

Empire and International Order: Should There be States?

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What should our future be like? Can the world order be organized along the lines of an international society, or will it dissolve into anarchy? Before attempting to answer such a big question, let us first inquire whether in the future there should be states.

The phrase “transnational progressivism” was coined in 2001 by John Fonte to describe a post-modernist ideology that is a new challenge to the world order based on a system of states and to liberal democracy in particular. The transnationalists argue that in the era of globalization, the transnational connection between non-state actors increase and make obsolete the traditional paradigm of governance based on the nation-state. Perhaps there is no more sophisticated theoretical expression of this ideology, which I prefer to call “global progressivism,” than *Empire* of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.¹ The authors do not hide their ideological preferences and compare their book to Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*. However, in intellectual complexity they exceed their old master. They display a comprehensive knowledge of the Western philosophical tradition and use it to deconstruct the intellectual scaffolding that supports the modern political theory of the West. They advocate political arrangements that can be described as post-modern, post-democratic, post-liberal, and even post-human.

Rich in metaphor, the writing of Hardt and Negri is a proof that nowadays IR theory can be not only scientific or philosophical, but also poetic. Nevertheless, since a theory has to be evaluated in rational terms, I will apply the principle of charity and present their argument as clearly and as strong as I can. To present their work I will use a series of images, and then I will examine the ideology of global progressivism which will thus be unveiled.

The first image is globalization. One can say that we do indeed live today in a complex, interactive and interconnected world—a world which can be characterized by some trends.

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

- The first is the globalization of finance and production. One can witness the development of a global economic system that stretches beyond the control of any individual state.

- The second trend is the rise of global issues such as global warming, proliferation of nuclear weapons, or distribution of resources that are beyond solution by any particular country. The result is the growing regional and global interconnectedness among states.

- The third trend is the awakening of a global moral consciousness. Increasing literacy, the influence of television and other mass media, and the growing popularity of the internet, in other words the influence of all that which Hardt and Negri describe as the "horizon of language and communication," have brought humanity closer together and this feeling of solidarity has created a universal demand for social and political justice.

For many of us this picture of globalization can look quite persuasive. However, what can be questioned is its interpretation. First, for Hardt and Negri, globalization is linked to a phenomenon which can be called the "decline of the sovereign nation-states".² There is a shift which leads from a purely state-centered international system to a new form of global governance. While the idea of global governance can be accepted by scholars who represent different theoretical perspectives, what is peculiar to Hardt and Negri is that they relate the new form of global governance with their concept of Empire, which is the second image.

Let us now consider the issue of global governance. We can of course imagine that in the interconnected and increasingly complex world in which we live today there can be institutions that encourage global cooperation and provide global leadership. Such institution could be, for example, the United States, which in Ian Clark's vision could be turned into a legitimate hegemonic power. Another such an institution could be the United Nations, if it is turned into an efficient international organization.

However, for Hardt and Negri, both the United States and the United Nations are political entities that are based on the idea of modern sovereignty and hence are no longer relevant for post-modern living conditions. They do not fit into their poetic-ideological vision which not only recognizes but also celebrates the decline of the nation-state and aims at its final deconstruction. In their view, the United Nations is an organization which, on the one hand, by the limitation of the exercise of national sovereignty of its members, contributes to the decline of the sovereign nation-state, and on the other hand, is a source of juridical norms that are effective on a global scale. Thus, they consider the work of the UN merely as a transitory step in the process that ultimately leads to the establishment of a new global order. A similar role is ascribed to the United States.

One can argue that in recent years the United States, as a result of the war in Iraq and other foreign policy mistakes, suffered a considerable loss of its soft

² Ibid., p. 13.

power.³ By engaging in a unilateral military action, it lost credibility as a member of international society and as a moral authority. Hardt and Negri, who published their book in 2000, did not anticipate that loss. For them the United States is the unquestionable world leader. It enjoys not only the role of primacy as a result of its commanding the greatest military and economic power, but also the role of hegemony, for it attracts other countries by its policies and norms.⁴ It is guided by its benevolent mission to defend the international community against rogue states, to maintain peace, and to promote political stability, commerce, and economic and cultural exchange on a global scale.

Nevertheless, for Hardt and Negri, hegemony does not merely serve the purpose of making international society stronger and more capable of addressing some urgent world problems. Hegemony is for them a necessary condition for the construction of a global Empire. At this point they depart for a classical political theory for which, as we can for example learn from Cicero, empire represents a decline from hegemony, which is considered a superior political order. Hegemony allows for liberty, whereas empire implies a total control, and in the vision of Hardt and Negri this imperial control reaches a degree unknown before.

What is the Empire? Although to explain this concept Hardt and Negri use historical examples, especially from ancient Rome, their Empire cannot be associated with any historical formation. It cannot be identified with any actual state, including the United States, even if, as they say “the United States does indeed occupy a privileged position in Empire”.⁵ Modern national-states have territories and their power is limited. But the Empire, a post-modern political entity, has no fixed boundaries, no territorial center of power, and its rule has no limits. Hence, the Empire can be best described as a metaphor for a specific form of global governance, namely, for the ever expanding system of control that “progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open expanding frontiers”.⁶

The Empire, which ultimately serves world capitalism and for which the United States provides leadership, is a post-modern creation. It cannot be associated with any particular country, but rather presupposes a global network.⁷ Lacking a tangible reality, it can perhaps be fully grasped only in a poetic vision. The Empire “is formed not on a basis of force itself but on the basis of the ca-

³ Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of country's military and economic might; soft power, the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce, arises from the country's policies, political ideas, and culture. See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., ‘US Power and Strategy after Iraq’, *Foreign Affairs* (Vol.82, No.4, 2003), p. 66.

⁴ To clarify this term, I use “hegemony” to describe the domination of a single predominant state over others—a domination that is guided by its benevolent mission to defend the international order against rogue states, to maintain peace, and to promote commerce, economic stability, and cultural exchange on a global scale. This domination is not selfless. The exercise of hegemony involves actions that the hegemonic power undertakes in pursuit of its own national self-interest, but which also provide benefits, such as order and security, for other nations.

⁵ Hard and Negri., *Empire*, op.cit. in note 1, p. XIV.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. XII.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace".⁸ It is constructed on the basis of power and norms. These norms, whose sources could for example be NGO's and international organizations, enforced by the hegemonic leader or supranational bodies, such as the EU, either directly or indirectly "penetrate and reconfigure the domestic law of nation-states."⁹ They are omnipresent and interpenetrating. As a matter of fact, Hardt and Negri claim, we are all affected by the "imperial" ethical, political, and juridical categories. They not only weaken the sovereignty of individual nation-states, but have a totalizing effect on individuals.

Since there are capitalist productive forces behind the imperial throne, human beings affected by them are made into producers and consumers, or as Hardt and Negri more forcefully state, they are degraded into hybrids: human machines. Their identities, personal needs, social relations, in short, bodies and minds, are changed. Under the Empire, humankind, manipulated by consumer trends and divided by enormous differences in wealth, is no longer fully human. In this sense humanity becomes post-humanity. But Hardt and Negri do not oppose the Empire and the processes of globalization by which the Empire is sustained and which it in turn sustains. For in progressive globalization, which can be associated with such phenomena as the decline of nation-state, the development of universal juridical norms, and the rise of transnational relations, they see a possibility of human liberation.

Beyond all barriers. For the post-modernist, critical thinkers such as Hardt and Negri, human beings are liberated if they go beyond all social barriers. The walls of social class, race, and gender, if not fully destroyed, have been largely overcome. There are perhaps still more subtle barriers created by differences in language, education, culture, and religion, but what remains most striking are national boundaries. The internet and mass communication have helped to cross them. However, these boundaries appear to be the most formidable obstacles to the removal of exclusion and to a full human unification. Should there then be boundaries and states that maintain them?

The answer which Hardt and Negri provide is that we should get rid of them. They declare that everyone deserves to receive global citizenship, and they add to it a guaranteed income, as well as the means of production and communication.¹⁰ Further, although they cannot tell how exactly this fundamental social and political change which they envision would occur, they point in the direction of progressive globalization. The Empire that sustains the present stage of globalization and its social and economic inequalities cannot be the final end of history. It has seeds of decline within itself. It has to fall. It will eventually be replaced by a novel form of global governance, the "earthly city of the multitude" of which Hardt and Negri have only a deem image, but which, as they say, is created by cooperation and labor.¹¹

⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 400-406.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 396.

How should we then approach this conclusion of Hardt and Negri? Should there be indeed no states in the future? Certainly the future earthly city, cooperatively organized, from which private property will be removed, would still have to be a state of some sort. Even if its population will be subjected to an extensive program of self-imposed indoctrination that will produce a new human being, it is rather unlikely that it can function without some security forces and without courts. Our initial question should then be reformulated. Rather than asking whether in the future there should be states, we should rather ask whether the state system is to be replaced by a world state. In order to answer this question I will now turn to Alexander Wendt's article "Why a World State is Inevitable."

Starting from a different theoretical perspective, Wendt thinks that the state system is about to end. Employing the teleological model of explanation and the Hegelian concept of the struggle for recognition which takes place among individuals and groups, he argues that "the struggle for recognition among states undermines their self-sufficiency and makes a world state inevitable".¹² He compares the state system to a plant which grows to its end-state and associates this end-state with a world state. However, when he admits that a world state contains within itself sources of instability and does not need to survive for ever, he subjects his own argument to doubt. He suggests that the struggle for recognition, which is an open-ended struggle involving individuals, groups and communities, will not cease within the structure of a world state. Such a state will then be unable to solve the fundamental problem of human conflict and violence. It can indeed employ social engineering and powerful means of coercion. But, as Wendt himself notices, such means have not prevented previous empires, such as Soviet Union, from breaking down, and making those individuals who devoted their life energies to building them into members of so-called "lost generations."

The ideology of global progressivism aims at the removal of the state and at the establishment of a new form of community and governance, but the state persistently bumps back, if not in the form of a nation-state than at least in the form of a world state. There is, however, no reason to believe, I claim, that the world state will perform its function any better than the state system which is prudently organized on the model of international society. It will certainly not solve the problem of human violence.

In order to implement their vision of human liberation from the alleged oppression, Hardt and Negri are prepared to sacrifice almost everything that can be related to the word "human." Their final project, the earthly city, is a place without God. It is constructed solely on what they call the domain of immanence. The death of God, which is a part of the program of the total control of minds and bodies, they say, is prepared by the advancement of modernity. They bring the idea of total control to its logical conclusion, when it is turned into the self-control of the multitude. To put it more clearly, in the earthly city, the multitude, that is, we are in total control of us. As a result, at last we become all

¹² Alexander Wendt, 'Why a World State is Inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations* (Vol.9, No.4, 2003), p. 494.

alike. There are no longer differences in language, education, culture, and religion. All those elements that potentially distinguish human beings disappear and thus we reach a historical stage where indeed there is no longer any exclusion or oppression. But this vision, although it seems to be logical, is false. Like many other thinkers who belong to the post-Marxist tradition, Hardt and Negri, guided by their ideological light, overlook something that can be called the other, suppressed side of the human beings—the side that can be considered as dark but which in fact is not so dark at all but quite familiar to us. This dark side consists of human passions, and in particular, it is the desire for recognition of which the simplest expression is human ambition.

Hardt and Negri, like many other modern and post-modern thinkers, believe that a common identity can easily be imposed or self-imposed; and that under the sway of identity construction we can suddenly become all proletarians or all Europeans. But there is no proof of this whatsoever. Examples such as the former Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia can show that artificially imposed identities can easily break down, and what follows is a more or less violent struggle for ethnic or national recognition. Only those identities, which I would call natural and which are a result of the play of human passions, and particularly of our natural desire for recognition at individual or group level, can last. In any theoretical reflection one has to take these passions into account. To quote Hans Morgenthau, “to improve the world one must work with these forces, and against them”.¹³ They have to be turned in the right direction. This presupposes the existence of norms. Rather than serving glory and conquest, they should be utilized to bring prosperity and scientific progress.

What is the relevance of all this for international relations? What are the final conclusions? First of all, I hope that it is now clear that in the future we should still have states. Unlike artificial projects such as a global earthly city, a world state, or supranational organizations, states are natural creations for they are expressions of the basic human desires for security, community, and recognition. Then, the EU will continue to exist as long as it remains capable of attracting people by its security and prosperity, but if its wealth declines, it will fall apart. For the European identity is a failed project. Because of linguistic, cultural, and historical reasons, the inhabitants of Europe will remain attached to their national identities. Furthermore, the desire for recognition will bring new actors into the arena of international politics. There will be a massive shift in the global distribution of power from the Atlantic region to Asia. There will be new centers of power. Will the future world be more peaceful? It depends on human prudence. Since modernity is characterized, on the one hand, by abundance of ideologies, and on the other hand, by prudential deficit, perpetual peace is unlikely. For a better world, modernity has to turn into the real post-modernity—a post-modernity which is not a mere critical continuation of the modern project, but which will bring about a revival of classical wisdom. What does wisdom tell us? I think this was already partly expressed by Ian Clark.¹⁴ We need to mobilize international society. The future world order, based on the state system, should

¹³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 4.

¹⁴ See Ian Clark, ‘World Order and Hegemony as an Institution of International Society’, Key-note Address at the 7th METU Conference on International Relations, Ankara 2008.

be a sophisticated international society that at various levels of the decision-making process includes transnational actors. Unilateralism should be avoided. Finally the last question: what is the future of Turkey? Turkey is an emerging power which will remain prosperous, as long as it continues to live animated by the heritage of prudence left by Atatürk—the heritage which is not any rigid belief or ideology but science and reason.

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