of liberty and equality underlying the modern liberal state have been discovered and implemented in the most 'advanced' countries and that there exist no alternative principles or forms of social and political organization superior to liberalism. Therefore, mankind's long ideological struggle to find a form of government and social organization that completely satisfies human beings in their most essential nature is over.²⁰

Fukuyama's work is firmly rooted in the rational and optimistic enlightenment tradition of political theory. From Kant's “An Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”, Fukuyama adopts the idea that history has an endpoint, that is to say a final purpose that is implied in man's current potentialities and which makes the whole of history intelligible. For Kant, this end point was the realization of human freedom.²¹ Fukuyama believes “human freedom” to be perfectly embodied in the modern liberal state.²² According to Fukuyama, the question to be answered by a 'universal history' is “whether, when taking all societies and all times into account, there was overall reason to expect general human progress?”²³ Since, in general, archaic forms of government have given way to modern political ideologies such as communism,

¹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

²¹ Robert Burns and Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Philosophies of History from Enlightenment to Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

²² Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 58.

²³ *Ibid.*

fascism, and liberalism, Fukuyama argues that history is, in fact, linear and that each successive stage represents progression over the last.

From Hegel, Fukuyama adopts the belief that history proceeds through a continual process of conflict wherein systems of thought as well as political systems collide and fall apart from their own internal contradictions. These systems are then replaced by less contradictory and therefore higher ones.²⁴ Hegel defined history as the progress of man to higher levels of rationality and freedom, and, for Hegel, this process had a rational terminal point in the achievement of absolute self-consciousness. For Hegel and for Marx, who used the Hegelian dialectic to develop his theory of historical materialism, there was a coherent development of human societies from simple tribal ones based on hunting and gathering, to subsistence agriculture, through various theocracies, monarchies, and feudal aristocracies, up through modern liberal democracy and technologically driven capitalism. Therefore, for Hegel, Marx, and Fukuyama, history can be understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples.²⁵ As Hegel did before him and contrary to Marx, Fukuyama concludes that the embodiment of human freedom is the modern, liberal democratic state. While Marx argued that capitalism would crumble as a result of the inherent inequality and class conflict it produced, Fukuyama argues that capitalist, liberal democracy has successfully conquered its contradictions and emerged as the epitome of rationality and freedom. Therefore, for Fukuyama, the “universal history of mankind” is embodied in humanity's progressive rise to full rationality and to the self-conscious awareness that full rationality is expressed in liberal democracy.²⁶ Therefore, for Fukuyama, the historical

²⁴ Ibid., 60.

²⁵ Ibid., xi.

²⁶ Ibid.

dialectic has come to an end.²⁷

While Fukuyama's thesis has been criticized as idealistic and Eurocentric, it nonetheless has been highly influential. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama's optimism and his appeal to traditional liberalism struck a chord with a disgruntled international relations community that felt it had been misled by the pessimism of realism. It is now widely accepted in the policy-making community and among a large percentage of scholars that “history indeed does have a pattern, a shape, a direction”²⁸ that will lead to the eventual installment of liberal democracy in all nations, thus fulfilling Kant's ideal of perpetual peace.²⁹ It is also widely believed that peace and prosperity will arise out of an ideologically homogenous system of nation-states that have all reached the “end of history”. According to this perspective, as all states increasingly resemble one another, they will unify nationally on the basis of a centralized state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization like tribe, sect, and extended family with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency and adopt democracy as their chosen form of government.³⁰ For many, therefore, Fukuyama's utopia, a world of identical states, each supremely rational and without contradictions, is not a fantasy but a possibility that is realizable in the near future.

Fueled by Fukuyama's “end of history” thesis, a series of liberal, optimistic research paradigms has emerged which promise that states can become modern, peaceful, and prosperous by adopting liberal democracy and free market capitalism. The triumph of liberalism as an ideology ushered in an era of reassessment in security studies and development theory, both of which came to be dominated by liberal thought during the

²⁷ Ibid., 64.

²⁸ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 233.

²⁹ Ibid., 234.

³⁰ Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, xv.

1990s. Furthermore, the ideals of free market capitalism and liberal democracy came to profoundly influence the concept of globalization. Hence, the goal of creating a homogenous world-system characterized by liberal democratic states has emerged as the implicit goal of many international relations research paradigms. For example, Thomas Friedman claims:

The driving idea behind globalization is free-market capitalism – the more you let market forces rule and the more you open your economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient and flourishing your economy will be.³¹

In security studies, Democratic Peace theorists have argued that liberal democracies rarely, if ever, go to war with one another. Therefore, if all nations are liberal democracies, war between states will be almost unthinkable.³² Within the paradigm of development studies, the neoliberal path to prosperity, championed by the IMF, World Bank, and United States government, has become the dominant discourse in the field. Free-market capitalism is widely acknowledged as the route to prosperity and many neoliberals believe that “all sovereign states seek to install market economies because they all seek to be prosperous. At the outset of the 21st century, the market is universally acknowledged to be the one true path to prosperity.”³³

Fukuyama makes a powerful argument for liberalism and for the concept of a “universal history of mankind”. His formulation powerfully articulates the liberal expectation that globalization, envisioned as the spread of market capitalism and liberal democracy, offers the prospect of at last fully realizing the promise of modernity.³⁴ Furthermore, Fukuyama openly reveals the origins of his thesis; his prediction is part of

³¹ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 9.

³² For an account of the Democratic Peace see Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a post-Cold War World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³³ Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World*, 235.

³⁴ Jan Aart Scholte, “Beyond the Buzzword: Towards a Critical Theory of Globalization” in *Globalization Theory and Practice*, eds. Eleonore Kofman and Gillians Young (London: Pinter Publishing, 1996), 50-51.

the continued Enlightenment project which promises the triumph of mankind over nature through reason and self-awareness. Fukuyama's promise of peace and prosperity through liberalism lies in a belief that by ultimately understanding the fundamental needs of human beings through rational analysis, a political order can be constructed that satisfies their deepest needs as individuals and as societies. While it is impossible to prove or disprove the eventual arrival of "the end of history", it is possible to examine the character of the current liberal program and assess whether it is characterized by an adherence to its core principles of individual liberty and freedom from tyranny, or whether the desire to bring about an "end of history" has caused liberal nation-states to adopt policies that stress a radical, centrally planned transformation of the international system and its individual member states in order to bring about the "end of history".

Contradictions: Liberal Visions, Illiberal Methods

For every rationalist metaphysician, from Plato to the last disciples of Hegel and Marx, this abandonment of a notion of a final harmony, in which all riddles are solved, all contradictions reconciled, is a piece of crude empiricism, an abdication before brute facts, an intolerable bankruptcy of reason before things as they are, a failure to explain and to justify, to reduce everything to a system, which 'reason' indignantly rejects.³⁵

–Isaiah Berlin

Liberals believe that they have discerned the final point towards which human history must inexorably lead. In this framework, globalization has become the means by which “the end of history”, the triumph of liberal ideology above all others, is to be attained. Mainstream liberals believe the proliferation of democracy and the integration of world markets will lead to a harmonious world order that mitigates the tensions and struggles caused by economic and security competition. The diffusion of liberal ideas throughout the globe is expected to “uplift” the underdeveloped nations of the world and allow them to “advance” to the “end of history” at roughly the same time as the vanguard states of the West. However, what are to be the mechanisms by which the economically “underdeveloped” and undemocratic nations of the world globalize, transcend history, and “catch up” with the West? Should liberal nations actively coerce developing nations in order to bring about the global utopia of the future?

As an ideology, liberalism stresses the freedom of the individual from tyranny and upholds the sovereignty of nation-states. However, unlike Fukuyama, not all liberal thought envisions an “end of history” characterized by a peaceful and prosperous capitalist utopia. In his well-known essay “Two Concepts of Liberty”, political philosopher Isaiah Berlin distinguishes between negative liberty or the absence of constraints on, or interference with, agents' possible action and positive liberty which he

³⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 53.

associated with the idea of self-mastery, or the capacity to determine oneself and to be in control of one's destiny.³⁶ While Berlin believed that both concepts of liberty were valid human ideals, he argued that throughout history positive liberty has proven susceptible to political abuse and totalitarianism. Berlin claimed that the track of Enlightenment thought begun by Kant and Hegel had led many governments to equate liberty with forms of political discipline or constraint. Following this logic, historian J.L. Talmon has noted that the rationalist program has often led to “totalitarian democracy” - a form of social determinism, a belief that men are irresistibly driven to adopt a single valid system, which would come into existence when everything not accounted for by reason and utility had been removed.³⁷ In other words, in order to achieve a liberal ideal, governments often assert rational self-control over their own destiny, and the destiny of other nations, and temporarily suspend individual freedoms and the sovereignty of nations to achieve a desired end. According to Berlin, popular demands for freedom can quickly transform into demands for collective control and discipline. Therefore, for Berlin, there exists a danger that positive liberty can lapse into totalitarianism. This danger was most likely to occur when agents of power believed that their actions served a higher purpose, specifically when they believed that their actions would propel them on the path to final harmony. In “Two Concepts of Liberty” Berlin stresses the danger that actions justified by a “final solution” or an “end of history” brings with them:

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals – justice or progress or the happiness of future generations, or the sacred mission or emancipation of a nation, race, or class, or even liberty itself, which demands the sacrifice of individuals for the freedom of society. This is the belief that somewhere, in the past, or in the future, in divine revelation, or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution.³⁸

While both positive liberty and negative liberty affirm the value of freedom, negative

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 2.

³⁸ Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 52.

liberty finds the essence of freedom in spontaneity and the absence of coercion, while positive liberty believes it to be realized only in the pursuit of the attainment of an absolute purpose.³⁹ The aim of achieving this final harmony can have profound effects on the present.

As Waltz points out, “globalization is not a statement about the present, but a prediction about the future.”⁴⁰ To reach the rational and utopian “end of history”, the predicted culmination of a liberal, globalized world, the nations of the West have taken it upon themselves to actively transform the present. Their goal is to speed up humanity's historical progress towards what many liberals consider its rational end-state. This active promotion of global transformation departs from faith in the idyllic concept that humanity indeed does possess a “universal history” that will eventually result in convergence of global, political, and economic systems which will occur through endogenous national processes. The methods employed by Western nations to transform underdeveloped nations into their own likeness do not constitute a natural, bottom-up process, rather these methods are a top-down, systemic effort to create a world of nation-states characterized by similar political and economic systems.

The process of “development” or “transformation” has occurred largely through disciplinary, carrot-and-stick measures employed by liberal nations and international institutions dominated by liberal powers. Since the end of the Cold War, newly empowered international financial institutions have expanded beyond their traditional realms to assist in structural economic and political development and transformation.⁴¹

³⁹ Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 2.

⁴⁰ Waltz, “Globalization and Governance”, 354.

⁴¹ Joseph Stiglitz notes that the IMF was originally supposed to limit itself to matters of macroeconomics in dealing with a country, to the government's budget deficit, its monetary policy, its inflation, its trade deficit, its borrowing from abroad; and the World Bank was supposed to be in charge of structural issues – what the country's governments spent money on, the country's financial institutions, its labor

The increased power and influence of institutions such as the IMF and World Bank have been enormous. Their overall record, however, is less than stellar. As Joseph Stiglitz summarizes in *Globalization and Its Discontents*:

Today these institutions have become dominant players in the world economy. Not only countries seeking their help but those seeking their “seal of approval” so that they can better access international capital markets must follow their prescriptions, prescriptions which reflect their free market ideologies and theories. The result for many people has been poverty, and for many countries social and political chaos.⁴²

Like totalitarian forms of democracy, neoliberal development policies suspend choice, rights, and freedoms substituting a promised endpoint in which, after normalization, freedoms will be returned. Through rational analysis of history, politics, and economics, neoliberals claim to have discovered “a single sustainable model for national success”⁴³ often referred to as the Washington Consensus. Its core tenets are deregulation, privatization, openness, unrestricted movement of capital, and lower taxes. Presented with special force to developing countries as a formula for economic management, it is also a universal theory of economic, political, and social organization that promises a future characterized by progress. There is, in the neoliberal view, simply no other way to develop and achieve national prosperity. Furthermore, according to neoliberals, history has validated this vision and the Western role in leading the world to its realization.⁴⁴

Michel Foucault's conceptions of punishment, reward, and judgment prove extremely useful in analyzing neoliberal policies of development and the neoliberal interpretation of globalization. The method employed by international financial institutions and Western powers to accelerate global development is one that Foucault

markets, its trade policies.

⁴² Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 18.

⁴³ Michael Finnegan, “Notes on the Washington Consensus” in *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, eds. Robert Art and Robert Jervis (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 382.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

might label “normalizing judgment.”⁴⁵ When neoliberal political and financial institutions determine what nations will be punished, what Foucault might label “a suspension of rights,”⁴⁶ (denied loans, denied foreign aid, and sanctioned) and what nations will be rewarded (granted loans, aid, and trade preferences), there exists an ideal or optimum nation-state in their imaginations. This conception of “the ideal nation-state” is regarded as “normality”. In the neoliberal conception, a normal state is one which exhibits the political, economic, and social characteristics of the developed Western nations. Any deviation from this ideal is viewed as an aberration. States are then set up in a “field of comparison”⁴⁷ which differentiates them from one another and ranks them in hierarchical fashion based on the relative relation of their attributes to the idealized norm. “Abnormal” states are then punished or rewarded based on their recent recession or progress from this abstract ideal. As Foucault points out, the normal “is established as a principle of coercion.”⁴⁸ The “normal” nation-state is a member of a “homogenous social body”⁴⁹, while the abnormal nation-state is an isolated anomaly that must be addressed and corrected. This correction, that is the coerced transformations that must take place for a nation-state to be viewed as normal, are presented as desirable changes that will bring about prosperity. Furthermore, the argument is made that the convergence of economic, political, and social forms of organization will inevitably lead to peace and could even be the foundations for a form of world government.

Furthermore, as Foucault notes, the asymmetric juxtaposition and use of power need not occur at the level of the nation-state or class. With this idea in mind, individuals can be powerful agents in efforts to transform “abnormal” nation-states. For Foucault,

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 177-180.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

power “is exercised rather than possessed; it is not a privilege of the dominant class but the overall effect of strategic positions...these relations go down to the depths of society.”⁵⁰ Hence, for Foucault, the agency of power is not necessarily the nation-state, the dominant class, or a powerful institution, although it can take these forms, but also it can occur at the individual level of analysis. This insight can be applied to globalization's transformation of traditional power relations in international relations. As Thomas Friedman notes in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, globalization has altered the traditional agencies of power. For Friedman, “globalization has its own defining structure of power, which is much more complex than the Cold War structure.”⁵¹ Individuals at one end of the globe now have the ability to exercise influence over nation-states through simply clicking a mouse. According to Friedman, this anonymous and impersonal “electronic herd”, which includes currency traders, securities traders, and hedge fund managers, exercises strict control over the decisions of distant nations. However, as Friedman points out, the “electronic herd is not just made up of stateless offshore money funds, Internet investors from abroad...It is also made up of locals in every country that has opened itself to the herd.”⁵² Thus, average individual investors, both from developed and developing nations, become agents in neoliberal transformations. Led by the rational goal to maximize wealth, these investors “vote” with their pocketbooks. They “buy” and “sell” nations on the basis of their structural similarity to the idealized norm of the nation-state imposed by neoliberal ideology. This mechanism of transformation may seem decentralized and democratic; however, individual investors do not have the apparent freedom that Friedman suggests. Investments in a nation must be based on what international financial institutions, powerful individual and institutional investors, and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

⁵¹ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 13.

⁵² Ibid., 127.

aid-giving nations consider likely candidates for success. Investments by individuals in what dominant neoliberal powers consider protectionist, mercantilist, or ideologically divergent states are not likely to provide a large return.

Hence, when considering the mechanisms by which the neoliberal goals of spreading democracy and capitalism throughout the world are to occur, it is clear that change is not expected to happen endogenously or by means of the “invisible hand”. Rather, exogenous systemic, national, institutional, and individual pressures are to be the mechanisms of change. The admonition that external pressures are necessary to bring about the convergence of political and economic forms constitutes a serious flaw and concession in optimistic liberal ideology. For through adopting policies of active transformation, liberals become pessimists. As Waltz writes:

Their realism lies in rejecting the assumption of automatic progress in history and in the consequent assertion that men must eliminate the causes of war if they are to enjoy peace. This realism involves them in Utopian assumptions that are frightening in their implications. The state that would act on the interventionist theory must set itself up as both judge and executor in the affairs of nations.⁵³

In the global era, interventionist liberals believe that free trade and democracy will lead to peace and prosperity; however, they do not believe that the spread of these systems is inevitable. In order to promote and support their cause, they often adopt aggressive methods. These methods are justified by the claim that “the future” and a “greater good” are at stake. Implied in the notion of this “greater good” is the promise that once liberal forms of political, economic, and social organization are adopted, harmony will follow. Therefore, the suffering of “transitioning” societies is imposed in the name of “the future” and rights and freedoms are denied with the justification that they will be returned once development has occurred.

Perhaps no nation-state has adopted the interventionist liberal perspective as

⁵³ Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 113.

quintessentially as the United States. The goal of transforming other societies for the purpose of creating a future utopia has formed part of the American ethos since the middle of the 19th century. In *Virgin Land: American West as Symbol and Myth*, American Studies scholar Henry Nash Smith highlights the United States leaders' belief that active foreign policy measures were necessary to spread the singular and unique qualities of American life throughout the world. While manifest destiny and American exceptionalism certainly cannot be equated with neoliberalism, these viewpoints do claim to have discovered an optimum way of social organization coupled with an aggressive drive to proliferate. Smith captures this drive in a speech made by Henry T. Gilpen, Martin Van Buren's attorney general:

The untransacted destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent – to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean – to animate the many hundred millions of its people, and to cheer them upward... - to agitate these Herculean masses – to establish a new order in human affairs...- to regenerate superannuated nations - ... to stir up the sleep of a hundred centuries – to teach old nations a new civilization - to confirm the destiny of the human race – to carry the career of mankind to its culminating point – to cause a stagnant people to be reborn – to perfect science – to emblazon history with the conquest of peace – to shred a new and resplendent glory upon mankind – to unite the world in one social family – to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity – to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and to shed blessings round the world!⁵⁴

While the notion of bringing “civilization” to “barbaric” peoples for the purposes of improving the world went out of vogue long ago, the United States' present attempts to spread liberal political and economic forms make similar idealistic promises using similarly aggressive methods. In a December 2005 op-ed in the *Washington Post* entitled “The Promise of Democratic Peace”, Secretary-of-State Condoleeza Rice argues that: “The statecraft that America is called to practice in today's world is ambitious, even revolutionary.”⁵⁵ This revolutionary foreign policy of forcibly imposing liberal systems on other nations is necessary because, through it, Rice claims that “future generations

⁵⁴ Quoted. in Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 37.

⁵⁵ Condoleeza Rice, “The Promise of Democratic Peace,” *The Washington Post*, 11 December 2005: Sec. B, p. 7.

will realize our nation's vision of a fully free, democratic, and peaceful world.”⁵⁶ Therefore, Rice explicitly promises that a future utopia is possible only through revolutionary means in the present. Similarly, in his second inaugural address to the nation, President George W. Bush claimed that actively and aggressively spreading liberal values throughout the world was necessary because it was the only way to achieve the “ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁵⁷ Both leaders believe that actively spreading democracy is an “assurance of lasting peace between states”⁵⁸ and that using power in the present for peace in the future is justified. Democratic peace theory has been widely embraced by policymakers and foreign policy analysts alike, and it has become one of the pillars that guide the United States' foreign policy in the era of globalization.⁵⁹ However, Christopher Layne stresses that since the democratic peace theory “links American security to the nature of other states' internal political systems, democratic peace theory's logic inevitably pushes the United States to adopt an interventionist strategic posture.”⁶⁰ Therefore, while the democratic peace theory stresses the importance of liberal political systems, it impels nations to intervene in each others' domestic political systems.

Thus, while liberalism stresses freedom of the individual from coercion and freedom of the sovereign nation-state from foreign intervention, these principles are rarely upheld in practice by self-proclaimed liberal states. In the age of globalization, the difficulty of reconciling freedom with the idea of achieving an absolute purpose is apparent. Is human freedom compatible within a singular form of social existence, even

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Christopher Layne, “Kant or Can't: The Myth of the Democratic Peace” in *Theories of War and Peace*, eds. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven Milner (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 217.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

if this pattern aims at the maximum of social justice and security? Furthermore, are the promises made by interventionist liberals realizable?

A Pessimistic Response to the Utopian Vision of Globalization

*But judging by reason, and not imagination, do we really think that those to come are likely to be better than our contemporaries?*⁶¹

-Giacomo Leopardi

The liberal conception of globalization views the process as a worldwide extension of the modern project. Liberals and neoliberals alike have concluded that the ultimate goal of any rational society must be to establish a system in which economic liberalism can furnish citizens with the most effective guarantee of economic and political development.⁶² According to this line of thought, once liberal institutions and values have spread throughout the world, the political, economic, and ideological development of human beings will have reached its culmination and the “end of history” will have arrived. This optimistic tradition, however, has been challenged by an opposing discourse that Dienstag has labeled the “pessimistic tradition.”⁶³ If the optimistic notion of globalization carries with it inherent flaws and dangers, what does a pessimistic conception of globalization entail and what advantages does it carry with it? Before attempting to outline a pessimistic notion of globalization, it is necessary to outline some salient features of the pessimistic tradition of thought.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Friedrich Nietzsche asks: “Is pessimism necessarily a sign of decline, decay, weary and weak instincts?”⁶⁴ In response to this query, Nietzsche outlines the parameters of a pessimism that does not correspond to the stereotypical notions of weakness and negativity. Nietzsche writes:

Is there a pessimism of strength? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspects of existence that arises from well-being, overflowing health, from the fullness of

⁶¹ Giacomo Leopardi, “Parini, or Concerning Fame,” in *The Moral Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 127.

⁶² Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 176.

⁶³ Dienstag, “The Pessimistic Spirit”, 71-95.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 18.

existence?...A seductive, striving courage that sees clearly and demands the fearsome as the enemy, the worthy enemy on whom it can test its strength? From whom it wants to learn what it means "to be afraid"?⁶⁵

It is Nietzsche's idea of pessimism as an acceptance of reality and of reality's negative attributes as a fundamental part of human existence that forms the basis of a pessimistic interpretation of globalization. In this sense, pessimism does not constitute an admonition of inexorable failure or the eventual demise of humanity; on the contrary, a "pessimism of strength" encourages a struggle against the evils that arise from humanity's increasing domination over nature. The claim that this struggle likely will never be complete, that humans will consistently face new threats to their very existence, forms the foundation of a pessimistic perspective and is what challenges the notion of social "progress" that forms the foundation of optimistic thought.

The notion of "civilization as progress" that began with the Enlightenment adopts the premises of the rational project and imposes these methods of thought on present-day societies. These premises, which Nietzsche might characterize as "Socratic maxims"⁶⁶, revolve around the beliefs that "virtue is knowledge"⁶⁷ and that "man sins only from ignorance."⁶⁸ Adopting this rational framework, optimists believe that the power of human knowledge will inevitably conquer any social ills that plague mankind. Oddly, rationalists possess a firm faith in the lengths to which the human intellect can penetrate and the problems it can solve. As Nietzsche argues, supporters of the modern project possess an "unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abyss of being."⁶⁹ Thus, for Nietzsche, rational optimism represents the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 95.

“delusion of limitless power.”⁷⁰ It is this delusion of power that leads liberals to believe that a utopia is possible once the rational methods of conceiving it and of achieving it are discovered.

It is also important to note that a pessimistic interpretation of globalization does not equate it with “rejectionism”. Scholte has identified “rejectionism” as any world view that “concludes that any and all forms of transworld connectedness have calamitous consequences.”⁷¹ For these critics, “globality is by its very nature deeply and unacceptably unsafe, unjust, undemocratic, and unsustainable.”⁷² Pessimists do not ignore the process of globalization nor are they attempting to reverse it. As Slavoj Zizek has advised, “we should resist the temptation to endorse a false kind of anti-globalization.”⁷³ Rather than deny that globalization is occurring, attempting to prevent it altogether, view globalization as a disastrous process, or see it as linear progression towards a utopian telos, a pessimistic view of globalization stresses “that history just unfolds, independently of a specified direction.”⁷⁴ Therefore, at each new stage, significant threats and injustices will arise that must be addressed through the non-ideological examination of a broad spectrum of policy options without recourse to a fixed paradigm.

As a starting point, a pessimistic interpretation of globalization stresses, as Anthony Giddens writes, that “history is not on our side, has no teleology, and supplies us with no guarantees.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, pessimists claim that “history cannot be seen as a

⁷⁰ Ibid., 112.

⁷¹ Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 41.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Slavoj Zizek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Zizek* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2004), 155.

⁷⁴ Cioran, *History and Utopia*, 91.

⁷⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 154.

unity, or as reflecting certain unifying principles of organization and transformation.”⁷⁶ Therefore, from a pessimistic perspective, globalization cannot be seen as 'the next stage' in a progressive view of history. The conception that history moves in a linear series of stages, each era an improvement over the previous one, terminating in final harmony, is inherently optimistic and, as has been demonstrated, has been a cause of interventionism, imperialism, and totalitarianism. Optimists often adopt the modern concept of progress and the Panglossian notion that the present era is superior to past eras to justify the present order through false claims about the past. This is why most people tend to view the present era as “the best of all possible worlds” and as far superior to previous ages. As Leopardi writes, “all ages have thought this [superiority to past ages] of themselves, even the most barbarous; and thus my own age thinks.”⁷⁷

There exists a long tradition of political thought that cautions against the arrogance and the dangers of believing that one's nation or one's age is exceptional and that progress is inevitable. For example, in *The Second Discourse* Rousseau argues that humanity's emergence from the state of nature and the consequent development of civilization have only served to make humans unhappy. For Rousseau, civilization has made people slaves to one another “since the bonds of servitude are formed only from the mutual dependence of men and the reciprocal needs that unite them.”⁷⁸ While there is no possible return to the state of nature, thus making Rousseau's insights theoretical at best, the claim that “things are getting better” can not be taken as a given. As Freud cautions in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, it is necessary “not to fall in with the prejudice that civilization is synonymous with perfecting, that it is the road to perfection pre-ordained

⁷⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

⁷⁷ Giacomo Leopardi, “Dialogue of Tristan and a Friend,” in *The Moral Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 221.

⁷⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses Together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages* (New York: Perennial Library, 1986).

for men.”⁷⁹ Similarly, E.M. Cioran laments that “progress is the injustice each generation commits with regard to its predecessor.”⁸⁰

Globalization scholar Martin Wolf falls prey to Cioran's predictions when he claims that “the challenges we face are huge, but they are far less frightening than those of four decades ago when nuclear-armed superpowers confronted each other, more than a quarter of humanity lived under totalitarian political regimes, and Asia was mired in its millennia-old poverty. Things are getting better.”⁸¹ At first glance, Wolf's conception of a globalizing world seems far rosier than the grim bipolarity of the Cold War. A unipolar world governed by a hegemonic policeman is at least one where anarchy is transcended and where profit-maximization rather than war can be the fundamental concern of nation-states. Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, many scholars have argued that major war between nations is unthinkable.⁸² Furthermore, advances in science now allow people in the developed world to live longer and more comfortable lives. However, when taking stock of the globalizing world, it possible to say that “things are better” than in the past?

In response to the optimistic view that each era in history represents an improvement to its preceding stage with globalization being humanity's most recent advancement, pessimists like Waltz reply that optimists “have assumed that progress moves in a straight line, ever upward, whereas in fact each advance in knowledge, each innovation in technique, contains within itself the potentiality of evil as well as of

⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989).

⁸⁰ E.M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, 125.

⁸¹ Martin Wolf, “The Case for Optimism: A Response,” in *Debating Globalization* ed. David Held, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 42.

⁸² Leading representatives of this school include Klaus Knorr, *The Power of Nations* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Richard Ullman, *Securing Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Max Singer and Aron Wildavsky, *The Real World Order* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1993).

good.”⁸³ Scientific and technological innovation is often perceived to be entirely beneficial to humanity. The rationalist promise that human knowledge will conquer all obstacles does not address the possibility that as “man widens his control over nature...the very instruments that promise security from cold and hunger, a lessening of labor and an increase of leisure, enable some men to enslave or destroy others.”⁸⁴ Similarly Schopenhauer cautions that “the production of superfluous things for the wealthy becomes the cause of misery for slaves.”⁸⁵

At first glance, the technological advances made in the past half-century seem to justify the optimists' predictions. While the luxuries and advantages of modernity have not yet proliferated throughout the world, it is only a matter of time, optimists argue, until wealth spreads and thus raises the general standard of living. These advances, coupled with the demise of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of great power competition, have resulted in an optimistic conception of human history and a rosy view of globalization. It is equally possible to argue; however, that the negative consequences of recent scientific innovations pose an existential threat to humanity that is greater than at any time in world history.

Scholars who address the negative aspects of globalization note numerous threats to humanity's future caused by the spread of scientific knowledge and the increased interdependence and interconnectedness of nations and peoples. For example, the increased lifespan which modern medical science has enabled humans to achieve has resulted in a worldwide population boom. Within the next fifty years, the planet's human population will likely exceed 9 billion and global economic output will quintuple.⁸⁶ As a

⁸³ Waltz, *Man, The State, and War*, 21

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parega and Paralipomena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 243.

⁸⁶ Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, “Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases” in

result of these increases, scarcities of renewable energy resources will increase sharply, the total area of high quality agricultural land will drop, water resources will degrade, and significant climate change is likely to occur.⁸⁷ These changes are likely to lead to widespread scarcities of energy, food, and clean water, which will in turn lead to increased competition between nation-states for these resources.⁸⁸ This competition for resources is not likely to be peaceful.⁸⁹ If the world population surge outpaces improvements in agricultural productivity, and industrialization drives up the costs of resources, states will indeed be compelled to compete, through military means, for these scarce resources.⁹⁰

While many modern scholars believe that war has become obsolete due to its unprofitability, recent innovations in military technology including dramatic improvements in the accuracy and range of weaponry, the acuity of reconnaissance and surveillance, the ease of deception and suppression of the enemy's defenses, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and fissile material, have drastically reduced the costs of preparing for and conducting war.⁹¹ These innovations in military technology have eased the restraints, reduced the costs, and increased the effectiveness of the use of force. The attractiveness of war, however, depends not only on the productivity of military capabilities but also on the ends for which they are employed.

While nation-states have benefited from the information revolution, stronger political and economic linkages, and the shrinking importance of geographic distance,

Theories of War and Peace, eds. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven Milner (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 501.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Robert North, "Toward a Framework for the Analysis of Scarcity and Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 21 (1977): 569-591.

⁸⁹ John Orme, "The Utility of Force in a World of Scarcity," in *Theories of War and Peace*, eds. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven Milner (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 544-566.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

criminal and terrorists networks have benefited as well. The spread of communication, information, and weapons technology around the world has made it far easier for small groups, and even individuals, to cause large scale devastation in distant locations. In the present unipolar system, terrorist groups, which use asymmetric warfare strategies to combat nation-states, have arisen to challenge the United States and other leading powers. Since terrorist networks are not nation-states and are not responsible for the welfare of large groups of people, no effective deterrent exists to prevent them from attacking seemingly invincible powers. The spread of nuclear weapons technology throughout the world, especially to states known to support terrorists, has led some scholars and policy-makers to argue that it is only a matter of time until a nuclear device is detonated in a major American city by a terrorist organization.⁹² From this perspective, the bipolar, great power conflict of the Cold War looks like an idyllic era characterized by stability and predictable behavior due to the logic of nuclear deterrence. Although the United States and the former Soviet Union had the ability to annihilate each other during the Cold War, the chances that they would ever resort to nuclear war were slim. On the other hand, the proliferation of nuclear weapons expertise and fissile material around the world has left the United States closer to the brink of a nuclear catastrophe than ever before. With these challenges in mind, it is difficult to say that the present, globalized world represents the “end of history” or a “step forward” from the past.

⁹² For example see nuclear proliferation expert Robert Gallucci's comments in Jack Kelly, “Arms Expert Warns U.S. Cities Face Nuclear Terrorism Threat”, *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, 23 Jan. 1999.

Conclusion

An optimistic, liberal paradigm stressing the end-stage of human political and economic development forms the dominant discourse of globalization. While liberal pundits and scholars, including Thomas Friedman and Francis Fukuyama, acknowledge that the worldwide spread of market capitalism and democracy may cause some “growing pains” they insist that globalization, in all its incarnations, is a desirable process that will help increase the wealth and freedom of people throughout the world. Liberal scholars believe that globalization represents a progressive stage in the course of human history. Whether implicit or explicit, most liberal scholarship in the fields of security studies and development studies revolves around the possibility of a world in which homogenous nation-states, characterized by democratic political systems and free market capitalism, live in harmony and collectively pursue wealth maximization. When all nation-states adopt democracy and capitalism and have successfully overcome the initial hurdles of development, liberals argue that the “end of history”, or the final stage of human political, economic, and social organization will have arrived.

Since liberal scholars believe they have discovered the most efficient and most rational means for organizing human society, their central problem lies in how their model will be implemented in countries that are “lagging behind” so that the “end of history” can arrive. This challenge poses a particular problem for liberals because, in order to arrive at utopia in a timely fashion, developed nation-states must intervene in the internal affairs of the underdeveloped. In the name of a “greater good” liberal states adopt non-liberal, realist methods to bring about their vision. These methods include both direct intervention in the political affairs of other nations as well as the employment of vigorous monitoring and assessment to determine whether punishments or rewards

should be doled out to nations through powerful international financial institutions.

While liberals insist that the changes brought about by the process of globalization will speed up the development of lagging nations and are otherwise largely beneficial, they tend to ignore the negative consequences of globalization, including increased cultural homogeneity and income inequality. They also dismiss the many dangers brought about by advances in science and technology. A pessimistic interpretation of globalization stresses that human history does not have a conclusion and insists that optimistic conceptions of the present and the future through manipulations of the past can result in the dangerous belief that all problems can be overcome through rational means. Pessimists argue that rather than standing on the edge of utopia, humanity is, in fact, facing several imminent challenges to its existence. Population growth, nuclear proliferation, and environmental decay represent unparalleled dangers that must be addressed with a “pessimism of strength” rather than glossed over and dismissed with the optimistic fallacy that increased knowledge will inevitably solve all problems.

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