From Modernism to Messianism: Liberal Developmentalism and American Exceptionalism

Following the Second World War, we encounter again many of the same developmental themes that dominated the theory and practice of imperialism in the nineteenth century. Of course, there are important differences as well. For one thing, the differentiation and institutionalization of the human sciences in the intervening years means that these themes are now articulated and elaborated within specialized academic disciplines. For another, the main field on which developmental theory and practice are deployed is no longer British – or, more broadly, European – imperialism but American neoimperialism. At the close of the War, the United States was not only the major military, economic, and political power left standing; it was also less implicated than European states in colonial domination abroad. The depletion of the colonial powers and the imminent breakup of their empires left it in a singular position to lead the reshaping of the post-War world. And it tried to do so in its own image and likeness: America saw itself as the exemplar and apostle of a fully developed modernity.²

In this it was, in some ways, only reproducing the self-understanding and self-regard of the classical imperial powers of the modern period. But in other ways America’s civilizing mission was marked by the exceptionalism of its political history and culture, which was famously analyzed by Louis Hartz fifty years ago.³ Picking up on Alexis de Tocqueville’s observation that Americans were “born equal,” Hartz elaborated upon the uniqueness of the American political experience. Owing to its settlement by émigrés fleeing the ancien régime of Europe, it never had to undergo a social revolution to arrive at a liberal society.⁴ Blessed with an abundance of available land and
natural resources, sparsely populated and far removed from the great powers, it was able to develop and sustain a liberal tradition that was not revolutionary but hegemonic. Individual life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness had a saliency in its political culture that was only enhanced by later waves of immigrants seeking success in a land of equal opportunity. At the same time, this unbroken and unchallenged liberal tradition has entailed a certain narrowness of political discourse and dimness of ideological self-consciousness in comparison to the politics of old Europe, in which liberal and democratic revolutions had first to be won and then to be defended against the forces of feudalism. And that in turn has entailed that there is a certain “absolutist” – or, as we might put it today, fundamentalist – quality to the American civil religion.

As a result, according to Hartz, Americans have had difficulty co-existing with ideological opposition, which has typically been perceived as an alien threat and dealt with through withdrawal or elimination.

‘Americanism’ has had a dual life…[It] has been characterized by a strong isolationist impulse: the sense that America’s very liberal joy lay in the escape from a decadent Old World that could only infect it with its own diseases…[It] has also crusaded abroad in a Wilsonian way…Embodying an absolute moral ethos, ‘Americanism,’ once it is driven on to the world stage by events, is inspired willy-nilly to reconstruct the very alien things it tries to avoid. Its messianism is the polar counterpart of its isolationism.⁵
In Hartz’s view, the domestic counterpart to this fundamentalist impulse to withdraw from or convert ideologically threatening others is the sort of national hysteria familiar from the “red scares” of the 1920s and 1950s. Opposition abroad gets represented as evil, opposition at home gets represented as subversive: “in a time of ideological war the judgment of others by our norms brings, by automatic reflex, the passionate and fearful intensification of those norms as they apply to ourselves as well.” In short, crusading Americanism abroad – “making the world safe for democracy” – and repressive Americanism at home – heightened anxiety over “the enemy within” – are recurring patterns of reaction to others perceived as threatening from the limited perspective of the “American liberal faith.” The dark side of our unique “national liberalism,” according to Hartz, is a “national blindness” that tends to project “the limitations of the American liberal perspective onto the world scene.” If and to the extant that Hartz is right, then, America’s evangelical impulse to spread the freedom, democracy, and economic opportunity it enjoys to other societies runs the constant risk of transmuting into an imperialist messianism blinded by the certainty of its own righteousness. As we shall see, in the half-century since he offered this analysis, the impact of American exceptionalism on the theory and practice of liberal internationalism has varied enormously.

For several decades after the War, American social science and foreign policy were pervaded by liberal theories of development and modernization, which consequently exercised great influence in such US-dominated agencies as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, US Agency for International Development, Alliance for Progress, and the like. The spirit behind this incarnation of liberal internationalism
was proclaimed by President Truman in his 1949 inaugural address: “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas…. The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on concepts of democratic fair dealing…. Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.”

This mix of material progress (science, technology, and industry as the keys to global peace and prosperity), political idealism (the extension of the “Fair Deal” to the whole world), and moral goodwill (assisting others to better their conditions of life) is characteristic of the earlier phases of post-War developmental discourse. And at the start, at least, this was not merely an ideological cover for national self-interest but was also a sincere expression of good intentions. Moreover, the largely Western-trained leaders of newly and soon-to-be emancipated colonies themselves tended to view the task of nation-building in terms of economic development and social modernization. To that extent, the aims of US foreign policy could converge for a time with the aspirations of many “underdeveloped areas.” But the failures of development economics and the widening gap between rich and poor countries soon became evident. The growing disenchantment in Latin America was given theoretical expression in neo-Marxist theories of dependency, which gained increasing purchase across the developing world as the United States escalated its brutal, neocolonial war in Vietnam.

By the 1980s, development and modernization theory had been largely discredited, not only by attacks from the left but also – and increasingly – by attacks from
the right. Neoliberal critiques of welfare state programs on the domestic front were accompanied by a shift from modernization to globalization in the international arena. And more recently, neoconservative views combining neoliberalism in economics with social conservatism at home and the imposition of American values abroad have come to dominate public discourse and political practice. Yet, as I shall argue, the central ideas of development theory still retain their hold on the scholarly, political, and popular imaginations.

In what follows, I want to examine the fate of developmental thinking in the USA over the last half century. After sketching some main lines of development and modernization theory in post-WW II America, and some main lines of critique from left and right, I will look briefly at the neoconservative reprise of American messianism and then conclude with some thoughts on where all this leaves us in respect to thinking about development today. At every point in this post-War discourse, there has been a great variety of approaches to and critiques of development theory; but I shall have to confine my remarks to a few of the principal forms and treat even those in very general terms.

I. Development and Dependency

A critical feature of post-WW II development discourse was its Cold War setting: throughout this period, the West was locked in a geopolitical and ideological struggle for global hegemony with the Soviet Union. And the principal battlegrounds were the vast areas of our planet that had been subjected to various forms of colonial domination and exploitation. In that situation, the United States, which had not been a traditional colonial center and was now the dominant geopolitical power, was positioned to lead the struggle
against communism. Given the entwinement of nationhood and modernization in the “Third World” – so that the nation state was viewed as the privileged vehicle of modernization and modernization as the privileged path of nation building – a central issue in the struggle was the preferred path to modernization in the newly independent states; for the Soviet Union had demonstrated an alternative route of industrialization: a socialist form of state directed economic growth rather than the “free trade” capitalism of their former colonial masters.

To be sure, the form of economic development the Western powers opposed to socialism also envisaged an active role for the state. The political-economic ascendency of social democratic and welfare state models of capitalism after the War, and the perceived successes of such interventionist economic policies as the New Deal and the Marshall Plan, encouraged development theorists in the belief that Keynesian macroeconomics was the key to managing economic growth. It was a presupposition of this approach that national economies were in fact susceptible to state management. And that presupposition had been partially satisfied by the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, through the creation of a world trade and finance system under the aegis of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which allowed for state directed, national economic policy. When this regulated international system of national economies was dismantled in the 1970s, that presupposition was no longer met, and the route to neoliberal globalization was opened wide. In the post-WW II period, however, the regime of “free trade” established at Bretton Woods was supposed to reflect a convergence of US interests in ensuring free access to markets and resources formerly under colonial restrictions, on the one hand, and postcolonial interests in blazing the
shortest possible path to economic growth and modernization, on the other. But this alleged convergence of interests came increasingly into doubt well before that system was transformed. The breakdown of the “development consensus” was already apparent in the fate of the development economics that dominated development theory and practice in the 1950s.

It was no accident that an economistic conception of development achieved the primacy it did. No one doubted that that improvement of the material conditions of life was a, if not the, significant variable in development; and few disputed that increased productivity through industrialization was critical to such improvement. Moreover, by comparison to the other social sciences, economics had a long history as an independent discipline. Thus, it was to be expected that development economists would predominate in such agencies as the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development.

In this first phase, then, the focus of developmental theory was on economic growth, particularly as measured by Gross National Product or by GNP per capita, and development practice emphasized policies that favored foreign investment, technology transfer, state management of the economy, and the like. In short, the dominant form of development theory and practice was a kind of global Keynesianism promoting active intervention into national economies to achieve and sustain growth. Subsequently this core conception of development was expanded to include social and cultural variables – as in the “Human Development Index” used by the United Nations Development Program – and to take political participation and the rule of law into account – as in the UNDP “Human Freedom Index.” But I will not be tracking such piecemeal expansion here, for toward the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s, development economics was
incorporated into a broader, sociological conception of development as “modernization.” It is this conception that bears the strongest affinities to the broader views of historical development that we find in the philosophy of history from Kant to Marx and in classical social theory from Durkheim and Weber to Parsons – which is only to be expected, as it was Parsons who provided the general theory of action it drew upon. But before shifting the focus to modernization theory, it will be useful for our purposes to take a brief look at a form of neo-Marxist critique that development economics soon encountered, “dependency theory,” for it was later directed at modernization theory as well.  

The distant ancestors of dependency theory can be found in the theories of imperialism developed earlier in the twentieth century by Hobson, Hilferding, Lenin, Luxembourg and others to explain the furious scramble for colonies by European powers during the last third of the nineteenth century. A central theme of that discourse had been the need of advanced capitalist economies to resolve their growing internal contradictions and continue the process of capital accumulation by expanding abroad, exporting capital, gaining access to new markets, and the like. A cognate school of neo-Marxist thought was established in the United States after World War II by a group of thinkers around the journal *Monthly Review*, particularly Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy. At almost the same time, Latin American economists associated with the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, Raoul Prebisch in particular, were theoretically articulating the growing disillusionment with development theory and practice in view of its increasingly evident failure to narrow the gaps between rich and poor nations. Elaborated by other Latin American economists and eventually spread to other parts of the world by theorists like Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin, among others, dependency theory criticized
development economics for some of the same reasons that Marx had criticized liberal internationalism in his day: it was predatory capitalism in disguise. The idea that non-Western societies were “underdeveloped” for internal reasons – race, custom, culture, tradition, and so forth – and were thus in need of help from the outside, was an ideological cover-up of the external causes of misery in the “Third World”: precisely the Western conversion of non-Western economies into dependent components of their own economic systems from the fifteenth century onwards. The sustainability of indigenous modes of production in non-Western societies had thereby been undermined. Traditional economies had been restructured as extractive systems producing primary commodities for the industrializing West. In this way, the development of the capitalist world and the underdevelopment of the colonized world were two sides of the same process of capital accumulation, which had been global from the start but by no means even. The economic geography of the planet had been reorganized into centers and peripheries.

Dependency theorists understood the contemporary forms of liberal internationalism articulated by development theory as a continuation of this global exploitation by new means. In theory, national economies in the post-War world were represented as independent units and the trade between them as free and fair; in practice, however, the terms of trade between industrialized countries and primary producers were systematically skewed in favor of the former, for the socially necessary labor time required for industrial goods was much more elastic in relation to technical innovation than that required for primary commodities. As a result, capital – in the form of profits, interest, rents, royalties, and the like – flowed continually to the First from the Third World, which then had to borrow it back to finance its own “development.” In reality,
what was developed by this system was continuing underdevelopment. And because it served the interests of powerful states, multinational corporations, and local elites, there was little hope of overcoming structural dependency from within it.

Thus, dependency theorists often promoted an alternative route to development: the de-linking of Third World economies from this system by means of “import substitution strategies.” Replacing industrial imports with domestic production under protective tariffs would enable agricultural economies to industrialize and gain a measure of independence. Despite some initial success, however, this alternative route to development proved untenable over time. The high-cost, low-quality output of industrial production in the Third World was generally not competitive with that of the First World; the emphasis on industrialization often led to a deleterious neglect of the agricultural sector; the need for foreign investment in developing industries regularly led to higher levels of indebtedness; and so forth.

According to an important outgrowth of dependency theory, the “world systems theory” elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein and others, this was not surprising; for there was no possibility of de-linking national economies from the global economy. The world economic system was in fact a single system, of which national economies – or regional economies or economic sectors – could only be interdependent parts. Development could be achieved, if at all, only within this system. And indeed, the success of the state-managed export strategies of newly industrializing counties (NICs) – e.g. South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan – in the 1970s and thereafter demonstrated that it did in fact allow for forms of “dependent development.” Consequently, the economic world was not divided into center and periphery, as claimed by dependency theorists; rather,
global capitalism allowed for a “semi-periphery” of dependently developing nations. Nevertheless, it remained true that capitalism was an inherently inequitable system predicated upon exploitation. There was no way to “level the playing field” as long as world economic relations were structured along capitalist lines. The only way to do that was to change the system as a whole.

As we shall see, contemporary theorists of neoliberal globalization agree with world system theorists about the impossibility of de-linking from the global economy, but they disagree with them about whether the latter can or should be fundamentally altered. Critics of both have argued that each in their own way – the world system theorists with self-conscious resolution, the neoliberals with unself-conscious irony – evince an economic determinism reminiscent of Marx’s political economy, and that both consequently suffer from a blindness to possibilities of political agency: just as Marxists failed to give due weight to the state management of economic processes characteristic of social democracy and reform liberalism, world system theory and neoliberal globalization theory consistently underestimate the possibilities of legally regulating global markets and politically managing world economic processes.

II. Modernization and Domination

For our purposes, the most significant theoretical response to the evident inadequacies of purely economic approaches to development was the ascendancy of a general theory of societal modernization in the late 1950s and 1960s. With this, the postwar discussion of development rejoined the tradition of grand social theory and historical sociology descended from Comte and Marx, Durkheim and Weber, which had been occupied above
all with the modernization of Europe. The main link to that tradition was, of course, Talcott Parsons, who had been developing a general theory of action since the 1940s, precisely in conversation with such predecessors. From this theoretical perspective, it was evident that the economic system was one, interdependent subsystem of the society as a whole, which could be treated separately for analytical purposes but not for practical purposes. There were social, cultural, psychological, legal, and political preconditions and consequences of economic development that had to be attended to both in theory and in practice. One-dimensional, economistic approaches to societal modernization were bound to prove inadequate. By contrast, the approach to modernization theory that came to dominate in the 1960s – in the social sciences, in US policy circles, in national and international development agencies, and among Third World elites -- was multidimensional and interdisciplinary in character. 11

Although the modernization-theory approach to development shared many features with the approach adopted by J.S. Mill a century earlier – for instance, it too was holistic, unilinear, and binary (with the earlier backward/civilized dichotomy replaced by traditional /modern or undeveloped/developed) – it benefited from the differentiation and institutionalization of the specialized social sciences in the intervening century. Thus, while some of the same themes and tropes appeared, they were elaborated in much greater detail and were saturated with much more empirical material. Of the myriad strands of modernization theory, it will be convenient for us to follow Nils Gilman in focusing on three interrelated strands centered in three institutional contexts: one, in sociology, centered around the Harvard Department of Social Relations (DSR) under Talcott Parsons; a second, in political science, centered around the Social Science
Research Council’s Committee on Comparative Politics (CCP) under Gabriel Almond and later Lucian Pye; and a third, in foreign policy studies, centered around the MIT Center for International Studies CIS) under Walt Rostow.\textsuperscript{12} But before doing so, it will be useful to get a better sense of its general aims, at least at the start and for most of those involved. In his keynote address to a conference on the problems and prospects of new states, which he delivered in 1959, ten years after Truman’s inaugural address, the sociologist Edward Shils characterized the goal of modernization processes, i.e. modernity, as follows: “In the new states, ‘modern’ means democratic and equalitarian, scientific, economically advanced and sovereign. ‘Modern’ states are ‘welfare states’…Modernity entails democracy, and democracy in the new states is, above all, equalitarian…Modernity is scientific. It believes the progress of the country rests on rational technology, and ultimately on scientific knowledge…All this requires planning and the employment of economists and statisticians…[Modernity] is the model of the West detached in some way from its geographical origins and locus.”\textsuperscript{13}

A key text in articulating the sociological dimension of modernization theory was the 1951 collection, \textit{Toward a General Theory of Action,} edited by Parsons and Shils. Building on work Parsons had done in the 1940s, it offered a theoretical approach that combined the emphasis on environmental factors characteristic of post-Darwinian naturalistic theories of society with the stress on rationalization characteristic of post-Weberian culturalistic approaches, in a construction that also drew upon Durkheimian insights into the functional needs met by differentiated social structures, in particular the need to maintain social solidarity across change. Structural-functionalism not only provided a synoptic framework of analysis and a coordinated agenda of research for
social science in general, it also provided an integrated framework for research and policy concerned with modernization processes in particular. The traditional/modern dichotomy was embedded in Parson’s scheme of dichotomous “pattern variables” (i.e. value orientations), and the process of modernization was represented as movement from one pole toward the other. Its path was marked by increasing differentiation within and between specialized subsystems of action, in which changing cultural patterns of value were institutionalized in normative structures and internalized in socialization processes. At the same time, increasing functional differentiation meant growing societal complexity and enhanced adaptive capacity, which meant that more developed societies had a competitive advantage over less developed ones as regards the achievement of societal goals. And given that functional needs were basically similar for all social systems, this superiority in the struggle for survival entailed a pressure toward structural convergence upon developing societies. In consequence, the highly differentiated societies of the modern West represented the model and measure of development for the rest of the world.

As applied to the modernization of postcolonial societies in the mid-twentieth century, this meant that the development processes they had begun under colonial regimes could best be completed by their adopting Western attitudes, values, practices, and institutions – including market mechanisms and state bureaucracies, industrialization and urbanization, secularization and rationalization, the rule of law and democratization, social mobility and mass education, and so forth. And all this could best be accomplished with the assistance of already developed societies and under the management of strong national states. To be sure, there was always disagreement among
modernization theorists as to which factors were most basic to development. But even those who, like Rostow, stressed material factors such as technology transfer and capital investment, subscribed to the multidimensional conceptualization of modern society and thus to the necessity of interrelated changes in all areas. There were prerequisites and consequences of economic development no less than there were of political reform.

The type of political reform desired was most often characterized as “democratic.” However, from the start this was understood by the most influential theorists less in terms of popular sovereignty than in terms of formal democracy, that is, universal suffrage, regularly scheduled elections, competing parties, representative bodies, and the like. The recent history of fascism in Europe had made many of them wary of populist politics. And the growing influence in the 1950s of Joseph Schumpeter’s 1942 book, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, led to widespread acceptance of the “elite theory” of democracy, which conceived it as a legally regulated competition for power among elites.¹⁴ The chief distinguishing mark between modern Western democracies and the “people’s democracies” of the Communist world was said to be pluralism: a variety of competing groups were involved in the procedurally legitimate acquisition, transfer, and sharing of power. To this was added an emphasis on the essential role of expertise, particularly of social-scientifically trained technocrats, in modern government administrations. Democratically legitimated political elites guided by such expertise, not public opinion, should set policy. It was this sort of democracy that should be promoted in the Third World as an alternative to communist dictatorship: pluralistic, formal democracies with strong states, governed by elites with the aid and advice of a variety of experts. Democratic institutions and procedures of this sort were
regarded by most modernization theorists, at least early on, as the core of political modernization and thus as integral to societal modernization overall.

The Committee on Comparative Politics, under the leadership of Gabriel Almond in the 1950s and of Lucian Pye after 1963, laid the foundations for a new science of comparative politics along these lines. Drawing on the general theory of action elaborated by structural-functionalist, particularly on the contributions of Shils, they focused their efforts on the Third World, with a view to America’s role as “the leader of the free world” and the need to counter the threat of global communism. The work of the Committee was pervaded by the dominant ethos of scientificity, with its emphasis on behavioralism, value-free inquiry, quantitative measurement, the discovery and testing of empirical laws, and the like – all framed by and contributing to the scientific theory of social action. And it generally underwrote the need for strong postcolonial states to direct the modernization process through central planning guided by scientifically trained elites.

As we shall see, it was mainly the violent exacerbation of this authoritarian streak in modernization theory that led to its thorough discrediting by the 1970s – “mainly” but not “only.” From the start, it was subjected to many of the criticisms of development theory already familiar to us, including those raised by dependency theorists. Modernization theory was said to be marked by a “blaming the victim” stress on the internal causes of underdevelopment and a neglect of the external depredations by European and American imperialism. It evinced no less inveterate an ethnocentrism than the ideologies of colonialism; only now an idealized image of the USA served as the model and measure: modernization = Americanization. And it unself-consciously
assumed (or at least asserted) that US interventions in developing nations were essentially benign, while their targets increasingly saw them as covers for self-interest. Moreover, like its predecessors, modernization theory painted the non-Western world with one brush; the binary schemes of traditional/modern and undeveloped/developed classified the very diverse societies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East as one and all traditionalistic and undeveloped. Together with this unitary starting point went a single end-state, developed modernity in the American style, and a unilinear path of development, a replication of the earlier modernization of the West – though it was never convincingly explained how history could repeat itself under such very different conditions, particularly the structural domination of the capitalist world system by already modernized centers. And through all this, modernizers long continued to exude confidence that history was on their side and that they were acting for the benefit of those being modernized – at least in the long run.

In the United States, the elaboration of modernization theory was closely linked to the foreign policy aims of the American government. Among its various practitioners were numerous cold warriors – Shils, for instance, in sociology, and Almond and Pye in political science – but nowhere more than in the field of foreign policy studies itself. The work connected with the MIT Center for International Studies was in general more loosely oriented to democratic values than that by sociologists of modernization or by comparative political scientists. In particular, the Center’s leader, W. W. Rostow, had been trained as an economist, and his very influential work, *The stages of Economic Growth*, though framed by a multidimensional structural-functionalism, was rather more economistic in emphasis than was typical of their work. Moreover, as the subtitle of
that work – *A Non-Communist Manifesto* -- might suggest, he and his affiliates saw themselves as engaged in a global struggle with communism. In the end, Rostow’s deep involvement with the US war in Vietnam, as National Security Advisor to President Johnson, would be widely perceived as revealing the true colors of modernization theory and practice generally. For though many of those involved had sincerely entertained democratic hopes for developing countries, and though most had paid lip service to democratization as an integral element of modernization, at least early on, the authoritarian and technocratic strains of elite theory became increasingly salient in the 1960s until, by the end of the decade, talk of freedom and democracy was largely displaced by a stress on order and control.\(^{18}\)

In part, this shift had its internal grounds, for as noted above, modernization theory had generally assigned key roles to strong states, political elites, and scientifically trained experts; and modernization practice had largely operated on the paternalistic assumption that the benevolent hegemon knew what was “for their own good.” But events on the ground -- especially the surge of political instability, revolutionary activity, and military coups in the 1960s – increasingly made even those watered down commitments to democracy untenable. US foreign policy moved rapidly in the direction of endorsing whichever authorities seemed most likely to maintain order and defeat communist insurgency. Anti-communism became the core of liberal internationalism.\(^{19}\) In practice, this often meant supporting military coups and repressive regimes, and theorists such as Almond, Pye, and Rostow provided the justification for such policies. Moreover, they did so, it seemed, while remaining within the bounds of modernization theory and drawing upon some of its basic tenets.
For one thing, it had been argued from the start, even by Parson’s himself, that there were empirical preconditions to democracy, which had to be in place before it could be successfully established. One needed only to argue that, under the precarious conditions obtaining in the developing world in the 1960s, those preconditions could best be achieved by authoritarian governments, and thus that democracy would have to be deferred until that had been accomplished. It was, then, only a kind of poetic justice when, toward the end of the 1960s, an illiberal critic of mainstream modernization theory, Samuel Huntington, published one of the most influential works on political modernization; for Huntington made explicit the concern with order, anxiety over revolution, and obsession with security that were at least implicit in the then prevailing version of liberal internationalism.

For another thing, many influential modernization theorists had followed Harold Lasswell in arguing that radical political dissent was out of place in a well-ordered, democratic society. This line of thought, reinforced by the “end of ideology” ideology, was elaborated by his students, Almond and Pye, into a full-blown account of the psychopathology of political passion in general and of the passionate resistance to American-led modernization in particular. This left little room for reasonable disagreement with the theory and practice of modernization; ardent opposition was rather a symptom of the anxieties caused by rapid change. The normal state of affairs in democratic politics was the disinterest in political matters shown by the contented consumers of mass culture in developed societies, and their trust in the scientifically informed decision-making of their elected officials. In connection with modernization theory, this line of thought was used to assign a passive role to the masses in developing
countries and to justify the engineering of mass consent to American foreign policy objectives by authoritarian postcolonial states. That policy was, after all, the result of value-free social science, which trumped the deliverances of any ideology, and disagreement with which could only be unreasonable and, if passionate, even pathological. Of course, this line of thought lost much of whatever plausibility it had later in the 1960s, when the model democracy itself erupted in passionate protest.

At the same time, the model-status of the USA became increasingly implausible: the assassinations of Kennedy and King, the failures of the War on Poverty, race riots and police riots across the country, Watergate, the disaffection and protest of American youth, and so forth, made its exemplary status as unlikely as the brutality of the Vietnam War did its benevolence toward postcolonial peoples. Criticisms of modernization theory from the left, which had been present from the start but largely ignored, were now amplified by events and gained a broad hearing (as did criticisms from the right, which will be discussed below). As a result, modernization theory had lost its credibility by the early 1970s, when the institutional structures we have been considering – the DSR, CCP, and CIS – either disbanded or changed the focus of their work. In the Third World, the discrediting of modernization theory meant that the liberal, secular, rationalist, and individualist ethos that informed it also fell into disrepute, as did the putative scientificity and objectivity of the social research that had produced it. The whole package was now widely viewed as a cover for the real interest of the United States in geopolitical hegemony, as well as for the self-interest of the modernizing national elites that colluded with them. Naïve protestations or assumptions of goodwill on either part, which had had
a certain plausibility in the early optimistic phases of modernization, were now
thoroughly incredible.

What had come to an unholy end was what James Scott has termed the
authoritarian “high modernism” of mid-century development policy. Schemes to
improve the human condition, when combined with authoritarian states, regularly lead to
disaster, even with the best of intentions. Liberal developmentalism, which deployed
state power to effect large scale improvements in traditional societies, was no exception.
Its willingness to impose modern forms on traditional societies -- to “force them to be
free,” as it were -- and to push integration into the capitalist world economy at all costs
proved to be a license for repressive regimes everywhere.

So once again, the dilemma of development played itself out; and once more,
liberal ideals succumbed to the realities of power. Many postcolonial critics have
argued that “once more” is more than enough, that it is past time to dismantle
developmental thinking once and for all. But before turning to that suggestion in the
concluding section, I want to consider two critiques of modernization theory from the
right, for it is they that eventually won the day in the neoliberal globalization and
neoconservative interventionism that are now visiting their own brands of “development”
upon the wretched of the earth.

III. Neoliberalism and Globalization

Another powerful blow to modernization theory came from a very different direction.
Since the time of the New Deal, a number of economists -- prominently among them
Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman -- had criticized the basic
presuppositions of Keynesianism and argued against state intervention in the economy. During the period of post-War economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, they were largely ignored by the dominant social democratic, welfare state consensus. But the perceived failures of the War on Poverty and other social programs at home, and the increasingly evident failures of development policies abroad, which neoliberal theorists attributed to their Keynesian underpinnings, lent new resonance to their criticisms. The decisive blow came in the 1970s, with the breakdown of the regulated system of capital flows and global trade among national economies established at Bretton Woods in 1944. During the international economic crisis following the Arab oil embargo of 1973, the world economy was opened up to the largely unrestricted flow of financial capital. In consequence of this and other measures deregulating global markets, the ability of national governments to manage their own economies was significantly reduced. The economic regime to come was signaled early in the 1980s by the policies of Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the USA: the social-democratic consensus was under severe attack, and not only domestically.

Neoliberal critics of development theory and practice argued that it amounted to an extension of New Deal liberalism across the globe. It sprung from the same confidence in the capacity of government bureaucracies to manage market economies and the benevolence of political leaders to seek what was best for the people. But that confidence was badly misplaced: governments were constitutionally incapable of displacing markets, and their leaders, particularly in the Third World, were more often than not self-interested and corrupt. Interventionist policies were thus inherently inefficient by comparison to markets, and thus largely counterproductive in respect to
both First World economic growth and Third World development, as the world economic crisis of the 1970s demonstrated. Once in the ascendant, neoliberals pushed the World Bank, IMF, and other international development agencies to adopt the same sorts of market-oriented policies as were being adopted in Britain and America. By the end of the 1980s, that had largely been done. The new “Washington consensus,” increasingly reflected in the policies of major international economic organizations, promoted the deregulation, privatization, fiscal discipline, reduction of state expenditures, tax reform, trade liberalization, removal of barriers to foreign investment, and the like, that neoliberals demanded. The path had been cleared for a momentous shift from liberal modernization to neoliberal globalization.  

The exemplars of development were now the newly industrializing countries of the 1970s and 1980s, which, by following export-oriented strategies, had achieved development through successful integration into the global economy and not, as dependency theorists had erroneously advised, through delinking from it. State-based programs were not a shortcut to development but the main obstacle to it; the correct path was market-based globalization. And that was the path now dictated by the principal international development agencies, which offered assistance only on the condition that “structural adjustment programs” were put in place, featuring the sorts of measures mentioned above. (The fact that the NICs typically succeeded through the systematic intervention of strong centralized states pursuing long-term development strategies did not figure importantly in neoliberal policy recommendations.)

In a restructured global economy organized around free markets, it was up to each nation to pursue its own development. The international division of labor was
dramatically changing; the globalization of production and marketing was accelerating; the application of new information and communication technologies had vastly reduced the significance of geography. There was nothing about the structure of the global economy that would prevent any nation from competing successfully for a position within it that would enable it to prosper. If a nation failed to do so, the fault lay with it. It would have to get its economic house in order, in accord with the neoliberal prescriptions of the Washington consensus.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s, a triumphant neoliberalism proclaimed “the end of history,” that is, the absence of any real alternative to what it prescribed nationally and internationally. But this replay of “the end of ideology” ideology did not go unchallenged for any longer than the original had. While the failures of development policy in the 1950s and 1960s, and the part played in them by inefficient and corrupt governments, were undeniable, there was little warrant for the neoliberals’ unbounded confidence in the workings of the market and their principled opposition to state intervention. The long political struggle to domesticate capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries was not without cause. Free-market capitalism had proved historically to be horrendously exploitative and had produced vastly unequal distributions of social wealth. There were always weaker and stronger market positions, winners and losers, and consequently gross inequity and widespread immiseration. That had not changed in the 1980s. Now that hard-won controls over the capitalist economy were being dismantled at home and abroad, inequity and immiseration were on the rise. For every winner, there was a loser; for every NIC, several LDCs (less developed countries). Many weak, impoverished, postcolonial societies were simply unable to compete
successfully on these terms. Rather than “catching up,” they saw their shares of world trade decrease and their per capita incomes decline, while their indebtedness grew. Thus, in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, many parts of Latin America, some parts of Asia, and the non-oil-producing parts of the Middle East, the new political economy of development has meant continuing underdevelopment. Many poor nations have become poorer, indebted nations more indebted, and weaker states even weaker, some to the point of collapse. The gaps between rich and poor, both within and between nations have grown larger. For the global economic playing field is by no means level. Its general contours were laid out by the modern history of colonialism. Societies that entered into global competition after their economies had been restructured and underdeveloped by colonial powers were placed at a disadvantage that many have not been able to overcome. Moreover, the rules of the “free market” game are, as usual, heavily skewed in favor of the most powerful players, who dominate international associations, agencies, and agreements, from the IMF and World Bank to the G-7 and World Trade Organization. They have been able, for instance, to maintain massive subsidies for their agricultural produce and thus to gain unfair advantage in competition with primary producers in the developing world. And they have been able to impose “structural adjustment programs” that have precipitously reduced the public sectors of developing societies and dangerously weakened the basic social securities they underwrite, while themselves often disregarding their own prescriptions.

Where the increase in suffering can’t be denied or statistically obfuscated, neoliberal apologists sternly advise: “no gain without pain.” Economics is, after all, no longer a “moral science,” as it was for their classical forebears, but an empirical science
with iron laws that can’t be bent for political purposes. In the global economy as presently constituted, putatively alternative paths of development are in reality roads to nowhere. There is one world economy and one general prescription for becoming a viable competitor within it. If that prescription sometimes causes pain in the short run, it will pay off in the long run. But the alleged scientficity of this “value free” advice has come in for some heavy criticism. To many it appears to be a not-unfamiliar cover for what is in reality a political agenda. The shift from Keynesian to neoliberal policies on the national and international levels was not simply dictated by laws of economics, as the ruling ideology would have it. It was the result of organized political mobilization: neoliberals gained political power in Britain, America, and elsewhere and pushed through significant policy changes in national and international arenas. They were not merely responding to economic realities but shaping them; the growing domination of economics over politics was itself accomplished politically. But once put in place, the global market has hovered over us, as Marx once put it, “like the fate of the ancients, and with an invisible hand allots fortune and misfortune to men.”28 It can be subdued, if at all, only by the same means that created it: organized political action. From this perspective, the critical question of the present is whether and, if so, in what ways democratic control over capital can be reestablished at the global level.29 For only insofar as it is possible to subordinate global markets to a new system of national and international regulation will it be economically feasible to pursue social goals. And only to that extent can the narrowly economistic focus of neoliberal development theory be expanded to encompass again concerns with equity, democracy, and social welfare. Failing that, much of the world will
be condemned to live in a no man’s land between destroyed traditions and unachieved modernity.

IV. Neoconservatism and Neoimperialism

Development was understood in more directly political terms by the neoconservative policy elites who came to power in 2000 with the improbable (s)election of George W. Bush as the 43rd President of the United States. The term “neoconservative” was first used in the 1970s to designate a group of anti-Stalinist left and liberal intellectuals who had begun migrating rightwards in the 1960s – Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Normal Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Michael Novak, Peter Berger, and Nathan Glazer, among others. Repulsed by countercultural attacks on traditional values and New Left opposition to the Vietnam War, and dissatisfied with the “culture of appeasement” they saw crippling American liberalism, they regarded the 1972 presidential candidacy of George McGovern as symptomatic of all that was wrong with the dominant wing of the Democratic Party and began a rightward migration toward the “Scoop” Jackson wing of the Party or, in some cases, into the Republican Party. That shift was further consolidated during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, when a number of neoconservatives received government appointments – most visibly, Jeane Kirkpatrick as US Ambassador to the UN. The main source of their increasing influence during the 1970s was their prolific intellectual output, centered around journals such as - Commentary, in which they attacked détente with the Soviet Union as a failure of nerve and promoted an aggressive brand of anti-Communism.
But it was the “second generation” of neoconservatives – such as William Kristol, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Joshua Muravchik, Charles Krauthammer, Robert Kagan, I. Lewis Libby, Elliott Abrams, Douglas Feith, and John Bolton, among many others – who completed the turn to the right. They came to maturity in a world in which a new American conservatism had established itself as an intellectual and political force to be reckoned with. The 1970s and 1980s saw not only a proliferation of influential conservative journals but the formation of a dense network of ideologically conservative think tanks and policy institutes, funded largely by corporations and conservative foundations -- all of which gave rise to a flood of books, articles, position papers, draft resolutions, memoranda, speeches, and by the 1990s, op eds and talking heads for the mass media, particularly the emerging conservative media empires in cable news and talk radio. And it was the second generation of neoconservatives that forged closer ties to social conservatives and Christian evangelicals, who came broadly to support the neoconservative agenda in foreign and defense policy. The details of this process are not our concern here. We are interested, rather, in the ideological background of the “preemptive” National Security Strategy of 2002, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Second Inaugural Address of 2004, in which President Bush announced that “the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands…America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.” How did the anti-communist liberalism of the first generation of neoconservatives get transformed into the crusading liberalism of the second? Here too, I can offer only a few schematic thoughts on the matter, at again the cost of unavoidable simplification.
We may conveniently begin with the break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. For the founding generation of neoconservatives, this meant a confirmation of the stronger anti-communist line they had advocated, the accomplishment of their overriding aim in foreign policy, and an opportunity for the US to adopt a more classically realist policy directed to the nation’s “vital interests.” For many younger neoconservatives, however, it meant something quite different: an opportunity to pursue an “idealist” policy of shaping the international environment according to American values. The US now found itself in a position of “universal dominion” in a “unipolar world.” And it should take advantage of that situation to launch a democratic crusade, for only thus could it effectively counter the main new threat to world security, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in outlaw “weapon states” such as Iraq. That threat called for military interventionism and the export of democracy to preserve the peace. Some went so far as to characterize this new form of liberal internationalism as “hard Wilsonianism,” that is, the pursuit of Wilsonian ends with other – military rather than multilateral – means. One can thus appreciate the rage amongst neoconservatives when President George H. W. Bush decided to end the first Gulf War without removing Saddam Hussein.

Second-generation neoconservatives used the interregnum of the Clinton years to develop and promote an alternative, much more aggressive, national security policy, which was focused particularly on the Middle East, and which, as we shall see, was subsequently adopted as part of the US “response” to the events of September 11, 2001. The basic outlines of that policy were already visible in the Defense Policy Guidance drafted by Paul Wolfowitz, I. Lewis Libby, and others in 1992, toward the end of the first
Bush administration, under then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney. Anticipating the National Security Strategy of a decade later, that document recommended preventing the emergence of a new rival power, being prepared to use force to preclude threats and impede the spread of nuclear weapons, and acting independently when collective action could not be effectively organized. The idea of the US as a global hegemon was repeatedly discussed in neoconservative publications during the 1990s, as was the idea of “preemption.” The latter was specifically applied to the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime in a 1998 public letter to President Clinton by affiliates of the Project for a New American Century. The signatories included a number of people who would find themselves in positions of power to promote just that policy after 9/11: Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Richard Perle, and Elliott Abrams, among others.

The point of this recitation is simply to make clear that, after the invasion of Afghanistan, the further “response” to 9/11 was in reality the adoption of a national security strategy that had been prepared and promoted for the previous decade. Given its radical departure from the previously dominant strains of foreign policy thinking in conservative American circles – realism and isolationism in particular – it apparently required the shock of those events to prepare the ground for its official adoption. That was not long in coming. Wolfowitz, who had urged regime change in Iraq in 1991 and repeatedly called for the same over the next decade, made the case for invading Iraq as soon as September 15, 2001, at a crucial Camp David meeting. Although the decision was taken to go first into Afghanistan, Cheney’s backing for the neoconservative agenda meant that it was only a matter of time before Iraq too was in the line of fire. The President’s speech to the graduating class at West Point in June of 2002 already
proclaimed the new national security strategy, which would be formally announced later that year: “New threats require new thinking…If we wait for the threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long…[We must] confront the worst threats before they emerge…[and] be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty.” And he placed it firmly within the American tradition of liberal absolutism: “Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place…We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name… [and] will lead the world in opposing it…America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge…”

The views of international affairs adumbrated in this address and further elaborated in the National Security Strategy of September 2002 comprise a peculiar mix of “realism” and “idealism.” On the one hand, unchallengeable military power is said to be fundamental to maintaining national security and international order. And given the nature of the new enemy and the new threat, that power will have to be used preemptively to intervene against despotic regimes that do or may provide terrorists with access to weapons of mass destruction. In a unipolar world, the United States, as the only superpower, will have to assume responsibility for preserving global peace and, when expedient, acting unilaterally to guarantee the security of the “civilized” world against terrorist “barbarians” and those who support them. On the other hand, “moral clarity” is essential to survival in this dangerous world. The forces of evil, particularly Islamist radicals, can be most effectively countered by the spread of just those basic values they so violently oppose: freedom, democracy, and human rights. Thus, in the present conjuncture, idealism is realism in foreign policy. Regime change and nation re-building,
by force if necessary, to install American-style, free-market, liberal democracies are, in the final analysis, the most effective response to Islamist terrorism. For “moral truths are the same in every culture,” and American values are a privileged expression of just such universal moral truths, which can thus be implemented, with due accommodation for cultural and historical differences, in every society. Iraq is a paradigm case for this approach: the overthrow of tyranny and establishment of democracy there would have a domino effect throughout the Islamic world, and as that happened, the threat of terrorism would recede. So the best way to protect America’s interests is to promote American values. And in doing this, the United States cannot allow its hands to be tied by the international norms, institutions, and treaties with which militarily less powerful and morally less clear nations – in particular, the old Europeans – seek to restrain us. We must finally get over the “Vietnam syndrome” that has eaten away at national self-confidence for too long. We must, that is, overcome the crippling hesitancy to use military force to accomplish foreign policy aims, which the dominant misinterpretation of those unfortunate circumstances instilled in the national psyche. America must once again assume its proper place as the last best hope of humankind.

In some respects, the rhetoric of neoconservatives deviates noticeably from the accustomed tropes of developmentalism. The explicit anti-modernism of many elements of their cultural criticism and social conservatism, as well as their explicit appeals to American civil religion to ground and interpret basic political values are unusual in this regard. Moreover, the rhetorical valorization of “traditional values” prevents them from simply replacing the civilized/barbarian dichotomy Bush briefly flirted with by the more usual modern/traditional dichotomy. Thus they often deploy the seemingly non-
developmental rhetoric of good versus evil, which has the added advantage of playing
directly to the large constituency of evangelical Christians. Nevertheless,
developmentalism is still at work providing ideological cover. American values are
represented as a peculiarly happy realization of universal values that find various
expressions in various cultures. Without some recognizable forms of freedom,
democracy, and human rights, no people can attain a civilized mode of existence. And
this, it is argued, is precisely the predicament of the Islamic world. In consequence of the
historical failure of westernizing elites to create an Islamic modernity combining
economic development, political democracy, and Muslim identity, and in response to the
ever-increasing pressures of globalization in every sphere of life, resentment of Western
superiority has grown, as has the temptation to Islamist radicalism. The result is a
“clash of civilizations,” which, though it is typically articulated in religious terms, is at
bottom a matter of failed modernization – hence the importance of spreading, by
imposition if necessary, American/Western values and institutions throughout the Islamic
world. This more explicitly developmentalist version of the present predicament
deliberately downplays other key factors, often stressed by critics, such as the long-
standing Western practice of supporting military dictatorships in the Arab and Muslim
worlds whenever that seemed expedient to securing vital interests, especially oil supplies,
and the rampant disparities and depredations of neoliberal globalization.

In any case, these diverse elements have now been assembled into a more or less
coherent developmental account, which Bush unveiled at the twentieth anniversary of the
founding, under President Reagan, of the National Endowment for Democracy. The
basic components may be briefly summarized as follows:
(1) While “the progress of liberty” is “the direction of history,” it is “not determined by some dialectic of history” but requires the active engagement and political courage of free people. In particular, the moral and military commitment of the US to defending freedom across the globe has been central to its worldwide advance.

(2) Though technological, economic, and social developments are crucial ingredients of modernization, they are not prerequisites that have to be satisfied before a people can become free and democratic. Quite the contrary: “the prosperity, and social vitality, and technological progress of a people are directly determined by the extent of their liberty,” for freedom unleashes creativity and private enterprise, and that is the key to advances in these other domains. Again: “it is the practice of democracy that makes a nation ready for democracy,” democracy itself is “the path of progress…and every nation can start on this path.” In short, liberal democracy is not the endpoint but the starting point and driving force of development.

(3) In some parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East – which is “of great strategic importance” and “must be a focus of American policy for decades to come” – there is a “freedom deficit” that prevents people from entering upon this path and thus “undermines human development.” These “relics of a passing era” – military and theocratic dictatorships – represent the major challenge of our time and “the resolve we show will shape the next stage of the world democratic movement.”

(4) As long as “the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish,” it will produce an endless supply of “violence for export,” increasingly armed with weapons of mass destruction. This is something we cannot accept, and so “the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward policy of freedom in the Middle East.”
As demonstrated in Iraq – “a watershed event in the global democratic revolution” – a key to this forward strategy is the use of American power to start oppressed peoples on the path of liberty and democracy – or, as Charles Krauthammer has put it, to “help trigger democratic revolutions by militarily deposing their oppressors.”

(5) In doing so, the US is not simply imposing its values on other cultures. We recognize that “modernization is not the same as Westernization,” and that democratic governments reflect their surrounding cultures. But there are also “essential principles common to every successful society,” and these are based in the end on universal values, especially liberty. For liberty is not only the “design of nature” and “the direction of history,” it is “the right and capacity of all mankind,” the “plan of Heaven for humanity,” and “the best hope for progress here on earth.” This interlinking of nature, history, morality, Providence, and progress may seem extravagant, but it is not unfamiliar: it hearkens back to early modern liberal theory.

It is not only the resurgence of American exceptionalism that critics of this outlook object to. Traditional realists have criticized the fantastical quality of neoconservative “democratic realism.” To begin with, the social engineering that neoconservatives regard as condemned to failure at home pales in comparison to the ambitious rebuilding projects they promote abroad. There is no serious risk-assessment involved, and very little appreciation of the social, cultural, economic, and other preconditions of democracy that modernization theorists were concerned with. And there is a willful ignoring of the lessons concerning the limits of military power that Vietnam should have taught us. You cannot impose “freedom and democracy” by force of arms; attempting to do so predictably produces backlashes that undermine them. It is, moreover, unrealistic in the
extreme to suppose that non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, intelligence
gathering, policing of international terrorism, nation re-building and economic integration
can be accomplished unilaterally. International cooperation cannot be segmented in the
way neoconservatives suppose; and international legitimacy cannot be sustained without
it. The basically unilateral logic of power the neoconservative strategy subscribes to is
fundamentally at odds with the essentially multilateral logic of global interdependency
and with the global leadership to which the United States aspires. There are, moreover,
evident inconsistencies between theory and practice. Is the United States prepared to
apply its interventionist policies – in addition to its political rhetoric -- to the despotic
“weapon states” of Pakistan, Uzbekistan, or Saudi Arabia? Is it willing to countenance
the implementation of similar preemptive policies by China, Russia, or any other nation
that judges its security to be threatened? If not, it seems we have to do with yet another
might-makes-right wolf in the sheep’s clothing of universal values. And this type of
imperial overreach inevitably gives rise to the sorts of reaction, resistance, and
regionalism with which we all too familiar.

Despite the palpable tensions in the neoconservative ideology of benevolent
global hegemony implemented by unilateral military power, there are presumably
defense and foreign policy elites who genuinely subscribe to it: we should not
underestimate the messianic impulses of American exceptionalism. But as with all
previous high-minded ideologies of empire, critics have been quick to point out the more
earthly interests this one serves. I shall mention only three – of very different kind and
weight -- that have received considerable attention: the “paranoid style” of American
politics, the Likud view of Israel’s national security interests, and – most importantly in my view -- the geopolitical interests of the United States.

(a) Many critics of the so-called “war” on terrorism have noted the predicament in which the American right found itself after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The seemingly inexhaustible supply of fear of “the enemy” it had made available for purposes of political mobilization, social control, and military-industrial expansion dried up almost overnight. Defense spending declined precipitously and the White House was soon occupied by an avatar of the 1960s counterculture. Even Bush was able to “win” the 1999 election only by claiming to be a “compassionate conservative” at home and deeply opposed to any “nation-building” abroad. In these difficult circumstances, 9/11 was a political bonanza, thoroughly exploited by the Republican right under the intellectual leadership of the neoconservatives. The never-ending “war on terror,” against an omnipresent yet evanescent enemy, reinvigorated the paranoid style of American politics, which paid immediate dividends in partisan politics, “homeland security,” and military spending.46

(b) A number of critics, on both the left and the right, have noted a neoconservative tendency to conflate the vital interests of the United States with the national security interests of Israel as understood by the leadership of the Likud Party.47 The strong criticisms of Israel following the 1973 Yom Kippur War – by left intellectuals in the US and abroad, as well as by Communist and Third-World countries using the UN as a platform -- the European tilt away from Israel and toward the Arab states in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis, and the general failure of critics to separate anti-Zionism clearly from anti-Semitism left many American Jewish leaders believing that United States
military power was the only possible security for Israel in a generally hostile world, and they acted accordingly. Thus, for instance, in 1976 the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) was established in Washington to promote American Support for Israel by linking US national security interests to those of Israel. Like a number of other institutions and organizations dedicated to this purpose, JINSA served to establish multiple ties between neoconservatives and the Likud-supporting American Israel lobby. Thus, on its advisory board during the 1990s we find such familiar figures as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, John Bolton, Joshua Muravchik, and Dick Cheney. Neoconservative views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also tended to follow a Likudite line. Thus, for instance, a position paper coauthored by Feith and Perle for an Israeli think tank in 1996, and intended to advise the new Likud government, recommended breaking with the Oslo process and the idea of land for peace, and taking permanent control of the occupied territories. Somewhat surprisingly, this view of Israel’s vital interests is widely shared by Christian fundamentalists in the USA, who for their own scriptural reasons – the ingathering of the Jews, the Second Coming of Christ, etc. – strongly support Likud policies.

This is a peculiarly complicated line of criticism, in which everything turns on keeping clear the differences between pro- and anti-Likud, -Zionist, and –Semitic arguments, which has proved virtually impossible to do, on every side.

(c) By comparison, the matter of US geostrategic interests in the Middle East seems relatively straightforward. That region has by far the greatest proven oil reserves in the world; it is the only area believed to be capable of increasing output sufficiently to meet the needs of an expanding global economy beyond the next decade or so. Given the
heavy dependency on imported oil of all the advanced economies and the rapidly
growing need for the same by the potentially mammoth economies of China and India, as
well as the dependency of the modern military on petroleum products, the ability of the
US to maintain its global hegemony will be directly related to the extent of its access to
and control over global oil reserves. From this perspective, the situation at the time of the
first Gulf War was very worrying. In addition to Iraq’s uncooperative behavior, the US
was concerned with the growing instability in Saudi Arabia, and more generally with the
rise of Islamic radicalism throughout the region. In that situation, many neoconservatives
within the defense establishment and policy-oriented think tanks urged that regime
change was the surest route to the long-term security of US interests in the region – hence
the criticisms of Bush senior and Colin Powell for halting the invasion before Saddam
Hussein was overthrown, the draft of the Defense Planning Guidance in 1992, the letter
to Clinton by the Project for a New American Century in 1998, and the proposal to
invade Iraq advanced only a few days after 9/11. On this reading, there is, after all, a
form of self-interested “realism” behind the US policy of “democratic idealism” in the
Middle East: it is an attempt to establish a client state and a permanent military presence
in Iraq, to stabilize the political situation in Saudi Arabia, and to install, by whatever
means, friendlier regimes with greater regard for American interests in Iran, Syria, and
other key states. Given the geopolitical significance of the increased influence over the
world’s oil supply this would bring, the United States could then view the rise of
competing regional powers in Europe and – especially – East and Southeast Asia with
somewhat less apprehension. Its economic and political dominance would be secured for
the foreseeable future through deploying its military might. This type of geostrategic
calculation might help explain why someone like Cheney would close ranks with the neoconservatives, which, as everyone agrees, was crucial to their recent ascendancy. In any case, it is the strategy that much of the world believes is behind America’s recent actions.

V. Toward a Critical Theory of Development

Our journey from modernization theory to neconservative policy has taken us from the precincts of European developmentalism into the province of American exceptionalism. And as one might expect from Hartz’s account of the liberal tradition in America, this has meant another crusade abroad and more repression at home. At the close of the Second World War, the United States and its allies had defeated one of the two major alternatives to liberal democracy, European fascism. It required another half century, again under American leadership, to defeat the second, Soviet communism. In the eyes of most neoconservatives, that was accomplished less through decades of containing communism and modernizing the postcolonial world than through the shock therapy administered by the more confrontational policies of the Reagan administration. But just as the final triumph of liberal democracy and the “end of history” were being proclaimed, a new form of fascism, Islamist fascism, reared its head and threatened the free world. This has made it necessary to launch a third global struggle after the World War and the Cold War, a “War on Terrorism.” And the principal means to fight this war are not long-term development projects aimed at ameliorating the poverty, stagnation, and resentment that breed and nourish terrorism, but “democratic revolutions” – not patient Bildungsprozesse, so to speak, but sudden conversions. It remains to be seen whether modernization
thorists are right about the empirical preconditions of democratic self-governance, or whether democratic revolutions “triggered” by external military force can create their own supporting conditions, as neoconservatives aver.

Despite the evident differences between the liberal progressivism of modernization theory and practice and the liberal fundamentalism of neoconservative theory and practice, however, much has remained constant. From Vietnam to Iraq, liberal universalism has been rendered not only compatible with but even supportive of forceful interventions into postcolonial societies by appeal to some version or other of the modern/premodern dichotomy. From the perspectives of those societies, it might indeed appear that the more things change, the more they remain the same: from Locke to Bush, the pursuit of Western interests in the non-Western world has repeatedly been disguised as being for “their” improvement. In this respect, Mill’s characterization of nineteenth-century Britain as a “benevolent despot” is not so different from the neoconservative understanding of the USA today as a “benevolent hegemon.”

Thus, one can easily understand why many postcolonial thinkers have rejected the fundamental assumptions of development thinking altogether. From their perspective, even the received forms of Marxist and neo-Marxist critique are themselves modernist theories oriented to the ultimate convergence of all societies and cultures. What is needed, in their view, is not yet another form of critical modernism but “postmodernism,” not a new and better form of development but “postdevelopment.” On this view, developmental thinking functions in a neocolonial regime of power/knowledge designed to replace the colonial regime, and thus as a strategy of power rather than a path to emancipation. In development theory, colonial discourse has been able to outlive the
death of colonialism itself; and there is no antidote to that but a patient and persistent “decolonization of the mind,” until we have un-learned to think of history as a unitary process opening onto a uniform future.54

I doubt that our minds can be purged of development thinking in this way. There are deep-seated features of the historical-geographical world we live in – inescapable “facts” of cultural and societal modernity -- that make it impracticable for us to dismiss ideas of development. Whatever side one takes in the debates surrounding global modernization, for instance, it is obvious that those discourses live from the fruits of the historicist enlightenment in the Geisteswissenschaften of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is precisely our historically, sociologically, and anthropologically schooled views of the diversity of beliefs and practices that, for instance, enables and constrains the discussion of “alternative modernities.” If we add to this the continuing effects of the earlier enlightenment -- including the ongoing advances in our scientific understanding of the world and in our technical ability to manipulate it, as well as the effects these have on traditional systems of belief and on the normative and evaluative elements of culture intimately interwoven with them – we can understand why entire kinds of reasons have lost and continue to lose their discursive weight. To such “Hegelian” facts of cultural modernity, we can add some “Marxian” facts of societal modernity. The conditions of globalized modernity, in which all societies willy-nilly find themselves, confront them with an array of basic challenges that have to be met if they want to survive and thrive: for instance, how to position themselves in an increasingly integrated, global, market economy; how to administer increasingly complex, functionally differentiated societies efficiently; how to achieve and maintain national
integration while accommodating ethnic, cultural, and regional diversity; how to devise and implement public policies and programs while maintaining political legitimacy. Cultural and societal “facts” of these sorts practically constrain the range of viable “alternative” modernities, especially when we take into account the myriad internal relations and causal connections between them.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that “modernization,” “development,” and related notions are still routinely invoked for purposes of analysis, assessment, policy, and planning in official and unofficial public spheres. This is not only a matter of the colonization of our minds, but also of ineliminable features of the world we live in and of the ways we think about it. And even if it were possible to dismiss such notions, not everyone in postcolonial societies would find that desirable; for most people value at least some elements of modernization, if not the increased wealth and power it normally brings, then perhaps the greater material sufficiency, personal freedom, and national self-determination it favors. For them, the issue is not whether to modernize or not, but how to do so and within what limits. And if that is so, we have no practicable alternative but to revisit and rethink the idea of development. I shall conclude with a few “rules for the direction of the mind” when occupied with that task.

(1) To begin with, the reflexivity of modern cultures has meant that modernization has been accompanied from the start by critiques of modernization. Romanticism and Marxism, Nietzsche and Weber, Du Bois and Fanon are as integral to the discourse of modernity as the dominant ideologies they opposed. Precisely the claimed universality of that discourse leaves it semantically and pragmatically open to dissent and criticism from subordinated and excluded others. For this reason, modernity
need not – indeed, can not – be left behind for some putative postmodernity; but it can be continually transformed from within. In the present connection, it is significant that the late twentieth century saw the establishment of a global discourse of modernity in which postcolonial thinkers have played an increasingly important, critical and transformative role.

(2) If the facts of cultural and societal modernity are as I have suggested, there is little chance of radically alternative modernities arising and surviving in the world we live in. On the other hand, there is not only the possibility but also the reality of multiple modernities. Convergence at abstract, formal, or structural levels is quite consistent with diversity at more concrete levels. For example, the abstract norm of equality has been interpreted and implemented in any number of ways, from equality of opportunity to equality of outcome, from formal equality to substantive equality, and in various respects; freedom of speech is compatible with the proscription of hate speech in many European countries but not in the United States, and freedom of religion is compatible there with established churches but not here; free market economies look quite different in Sweden, the United States, and Japan; and representative government can mean everything from constitutional monarchy and parliamentary government to the American federal system and Scandinavian or Latin American corporatism. The conceptual point is simply this: by their very nature, the universal cannot be actual without the particular, nor the formal without the substantive, the abstract without the concrete, structure without content. Thus the idea that all societies are converging on the British or the American model is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of generality as uniformity. The “dialectic” of the general and the particular would lead us to expect, rather, that different cultures,
different circumstances, and different histories – including different histories of
donomination by and resistance against European imperialism – normally give rise to quite
different modern cultures and societies, that is, to multiple modernities. Given the
intensity and variety of cultural encounters in the modern period, one would expect to
find what one in fact finds: not unilinearity and uniformity but syncretism and hybridity –
the coalescence of diverse forms, patterns arising from heterogeneous origins. Moreover,
how much convergence to expect at the societal level, is partly a pragmatic matter – what
kind of institutional arrangements are needed to function effectively in a global economy,
for instance, or what kind of legal institutions are required to establish an effective rule of
law in national and transnational contexts. So the issue confronting postcolonial societies
is not whether to modernize at all but how best to do so. Of course, as long as wealth and
power are distributed as unequally as they are, the range of answers available to the
poorest and the weakest will be vastly more constricted than any “inner logic” of
modernization processes itself dictates.

(3) Grand theories and grand narratives of development or modernization always
outrun the available empirical evidence. They are macro-historical interpretive schemes
that, as Weber recognized, can never be value-free all the way down. However value-
neutral the grammar of such theories may appear, they are framed from interpretive and
evaluative standpoints that are essentially contestable. Hence the claim to scientific
objectivity raised by the varieties of development theory we have examined – save
perhaps the moralistic version of neoconservatism – has to be seen as ideological. It
functions to foreclose or foreshorten moral, ethical, and political debate concerning
questions of justice and the common good: “we’d like to do more for those in need, but
the iron laws of global markets simply preclude it.” And it underwrites a technocratic-bureaucratic form of development practice, implemented by social-scientifically trained experts, that eliminates or marginalizes democratic input by those being developed. This is not to say, of course, that empirical data and the interdependencies, preconditions, and consequences they underwrite are irrelevant. They place very real constraints on which types of theory and narrative make interpretive sense, and on which types of policy and planning are practicable and promising. From this standpoint, the current neoconservative strategy of militarily triggering “democratic revolutions” around the world appears as a hypermoralism that treats empirical evidence of this kind as largely irrelevant. However, between the scientistic suppression of normative discourse and the moralistic disregard for empirical inquiry there is a broad spectrum of options. In some respects, Kant’s understanding of grand narrative – universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view – as the object neither of theoretical knowledge nor of practical reason, but of “reflective judgment, was closer to the mark. On his view, while such narratives must take account of, and be compatible with known empirical data and causal connections, they always go beyond what is known in aspiring to a unity of history. And that can best be done from a point of view oriented to practice: grand narratives give us an idea of the kinds of future for which we may hope, but only if we are prepared to engage ourselves in bringing them about.

(4) Since we have no God’s-eye view of the past or future, and macro-historical accounts are always interpretive schemes projected from value-related points of view, it is not surprising that the chief exemplars of this species of theorizing should retrospectively appear to be so obviously ethnocentric. It is not surprising because the
major participants in the discourse of global modernity have until quite recently come largely from the same cultural setting. This has given their disputes an in-house character, so that notwithstanding the very basic disagreements among Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Mill, for instance, they could all agree that European history marked out the one true path of modernization. The glorification of Britain’s culture, society, economics, and politics in the late nineteenth century and of America’s in the late twentieth was not, then, a matter only of inflated self-regard but also of the ethnocentrism endemic to a culture talking only to itself. The antidote to this is not merely gathering more data but further opening the discourse of modernity to non-Western voices. To some extent, in our major cultural institutions this process is already underway; and the increased presence of postcolonial voices in scholarly and popular discourse has already begun to have its decentering effects. But in the institutionalized venues of global wealth and power, such voices are still largely peripheral, and that cannot be changed without restructuring the asymmetrical relations that have shaped modernization processes from the start. Until that happens, mainstream development theory and practice are likely to remain deeply ethnocentric.

(5) Nevertheless, the theory and practice of development should not simply be abandoned in favor of some postdevelopmental thinking of difference. Not only do the facts of cultural and societal modernity weigh theoretically against that, but the pressing need for organized collective action on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable societies also make it practically objectionable. Instead, we have to fashion a critical theory of development that acknowledges its inherent risks and continuously works to contain and counter them. To start with, such a critical development theory has to reject
natural-historical accounts of social evolution that conceal from view the massive and pervasive use of force and violence in the capitalist modernization of the West and imperialist modernization of the Rest. This is not simply a matter of the inherent ambivalence of modernization processes, which Weber among others movingly portrayed, but of the “surplus” suffering and devastation inflicted by the specifically capitalist dynamics of European-American-led global development. Exploitation, expropriation, conquest, genocide, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism were not just inessential byproducts of a developmental process driven by the exigencies of capital accumulation: they were among its central mechanisms. It is, then, remarkable that the various mainstream accounts we have just examined agree in ignoring or discounting that part of the historical record. Force and violence, power and domination, resistance and revolution played no central role in their master narratives of development, so that the latter could better serve as dominant ideologies, veiling the interests and strategies actually in play. But the repeated resort to overt force and the undeniable fact that European-American-led modernization has left billions in poverty and established deeply unjust and clearly unsustainable modes of economic growth, with little regard to their devastating social and environmental consequences, has torn that veil aside. Relatively few believe today that America’s messianic militarism is really a “forward policy of freedom” (although those few may include a majority of Americans). Critical development theory must acknowledge the violence, destructiveness, and injustice of Western modernization and keep alive the memory of the immense suffering and irreparable loss visited upon multitudes in every part of the world.
(6) If European-American development is viewed within the world system it created and dominated from the start of the modern era, the natural-historical picture of self-contained national “organisms” with stronger or weaker internal impulses to growth and maturation has to give way to that of an interactive global nexus of agents outfitted with significantly more or less money and power. Unless these vast differentials are leveled down, there can only ever be “uneven” development. Apart from the direct use of military force, the entrenched domination by rich and powerful nations of the most important international agencies, including development agencies, will ensure that most weak, impoverished, postcolonial societies will never “catch up,” and thus that the “underdevelopment” constructed by colonialism will become an inescapable fate. That this not be allowed to happen is a demand not only of distributive justice but of reparative or restorative justice as well. Those nations that have been historically implicated in the expropriation of native lands, the slave trade, colonial exploitation, and imperial domination have a moral-political obligation to right the wrongs of their own past injustice, to redress the continuing harms that resulted from it. Critical development theory thus regards remembering and repairing the deep injuries of imperialism as an obligation in justice and not as a matter of benevolent paternalism. But if paternalism is to be avoided in practice, the agencies, regulations, reforms, policies, programs, and the like instituted for that purpose have to be collectively organized in such a way that those whose historical under-development is being addressed have an equal say in their design and implementation. The democratization of retroactive justice has to be part and parcel of the democratization of global governance generally.
(7) From whatever angle one approaches the critical theory of development, it becomes clear that the central issue is the distribution of global wealth and power. And that is what one would expect from examining the rise of the nation state and the development of national economies in the modern period. It required long and often bloody struggles to gain even the limited measure of redistribution finally achieved by mass-democratic politics, state regulation of economies, and social-welfare policies and programs. It seems that we are now at the start of another – hopefully less long and less bloody – struggle to reign in the systemic force of money and power through a global rule of law, democratic forms of global governance, and a solidaristic politics of distributive and restorative justice. Of course, the structures of the nation state cannot simply be replicated at the global level. And so it will require institutional imagination, experimentation, and proliferation to discover which forms of law, democracy, and politics work best in a transnational context to domesticate capitalist modernization for a second time, this time for everyone alike. If that should prove to be impracticable, then there seems to be no way of avoiding a continuation of the “state of nature” in international politics that Kant once bemoaned – though not necessarily in the form of a “war of all against all.” One could imagine, for instance, that the rise of cultural-geographical constellations of wealth and power outside of Europe and America could, in the absence of transnational structures of peace and justice, lead to a continuation of international power politics in the altered forms dictated by a militarily, politically, and economically multipolar world. Macro-sociological theories of historical change are, as we have seen, notoriously weak in predicting the future. But one may at least hope that the neo-Kantian cosmopolitan scenario has as good a chance as the neo-Hobbesian one.
I am grateful to Bill Barnes for making parts of his very rich dissertation available to me: *Development Theory and Ideology: The Triumph of the Modern Middle Class in Theory and Practice*, University of Michigan, 1979. That and his helpful bibliographical advice contributed significantly to shaping my discussion.


4 In the USA, the public discussion of liberalism is terminologically complicated by a usage of “liberal” that nearly inverts its traditional meaning, emphasizing individual liberty and limited government, which is still dominant not only abroad but also among American political theorists. Thus the public use of “conservative” to characterize the Goldwater-Reagan shift in American political ideology refers to a move in the classically liberal direction. In this discussion, I shall use “liberal” and its cognates in the traditional sense, unless modified by “reform,” “social,” or “left,” which bring it closer to common usage.


6 Ibid., p. 302.

7 Ibid., pp. 292-3.


9 See Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), chap. 2.


11 I remind the reader that though I discuss “modernization theory” in the singular here, there were many variants of it; and, further, that I am considering here only a few central tendencies, and those at a high level of abstraction.


18 Again, I am referring here to some general tendencies and ignoring many individual differences.


I discuss the tension between liberal universalism and developmental hierarchy in a paper presented at the 100th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (2004): “Liberal Imperialism and the Dilemma of Development.”

I shall be using the term “neoliberal” in the usual (for scholarly discussions) sense to refer to economic doctrines and policies drawing upon, among other things, the new classical liberalism of von Hayek and others, which hearkened back to the classical liberalism of Smith and Ricardo, and the monetarist approach of Milton Friedman and others, which blamed government spending for inflation and most other macroeconomic problems. The common practice of referring to this type of neoliberalism -- particularly when combined with elements of a socially conservative political ideology -- as “neoconservatism,” while reserving the term “liberalism” for reform or social liberalism, confounds public discussion in the USA. (See n. 4.) As regards economic policy, those who are neoconservatives in common parlance are often neoliberals in academic parlance. The situation is further complicated by the fact that some reform (or “New Deal”) liberals converted over to a combination of neoliberal economics and neoconservative social and foreign policy during the Reagan and Thatcher period. These distinctions and relations will become clearer in the discussion of neoconservativism in section IV.


This is the perspective of Peet and Leys, in the books cited in note 7. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, tr. Max Pensky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).


In the early 1970s, Sen. Henry Jackson worked effectively with neoconservatives, major Jewish organizations, and other Senators to address the plight of Soviet Jewry, particularly the barriers to emigration being raised. The success of that effort was a significant factor in consolidating the neoconservative shift.

Though my focus here is on foreign policy, in light of the later affiliation of neoconservatives with neoliberals, social conservatives, and the religious right, it is also worth mentioning their early skepticism concerning Great Society Programs, affirmative
action, multiculturalism, and the like, and their abiding interest in the social function of religion.

Unlike development, modernization, and neoliberal discourse, and even the first generation of neoconservatism, second generation neoconservatism is notably bereft of front-rank theorists. The preponderance of their publishing output, when not sheerly polemical, is devoted to policy and strategy. This may be one reason why so many commentators, in casting about for their intellectual antecedents, have hit upon the improbable figure of Leo Strauss. When confronted with this genealogical hypothesis, Wolfowitz and Perle acknowledged instead their indebtedness to Albert Wohlstetter, who was himself a defense strategist. See Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, pp. 61-68.


Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, pp. 145-46. This draft was never officially adopted; but it was completed and leaked to the press.


President Bush used the civilized/barbarian contrast in his Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People of September 20, 2001; available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/. But he soon dropped this nineteenth century rhetoric, which is obviously unsuited to winning friends and influencing people in the postcolonial world, for the contrast between good and evil. See below for some thoughts on this change.

In this spirit, the Bush regime has repudiated the International criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and various other international agreements.


For a conservative critique to this effect, see Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, pp. 58-60, 105-108; for a neoconservative critique, see Francis Fukuyama, “The Neoconservative Moment,” *The National Interest*, summer 2004. The Fukuyama article and the neoconservative dust-up it occasioned are analyzed by Danny Postel in


49 See, for instance, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

50 In a speech given at the Institute of Petroleum in 1999, shortly before he became Vice-President, Cheney explained: “By some estimates, there will be an average of two percent annual growth in global oil demand over the years ahead, along with conservatively a three percent natural decline in production from existing reserves. That means by 2010 we will need on the order of an additional fifty million barrels a day. So where is the oil going to come from?...While many regions of the world offer great oil opportunities, the Middle East, with two thirds of the world’s oil and the lowest cost, is still where the prize ultimately lies...Oil is unique, in that it is sp strategic in nature. We are not talking about soapflakes or leisurewear here. Energy is truly fundamental to the world’s economy. The [first] Gulf War was a reflection of that reality.” Available at http://www.energybulletin.net/559.html.


52 I discuss this aspect of Mill’s thought in the paper cited in n. 23.


55 This is, of course, a point we owe to Hegel. Charles Taylor has brought it to bear upon the discussion of multiple modernities in, among other essays, “Two Theories of Modernity,” in D. P. Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 172-196.


57 See, for instance, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, chapter 4, “Accumulation by Dispossession.”


59 See Jürgen Habermas, “Hat die Konstitutionalisierung des Völkerrechts noch eine Chance?” in Habermas, *Der gespaltene Westen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004), pp. 113-193); and Seyla Benhabib’s discussion of “federated cosmopolitanism” in *The Rights of Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapters 3 and 5.