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IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS AND PEACE

The "standard of civilization" and the
universalizing project

Brett Bowden

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Robert Wright has written that "the more closely we examine the drift of biological evolution and, especially, the drift of human history, the more there seems to be a point to it all." In explaining "the arrow of the history of life, from the primordial soup to the World Wide Web," he argues, "Globalization . . . has been in the cards not just since the invention of the telegraph or the steamship, or even the written word or the wheel, but since the invention of life."¹ This bold claim is reminiscent of Francis Fukuyama's assertion that the end of the cold war marked not just "the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."²

The evolutionary logic that Wright, Fukuyama, and others see as a natural and inevitable turn of events actually reflects a concerted effort to impose a particular ideological rationale to the passage of history. That is to say, certain forces in international politics have a clear-cut vision of the form of international society they hope to see materialize. These architects of international society continue to be informed by a belief in the Enlightenment ideal of progress and humankind's universal linear march toward modernity—a modernity that is both liberal, globalized, and cosmopolitan in appearance. As John Gray argues, "it is not too difficult to discern . . . [a core] project in the central Enlightenment thinkers, and to detect its presence in the new liberals"—the intellectual descendants of Kantianism such as "[John] Rawls and his disciples"—who "unreflectively subscribed to a version of the Enlightenment philosophy of history in which universal

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convergence on a cosmopolitan and rationalist civilization . . . was taken for granted as the *telos* of the species." In essence, the philosophical anthropology of the Enlightenment held that different "cultural identities, along with their constitutive histories, were like streams, whose destiny was to flow irresistibly into the great ocean of universal humanity."³

Underpinning attempts to realize the vision of an interconnected cosmopolitan world order are three interrelated propositions that constitute what Fukuyama calls the "democratic syllogism":⁴ a syllogism that has become the cornerstone of international public policy in the ongoing endeavor to "civilize" international society. Furthermore, one of the primary tools used to shape this liberal cosmopolitan world order is the reinvigoration of a "standard of civilization" in international society.

According to Hedley Bull, a "*society of states* (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions."⁵ With the expansion of Europe from the fifteenth century and the export of the European states system established by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, by the time of the postcolonial twentieth century, international society was increasingly identified as universal in scope.⁶ That is to say that values and norms that are widely thought of as having their roots in the European Enlightenment—such as human rights, democracy, and the efficacy of science and technology—are now thought to be embraced by, or are at least aspirations of, a large majority of humanity.

In referring to the international political arena more generally, Norbert Elias has observed that the pacification of domestic societies—"the relatively peaceful life of large masses of people"—is "in good part based on" the state's monopolization of violence. Adding that "if the reduction of mutual physical danger or increased pacification is considered a decisive criterion for determining the degree of civilization," Elias says humankind can be said "to have reached a higher level of civilization within domestic affairs than on the international plane." According to Elias, at the "[international] level we are living today just as our so-called primitive ancestors did."⁷

The three tenets of the democratic syllogism are widely thought of as capable of remedying this "primitive" condition and bringing about a peaceful cosmopolitan world order in its place. The first proposition of the syllogism is commonly referred to as liberal or democratic peace theory and is supposedly one of the few "nontrivial" assertions political scientists can make regarding the realm of international relations. It holds that liberal democracies tend not go to war with one another and that, therefore, the further liberal democracy spreads throughout the world, the greater will be the reaches of the so-called "zone of peace." The second element of the democratic

syllogism, another thought-to-be "nontrivial" generalization, is the correlation between democracy and economic development: Democracy is said to be the best form of government for promoting economic development; and the best means of maintaining a stable democracy is via sustained economic growth. The final part of the syllogism, often referred to as the "Washington consensus," holds that the best way to "open up" a country and promote growth is through complete integration into international trade and investment regimes. This form of economic "shock treatment" entails measures such as the privatization of state-owned enterprises, floating the currency, and ending subsidies and tariffs.⁸

Despite the credibility of this "consensus" being undermined by the economic turmoil of the late 1990s, key areas like free trade and unrestrained foreign investment remain at the heart of the democratic syllogism: Commerce and economic interdependence have long been seen as essential elements of a peaceful interconnected world. For instance, around the time of Jesus of Nazareth, Philo of Alexandria argued that commerce was an expression of the "natural desire to maintain a social relationship," while the first-century historian Lucius Annaeus Florus claimed, "If you destroy commerce, you sunder the alliance which binds together the human race."⁹ And then there is the more recent testimony of Montesquieu that "commerce is a cure for the most destructive [of] prejudices" and serves to "unite nations."¹⁰

A number of key themes have been revived to assist in driving history "forward" along a path that is thought to be a universal history of human progress. As is the case with fashion, so it is with ideas: What has sometimes long been dormant or out of favor makes a comeback, and not just because some brave, or foolhardy, individual dusts it off and gives it a public airing. Since the end of the cold war—in fact, in no small part because of its end—new life has been breathed into three related ideas that had, by and large, lain dormant, relatively, for some time. The first of these notions to be returned to the center stage of ideas is best identified as the "end of history" thesis: the idea that human history has a purpose, or *telos*—that history is a story of linear progress toward a certain point or end. The second notion to make a comeback is the idea that the world can be divided and classified into societies of varying shades or degrees of civilization. Closely related to this is the increasing number of calls for the enforcement of a renewed "standard of civilization" in international society.

History and the idea of progress

When the Berlin Wall came down, Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis reinvigorated debate over the idea that humanity is constantly progressing toward a certain endpoint. Since the time of Marx and the first of the Communist revolutions, there has been debate over precisely what is humankind's

ultimate form of politico-socio-economic organization. Had Marx and Engels got it right? or was it Adam Smith and his kind who had seen the future? With the fall of the wall signaling the demise of the longest-running Communist experiment, Fukuyama claimed that the debate was over. For many in the West, it was a moment of triumphalism, a knockout victory for capitalist democracy over authoritarian Communism.

For Fukuyama, it signified something more: It was "an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" and marked the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution," the pinnacle of the story of human progress so far as the issue of governing was concerned.¹¹ In making such grandiose declarations, Fukuyama was arguing that the history of humankind is a story of progress in virtually every sense of the word—that there is a point to political, moral, social, and technological evolution. It was not "the occurrence of events, even large and grave events" that had come to an end, but History in the Hegelian/Marxist sense; "history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times." According to Hegel, on Fukuyama's interpretation, this evolutionary process culminated in "the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society," and at the end of the day, at the end of History actually, Hegel had got it right.¹²

Although Fukuyama has since admitted that his thesis has flaws, it is not one he has abandoned, for on the tenth anniversary of his original article he declared: "There is nothing . . . that has occurred in world politics since the summer of 1989 that in any way invalidates the original argument: liberal democracy and markets today remain the only realistic alternatives for any society hoping to be a part of the modern world."¹³

Wright has added his voice to the cause in presenting a similar but broader proposal in his book on social and cultural evolution. Drawing on game theory, he argues that "both organic and human history involve the playing of ever-more-numerous, ever-larger, and ever-more-elaborate non-zero-sum games."¹⁴ The accumulation of these games over millennia have seen humankind tread a predetermined path of progress that could not help but lead to the globalized world in which we live today.

These are basically old ideas given new life by new perspectives or methods of inquiring into history, for some argue that the concept of human progress has been around since classical antiquity.¹⁵ More recently, Condorcet asked the question: "If man can, with almost complete assurance, predict phenomena when he knows their laws, . . . why, then, should it be regarded as a fantastic undertaking to sketch, with some pretence to truth, the future destiny of man on the basis of his history?" Condorcet's belief in the direction of progress is found in his declaration that "our hopes for the future condition of the human race can be subsumed under three important heads: the abolition of inequality between nations, the progress of equality within each nation, and the true perfection of mankind."¹⁶ The means by which

this progress is to be made are those of science and reason, the two pillars of the Enlightenment.

Responding to his student Johann Gottfried Herder,¹⁷ with whom he disagreed, Immanuel Kant outlined a philosophy of history as a story of progress that was not too dissimilar to Condorcet's vision. He wrote:

If one follows the influence of Greek history on the construction of and misconstruction of the Roman state which swallowed up the Greek, then the Roman influence on the barbarians who in turn destroyed it, and so on down to our own times; if one adds episodes from the national histories of other peoples insofar as they are known from the history of the enlightened nations, one will discover a regular progress in the constitution of states on our continent (which will probably give law, eventually, to all others).¹⁸

Kant also suggested that we have the power to influence history's progress toward its ultimate destination. This was reaffirmed in another essay in which he posits: "We desire a fragment of human history and one, indeed, that is drawn not from past but future time, therefore a predictive history." Asking himself, "How can we know . . . a divinatory historical narrative of things imminent in future time, consequently as a possible representation a priori of events which are supposed to happen then. But how is a history a priori possible?" he immediately responds. "Answer: if the diviner himself creates and contrives the events which he announces in advance." For Kant, this was all part of the story of human history. He continues: "It was all very well for the Jewish prophets to prophesy that sooner or later not simply decadence but complete dissolution awaited their state, for they themselves were the authors of this fate. . . . So far as their influence extends, our politicians do precisely the same thing and are just as lucky in their prophecies."¹⁹ And this, I maintain, is an important consideration when contemplating the course of this era's recent past and near-term future.

The end Kant envisaged humanity progressing toward is one that resembles the ideal of "Perpetual Peace" that is so closely associated with his name. According to Kant, the "highest purpose of Nature" is the attainment of "a perfectly just civic constitution,"²⁰ and the "only constitution which derives from the idea of the original compact, and on which all juridical legislation of a people must be based, is the republican."²¹ From which point Kant proposes: "The only question now is: Is it also the one which can lead to perpetual peace?" To which he answers: "The republican constitution, besides the purity of its origin . . . also gives a favorable prospect for the desired consequence, i.e., perpetual peace."²²

Kant believed that the spread of republican government and the extension of trading relations between republican states was the most likely means of securing international peace and "a universal cosmopolitan

condition... wherein all the original capacities of the human race can develop."²³

In reaction to Kant's musings, G. W. F. Hegel was stirred to expound a competing theory. Hegel's philosophy of history is important here for it lays the foundation on which Fukuyama builds his "end of history" thesis. Not unlike Condorcet, Hegel embarked on an investigation of human history firmly believing in the ideal of progress. That, however, is where similarities end, for his investigation led to a rather different destination.

Hegel thought that "the phenomenon we investigate—Universal History—belongs to the realm of the *Spirit*," where "the essence of Spirit is Freedom." Not unlike other proponents of the idea of a universal history of human progress and the "impulse of *perfectibility*," Hegel believed that "the History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom," and that the "final aim [of] God's purpose with the world... is what we here call the Idea of Freedom." However, Hegel's "Idea of Freedom" finds expression in a considerably different form to that of other, particularly liberal, philosophers. For Hegel, "Freedom is nothing but the recognition and adoption of such universal substantial objects as Right and Law, and the production of a reality that is accordant with them—the State."²⁴

To comprehend Hegel's "Idea of Freedom" and its realization in and through the state, it is necessary to have an understanding of his theory of the state, for the two go hand in hand. Hegel makes a clear distinction between the "state as a political entity" and the "state [as] the actuality of the ethical Idea," where the "ethical Idea," or "ethical life," is the "Idea of Freedom." For Hegel, a person is actually free only in that he is a rational, self-determining being with the ability to think and apply his powers of reason. As mere individuals, however, humans are incapable of ever being truly free or fulfilling their rationality without the rational state. It is only in the state that true freedom can be actualized, whereby "right and duty coalesce, and by being in the ethical order a man has rights in so far as he has duties, and duties insofar as he has rights." It is in the state, Hegel argues, that individual interests are realized as they become, "of their own accord," one and the same as the collective interests. That is to say, the ends of those persons who constitute the community are not mutually exclusive, but "consciously aimed at none but the universal end"; that is, an ethical life through the state.²⁵

Despite Fukuyama's use of Hegel, today it is Kant's vision of human social progress that influences and resembles that promoted by contemporary democratic/liberal peace theorists. For example, following Kant and taking into account the rate of the spread of democracy, Michael Doyle estimates that "global peace should be anticipated, at the earliest, in 2113."²⁶ And it is not just liberal international theorists who make such claims. In *An Agenda for Peace*, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the then UN secretary-general,

stressed that "Democracy at all levels is essential to attain peace for a new era of prosperity and justice."²⁷

In the early nineteenth century, the French historian François Guizot asked "whether it is an universal fact, whether there is an universal civilization of the human species, a destiny of humanity; whether the nations have handed down from age to age, something which has never been lost, which must increase, form a larger and larger mass, and thus pass on to the end of time?" To which he immediately replied: "For my own part, I am convinced that there is, in reality, a general destiny of humanity, a transmission of the aggregate of civilization; and, consequently, an universal history of civilization to be written."²⁸

As to whether Guizot, Kant, Fukuyama, and their kind are correct or not is, I suspect, knowable only to an all-seeing deity—although there is nothing to stop mere mortals from finding fault with their arguments or methods. What is known, however—or, at the very least, what there is considerable evidence to suggest—is that the world powers that dominate modern international society are effectively attempting to write such a history. And it is not so much a Hegelian-style History, as Fukuyama would have us believe, but a history that bares far closer resemblance to the Kantian "idea of world history" for an *ius cosmopoliticum*.

The reasons for this are twofold: first, while Hegel's view that "the History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom" might fit with Fukuyama's view of human history, Hegel's "Idea of Freedom" is markedly at odds with that of most thinkers throughout history, especially liberals who base their philosophy on the primacy of the individual, although Fukuyama's reading of Hegel denies this. Second, Kant's "idea of world history" as something that can be constructed, and the destination he sees it heading toward—*ius cosmopoliticum*, or in Fukuyama's case, liberal universalism—is a more appropriate lens through which to view contemporary international society and the nature of its constituent institutions, as envisaged by its most influential architects.

Humanity divided: savages, barbarians, and the civilized

Related to the idea of progress is the notion of a distinction between civilized and uncivilized peoples of the world. Not so long ago, some thought that our world was reasonably neatly divided between "savage," "barbarian," and "civilized" peoples. For instance, in 1877 the lawyer-cum-anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan wrote: "It can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all tribes of mankind, as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization." He further claimed that the "three distinct conditions are connected with each other in a natural as well as necessary sequence of progress."²⁹

The ideas presented by Morgan and others held much appeal beyond their immediate discipline. For instance, Marx and Engels were so impressed by Morgan's conclusions that Engels stated that "Morgan rediscovered in America . . . the materialist conception of history that had been discovered by Marx forty years ago, and in his comparison of barbarism and civilization was led by this conception to the same conclusions, in the main points, as Marx had arrived at."³⁰ Similarly, the distinction between "savages," "barbarians," and the "civilized" was extended to, and found expression in law and legal philosophy. Montesquieu had earlier stated that the "difference between savage peoples and barbarian peoples is that the former are small scattered nations that, for certain, particular reasons, cannot unite, whereas barbarians are ordinarily small nations that can unite. The former," he adds, "are usually hunting peoples; the latter, pastoral peoples."³¹

The influence of anthropology and ethnology is most evident in the work of the nineteenth-century jurist James Lorimer, who stated: "No modern contribution to science seems destined to influence international politics and jurisprudence to so great an extent as that which is known as ethnology, or the science of races." Its appeal led him to conclude: "As a political phenomenon, humanity, in its present condition, divides itself into three concentric zones or spheres—that of civilized humanity, that of barbarous humanity, and that of savage humanity." To which he added, "Even now [1883] the same rights and duties do not belong to savages and civilized men." Like others, he believed that "savages are incapable of municipal organisation beyond its most rudimentary stages; and yet it is by means of municipal organisation that men cease to be savages."

Such beliefs led Lorimer to argue: "Grotius lays it down that a band of robbers is not a State. On this ground the Barbary States were never recognized by European nations; and the conquest of Algeria by France was not regarded as a violation of international law." He went so far as to declare: "To talk of the recognition of Mahometan States as a question of time, is to talk nonsense." Why? Because "in order to be entitled to recognition, a State must . . . possess" both "the will . . . [and] the power to reciprocate the recognition which it demands."³² It is this, the capacity for self-government, that is very much at the center of the debate over the distinction drawn between "civilized" and "uncivilized" societies, both past and present.

The classical "standard of civilization"

A major component of the legal distinction between civilized and uncivilized peoples is what Georg Schwarzenberger termed the "standard of civilisation in international law,"³³ or what Gerrit Gong later called the "the standard of 'civilization' in international society."³⁴ Operating during the European colonial period, the "standard of civilization" was a legal mechanism designed to set the benchmark for the ascent of non-European states to the

ranks of the "civilized" family of nations and, with it, their full recognition under international law. Reflecting the requirement of a capacity for self-government, Schwarzenberger summarizes the legal standard as follows:

The test whether a State was civilised and, thus, entitled to full recognition as an international personality was, as a rule, merely whether its government was sufficiently stable to undertake binding commitments under international law and whether it was able and willing to protect adequately the life, liberty and property of foreigners.³⁵

Naturally, the protection afforded to "foreigners" was limited to citizens of "civilized" states—that is, Europeans.

The legal standard became redundant upon the settlement of World War II: The abrogation of the laws of war as witnessed by the nature of the totalitarian aggression perpetrated by members of the thought-to-be "civilized" world had put paid to maintaining a legal distinction. The principle was further undermined by the use of nuclear weapons and the subsequent evolution of the concept of mutually assured destruction.³⁶

Even prior to World War II, leading jurists recognized that adhering to a standard of civilization was "considered anachronistic and insulting by the growing number of non-European countries which were becoming for both political and legal reasons full International Persons and members of the Family of Nations."³⁷ For example, Hersch Lauterpacht criticized Lorimer, declaring: "Modern international law knows of no distinction, for the purposes of recognition, between civilized and uncivilized States or between States within and outside the international community of civilized States."³⁸ Commenting on this development, Schwarzenberger misses the irony in his statement that "at this point doctrine reaches the other extreme. The standard of civilisation has vanished, and States are supposed to be under a legal duty to recognise even non-civilised States and their governments."³⁹ As this passage suggests, while it might be that the legal standard of civilization was superseded in the annals of international law, that is not to say that something similar did not continue to serve the same purpose in the conduct of international politics. As Martin Wight noted, during the cold war the states system remained "divided still concentrically between the world city and the world rural district." And out of this two-tiered states-system came "one of the unwritten understandings of the cold war . . . that the peace of Europe shall be warily preserved while the struggle is pursued for influence and position throughout the Third World."⁴⁰

The test of modernity: updating the standard

Since Wight made these observations, the collapse of communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union has brought the cold war to an end.

Nevertheless, the notion that there exists a "hierarchy of states" has outlived the cold war and continues to gather adherents. While it is interpreted and described in a range of ways, its "key theme is that disparities in capability are reflected, more or less formally, in the [membership and] decision making of the society of states."⁴¹

In his account of the classical standard of civilization, Gong points to the possibility that "at least two possible successors may have arisen as new standards in contemporary international society." The first is a "standard of non-discrimination or standard of human rights," and the second, a "standard of modernity." Reflecting its predecessor's origins, Gong notes that the "willingness and ability to protect human rights has become a new standard for Europe." Citing the example of Greece's entry into the European Economic Community in 1981, he adds that the European Human Rights Convention is the only convention of its kind empowered to enforce compulsory jurisdiction over its constituents. With its "ability to guarantee human rights," it "still retains something of its old role as shibboleth for those seeking to enter Europe."

Furthermore, with its "supranational conventions and court systems, Europe appears to be setting a standard of transnationalism" in an age that is characterized by strident assertion of national sovereignty. Gong insists that in this respect, despite protestations that they are not mere imitations, "groups like the Association of South East Asian Nations" effectively remain "quasi-European Communities, just as their nineteenth-century predecessors were labelled quasi-sovereign or semi-sovereign states" under the classical standard of civilization.⁴²

The second possible successor, the "standard of modernity," takes two possible forms: one "vindicates the nineteenth-century assumption that the laws of science, being universal, undergirded a rational cosmology which would bring the 'blessings of civilization' to all." Its primary significance is related in terms of the "standard of living" and "quality of life" that can be achieved universally via the application of science and technology to issues of health, nutrition, and general well-being. The other shape it might take is in the guise of a "contemporary cosmopolitan culture" reflecting the "shared values, moral norms, and experiences" given popular expression in terms like "the global village" and "the global city."⁴³

But, like Wight, Gong made these observations in the midst of a world divided by the tensions of the cold war—there was no agreement on universally shared values and norms, let alone experiences. On the contrary, the cold war divide engendered an environment that inhibited the formation of a universal international society based on shared ideological values and norms that some advocated.⁴⁴ Rather, given the opposing camps' desperation to woo allies at virtually any cost and the willingness to bring them into the fold regardless of the nature of the regime, the cold war made for some odd alliances of convenience. But as noted, the end of the cold war was seen by

many in the West as a triumphant turning point that ushered in a "new world order" in which capitalist liberal democracy had defeated all comers. Post-cold war international politics are now conducted in an environment in which the concepts of individual rights, participation in government, and unhindered access to the goods and services available in the marketplace are widely thought to be the universal aspirational norm.

The "triumph of the West," or possibly as significantly, the triumphalism of the now-dominant West, has allowed the West to set the agenda in terms of defining a "standard of civilization" for the twenty-first century. As Mehdi Mozaffari notes, the "role of formulating" and setting the principles that constitute the standard of civilization "is incumbent upon the predominant civilization." Thus, in the present era the "global standard of civilization is therefore defined—primarily—by the dominant Western civilization, which happens to be democratic," liberal, and economically globalized.⁴⁵ In essence, then, it is argued that a variation of the "might equals right," or realist, brand of logic prevails; since it is the West that dominates, it is the West that sets the standard.

Human rights, liberal democracy, and globalization

In large measure because of the more hospitable political environment, Jack Donnelly claims that, despite "still common scepticism towards international human rights... internationally recognized human rights have become very much like a new international 'standard of civilization.'" He goes on to plead that "a standard of civilization is needed to save us from the barbarism of a pristine sovereignty that would consign countless millions of individuals and entire peoples to international neglect."

Donnelly's intent is most clearly expressed in the statement that "human rights represent a progressive late twentieth-century expression of the important idea that international legitimacy and full membership in international society must rest in part on standards of just, humane or civilized behaviour." This is despite his acknowledging that the "language of 'civilization'" carries the "fatal tainting" of "abuses carried out under (and by the exponents) of the classic standard of civilization" and his admission that "internationally recognized human rights share a similar legitimating logic." Arguing that this "fatal tainting" has been overcome by giving "greater emphasis" to the "positive demands of 'civilization,'" the term *civilization* is now said to be imbued with a new and enlightened post-colonial meaning by "shifting attention from the exclusive or particularist, intercultural dimensions... [of the term] to the inclusive and universal." It is presumably with this shift that "European human rights initiatives have been missionary in the best sense of that term, seeking to spread the benefits of (universal) values enjoyed at home"⁴⁶—which one could interpret as implying that it will inevitably require yet more Western intervention in the

"uncivilized" world to save the wretched of the earth from homegrown "barbarism."

Similar sentiments are implied by John Rawls in *The Law of Peoples*, in which he constructs an implicit standard of civilization in endeavoring to outline a legal template governing interactions between what he calls "liberal" and "hierarchical" societies. The spheres of the Rawlsian world are not explicitly labeled civilized or uncivilized; rather, it is divided into a hierarchy of five distinct groups within two subsets, the "well-ordered peoples" and the "not well-ordered."

In using the term *well-ordered*, Rawls is following Jean Bodin, who set the parameters of what constitutes a "well ordered Commonweale." Bodin argued that a "wise and well ordered . . . Commonweale ought to be a lawfull or rightful government: for that name of a Commonweale is holy, as also to put a difference betwixt the same, and the great assemblies of robbers and pirates, with whome we ought not to have any part, commercement, societie, or alliance, but utter enmitie."⁴⁷ Within the "well-ordered" peoples are what Rawls calls "reasonable liberal peoples"—that is, liberal, democratic societies and "decent peoples," or what he refers to as "decent constitutional hierarch[ies]." Similar to Bodin, within the subset of "not well-ordered peoples" are "outlaw states," "societies burdened by unfavorable conditions," and "benevolent absolutisms," who, despite their recognizing human rights, are not deemed "well-ordered" because their members play no "meaningful role" in political decision making.⁴⁸

In speaking of a "Law of Peoples," Rawls is referring to "a particular political conception of right and justice that applies to the principles and norms of international law and practice." Arising out of its application is a "Society of Peoples," which approximates to Bull's definition of "international society" in that it encompasses "those peoples who follow the ideals of and principles of the Law of Peoples in their mutual relations." Rawls argues that the "Law of Peoples" regulating interactions within the "Society" is so right and just that the "Law of Peoples fulfills certain conditions, which justify calling the Society of Peoples a realistic utopia." But it is only the "well-ordered" who are admitted into this "realistic utopia" since they are the only peoples truly "worthy of membership in a Society of Peoples."⁴⁹ Presumably, the "not well-ordered"—which constitutes the majority of the world's population—are barred from membership in international society and are relegated to the chaotic realms of an all-too-realistic dystopia.

The jurist Thomas Franck's proposed conditions for membership in international society are even more exclusive: to qualify, states must have some form of democratic government. Moreover, Franck makes the explicit link between the role of a standard of civilization and the democratic syllogism. Following Kant, who is said to have "discerned a three-way link between democracy, peace, and human rights," Franck maintains "that compliance

with the norms prohibiting war-making is inextricably linked to observance of human rights and the democratic entitlement." He continues:

The democratic entitlement is welcomed from Malagache to Mongolia, in the streets, the universities, and the legislatures, not only for its promise of a new global political culture . . . but also because it opens up the stagnant politics, economies, and culture of states to development.⁵⁰

Franck further argues that "the right of each state to be represented in international organs, and to share in the benefits of international fiscal, trade, development, and security regimes should be dependent upon its government satisfying the system's standard for democratic validation." He is even prepared to consider "limit[ing] collective security measures to cases of attack against democratic states." Franck asks, "Would it help Kuwait to establish democratic internal order if its future protection by UN-authorized collective measures depended upon such a transformation?" and, while he acknowledges that it "is a change in the system's rules which is unlikely to come about in the near future" he thinks "it is worth contemplating."⁵¹

Taking the case for a reinvigorated standard of civilization yet further, David Fidler promotes what he calls a "standard of liberal, globalized civilization."⁵² This standard comes about by parallel or concurrent "standards of civilization and globalization." While the "historical contexts" of the classical standard and the new standard of globalization might be "dramatically different," he says, "the substance of the two standards is not." Just as the classical "standard of civilization required the creation and maintenance of certain conditions that would allow Westerners to conduct commerce and trade safely and effectively in non-Western countries," so does the standard of globalization. For the "standards of civilization and globalization share the central objective of improving the conditions of economic interaction between the West and the rest." Like Gong and Donnelly, Fidler sees the classical standard and the standard of globalization as sharing the same origins, the former reflecting the norms of European civilization of an earlier era, the latter reflecting "the norms of the same civilization now expanded beyond the confines of Europe and North America."⁵³

Mozaffari has a similar line of argument in his claim that "the rise of a 'global standard of civilization' reflects the transformation of the world" that is currently taking place as part of the "ongoing process of globalization."⁵⁴ While acknowledging that not all "countries 'share the same ideas and values' nor 'have similar approaches to human rights, democracy and liberalism,'" he insists that "it is undeniable that the gap between different world visions is now as narrow as it has ever been historically." Given this, he concludes that the "two pillars of our current mega-civilization remain unchallenged, . . . adherence to liberalism and capitalism . . . are on

the increase." In short, he asserts that "globalization has considerably reduced the differences between various world visions."⁵⁵ In offering this interpretation, Mozaffari overlooks that the range of ideological positions, or competing world visions, are not necessarily coming together; rather, it is the case that one pole remains firmly planted while others are drawn or coaxed toward it. This drawing together represents for Mozaffari a historical point of rupture that denotes a "shift from a world with multiple civilizations to a single global civilization."⁵⁶

When to be modern is to be postmodern

Some of the consequences of a standard of civilization are revealed when looking into Robert Cooper's claim that "we live now in a divided world." Delineating three distinct spheres in the current era, the first is what Cooper calls the "pre-modern world"; it is a world of failed or failing states trapped in the mire of a "post-imperial chaos."

The collapsing states of the "pre-modern world" no longer conform to Weber's criteria of exercising a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and what remains of the apparatus of state is ineffective or corrupt.⁵⁷ The second sphere is what Cooper describes as the "modern world"; it is "modern" not because it is new—it is in fact very old-fashioned—but because it is linked to that great engine of modernisation, the Nation State." In the "modern world," the "classical state system remains intact"; states continue to exercise a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and they remain prepared and willing to deploy that force. If there is any semblance of order within the "modern world," it is either because of balance-of-power arrangements or the presence of a hegemon concerned with preserving the status quo. International relations within this world are conducted in accordance with "the calculus of interests and forces described by Machiavelli and by Clausewitz."⁵⁸

The final component of Cooper's "international system" is its "post-modern element," where the states of the European Union represent the archetype. As with the chaotic "pre-modern world," here, too, "the state system of the modern world is also collapsing; but unlike the pre-modern it is collapsing into greater order [and interdependence] than into disorder." In the "post-modern world," the "legitimate monopoly on force, which is the essence of statehood, is . . . subject to international—but self-imposed—constraints."⁵⁹

Cooper's division of the world into three coexistent spheres is a comparable configuration to the classical standard of civilization that regulated the conduct of affairs between "savage," "barbarian," and "civilized" societies. His most explicit pointer to such comes in highlighting the "need" for "post-modern state[s] . . . to get used to the idea of double standards" when dealing with the "pre-modern" and "modern" worlds. In relations among themselves,

"post-modern" states can afford to "operate on the basis of laws and open co-operative security," but when dealing with "pre-modern" and "modern" states they "need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era—force, preemptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary for those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself."

Cooper's final piece of "advice for post-modern states" in this divided world is: "Those who have friendly, law-abiding neighbours should not forget that in other parts of the world the law of the jungle reigns. Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we also must use the laws of the jungle."⁶⁰ This final point about resorting to the notion that almost anything goes, or whatever states can get away with at least, is hardly an exhibition of leading by example. Yet Cooper suggests that despite Europe's military power having declined relative to its earlier exalted status, the "power of example remains. Perhaps that is the post-modern equivalent of imperialism."⁶¹

Conflating human rights, liberal democracy, and modernity

As noted, Gong's two possible successors to the classical standard of civilization are a "standard of human rights" and a "standard of modernity." Modernity is widely regarded as the world in which Westerners of capitalist liberal democracies live, while the rest of the world—much of the former Communist bloc and the Third World—is thought of as somehow being "backward," or "pre-modern." From this viewpoint, modernization, or modernity, is achieved through development.

This was clearly expressed in an account given by Joseph Stiglitz when he was the World Bank's senior vice president and chief economist of what it means to be developed. He stated:

Development represents a transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations, traditional ways of thinking, traditional ways of dealing with health and education, traditional methods of production, to more "modern" ways. For instance, a characteristic of traditional societies is the acceptance of the world as it is; the modern perspective recognizes change, it recognizes that we, as individuals and societies, can take actions that, for instance, reduce infant mortality, extend lifespans, and increase productivity. Key to these changes is the movement to "scientific" ways of thinking, identifying critical variables that affect outcomes, attempting to make inferences based on available data, recognizing what we know and what we do not know.⁶²

Or as Richard Norgaard skeptically notes: "Modernity, in short, promised to transform the heretofore slow and precarious course of human progress

onto a fast track. . . . At mid-twentieth century, progress somehow still assured peace, equality, and happiness for all."⁶³

Bearing Stiglitz's definition in mind, there is evidence that the emerging standard of civilization and the direction in which its proponents are taking it will see Gong's two alternatives become conflated. At the least, there is a belief in some quarters that in the march of progress, human rights, democracy, and Western-style modernity (or development) are so interdependent that they cannot be separated.⁶⁴ Such a belief underpins Franck's "link between democracy, peace, and human rights," from which basis he claims "the democratic entitlement . . . opens up the stagnant politics, economies, and culture of states to development."⁶⁵

In essence, this line of argument contends that the observation of human rights and arrival at modernity via economic development—which means full membership in international society—are all achieved via the medium of democratic government. An integral part of this process is, naturally, full integration into international financial and trading regimes. All of which are in turn thought to enhance the likelihood of world peace via the expansion of the pacific federation of democracies. The role of the democratic syllogism is evident in Fukuyama's conflation of human rights, democracy, and modernity, which are in turn linked to the idea of progress and his vision of how a universal history of humankind might look: that is, a pacific federation of democracies bound together in "positive-sum relationship[s]" by the ties of "trade and exchange."⁶⁶ It is a vision shared by the architects of international society and as such has become a cornerstone of international public policy—seen most vividly in the World Bank and IMF's rhetoric on "good governance."

Influenced by Wright's game-theoretical approach to evolution, Fukuyama argues, "Globalization—a world order in which mankind's largest in-groups no longer violently compete with one another for dominance but trade peaceably—can be seen as the logical culmination of a long-term series of decisions in favor of positive-sum competition." He asks himself. "Does this then mean that capitalist liberal democracy of the sort practiced in the United States is an ideal political system because it is optimally consistent with our underlying [human] natures?" Recognizing that the answer is "nuanced and complex," Fukuyama nevertheless responds that "most Americans are willing to give up a more natural kind of face-to-face community . . . surrounded primarily by kin and close friends, for the more diverse, wealthy, entertaining, technological and necessarily impersonal world that constitutes modern urban life." In effect, he argues that Americans are prepared to forgo what might be called a "spiritual" life for a "material" one. Fukuyama then makes the undertheorized presumptive assertion that "so is virtually everyone else in the world." "But the important point is," he writes, "so is virtually everyone else in the world, because ultimately they are human beings with very similar sorts of underlying preferences."

From these baseless assumptions on the intricacies of human nature, Fukuyama claims:

Human rights as understood in contemporary liberal democracies, then, comes as part of a larger package. These rights express the moral aspirations and priorities of modern societies, that is, of societies based on the systematic employment of science and technology for the satisfaction of human needs. To seek to export only the human rights part of that package to societies that are either traditional, non-democratic or otherwise based on contrary political principles can often be counterproductive and, if the country in question is powerful, dangerous as well. Human rights can be said to be universal only in a developmental sense: they become explicit aspirations primarily of societies that are both economically and politically developed.⁶⁷

Setting aside the issue of human nature, the assertion that one can expect to have basic human rights like the right to life, liberty, and freedom from torture or degrading punishment observed only once a society progresses to the point of economic and political modernity is a highly contentious one. Its advocates are still to provide a convincing case as to why the observation of general principles of human rights are incompatible with societies that do not resemble or conform to the Western model. Equally, a society that chooses not to opt for the peculiarities associated with science and technology and the material world need not be labeled "backward," as something to be looked down upon; to be "traditional" may simply be to be different. But more is the point, Samuel Huntington is essentially right in asserting that modernization and economic development in the non-Western world need not also demand cultural Westernization at the expense of local cultures.⁶⁸

Uniform, not universal

The rationale behind calls for a new "standard of civilization" is not so different from the logic and language underpinning the classical standard, as Schwarzenberger noted:

Once civilisation is related to the basic types of human association, it is no longer necessary to be content with the mere enumeration and description of a bewildering number of civilisations. It is then possible to evaluate and to measure individual civilisations in the light of a universally applicable test of the degree of civilisation which any such particular endeavour has attained. This criterion gives the key to understanding whether, and to what extent, democratic States

may claim to be more civilised than totalitarian or authoritarian systems.⁶⁹

Nearly fifty years on from Schwarzenberger, modern adherents of a standard of civilization go beyond some modicum of democracy in governance as the measure of civilization. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, for a state to be considered a full-fledged member of international society it must commit itself to human rights and the rule of law, democracy in governance, free-market economics open to international trade and foreign investment, and the efficacy of science and technology. If in the process of becoming globalized and liberalized a state conforms to these principles, then it is deemed to have arrived at that exalted condition—modernity, or, more accurately, Western modernity. But in reality, many non-Western states are said to have “failed the modernity test,” rendering them “uncivilized” by comparison to the “civilized” liberal states of the West.⁷⁰ Moreover, for some, the only hope they have of reaching modernity is “with a proper teacher—the West.”⁷¹

It is difficult to deny that there are parallels between the present and the past in terms of a division of the world into civilized and uncivilized spheres. For it is apparent that many contemporary Western theorists, commentators, and political practitioners continue to hold to a division of the world into different shades of civilization. As with the classical standard, the current measure of civilization revolves around the capacity of non-Western states to govern themselves in such a manner that they can engage with the West on terms of its making. As Benedict Kingsbury notes, “Emerging liberal thinking about the international legal order argues increasingly that it is possible to divide the world into zones, with a liberal zone of law, constituted by liberal states practising a higher degree of legal civilization, to which other states will be admitted only when they meet the requisite standard.”⁷² For some, the identification of different levels of civilization describes nothing more than existing political realities, but on another level there is a normative side to the story that promotes the West as the gatekeeper of liberal international order.

The theory of different shades of civilization necessitates “differential treatment where the boundaries of the liberal zone are crossed, conferring privileges based on membership in the liberal zone, and setting high barriers to entry,”⁷³ as seen in Cooper’s endorsement of double standards. The “new standard of civilization is defended normatively as the means to promote the advancement of the backward,” the very same justification behind the civilizing missions of the colonial era. Moreover, it is not obvious why human progress and well-being is best advanced by the artificial construction of “us” and “them.” The consequence of such constructions “seems likely to be the maintenance of a classificatory system which is itself both an explanation and a justification for those at the margins remaining there for

generations”⁷⁴—as seen in the fact that the classification of which types of societies are deemed “civilized” or not has barely progressed since Lorimer’s declarations of more than a century ago.

There are further consequences that proponents of a division of the world into different spheres of civilization leave unacknowledged. Just as the classical standard of civilization led to the civilizing missions that became colonialism, so, too, there are serious implications in the present era for how the “uncivilized” world is intervened in by the “civilized” world, be it in the form of humanitarian intervention, preemptive/preventative war, or under the guise of development assistance.

Claims such as Fukuyama’s that the U.S. way of life is universally accordant with human nature and aspired to by all or Mozaffari’s insistence that we are on the verge of a “single global civilization” are seriously flawed. As Huntington rightly argues, the “very notion that there could be a ‘universal civilization’ is a Western idea” that is “misguided, arrogant, false, and dangerous.”⁷⁵ If there is anything to these claims, it is not that the late twentieth century has witnessed the coming together of a *universal* civilization; rather, it is that the application of a standard of civilization based on Western values serves to engender a *uniform* civilization and/or international society. Using the democratic syllogism as a template and the standard of civilization as an engineering tool, the architects of international society are effectively writing Guizot’s universal history of human civilization.

But this supposedly peaceful cosmopolitan world order is not the benign system its advocates would have us believe. As Anthony Pagden highlights, “cosmopolitanism is a distinctively European concept” inextricably linked “with the history of European universalism.” Its history runs a “torturous course” through the “construction of . . . European overseas empires,” and “it is hard to see how cosmopolitanism can be entirely separated from some kind of ‘civilizing’ mission.”⁷⁶

Despite claims to the contrary, throughout its history cosmopolitanism has fallen well short of “extending a benign cultural relativity to all possible peoples.” For instance, “In calling upon all men to belong to a common *deme* or polis, Zeno was also, of course, making all men members of the *deme* or polis to which *he* belonged.”⁷⁷ Just as today, to belong to cosmopolitan civilized international society means conforming to an international society that continues to fly the colors of its Western origins.

Pagden argues that contemporary institutions of global governance, “in their quest for a new idiom with which to characterize the new international relations . . . have sought to create a fully cosmopolitan idiom.” “It is one,” he adds,

which, like Kant’s *ius cosmopoliticum*, is suitably flexible about the possible constitutional limits which can be placed upon any particular political system, but it is equally insistent that it can only be

achieved within one social and political form of association. For most earlier European theorists of empire, that had been the European Christian monarchical order; for Kant it was republicanism; for the United Nations and in the rhetoric (if not the policy) of the international monetary agencies it is clearly liberal—or neoliberal—democracy.⁷⁸

As argued, “it remains the case that membership of the global community demands the acceptance of a set of values which those who hold them assume them to be, much as Kant did, not the creation of a specific culture, but the expression of a universal human condition.”⁷⁹

Furthermore, in line with its Enlightenment origins, “cosmopolitanism . . . preserves the idea of a single human destiny, a *telos* for all [hu]mankind and the conception of the future—and ineluctable—emergence of a single human culture”⁸⁰—a scenario that marks not the rise of a universal culture, or universal civilization, but the death of culture.

The danger of the very idea of a “realistic utopia” and the implications it holds for those peoples who do not measure up to the norm are noted by Gertrude Himmelfarb:

The ideal of a utopia not only belittles any kind of progress that can be achieved short of utopia, making anything short of perfection seem radically evil, but the pursuit of that idea—whether absolute reason, absolute liberty, absolute virtue, or any combination of these—makes it all too easy to justify the use of absolute power.⁸¹

The violence committed against “uncivilized” peoples in the name of “civilizing missions” in the past five hundred-plus years is evidence enough of this danger. As a key tool in the pursuit of this enterprise, the principle of a standard of civilization is implicated in the universalizing project, and as a critical concept in international law it is neither neutral nor abstract; rather, it “is mired in this history of subordinating and extinguishing alien cultures.”⁸²

As history forewarns, the division of our world into varying shades of civilization and the concomitant enforcement of a standard of civilization has potentially dire consequences for the “uncivilized.” While there is some need to distinguish between states on the basis of legitimacy, which is essentially the objective of Rawls’s “law of peoples” and like projects, this particular endeavor comes at a (generally unacknowledged) cost. For distinctions based on civilization are implicated, by one means or another, in the diminishing of cultural pluralism. That is, such distinctions lead to (1) the self-fulfilling prophecy of the violent “clash of civilizations” thesis,⁸³ resulting in one extinguishing the other(s), or (2) a world in which there is a more stealthy homogenization of culture to the point at which Western liberal values represent *the* global culture.

On a similar note, it is widely held that Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis (and the associated notion of universal civilization) and Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis are competing views of the future state of international politics. On the contrary, in effect they are two sides of the same coin: The pursuit of the former through the West’s strict enforcement of a standard of civilization almost inevitably risks leading to the latter.

But these are not the only available options or conceivable outcomes. Basic human rights, a decent standard of living, and a just system of government are achievable in societies that are something other than replicas of the West. There need not be an arbitrary distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized” societies, the former looking down upon the latter with an unjustifiable sense of superiority closely accompanied by a missionary zeal. The “realistic utopia” of a Huxleyesque *Brave New World* is not the answer. People will revolt not only against totalitarianism, but against any universalizing system, be it well-meaning and seemingly benign or otherwise.

Notes

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- 9 Quoted in Anthony Pagden, “Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Legacy of European Imperialism,” *Constellations* 7, no. 1 (2000): 8.
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- 20 Kant, note 18, p. 16.
- 21 Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," in Beck, note 18, pp. 93–94. Kant makes the point "not to confuse the republican constitution with the democratic (as is commonly done) . . . democracy is, properly speaking, necessarily a despotism" (pp. 95–96).
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