Is robust globalism a mistake?

ROGER D. SPEGELE

The Imperfect Is Our Paradise

Wallace Stevens

1. Introduction

One significant consequence of the subsidence of positivism as the dominant methodology of the social sciences has been the strong emergence of an emancipatory conception of international relations. Resisting pedestrian calls 'to define one's terms', let us rather try to be more useful and characterize the general idea behind it in terms of its aim. The aim of any emancipatory international relations is to reveal to subjects who continue to suffer economically, politically, socially, psychologically, etc., not only that their condition is based on false beliefs but that in learning why such conditions came about, they will acquire the motivation and other instruments to eliminate them. Let us call any such conception, with some considerable trepidation of misunderstanding, 'an emancipatory conception of international relations'. Since we can, under the same rubric, further distinguish classical Marxism, critical theory, post-structuralism and feminist international relations, we evidently must acknowledge that an emancipatory conception of international relations is not all of a piece. The subjects who are picked out by the emancipatory theory may be the working class, or women or society's marginal people, but, whomever the subject, the theories addressed to them share the liberatory idea that there is something drastically wrong with the way human life is lived on this planet, and that, more importantly, people live in certain ways because they have an erroneous understanding of what their individual and collective existence ought to consist of which can, and should, be changed. It is here that we reach the principal feature which allows us to differentiate an emancipatory conception of international relations from competing positivist-empiricist and Realist conceptions of international relations.[1] To count as emancipatory, any prospective theory of international relations would have to show that its theoretical structure is hooked up

---

[1] For the distinguishing features of these conceptions, see my 'Theory and Practice in the Recent Study of International Relations', *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, 7 (1985), pp. 1–27.

with practice in a certain way, namely, that if the theory is correct and the subjects to whom it is addressed put it correctly into practice, the offending structures which caused their suffering will be eliminated, i.e., they will be emancipated.

The purpose of this article is to show that at least *one* version of emancipatory international relations—what I shall call 'robust globalism'—fails to provide adequate reasons for accepting it. I shall proceed as follows. First, I shall attempt to put some flesh on the concept of robust globalism by distinguishing it from 'soft globalism' and by describing, in a general way, its main features. Second, I will critically examine two different ways of making good on the claim that robust globalism provides a coherent understanding of international relations, contending that they fail. And, third, I will move on to show that if we accept some controversial views of Jean-François Lyotard, we shall have acquired a basis for undercutting robust globalism and a wide variety of other emancipatory claims relevant to international relations. The conclusion will be, quite simply, that we have not yet been given a good reason for accepting robust globalism; that is, that robust globalism is a mistake.

2. Setting the stage

It is important to distinguish *globalism*—the philosophical belief that it would, in some sense, be a good thing to live in a global world—from *globalization.* This latter term refers to an indefinite number of rapid changes that are taking place in the world, especially in technology and production, which we have good grounds to think will continue. Such changes are familiar enough:

that we live in a world which, since the industrial revolution, has shown a phenomenal increase in world production of primary, manufactured and service goods;
that we are experiencing an information revolution;
that we are *not* closing the gap between the rich and poor countries in the distribution of income;
that important demographical global changes are taking place; and
that the world has increasingly gained the physical ability to feed itself.

That these trends and processes (and a good deal more) are factual features of the world we live in is not here in question.

Nor is it, *au fond*, worth disputing one consequence of these changes: shifting identity. It is easy enough to point to an increasing number of processes that cross national boundaries and appear to be uniting different populations in certain respects. This is as true of eliminating nationalistic obstacles to world trade, averting nuclear, chemical and biological proliferation, diminishing environmental hazards, expanding human rights and avoiding harmful civil wars as it is of film styles, fashion and television news coverage. The question for us here, however, is whether such changes provide a sufficiently substantial basis to warrant acceptance of globalism in the philosophical sense, that is, whether it would be a good thing for human beings to live in an increasingly globalized world. After all, thinkers on the left and right have cast a cold eye on certain features of globalization which are regarded as inseparably bound up with it: techno-rationality, increasing

fragmentation of communities, a culture of narcissism.[2] Unlike questions concerning the extent to which the world is becoming globalized, the question why (and on what basis) human beings would want to live in such a world is a paradigmatic philosophical question, answers to which will take us deeply into the assumptions and presuppositions of alternative conceptions of international relations. To avoid such questions on the grounds that there are no non-controversial, determinative answers can only lead to an impoverishment of this vital discipline.

In trying to grasp what is at stake here, a useful initial distinction may be made between *soft* and *robust* globalism. Soft globalism may be characterized as the view that there are good grounds for believing that a global way of life will increase tolerance, promote understanding among different peoples, reduce conflict and wars and enhance the general well-being of the Earth's inhabitants. Although its core ideas are vague, the picture that lies behind this view still manages to capture a wide set of attitudes and beliefs within international relations. By contrast, robust globalism proposes that if globalism is going to shape attitudes both inside and outside international relations, it is under an obligation to advance a scientific and/or rational theory providing adequate grounds for thinking that global human emancipation is a reasonable, non-utopian and practical project which could actually be brought into being. While soft globalism suggests that the goal of global human emancipation can be achieved without revolutionary struggle, its robust counterpart proposes that revolutionary struggle of some sort is required.

Soft globalism has its source in the philosophical, political and social thought of Kant and, especially, in neo-Kantian versions of Marx.[3] An instructive recent example of this genre of globalism is to be found in an article by Alan Gilbert entitled 'Must Global Politics Constrain Democracy?'.[4] Gilbert here, as elsewhere, makes a case for what he calls *democratic internationalism*, defined as 'the thesis that the basic political and moral concerns of ordinary people conflict with imperial domination and will, through political activity from below, sometimes check the normal inclinations of the powerful and advantaged to war'.[5] The key idea in Gilbert's democratic internationalism, as well as in its Kantian provenance, lies in the 'historic liberal recognition of a *universal* human capacity for moral personality which rules out slavery, sexism, colonialism, and monarchy (tyranny)'.[6] It is worth noting here that the central idea, shared with many other soft globalists, that human beings can have a priori knowledge of 'a universal human capacity for moral personality' is rightly regarded by many analytic and continental philosophers as

---

[2] On this theme, see Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London, 1973); Martin Heidegger, 'The Word of Nietzsche, "God is Dead"', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. William Lovitt (New York, 1977); and Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York, 1984).

[3] For an anthology containing many articles falling into this category, see Richard Falk, S. Kim and Saul H. Mendlovitz (eds.), *Toward a Just World Order* (Boulder, CO, 1982). See also Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society', *Millennium*, 21 (1992), pp. 389–420. This special number of *Millennium* contains a number of articles relevant to the issues raised in the first section of this article. For another expression of this view, see Mel Gurtov, *Global Politics in the Human Interest*, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO, 1991).

[4] *Political Theory*, 20 (1992), pp. 8–37; see also A. Gilbert, 'Marx on Internationalism and War', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 7 (1978), pp. 346–69, and *Democratic Individuality* (Cambridge, 1990).

[5] Gilbert, 'Must Global Politics', p. 10.

[6] Ibid.

thoroughly unsustainable.[7] However this may (ultimately) be, soft globalism seems designed to take the revolutionary sting out of democratic internationalism. We learn, for example, that 'much radical policy' does not seek 'revolutionary change'. We are also told that the 'hallmark of Marx's political theory and action was democratic internationalism' and not, as we may have supposed, revolutionary praxis.[8] Whether Gilbert's interpretation of Marx's views is 'correct' I shall leave to others to decide. Nonetheless, there seems to be something missing from his account, namely, theoretical ideas which specify how to unify theory and practice. In failing to specify such links, Gilbert's democratic internationalism would have to be regarded as a purely *normative* notion rather than a theoretical concept which provides reasonable grounds for believing in the actualization of democratic internationalism. Gilbert and other soft globalists owe us an account of whether the changes they wish to see come about are not only desirable but also practical possibilities.[9]

If soft globalism cannot accomplish this (and there are good reasons for doubt), perhaps robust globalism will give emancipatory theorists what they need to make globalism (in the philosophical sense) reasonable, non-utopian and practical. Before we can assess this, we will need a clearer picture of what robust globalism consists of.

Robust globalism may be fuzzily understood (on the model of 'fuzzy' sets in mathematics) as characterized by such beliefs and attitudes as:

(a) The class-based character of the capitalist state

Robust globalists take the view that the state, under capitalism, is the expression of a ruling class or some other dominant interest and that, as such, the vast majority of people in it suffer. The main thrust of robust globalism is to maintain 'a classical Marxian concern to analyse the state as a class-based apparatus', while searching for mechanisms for transforming that apparatus from a condition of social inequality to one of social equality.[10] The capitalist state has to be removed in order to eliminate the class-based causes of social inequality. For example, G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History* provides a powerful defence of the view that the state under capitalism is class-based and that under socialism a class-based state would be replaced by a society owning the means of production.[11] Although some robust globalists may still accept this traditional view, more recently they have been worried by the loss of workers' rights under state socialism and prefer the establishment of worker cooperatives, self-managed enterprises, or some alternative which escapes both ruling classes and state power.

---

[7] For some reasons why, see Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Oxford, 1983); John Rajchman and Cornel West (eds.), *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (New York, 1985); and Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (London, 1987).

[8] Gilbert, 'Must Global Politics', p. 11

[9] On this point, and much else, I agree with Janna Thompson, *Justice and World Order: A Philosophical Inquiry* (London, 1992), esp. pp. 1–23.

[10] Stephen Gill, 'Historical Materialism, Gramsci, and International Political Economy', in Craig N. Murphy and Roger Tooze (eds.), *The New International Political Economy* (Boulder, CO, 1991), p. 57.

[11] G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford, 1978). See also his *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford, 1988), esp. pp. 14–20.

(b) Anti-nationhood

Robust globalists tend to be haters of nationhood, which they equate with state-created 'nationalism', i.e., a form of nationalism which has legitimized exclusion and oppression and continues to play a major role in generating militarism, colonialism and imperialism. On this view, nationalism is an irrational relic and so closely associated with xenophobic state power that virtually no conceptual resources remain for a 'positive' conception of nation or nation-state.[12]

(c) Economic forces as the dominant historical agent

Robust globalists hold that underlying economic forces, classically referred to as 'productive forces', either determine or, less conclusively, shape in decisively important ways the social, political, legal and moral structures of international relations. As we shall see, some robust globalists merely wave vaguely and innocuously towards productive determinism since the heart of their theoretical offerings lies in reason's increasingly self-conscious awareness of itself. Nonetheless, productive determinism is part of the metaphysical baggage which conditions robust globalism's options.

(d) New social movements as agents of historical transformation

Recent robust globalists admit that the classical Marxist vision of a proletarian uprising has to be set aside and replaced by the idea that new social movements could well serve as possible instruments of social change in international relations. According to one robust globalist, the 1980s testify to 'the massive emergence throughout the world of collective actions which are non-violent and pragmatic in their methods, non-integrated and multiple in their structures, anti-hierarchical and networking in their organisations, heterogeneous (cross-class, cross-ideology, cross-age) in their constituencies, non-coercive in people participation and non-exclusive in their adherence'.[13] Among robust globalists such optimistic views about new social movements are pervasive, a reflection perhaps of the evident need to find a privileged subject to transform global capitalism in the face of what is perceived to be its constantly increasing, and often pernicious, advance.

(e) Human global emancipation via a theory of history

Although robust globalists are prepared to accept the idea that certain features of classical Marxism's aspirations for human emancipation are utopian, they

---

[12] For an example of this view, see Jonathan Rée, 'Internationality', *Radical Philosophy*, 60 (Spring 1992), pp. 3–11. For a balanced response, see Ross Poole, 'On National Identity: A Response to Jonathan Rée', *Radical Philosophy*, 62 (Autumn 1992), pp. 14–19.

[13] Z. Hegedus, 'Social Movements and Social Change in Self-Creative Society: New Civil Initiatives in the International Arena', *International Sociology*, 4 (1989), pp. 19–36, p. 19.

nonetheless adhere to *some* version of historical materialism, a version which contains within it the claim that a major transformation in the practice of international relations is not a utopian, unrealizable or impractical ideal. Human global emancipation, on this view, is within reach of real societies in futures which we could actually care about.

Although much could be said to expand, support, and challenge these features of robust globalism, my self-conceived task in this article is directed to overturning the robust globalist belief that a global moral and/or political transformation is a reasonable, non-utopian and practical goal. The reason for this emphasis lies in my perception of the continued salience and staying power of this feature of robust globalism, notwithstanding collapses in other aspects of the globalist programme.[14] Moreover, it is a view which has been articulated by people holding a wide variety of political positions. It is certainly a feature of various versions of neo-Kantianism;[15] it has star billing in a recently revived form of neo-Hegelianism;[16] it sustains, notwithstanding certain reservations, various forms of post-Marxist thinking relevant to international relations;[17] it plays a renewed role in debates about security;[18] it finds resonance in some feminist writings on international relations;[19] and it continues to shape disputes in general debates about international relations.[20] To make the task of examining this fifth feature of robust globalism reasonably manageable, we need to raise two closely related questions about it. What does human emancipation consist of and how is it to be achieved? The answer to the first question, as already suggested, is very much bound up with Marx's conception of the good society and general Marxian legacy. In particular, the robust globalist believes that four traditional goals of the Marxian legacy—abolishing exploitation; decreasing alienation; meeting everyone's material needs; and achieving approximate equality of material condition—are constituents of the good society. And the answer to the second question is that these goals can only be achieved on the condition that *some* version of historical materialism will move us from our current situation to one in which the above goals have been globally institutionalized. Given this traditional emancipatory viewpoint, the leading question for robust globalists may be formulated in the following way: Is it reasonable to continue to hold on to traditional Marxian goals? Although the achievement of such goals would certainly seem to result in massive global improvements in human life, one wonders, not without reason, whether they are realizable. Adequate answers to these questions in turn hang on whether a satisfactory account of historical materialism can be provided for the context of international relations. In the next section, I will examine

---

[14] See, for example, Fred Halliday, 'Three Concepts of Internationalism', *International Affairs*, 64 (1988), pp. 187–98, pp. 188, 194–8. Halliday seems to hold that revolutionary internationalism has 'validity' because it exists. This version of the real being rational is obvious in its absurdity. Would one say that concentration camps have validity because they exist? Clearly not. But perhaps I've misread him.

[15] See Thomas Pogge, 'Rawls and Social Justice', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 18 (1988), pp. 227–56; and Thompson, *Justice and World Order.*

[16] That to be found, for example, in Andrew Linklater. See n.21 below.

[17] See Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, tr. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London, 1972); and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Democratic Politics* (London, 1985).

[18] See Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 313–26.

[19] V. Spike Peterson, 'Transgressing Boundaries: Theories of Knowledge, Gender and International Relations', *Millennium*, 21 (1992), pp. 183–206, pp. 203–4.

[20] James N. Rosenau (ed.), *Global Voices: Dialogues in International Relations* (Boulder, CO, 1993).

two different answers to these questions from within the Marxian legacy as it applies to international relations: the answers of Andrew Linklater and Robert Cox.

Why focus on Linklater and Cox? First, they both accept some version of historical materialism, and the emancipatory project contained within it, however attenuated their relationship to these traditional Marxist ideas may turn out to be. Secondly, in so far as many international relationists continue to look for alternatives to the dominant paradigms of liberal internationalism and neorealism, Linklater's and Cox's theoretical projects (or portions thereof) have merit. And, thirdly, these projects have just the sort of interesting differences required to bring out two sides of the revisionary historical materialist coin in international relations: Hegelian Marxism and Marxian materialism. For whereas Cox is committed to a strong productionist version of materialism as a way of moving to global struggle, Linklater relies on the movement of self-conscious reason to make emancipation a reasonable goal. So in examining these two alternatives, we will effectively be examining two different ways of trying to maintain some sort of grip on Marx's emancipatory project for international relations. It is important to keep in mind that my objective here is not to review the corpus of Linklater's or Cox's work but, rather, to critically assess their respective claims to ground robust globalism. As such, my analyses of their work will be developed along a narrow axis.

3. Linklater and Cox

Linklater

Let us consider Andrew Linklater's emancipatory project for international relations, as discernible in his lucid books *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* and, more recently, *Beyond Realism and Marxism*.[21] Linklater puts us on notice that he will develop a theory of international relations which is not only emancipatory but teleological: it is a theory, deeply steeped in German Idealism, which relies on Reason's increasing self-consciousness to provide us with a ground for believing in the coming into being of emancipated humanity. As Linklater clearly remarks: 'Reason has a history; it develops a determinate and progressive content from its expressions in various forms of social life'.[22] Linklater explains, quite correctly from the point of view he adopts, that it is this conception of reason 'which distinguishes the philosophy of history from rationalism and historicism' and therefore opens the way to global emancipation.[23] In the third part of *Men and Citizens*, Linklater deploys a set of arguments intended to 'suggest how the study of international relations might accommodate the study of human freedom'.[24] Using

---

[21] Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens* (London, 1982), and *Beyond Realism and Marxism* (New York, 1989). Although it could be held, with considerable justice, that Linklater's views, as expressed in *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, are not vulnerable to the main criticisms in this section, this only shows that Linklater has given up trying to defend a necessary link between theory and practice. But the consequence of this is that although it makes his views more plausible, it puts an even greater gap between these views and any emancipatory understanding of international relations.

[22] Linklater, *Men and Citizens*, p. 160.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 166.

'Marx's principles of historical periodization', Linklater first identifies the logic of three stages of international relations: *tribal community*, *political society*, and *emancipated humanity*. Secondly, he tries to show, if only in a speculative way, how these stages are dialectically and progressively related to one another. Since the movement of history through these stages is necessary rather than contingent, Linklater has to show how emancipated humanity—the last stage—is already prefigured in the dynamics and logic of development of the two prior stages. Only on this basis can Linklater hold his theory to be rational in the required sense, namely, that the end of political society and its replacement by global humanity are objective conditions which have already formed themselves within previous social structures or categories. The category of emancipated humanity takes the two other categories and posits itself as that which gives them their determinateness and so, on this view, gives a non-arbitrary rationale for the belief that the world's rational construction will culminate in the liberation of humanity. But just how does Linklater think he can explain this?

Each of the three stages is necessary for the development of the previous ones as the dialectical movement of history draws individuals, embedded in its rational swirl, towards greater moral autonomy. The *telos* of this movement is 'ethical universalism' which, Linklater contends, dissolves 'both the state's right to determine when it will use force and the government of international relations by principles based upon the consent of its constituent sovereign parts'.[25] How does Linklater attempt to justify a commitment to such a conception of international relations? To understand the problem Linklater faces, we need to examine Linklater's conception of philosophical history.

According to Linklater, philosophical history refers to a view of reason which is developmental.[26] Despite half-hearted, occasional waves in the direction of materialism, Linklater follows Hegel in claiming that the world is driven by 'consciously chosen rational principles'.[27] Linklater goes on to insist that reason involves principles 'which are specific to human subjects'.[28] However, the human subject does not have consciousness of its final end as such, but only of certain other ends by which the final end can be said to be mediated. And herein lies a difficulty; for, unless Linklater can show how the mediating ends are internally related to the self-formulation of the final end of humanization, how will he be able to defend himself against the charge that his belief in the actualization of the final end is arbitrary, i.e., a state of affairs which he would like to come about rather than one which must occur, or even has any likelihood of occurring? Linklater seems to have taken a certain world-view as a preferred end-state of a developmental-logical process and then read the stages of the development back into the process. Given this, it is unclear just how Linklater thinks he can make sense of the idea that the final end is internally related to the process in terms of which he claims it develops. If this cannot be done, the idea that there is a final end on behalf of which certain things must occur in history, e.g., the humanization of international relations, will be vacuous. I do not see that Linklater has been able to achieve this goal.

---

[25] Ibid., p. 199.
[26] Ibid., p. 140.
[27] Ibid., p. 147.
[28] Ibid.

In *Beyond Realism and Marxism* Linklater calls upon a Habermasian theory of communicative competence to substantiate his developmental views.[29] Will such an appeal help? According to Habermas, the development of a species-wide rationality that is inherent in language is not simply a convention of a specifically Western tradition: cognitive adequacy with language takes place over time, a hypothesis supported by rational reconstructions of the logic of that development. The question is whether the kinds of distinctions we make, the world-view we inhabit and so on, can be shown to reflect a higher level of cognitive adequacy than other 'undifferentiated' world-views. That is, how does Linklater think he will be able to justify equating the categorical distinctions we find necessary in Western culture with 'rationality' and 'humanity' once we admit, as we appear to be compelled to do, the existence of cultures that have done without them? How can we prove our communicative competence to reflect a higher stage in a species-wide developmental process if all the speculative research that we undertake in order to show that it is higher already assumes what is to be proven? How do we escape the vicious circle in which we accept as a principle of research precisely that which is at issue: namely, the greater cognitive adequacy of speculative research? Without non-question-begging answers to these questions, it is quite unclear how appeal to Habermasian distinctions will help justify Linklater's project.

In the last analysis Linklater's project of attempting to find a reasonable ground for robust globalism in the form of a Humanized International Relations fails, and this for two reasons. First, Linklater fails to show that the Hegelian vocabulary which he employs does not depend on tacit appeal to an a priori rationalism which Linklater's argument officially excludes. Secondly, Linklater's theory does not succeed in avoiding a frictionless utopianism. Since there is no proletariat *or any other special revolutionary agent* in Linklater's theory, we are left wondering how reason is to become fully conscious of its own freedom. For Marx, reality only becomes comprehensible with the emergence of the proletariat; for, only by virtue of this class's knowledge would there be adequate understanding of the class situation. The proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge. Linklater, like most other revisionary Marxians, eschews proletarian epistemological privilege. However, he implausibly suggests that *states* take on the role which Marx and Engels had assigned to the proletariat! Apart from its unpersuasiveness, this move is reification at its very worst. After all, states are artefacts and as such cannot, so far as we know, be conscious of anything. At the very least, Linklater owes us an argument here. We turn to consider Cox's alternative form of robust globalism.

Cox

In turning from Linklater to Robert Cox, we are moving away from a teleological Marxism to a more traditional positivist Marxism grounded in the materialist forces of production. But what is novel here is that Cox attempts to couple this traditional Marxist understanding with critical theory.

[29] Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, pp. 16–17.

According to Cox, 'theory can serve two distinct purposes'.[30] First, it can 'be a guide to help solve the problems posed within the terms of the particular perspective which was the point of departure'.[31] Cox calls this 'problem-solving theory', by which term he evidently means all non-emancipatory theories whether they call themselves 'utilitarian', 'realist', 'systems analysis', 'pragmatist' or whatever. By contrast, there is critical theory which calls 'institutions and social and power relations' into 'question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing'.[32] In contrast to Linklater's understanding of theory, Cox's view drops dependence on logical necessity. For Cox, only contingent relations link together the various transformations leading to *world order*. Critical theory cannot guarantee that observable historical tendencies will eventually coincide with the coming into being of a fully humanized international relations. Still, Cox does attempt to hold on to the idea of a coherent, developmental sequence, although he attempts to locate it not in consciousness, but in materialistic processes. For Cox, critical theory enables us to grasp those changing forces of material production which will hopefully, though not necessarily, move us towards the practice of world order. It is these historical, dynamic and universal interests which distinguish critical theory from 'problem-solving theory'. Cox finds no difficulty in dismissing this latter type of theory with undisguised contempt as 'non-historical or ahistorical', a genre of theory which serves 'national, sectional . . . class' and 'conservative' interests.[33]

For Cox, critical theory's 'foremost source' is 'historical materialism' and, as one might expect given the source, critical theory has a considerable agenda. First, its concepts have to be sufficiently flexible to adjust to a changing reality.[34] Secondly, critical theory has to ensure that problem-solving theory is effectively put out of harm's way by absorbing its acceptable face into critical theory's core.[35] A third task for critical theory is transcendental/utopian. According to Cox, the 'aims' of critical theory, though just as practical as those of problem-solving theory, 'approach practice from a perspective which *transcends* that of the existing order, which problem-solving takes as its starting point'.[36] But then this implies that critical theory, too, could have some difficulties in achieving its goals. Cox admits as much.[37] Now, I shall take it that Cox's subsequent book, *Production, Power and World Order*, may be understood as moving us toward understanding how to achieve these goals.[38]

Cox's international political economy revolves around bringing the three principal superstructural categories of the social relations of production, social classes and historical blocs into coherent relation with the appropriate substructural mode of production. The whole of Cox's schema is anchored in 'patterns of production relations called modes of social relations of production . . . the dynamics of these modes, their inter-relationships, and how they are affected by the nature and activity

---

[30] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 10 (1981), pp. 126–54.

[31] Ibid., p. 127.

[32] Ibid., p. 129.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 130; emphasis added.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order* (New York, 1987).

of states and international forces'.[39] The main problem with this foundationalist manoeuvre is not that production is unimportant, but that it becomes, in Cox's framework, the unquestioned metaphysical referent point for grasping the totality of social reality.

For example, readers are told: 'Production creates the material basis for *all* forms of social existence.'[40] Production thus becomes the ontological basis to which everything is ultimately reducible. To be sure, Cox tries to avoid reductionism by appealing to dialectical or reciprocal relations between 'power' and 'production'. But Cox's attempt to avoid reductionism fails to obviate his explicit efforts to reduce social reality to materialistically conceived Leibnizian monads. This reduction takes place in two ways. First, Cox says that the aim of his study is to classify 'the totality of world production into patterns of production relations called modes of social relations'.[41] Secondly, Cox says: 'Specific modes of social relations of production are treated as Leibnizian monads, as self-contained structures each with its own developmental potential and its own distinctive perspective on the world'.[42] So both patterns of production and modes of social relations—the key variables Cox uses to explain change in international relations—are anchored in production relations. On this reading, Cox's theory is grounded in metaphysical realism, an already discredited and eminently discardable monistic metaphysics.

Cox's historical materialism, unlike Linklater's, takes account of the fact that there are *perceiving* subjects in the world, that subjects are not solely collected up into classes as objectively *real* entities, as Marx had thought, but produce created realities ineliminable from any objective understanding of the world. This is where Cox's resort to Leibnizian monads comes into play. Monads, as Leibniz understood them, were spatial–temporal points—crucially linked to the metaphysics of substances—from which information about the past and projections into the future could be made. According to Leibniz, the substance of material things was derivative. For example, a block of marble was not a substance, strictly speaking, because it could be divided into two blocks. What is it, then, that makes it substantial? Leibniz's answer was that any parcel of matter was full of indivisible and immaterial substances, namely, *monads*. How did this help Leibniz? For one thing Leibniz was faced, in his early metaphysical writings, with the dilemma of both holding that substances were the really primitive and true entities in the world, i.e., in the sense that they could not be divided up any further, and, on the other hand, saying that since bodies were substances, they could be divided up in just the way all bodies could be divided up.[43] For Leibniz, the solution to this 'contradiction' was the monad. A monad is a 'substantial form' which, though non-material and non-spatial, is associated in some way with matter.

But how does this resurrection of Leibnizian monads help Cox? Monads have three properties which make them attractive to Productionist Marxists: substantiality, individuality and self-transformativity.[44] Cox implicitly uses these proper-

[39] Ibid., p. ix.
[40] Ibid., p. 1, emphasis added.
[41] Ibid., p. ix.
[42] Ibid., p. x.
[43] See R. N. D. Martin and Stuart Brown (eds.), 'Introduction', in *G. W. F. Leibniz: Discourse on Metaphysics and Related Writings* (Manchester, 1988), p. 8.
[44] On this point, see Nicholas Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1967), pp. 59–60.

ties to accomplish three things: first, to maintain the real material underpinnings of the social relations of production without having to explicitly *defend* a materialistic metaphysics; secondly, to posit world orders which contain temporal–spatial points, i.e., 'individual' structures as states and state-systems; and thirdly, to have a basis for claiming continuous changes in world orders which are internally self-directed, even if we cannot *know* or predict these changes. Notwithstanding the ingenuity of this foundational part of Cox's thesis, the deployment of monads will not help him to anchor social relations of production, productive forces, world structures or anything else.

For one thing, postulating monads is an empty gesture if one cannot also say— and Cox does not—how all-too-human creatures can get access to them. We seem to be faced with two choices here, neither of which is attractive. On the one hand, we might claim that we grasp monads on the basis of intuition. The trouble with choosing this option is that one person's intuition is likely to be different from another's and there would be no basis, *ex hypothesi*, upon which conflicting intuitions could be adjudicated. Another possibility would appear to be more congenial to Cox's project, viz., to posit a *structure* in the world which, as a set of essences, singles out some sort of implicit correpondence between the monads and social relations of production. In this way, we would have slipped 'materialism' into performing a foundational role but without having to spell out the problematic relation between language and mind-independent entities. However, the problem here is that monads themselves are empty. Although positing monads may provide us with the sense of having anchored our 'constructions' in *the world's* ontology, we don't seem to get any increased understanding of how we can get to live in better world orders. To see this, let me turn to the conclusions of Cox's book.

Here, Cox emphasizes that 'critical awareness of potentiality for change' has to be distinguished from 'utopian planning' and claims that his approach makes a place for the transformation of existing orders.[45] For Cox, the way to understand change in international relations is to examine 'the conditions favouring the maintenance of existing social order', and he holds that there are three such conditions, in particular, which have been found 'propitious for transformation'.[46] These 'include' (i) 'a weakening of global hegemony tending toward a more permissive world order in which it would be difficult for a dominant power or group of dominant powers to enforce conformity to its norms'; (ii) the 'existence of different forms of state' which have differential effects on 'the stability of world order'; and (iii) 'the mobilisation of forces into new counterhegemonic historic blocs'. What these three conditions 'add up to' is 'a diffusion of power'.[47] And it is here that we arrive at the *content* of Cox's claim that his is a *critical/emancipatory* theory of international relations rather than, say, positivistic descriptive history. For Cox, emancipation is not contained in the idea of 'equal moral autonomy' understood as the free association of producers, as it evidently was for Marx, but in the more modest goal of a greater diffusion of power in the international system, But now, if this is the goal, how is it to be distinguished from the time-honoured Realist programme, one purpose of which was to obtain greater autonomy for individual states in the international political system? It would appear that Cox's reductionist, objectivist historical materialism,

---

[45] Cox, *Production*, p. 393.
[46] Ibid., p. 394.
[47] Ibid.

though less objectionable to scientific Realism than teleological Marxism, has no place for a dynamic, necessitarian, antithetical route to emancipation. Emancipation would have to come about not as the teleological consequence of revolutionary world struggle, but as the result of 'rational' criticism of ideologies and contingent individual and group action. This is a pale reflection of Marx's view and leaves Cox without the theoretical resources for achieving anything remotely similar to Marx's sort of human emancipation. Although Cox may regard this as a gain in plausibility, it certainly leaves us wondering if there is any basis for distinguishing Cox's theory from positivist variants. If there isn't, then Cox's theory, whatever else it may do, seriously threatens the claim that Marxism constitutes a distinctive social theory, i.e., one which brings together theory and practice.

Unlike classical Marxists, Cox evidently sees no alternative to breaking the inextricable tie between theory and practice, between science and revolution. He makes this clear in his final discussion of *modes of production*. 'One way', Cox writes, 'to think of the mode of production' is in terms of 'the discovery of the inner essence of capital, giving rise to notions like the "logic" of capital or the "laws of motion" of capital'. Cox implies that Marx 'meant something like this', but whatever Marx's view, 'his [Cox's] approach has rather been *to infer structures from observable historical patterns of conduct*'.[48] Since this approach is indistinguishable from positivist theoretical methods, it would seem that Cox is prepared to abandon the teleological elements in Marx's philosophy. Perhaps Cox thinks that, in so doing, his theory will pass scientific muster in terms of the principles of science generally accepted today. If so, then one might wonder what is left of *historical* materialism and its claim to frame the dialectical dance of modes and structures from one stage of history to another as the rational and progressive movement towards human betterment? On one reading of Marx—a reading which sees him committed to teleological modalities—the idea that there could be emancipation from capitalist structures without invoking some teleological grounds for believing in a possible transformation to something better does not seem to have been seriously considered.

So the leading question here is why Cox would think it rational for us to believe that world order 'can be built only through a political movement capable of uniting sufficient of the segmented elements of existing societies into a counter-hegemonic bloc'.[49] Since Cox is committed to a form of materialism which precludes those teleological idealist elements of Marx's thought which would provide a rational basis for believing in the necessary movement to communism, why would people, groups or movements be sufficiently motivated to make the sacrifices required to join a counter-hegemonic bloc?[50] If no sacrifices are required, would the bloc have sufficient strength to be genuinely 'counter-hegemonic'? Just what is Cox envisaging here, a coalition of all the world's 'wage labourers' against capitalism? a coalition of peasants and marginals against the military-bureaucracies of the world? a coalition of new social movements? a coalition of all the wretched of the earth against the surveillance states? Is the counter-hegemonic bloc going to be a revolutionary agent

---

[48] Ibid., p. 396.
[49] Ibid., p. 403.
[50] Remember Oscar Wilde's witticism: 'How many free nights does one have to give up to be a good socialist?' To show that this claim arises not only from outside the Marxian legacy, see Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom*, ch. 8, and Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 9.

which takes political power and sets up new relations of power? Doesn't this pre-suppose that the overwhelming majority of people living in the counter-hegemonic bloc are unhappy, frustrated and, more importantly, sufficiently confident that there is a viable, superior alternative to what currently exists? Does Cox provide us with any arguments that such an alternative will become available at the global level? Isn't the very idea of a counter-hegemonic bloc, given the present configuration of forces, just a big dose of mystification mixed with precisely the sort of political romanticism that Marx deplored?

Although Cox, quite rightly, notes that a society without 'the profit motive . . . will not come about from wishing for it',[51] Cox, unlike Marx, doesn't give much weight to the practice which makes wishing for it beside the point. Instead, he adopts a form of rationalism in evidently supposing that reflection alone suffices to generate dialectical, antagonistic movement to world order. The intellectual 'task begins' we are told, 'with an *awareness* of the present social divisions generated in the production process'.[52] However, we are given no account of how this awareness moves through stages to practical conditions which are better. Identifying economic and social contradictions is of dubious benefit if it does not at the same time create motivational energies to change them. Merely alluding to the possibility of space for counter-hegemonic movements, in the face of the obvious obstacles which common sense suggests stand in the way of their development, does not suffice. On a classical Marxist understanding—not defended here—dialectical theory is inherently radical in so far as it engages in self-criticism as a way of preparing revolutionary agents to bring about revolutionary change.[53] But theory, for Cox, evidently is only about making people 'aware' of what the world is like, providing them with reasons and 'hoping' they will act upon them rather than, for example, transforming their self-understandings so that they *will* act to eradicate their suffering. But in stripping theory of its inherent radicalism in the evident interest of providing a more satisfactory 'scientific' conception of international politics, we lose all purchase on providing a basis for a belief in the movement from a condition of alienation to a condition in which things are radically better; we sacrifice emancipation, and thus call into question the critical/emancipatory goal which Cox offers as the *raison d'être* of his theory. But is not the whole point of critical/emancipatory theory not only to offer a theoretical assessment of a way of life which is inadequate because frustrating and unsatisfying to those who lead it, but to identify how society *will* change that way of life? If robust globalism cannot have that, if it must rest content with a world dominated by natural necessity and only marginally different from 'bourgeois capitalism', why would potentially revolutionary elements be at all motivated to join a party, a movement or even to hand out leaflets? Or to put this somewhat differently: who would want to spend most of his/her life rotting away in one of Mussolini's prisons for marginal changes towards '[a] more participant society'?[54] Productionist Marxism seems far too sanguine about its power to change

---

[51] Cox, *Production*, p. 403.
[52] Ibid.
[53] On this point, see Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London, 1983), pp. 9–14.
[54] Cox, *Production*, p. 403. It is worth noting that Antonio Gramsci, upon whom Cox is said to rely for his own view, seems to have believed that such sacrifices were justified given the 'truth' of historical materialism. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (London, 1971), pp. 454ff. Cox evidently disagrees.

the world by intellectual means alone, and far too willing to give up the very emancipatory goals which have distinguished Marxism from forms of left-wing positivism. Cox's version of robust globalism then, nothwithstanding its difference from Linklater's, also fails to persuade us that it is a reasonable, non-utopian and practical project.

4. Overturning robust globalism

From Marx to Lyotard

The failure of Emancipatory International Theorists to develop a revisionist historical materialism to rival Marx's traditional conception might suggest that one must 'go back to Marx' and adopt his view of the relation of theory and practice. This option should, I think, remain open. Still, we should not conceal from ourselves the great difficulty of developing any theory which is intended to bring theory into unison with practice. For one thing, however challenging Marx's understanding of theory and practice may be, its viability may very well depend on the possibility of certain social practices having been available whose 'moment' has passed. The absence of a revolutionary proletariat and the difficulty of finding a replacement presents a severe credibility problem for any version of Marxism. Further, it will not be easy to make any version of revolutionary practice acceptable which exudes even a whiff of Stalinism, the Securitate, or the suppresssion of democracy. At the same time, historical materialism, embodying as it does a progressive and dynamic view of history, might have some difficulty providing a convincing explanation in its terms for the collapse of the Soviet Union and many Marxist states in Eastern Europe.

Even the revised version of Marxism which I have called robust globalism would have to account for the apparent implausibility of its key assumptions. For example, robust globalists seem to think that the role of the state will greatly diminish, but they are a good deal less forthcoming about what will take its place. A common view is that 'universal rules' will be able to provide a basis for loyalty which extends beyond the state. Such a view constitutes a throwback to Kant's moral formalism and stands in marked contrast with any communitarian view of thick ethics in which moral rules are of secondary importance to moral activity. On this alternative view, ethics concerns the identity of people in the substantive communities in which they live. Ethics is not about rules; it is about protecting existing moral institutions and fostering their moral development. In this task the state has a decisive role to play, a role which cannot be performed if the state is eliminated in favour of global society whose authority rests on formal moral rules rather than loyalty and patriotism. Without socialization into the existing forms of life that embody moral values, ethics and morality would be thin, formal and politically fragile. Commitment to ethical life involves identifying with its demands sufficiently thoroughly that we resist taking seriously the possibility of giving them up. To replace this identification with a universal set of formal rules, as robust globalism proposes, hardly seems an attractive alternative.

Robust globalists also seem to presuppose that the sheer quantity of selfless

people will increase in the world, mainly as the result of self-conscious reason actualizing itself in history.[55] But although we cannot rule out a priori the possibility of an increasing number of selfless people—there have already been a certain number of such people in human history—the generalization of this idea to humanity certainly strains our credulity. For one thing, there may be a strong biological basis for thinking that most human beings could not achieve anything like the required selflessness. For another thing, it should be noted that the achievement of selflessness would have to be globally simultaneous. For, suppose a situation in which even a very large global majority became selfless while a small minority remained selfish. Then the latter would presumably have little difficulty in manipulating the altruistic attitude of the majority to suit its self-interested goals. But the prospect of a simultaneous global shift to selflessness seems to be a kind of eschatological fantasy.

A third presupposition of robust globalism is that there should be, and can be, an equal distribution of material resources. The leading idea behind the presupposition is that an extraordinary abundance would be generated in the humanly emancipated society so that everyone's basic material needs would be satisfied. But to accept this idea, we would have to ignore certain non-institutional facts about the world in which we live and in which we will, so far as our best theoretical and practical experience tells us, continue to live in the future. In such a world there will be a relative scarcity of technological knowledge, an episodic scarcity of good human judgment and a profound scarcity of time.[56] Given such permanent features of the human condition and their obvious consequences, the idea that everyone's basic material needs will be satisfied seems very hard to accept. So there seem to be some very real practical constraints on the realization of robust globalism. And then there are the theoretical problems.

Marxism is a theory which specifies an absolute origin; as such, it is effectively positing a privileged status for the object specified. For Marxism, the object in question is 'labour power' and this has two consequences both of which seem to undermine the possibility of an emancipated international relations. First, the theory underwrites a preclusive, monopolistic, 'totalizing' viewpoint inconsistent with the idea, powerfully expressed in Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, that construed all thought as relativized to a changing nature. Secondly, the theory paves the way for a revolutionary praxis with a centre in revolutionary labour which not only would create untold opportunities for totalitarian practices but would, relatedly, function to limit the boundaries of critique and the political possibilities of change through oppositional struggle. To be sure, such possibilities do not rule out the possibility of theory being unified with practice or of the robust globalism bound up with them. In the remainder of this section I shall attempt to spell out why we should give these things up. I shall do so by bringing to bear certain arguments of Jean-François Lyotard.

Why should one turn to Lyotard to generate arguments—hardly determinate in any case—for rejecting an emancipatory view of international relations? For three reasons. First, Lyotard resolutely rejects what we have independent grounds for wanting to put out of harm's way, i.e., a foundationalist understanding of politics.

---

[55] Linklater, *Men and Citizens*, esp. p. 198, and *Beyond Realism and Marxism*.
[56] N. Scott Arnold, *Marx's Radical Critique of Capitalist Society: A Reconstruction and Critical Evaluation* (New York, 1990), p. 225.

Foundationalism with regard to political theory is, I take it, the view that some of the knowledge which human beings possess about politics is more fundamental or basic than the rest and that political theorists can tell us which knowledge this is. Lyotard, along with many others, helps us to see that such claims are politically motivated projects rooted in conceptions of language and philosophy that are unsustainable. For Lyotard, it is more authentic for political theorists to grasp the nettle of political engagement than to pretend to take up the position of an impartial observer who can ground the moral content of a universal political order. Second, Lyotard, nothwithstanding his clear commitment to certain moral and political values, eschews moral and political guidance of a certain kind, namely, that which assumes the possibility of rational convergence on a single idea of what constitutes Right. In a world riven by profoundly divergent social, cultural, religious and ideological understandings concerning what constitutes legitimate political structures and the authority of political institutions, political theorists who claim, however implicitly, that their conclusions rationally establish how people ought to live are engaging in what amounts to political coercion. This, as it is, banal point needs constant restating. And third, Lyotard's views, on an interpretation of them which he would almost certainly *not* endorse, may be used to help us recover a version of political Realism which avoids both the scientism of neorealism and the moral scepticism of the traditional political Realism of Machiavelli and Hobbes. That is, on this view, the virtue of Lyotard lies not in his positive theses—in so far as there can be *any* of these in view of his commitment not to be philosophically committed—but in using his negative theses to problematize robust globalist conceptions of knowledge and their accompanying rationalistic ethics; and this with a view to constructing a distinctively different version of Realism in international relations.

In going down this route, I am urging that we accept two preliminary ideas about Lyotard: first, that Lyotard's pragmatic view of science destroys the robust globalist's belief in humanity as a collective subject seeking emancipation through rules authorized by all our language games at once, and second, that Lyotard's anarchistic exaltation of the sublime has nothing to offer the self-conscious Realist intent upon defending a better version of political Realism.[57] Lyotard is being used here only in so far as his views are consistent with positions which 'see the wrong turn as having been taken with Kant', whose transhistorical self-transforming subject is still being deployed to ground an implausible robust globalism.[58] This leaves international relations with a capacious space which alternative viewpoints will be eager to fill; and this is as it should be. The key point for our present purpose is that those who see robust globalism as an obstacle to a different version of political Realism will have good reasons for eliminating it, and in so doing will have cracked open a capacious space for Realist theorizing in international relations. If this strategy succeeds, then there could be place not only for post-structuralist and post-feminist international theory but also for Realist international theory; that is, for a con-

---

[57] This interpretation of Lyotard owes a good deal to Richard Rorty. See his illuminating essay, 'Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity', in Richard Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, vol. 2, Philosophical Papers, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 164–76.
[58] Rorty, 'Habermas and Lyotard', p. 174.

ception of political Realism which is neither 'an operator's manual' posing as a 'social theory' [59] nor the 'name for a discourse of power'.[60]

Although in the recent past political Realism has been an invitation to neorealists and traditional Realists to say what political Realism consists of, there is scope for another version of Realism, one which I have called elsewhere 'Evaluative Political Realism'.[61] What is Evaluative Political Realism? Very roughly, this is a conception of international politics in which a pragmatic/Realist conception of science is brought into coherent contact with a certain Realist understanding of ethics.[62] When the various issues which these commitments shape are flushed out, Evaluative Political Realism will turn out to have four features that, taken together, help us to distinguish it from other Realist views and, given Lyotard's success in defeating robust globalism, should help to provide a focus for future debates between Realists and anti-Realists in international theory.

The first of these four features is just this: Evaluative Political Realism holds that international relationists should determine the content of their discipline by advancing reflective answers to the 'philosophical' and 'quasi-philosophical' problems which the subject matter evokes. Quite clearly, there are a good many such problems, including for example: the ontological status of state and state system; methodological problems relating to claims about human nature; the degree to which we can legitimately describe history as truth-telling; the basis for making cognitive ethical claims; and so on. In seeking to make what John Rawls calls considered judgments on such matters, Evaluative Political Realism urges us to abandon all absolute, global and unified accounts of 'science' and determine, *from within* the discipline and in terms of *the primacy of practice to theory*, whether the deliverances

[59] Justin Rosenberg, 'What's the Matter with Realism?', *Review of International Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 285–303, p. 285.

[60] Richard Ashley, 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics', *Alternatives*, 12:4 (1987), pp. 403–34.

[61] The *locus classicus* of neorealism is to be found in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA, 1979), and 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: A Response to My Critics', in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, 1986); and Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, 1981), and 'The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism', in Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*. See also David A. Baldwin (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York, 1993). For a variety of quite understandable reasons, neorealists often picture their position as the natural successor of the classical Realist tradition, including, in particular, Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle For Power and Peace* (New York, 1948 and later edns); E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London, 1939); Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1978); and Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Castlereagh, Metternich, and the Problem of Peace, 1812–1822* (Boston, 1957). Those familiar with the traditional methodologies employed by these earlier Realists might wonder whether they would accept the neorealist effort to link up with classical versions of this school of thought. For reasons why they might not find these bedfellows to their liking, see Hedley Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', in Klaus Knorr and James Rosenau (eds.), *Contending Approaches to International Politics* (Princeton, 1969); and Richard Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', in Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*. See also my article, 'Three Forms of Political Realism', *Political Studies*, 35 (1987), pp. 189–210, and my book, *Political Realism in International Theory* (Cambridge, 1996).

[62] The idea of a pragmatic version of Realism as a conception of science has been shaped in many different ways by the remarkable writings of Hilary Putnam. See, in particular, *Words and Life* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), part 3, and *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford, 1995). In my view, but evidently contrary to Putnam's, however, Lyotard's project may be seen as at least partially consistent with the pragmatist's goal of drawing out the implications of the demise of foundationalist understandings of politics, including, in particular, that to be found in robust globalism.

of international relations constitute knowledge, ideologies of domination, texts, bad poetry, rhetorics, or whatever.[63] To be sure, this is not to imply that international relations should attempt to develop an account of itself in terms which are wholly or mainly divorced from its own past. That would be harmful even if it were conceptually possible. Human beings are embedded creatures and, as such, are never able to detach themselves completely from their culture, language and traditions.[64] An internal pragmatist/Realist philosophy of science which is both anti-sceptical and fallibilist is all the philosophy of science international relations needs and, given the approximate truth of anti-foundationalism, all it can have.

The second feature of Evaluative Political Realism worth emphasizing here lies in its commitment to explanation by reasons or, as I would prefer to say, 'ordinary-life explanations'. An ordinary-life explanation involves the claim that to explain human behaviour, in general and with appropriate *ceteris paribus* clauses attached, we need to appeal to someone's reasons for acting within a certain historical and environmental context. In other words, we generally account for the behaviour of statesmen or stateswomen on the basis of attributing to them belief-states, desire-states and intentional-states. From within the capacious category of ordinary-life explanation, we may say that past statesmen have chosen policies for their nation-states on the basis of reasons concerning the desirability of certain ends or purposes; we have access to those reasons by imaginatively putting ourselves in their place and judging whether those reasons were 'good' or 'bad' reasons. The fact that when the reasons are bad reasons different explanatory modalities need to be used to explain what happened should not distract us from accepting the centrality in the ordinary case of reason-giving explanations. Ordinary-life explanations, thus understood, have deep resonance in the explanatory accounts traditionally offered by political Realists, and stand in sharp contrast to the rational-choice explanatory modes upon which neorealists typically rely.

The third remarkable feature of Evaluative Political Realism lies in its firm commitment to history, in the sense of a commitment not just to history as methodology (historiography), but to history as a way of understanding and interpreting ordinary life. Since ordinary life is principally characterized by 'historicity' and human beings are the 'bearers' of history, they generally have access to the implicit ordinary-life explanations that underlie their 'traditional' and 'customary' ways of interpreting themselves. History is the public speech which creates heritages and the cohesive narratives of different cultures, communities and nation-states. In so far as we are all participants in the shaping of our heritage and the cohesive narratives of which we are a part, history is meaningful and this makes historiography possible. But although history is meaningful, there is, on this view, no predetermined *telos* that will make the whole course of events naturally and fully intelligible: there is an ineluctable gap between historiography as a *practice* and historiography as a vicarious *theory* that projects a pre-given *telos* for the whole.

A fourth feature of Evaluative Political Realism worth mentioning here lies in its commitment to a quasi-realist ethics for international relations. A quasi-realist ethics

---

[63] John Rawls' ideas on considered judgments may be found in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), pp. 19–21, 48–51, 577–87, and John Rawls, 'The Independence of Moral Theory', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 47 (1974/5), pp. 7–10.
[64] On this point, see Brian Fay, *Critical Social Science* (Ithaca, NY, 1987).

is one which says that it is both human beings and the world—in a sense that requires spelling out—that determine the success of our ethical practices and not, as in an alternative Kantian view, reason and the will. The problem for the Evaluative Political Realist is how to bring an internal pragmatist/realist philosophy of science into coherent relation with a quasi-realist ethics so that she can claim ethical knowledge of the world. One route to sustaining this claim lies in rejecting an absolute conception of the world and the rationalism which subtends it, and replacing it with a participant's conception of the human world—the world of human action—which makes a place for both pluralism and ethical objectivity. Evaluative Political Realism may thus be viewed as the attempt to make a place for a partially cognitive ethics within a non-absolute, but realistically conceived, pluralist world of different kinds of knowledge.

The motivation for this form of political Realism is twofold: first and negatively, it is derived from recognition of the extent to which positivism still shapes our understanding of what knowledge in international relations consists of, and secondly and more controversially, it is based on the idea that ethics is itself a form of knowledge. As to the first motivation, and notwithstanding general philosophical attacks on positivism, there is a widespread acceptance of the idea that what justifies a truth claim is data derived from observation-statements the evidence from which stands in logically justified relations to that truth claim; such relations are described by a set of criteria of some sort.[65] One sees positivist tendencies at work in the general insistence that when there is a debate between one view of international relations and another, the main basis for resolving it is supposed to be found in assembling hard data which, presumably, will be acceptable to every rational inquirer and applicable in the light of rational reflections on the content of the hypothesis and observation-statements.[66] For Evaluative Political Realism, by contrast, the stalemate between opposing positions in international relations—whether between neorealists and critical theorists, between post-positivists and post-modernists or whatever—will only be resolved (if at all) by pushing up the level of

---

[65] This idea has its fullest expression in Carl Hempel's 'Studies in the Logic of Confirmation', in Carl Hempel (ed.), *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (New York, 1965), p. 10. It has found a resonance in John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique* (London, 1983), and 'The Post-Positivist Debate: Reconstructing Scientific Enquiry and International Relations Theory after Enlightenment's Fall', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 217–40. Notwithstanding efforts to put some distance between his views and classical positivism, Vasquez makes it clear that there is a set of criteria, six in number, which will enable us to identify 'good' theories of international relations. Since one of the most important characteristics of positivism is precisely this idea, it is hard to see why Vasquez should shrink from identifying his view as 'positivist'. This is worth mentioning here to illustrate a pervasive tendency to avoid identification with 'unfashionable' views. My view is that if the shoe fits, one has to wear it, even if it pinches from time to time.

[66] Consider, for example, the debate between Markus Fischer, 'Feudal Europe, 800–1300: Communal Discourses and Conflictual Practices', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), pp. 426–66, and 'On Context, Facts, and Norms: Response to Hall and Kratochwil', *International Organization*, 47 (1993), pp. 493–500, in defence of neorealism, and Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, 'Medieval Tales: Neorealist "Science" and the Abuse of History', *International Organization*, 47 (1993), pp. 479–91, ostensibly supporting critical theory. Although the central question whether such entities as independently knowable, non-conceptualized facts can exist was raised during the debate, no attempt to resolve this or any other genuine philosophical issue was made by the discussants. The reason for this may lie in the (still) widely shared positivist idea that experience alone is the ultimate source of knowledge.

analysis where the real differences between them emerge and where the possibility of reaching wide reflective equilibrium is given genuine content.

The second motivation for Evaluative Political Realism is that it brings international theory into contact with ethics and politics in a way which tries to avoid question-begging appeals to 'normative' international relations. The idea that any understanding of the relation of morality or ethics to international relations should fall into the category of 'the normative' simply fails to register the thought that articulation of the moral problems in these terms may very well distort the moral questions at issue in actual cases since these cannot be adequately articulated in terms of norms, rules, laws or any other fundamentally legislative morality. A normative-oriented morality is one which identifies moral assessment with an impartial perspective—'the moral point of view'—and therefore refuses to make a place for personal attachments to individuals, groups or nations. A normative-oriented ethics begs the question against non-normative moralities by supposing, as premise, that morality must be universal. Those who say that morality is not universal in the required sense, that morality must make a place for personal attachments, might, for example, be sympathetic to a communitarian ethics which goes against the grain of any version of internationalism which oscillates between an essentially undefended transcendental humanism, i.e., arguably, Linklater's version of robust globalism, and an equally undefended reductive materialism, i.e., arguably, Cox's genre of robust globalism. To avoid question-begging argument against the communitarian position, then, one has to give up the misleading distinction between a 'normative international relations' which is supposed to deal with morality, ethics and values, on the one hand, and a descriptive international relations which deals with facts, data or observation, on the other.[67] Evaluative Political Realism, in refusing to accept that distinction and the fact–value dichotomy which subtends it, puts considerable distance between itself and any Kantian or neo-Kantian morality of the sort to be found *in nuce* in robust globalism.[68] This suggests another reason why Evaluative Political Realism cannot travel too far down the road with Lyotard; for Lyotard, notwithstanding the many respects in which he rejects Kantian philosophy, accepts, as the Evaluative Political Realist does not, a Kantian distinction between the normative and the descriptive. Still, Lyotard's position does considerable damage to robust globalism, and the self-conscious Evaluative Political Realist hopes to trade on these results for developing her own very different project.

Lyotard's rejection of utopianism

For Lyotard, the rejection of utopianism, and the human emancipation bound up with it, is an obvious feature of the world in which we live; we should accept it as a

---

[67] Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), shows in a lucid and appealing way the extent to which moral issues are in thrall to the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate. I am not suggesting that Brown commits himself to communitarianism; only that he does not beg the question against it.

[68] For some recent arguments from a pragmatist perspective concerning why we should give up the fact/value dichotomy, see Putnam, *Words and Life*, pp. 205–15.

self-evident description of 'how things are'. As Lyotard states it in *The Postmodern Condition*:

> We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives—we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern discourse.[69]

In rejecting the use of metanarratives to legitimize universal emancipation, Lyotard's position helps us to see why we should reject robust globalism as a utopian project, a project consistent with the Evaluative Political Realist's goal of avoiding moralistic thinking.[70] To be sure, while classical Realism located utopianism in the failure to grasp how human beings *as such* lust for power, Lyotard locates it in the Enlightenment's belief in freedom and progress. Metanarratives are narratives of emancipation. Such narratives allude to past conditions in which men, women and children were oppressed; their conditions were, nonetheless, legitimated through the use of myth and religion. Neither Lyotard nor the Evaluative Political Realist would object to this claim. But metanarratives don't stop there; they also point forwards to a future condition in which subjects are free. The Idea (in the Kantian sense) to be realized—freedom, enlightenment, material abundance, or whatever—was thought to have legitimating value, in part, because it embodied a morally necessary universal goal of some sort. Metanarratives based on 'the Idea' are the narratives of modernity; they are the narratives of an increasingly problematic foundational conception of philosophy; and they are the narratives of a robust globalism which many emancipatory theorists in international relations accept.

Lyotard rejects this part of the Kantian picture.[71] Lyotard's first claim about modernity is that the development of consciousness, of technology, of science—the very things which modernity vigorously promoted—has paradoxically rendered human emancipation impossible. The philosophical basis for this thought lies in understanding one consequence of modernity's substitution of epistemology for ontology: after modernity, neither society nor labour nor any privileged group of human subjects would have an essence in the sense required to make emancipation intelligible. In undermining the very idea of 'an essence' of infinite development, modernity, ontologically speaking, created a condition in which there was literally no-thing from which 'we' could be emancipated. For Lyotard, to say that there is something called humanity which would be the (possible) object of an emancipatory Idea (in the Kantian sense) is just question-begging.[72] Modernity's promise of emancipation passes beyond the limits of what can be reasonably offered in this way; for, just as there is no-thing from which to be emancipated, so there is no 'we' in whose name the emancipation could be realized. To be sure, Marxians attempted to legitimize a 'universal historical subject' by universalizing the workers' movement, but, according to Lyotard, the fate of the workers' movement was a 'telling example' of why the Kantian Idea of emancipation was bound to fail.[73] These views are, as it happens, consistent not only with the tradition of political Realism but with

---

[69] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition—A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, 1986), p. 60.

[70] For good reasons for rejecting utopianism which apply to present arguments, see Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York, 1991), ch. 3.

[71] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985* (Sydney, 1992), pp. 110–11.

[72] Ibid., p. 45.

[73] Ibid., p. 46.

Evaluative Political Realism and, if valid, give additional support to the Realist's case against emancipatory conceptions of international relations. Lyotard's second claim against modernity—his rejection of the Enlightenment view of justice—creates more interesting possibilities. According to Lyotard, modernity characteristically seeks a theory of justice which has certain properties: universality, comprehensiveness and necessity. This suggests that it thinks a theory of justice should be scientific in form. Lyotard and Evaluative Political Realism reject this claim. For Lyotard, questions of justice are always bound up with whether the institutions which are in place should continue to exist as they are. If this is the central political issue, then there is no escape from the question of whether a group of people affected by certain institutions should *prescribe* changes. But the act of prescribing is a far different speech act from the act of truth-telling and, as such, does not lend itself to scientific thinking. According to Lyotard, when such political philosophers as Plato and Marx held that there was a 'true being of society', that actual societies 'could be held to be just' if examined in the light of such exemplary standards, they were effectively confusing description and prescription.[74] This, Lyotard claims, is a logical error.[75] For Lyotard, discourse about justice is not a matter of observing the world in an attempt to find out its true workings, but a matter of listening. For 'there are language games in which the important thing is to listen, in which the rule deals with audition. Such a game is the game of the just. And in this game, one speaks only inasmuch as one listens, that is, one speaks as a listener, and not as an author'.[76] When justice is at issue, we need to begin with hearing what people in particular social and political contexts actually say about their practices. The call to be just, on this view, always supersedes so-called norms of rationality. If this reading is correct, then Lyotard's work supports Evaluative Political Realism in rejecting utopianism as frictionless universalizing, a genre of thinking which deprives itself of the resources to come to grips with local contexts and different understandings of justice.

Lyotard's pluralism

A second reason why Evaluative Political Realists might want to make contact with Lyotard's views is that they provide a somewhat different ground for supporting pluralism, a traditional feature of political Realism.[77] The form of pluralism relevant to Evaluative Political Realism involves recognizing that the legitimate ends of nation-states are many and varied, and that there is no blueprint devised in philosophical reason (or anywhere else) which would provide those who gained access to it with knowledge of how people actually living in nation-states should live their communal lives. This is not to say, of course, that people or governments cannot

[74] Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, tr. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, 1985), p. 23.
[75] As indicated above, Evaluative Political Realism rejects sharp distinctions between the normative and the prescriptive. However, it does not deny that there is a logical distinction between the two modes of discourse.
[76] Lyotard and Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, pp. 71–2.
[77] For an excellent discussion of the sources of pluralism, see Isaiah Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli', in *Against the Current* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 25–79.

make moral judgments about other nation-states. Claims that pluralism collapses into relativism are red herrings.[78] Lyotard's genre of pluralism, one hastens to add, is not directed towards defending Realist pluralism; nonetheless, one consequence of his position is that it provides a useful basis for reconstructing Realist pluralism in linguistic terms.

The main vehicle for this is Lyotard's Wittgensteinian understanding of language games as activities or 'moves' with or against players of one's own or another's language. In this view, the world always contains a multiplicity of language games which cannot be transcribed into or evaluated in any totalizing metadiscourse. Thus, for example, attempts by Marxian totalizers to remove the differences in the language games of nation-states in the international system should be countered, in the Lyotardian view, by the practice of paralogism; that is, by attempts to defer consensus, to produce dissension and undermine totalistic efforts to impose commensurability among existing language games. From this practical and local perspective, the globalist would be diagnosed as someone who, *malgré tout*, is determined to uncover and impose the common elements of different foreign-policy language games which culturally diverse nation-states use in their ongoing struggle to satisfy their needs and interests against others using their own or a different language.

But Lyotard's pluralism goes beyond claims concerning the diversity of language games. In *The Differend* Lyotard conceives language as made up of *phrases*—'the only givens'. Phrases are vehicles for grasping the world: 'a phrase presents what it is about, the case, *ta pragmata*, which is its referent'.[79] But phrases cannot belong to a single universe since this would entail the existence of a universe 'prior to the phrases'. Phrases are linked together by genres or regimens of discourse which are always local; discourse sets down rules for the linking of phrases within a non-universal context. These regimens are intended to ensure that the discourse in which phrases are articulated 'proceeds towards its generically assigned end: to convince, to persuade, to inspire laughter or tears, etc'.[80] Given a heterogeneity of phrase regimens, Lyotard's pluralism may be expressed by doubting the very coherence of 'common subordination to a single end'.[81] To be sure, Lyotard recognizes that alternatives to heterogeneity have been offered in the form of 'some metaphysical will' or in 'a phenomenology of intention', but these alternatives, Lyotard insists, fail to resolve Kant's problem (in the *Introduction to the Third Critique*) of how to bridge the gaps between dispersive discourses.[82] After canvassing a variety of preferred solutions to Kant's problem, Lyotard concludes that the order of the philosophical day is: 'Incommensurability, heterogeneity, the differend, the persistence of proper names, the absence of a supreme tribunal'.[83] Resistance to the integration of language games is a warning to the effect that one should be wary of universalizing tendencies in foundationalist solutions to political problems.

To sum up this point: Lyotard's emphasis on the heteromorphous and wholly

---

[78] For a powerful argument which shows that pluralism, at least in certain cases, need not collapse into relativism, see Susan Wolf, 'Two Levels of Pluralism', *Ethics*, 102 (1992), pp. 785–98.

[79] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend* (Manchester, 1988), p. 14.

[80] Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, p. 54.

[81] Lyotard, *Differend*, p. 129.

[82] Ibid., p. 130.

[83] Ibid., p. 135.

conventional style of language games implies a radically different, critical conception of ideology, one that abandons the search for foundations and totalizing truth and instead embraces the logic of particularity and context dependence. From this standpoint, a *grand récit*, a particular type of (potentially) hegemonic language game which functions as a mask of the conditions of its own engendering, would be the very epitome of ideology. The term ideology would not apply, however, to *petit récit*, 'the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science'.[84] In other words, 'ideology' may be the appropriate pejorative term for language games which endeavour to represent and secure themselves as general, global or universal.[85] We could then make a distinction between non-ideological language games and ideological language games. The former may be understood as local, context-laden language games. By contrast, ideological language games are those which, in presupposing universal truth, demand their general adoption and, therefore, the exclusion and/or repression of every other *particular* language game. So conceived, the Lyotardian critique of ideology would break decisively with the political aim of robust globalism in its attempt to devalue the false universality of an opponent's language game by presenting its own as unassailable.

The key point for our present purpose is that no sense can be given to emancipation as the Idea of universal history since history, as material practice, is not universal. We understand this because we know that names, which serve as our only link to reality, are learned in cultures and can only be grasped through narratives. Narratives in which names appear are *sui generis* and 'absolutely opposed to the organization of the grand narratives of legitimation which characterise modernity in the West'.[86] If Lyotard is correct in his controversial views of language—and there does seem to be something right about them—then we have a version of pluralism which enhances political Realism.

Lyotard on theory and practice

We have now reached the third and final way in which Evaluative Political Realism may be able to find support in Lyotard's reflections. Lyotard strongly endorses replacing the theoretical apparatus of a scientific understanding of politics with a new conception of practice. As such, he questions the role 'theory' would play once we give up, as presumably we must, the idea that there is a universally or globally just society.[87] Lyotard's general redrawing of the boundaries of theory and practice is continuous with commonsense Realism and its general suspicion of 'abstract theory'. In Lyotard's view, attempts to discover and justify a theory of the unity of theory and practice are 'futile'.[88] No theory of persons and society can generate the universal consent required to bring theory into unison with practice without massive

---

[84] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 60.
[85] Attacks on the general are not confined to French postmodernist philosophers. For example, see the attack on 'generalism' in the work of the analytical philosopher Richard W. Miller, *Moral Differences: Truth, Justice and Conscience in a World of Conflict* (Princeton, 1992), ch. 4.
[86] Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, p. 44.
[87] Lyotard and Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, p. 25.
[88] If Rorty is correct, this would make Lyotard's view of theory and practice consistent with John Dewey's. See Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Brighton, 1982), pp. 43ff.

coercion. And if massive coercion is used, then political practice becomes a form of terrorism. Since theories of justice (and especially world justice) are always riddled with indeterminacies, the idea that a theory of justice can prove its truth—an idea shared by Plato and Marx—cannot even arise. Marxian theory of the unison of theory and practice cannot be sufficiently determinate to obtain the massive, uncoerced consent required for it to become a global revolutionary praxis, the acting on which proves the theory's truth. If this is so, there is an unbridgeable gap between theory and practice. This means, for example, that justice 'cannot be thought from the theoretical and the apophantic'.[89] Justice, on this view, would be a matter of practical judgments by judges 'worthy of the name'.[90] Lyotard goes on to say that the making of just judgments in Aristotle's sense implies that such judgments cannot stretch beyond *doxa*, that is, statements of opinion or dialectics; what they cannot be are statements of truth or theoretical statements in a science of justice.[91] If this claim is correct, devastating consequences follow for the intelligibility of robust globalism.

Without a theoretically persuasive account of how theory and practice link up to yield a route to universal justice, robust globalists are caught in a dilemma. Either they can attempt to renew the claim that emancipatory theory embodies a conception of the unity of theory and practice and show why this is so notwithstanding the sort of criticisms brought against it by Lyotard (and others), or they can give up the claim to possess a theory that links theory and practice. Being impaled on either of these horns would be uncomfortable. In choosing the first horn, robust globalists would be obliged to do what no Marxian has yet been able to do, namely, find a theory of the unity of theory to practice which is coherent and acceptable. But if they choose the second horn, they would have to give up what Marx considered the *raison d'être* of his conception of people and society: bringing about human emancipation.[92]

Summing up

Totality is the centrepiece of Lyotard's attack on modernity. He views totality as an anachronistic effort to reconcile theory and practice in the name of universal history, an effort which has led to campaigns of terror against real communities with named individuals in concrete temporal–spatial locations. For Lyotard, universal narratives (theories) are for ever divorced from universal Ideas of practical freedom. Consequently, such Ideas as freedom, emancipation, equality and so on 'cannot be verified by empirical proofs but only by indirect signs, *analoga* which signal in experience that this ideal is present in people's minds'.[93] But this means, on Lyotard's reckoning, that any discussions of emancipation will be '"dialectical" in the Kantian sense, that is, without conclusion'.[94] Since Ideas are not mirrors of the world they

---

[89] Lyotard and Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, p. 25.
[90] Ibid., p. 26.
[91] Ibid.
[92] On this point, see Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p. 515.
[93] Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, p. 61.
[94] Ibid.

are meant to represent, 'there will always be a profound tension between what one ought to be and what one is'.[95] In the context of this discussion, one form of totality involves absolutizing the Kantian Idea and then finding something in the sensibility to confirm it, whether this involves confirming reason's increasing self-awareness of freedom or reducing reality to modes of production.[96] But whether they are one or the other, such posits eliminate the profound tension between what ought to be and what is. They also lead to terror. 'Terror acts on the suspicion that nothing is emancipated enough—and makes it into a politics. Every particular reality is a plot against the pure, universal will'.[97]

Totalitarianism can borrow the Idea of freedom from modernity and legitimate it by the use of myths. The most important of these—and contrary to pluralism—is the name of a *we* and an end to human history. By announcing the singularity of a *we* and an end to human history, we would then be in a position to assert the possibility of the universal history of humanity. What prevents this claim from going through, however, is that no universal history can actually be written. Why not? To have a universal history it would be necessary to use such phrases as '*On that date, in that place, it happened that x, etc.*', but such references 'would not be accepted by the addressees of the so-called universal narrative'.[98] On Lyotard's view, reflection on universal narrative will show its practical impossibility. For there to be a universal narrative there would have to be 'addressees who were themselves "universal"'.[99] But this is impossible because 'addressees' of narratives are always rooted in named, spatial–temporal particularities. Given this, the very idea of narrative emancipation can get no grip.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that globalism—in its philosophically most interesting form of robust globalism—is bound up with human emancipation which, in turn, finds its numen in the Marxian tradition. Many research programmes in international relations, even those which 'officially' reject the Marxian idea of human emancipation, nonetheless attempt to keep some grip on an emancipatory understanding of international relations. I have argued that certain ideas of Jean-François Lyotard, who is of course no Realist, may be deployed to provide grounds for taking up an anti-emancipatory stance in international relations. In putting Lyotard's contribution into intimate contact with Evaluative Political Realism, we get the following few points for reflection. Robust globalism starts with the morally attractive idea of egalitarian impartiality and attempts to build a theory of social justice which contains within it the motivational materials to put it into practice. The problem for robust globalism is that it is caught between utopianism and authoritarianism. A project is utopian if

---

[95] Ibid.
[96] These are, I take it, the projects of Linklater and Robert W. Cox respectively. For the former, see *Men and Citizens* and *Beyond Realism and Marxism*. For the latter, see *Production, Power and World Order*.
[97] Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, p. 65.
[98] Lyotard, *Differend*, p. 157.
[99] Ibid.

it depends on transformations in institutional frameworks, rules, conventions which it is very hard to imagine. A politics is authoritarian if it involves the imposition of a system of rules which most of those affected by them could reasonably and legitimately reject. It is not just that some of the people who are living under the system can reasonably feel that their interests are not being taken into account; rather, since the interests of the overwhelming majority are not being adequately accommodated, they are, reasonably enough, in opposition to the system. On this construal, the viability and the legitimacy of robust globalism turns on whether it can avoid both utopianism and authoritarianism. Lyotard's position, as interpreted here and as shared with Evaluative Political Realism, is that robust globalism cannot avoid being either utopian or authoritarian. Robust globalism falls into utopianism if it requires, as a condition of human emancipation, either the elimination of states altogether or their rational self-transformation into entities self-driven towards emancipated humanity in the way Linklater's theory proposes. On the other hand, robust globalism tumbles into authoritarianism if the theory requires, as a condition of its practice, the effective subversion of legitimate grounds for complaint against its own theoretical structure. Historical materialism, for example, appears to require just this when it builds into itself unconstrained resistance to the complaints of the privileged subjects it is supposed to emancipate, on the general grounds that they are self-deceived or benighted. Lyotard's position rests, at least in part, upon certain Wittgensteinian views of language which deserve close attention. For Lyotard, the utopianism found in historical materialism is based on the implicit claim that there exists a single language belonging to a single universe—a metanarrative—which can describe a future state not just of political freedom, but of human emancipation itself. Lyotard contends that there is no such language and that Wittgenstein's conception of language games explains why. In particular, we have a variety of language games—some scientific and some non-scientific, some 'modern' and some 'primitive', and so forth—but what we do not, and cannot, have is a meta-language game in which human desire and feelings can be integrated into one another in a satisfactory way, i.e., in a way which presupposes the hiving off of all sub-world language games. Lyotard's position may thus be understood as claiming that robust globalism presupposes that there is a single language game that deserves to be called true, rational or epistemologically privileged. And this idea is utopian.[100] Recoiling from the utopianism to which its presuppositions concerning language commit it, the robust globalist focuses in on the manifest inequality which obviously exists in the world. But instead of trying to discover how to eliminate this inequality, from a perspective which admits the reality of different language games and the different perspectives which they represent, robust globalism reasserts its privileged epistemological position over these different perspectives, pre-empting the possibility of morally legitimate resistance to its authority.

Although there may well be a *tertium quid* to avoid this constant reverberation between utopianism and authoritarianism, it is not clear that this can be accomplished in a way which helps the theses of either Linklater or Cox. To be sure, such arguments by no means 'refute' robust globalism (what an absurd idea!), but enough

---

[100] Although interpretations of Wittgenstein's understanding of language game are controversial, some textual support for Lyotard's position may be found in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, paras. 608–12.

has been said perhaps to understand why reasonable people might be sceptical of its claims. For it is difficult to see, contra robust globalism, how we could even make sense of our social and political lives unless we were able to give weight to the bonds of particular identities that are rooted in the particular languages in whose traditions we are enmeshed.