Anthony Pagden

Imperialism, liberalism & the quest for perpetual peace

For at least two generations, 'empire' and 'imperialism' have been dirty words. Already by 1959, when neither the French nor the British Empire had yet quite ceased to exist, Raymond Aaron dismissed imperialism as a "name given by rivals, or spectators, to the diplomacy of a great power" – something, that is, that only others did or had. By the 1970s, a consensus had emerged in liberal circles in the West that all empires – or at least those of European or North American origin – had only ever been systems of power that constituted a denial by one people of the rights (above all, the right to self-determination) of countless others. They had never benefited anyone but their rulers; all of those who had lived under imperial rule would much rather not have and finally they had all risen up and driven out their conquerors.

Very recently this picture has begun to change. Now that empires are no more (the last serious imperial outpost, Hong Kong, vanished in 1997), a more nuanced account of their long histories is beginning to be written. It has become harder to avoid the conclusion that some empires were much weaker than was commonly claimed; that at least some of the colonized collaborated willingly, for at least some of the time, with their colonizers; that minorities often fared better under empires than under nation-states; and that empires were often more successful than nation-states at managing the murderous consequences of religious differences.

Ever since 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan, a few intrepid voices have even been heard to declare that some empires might in fact have been forces for good. Books both for and against – with such titles as *The Sorrows of Empire*, *America's Inadvertent Empire*, *Resurrecting Empire*, and *The Obligation of Empire* – now appear almost daily. As these titles suggest, the current revival of interest in empire is not unrelated to the behavior of the current U.S. administration in interna-

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tional affairs, and to the widespread assumption that the United States has become a new imperial power. Even so, most Americans continue to feel uncomfortable with the designation, which (forgetting Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico) they have long regarded as a European evil. Yet ever since the mid-1990s, the rhetoric of U.S. international relations has become increasingly imperial. "If we have to use force, it is because we are America," declared Madeleine Albright in 1998, taking care not to pronounce the word 'empire.' "We are the indispensable nation, We stand tall, We see further into the future."[1] No British proconsul could have put it better.

But for all the talk about a new American empire, is the United States today really, in Niall Ferguson's words, "the empire that does not dare to speak its name – an empire in denial"?[2]

This would appear to suggest that the United States behaves like and pursues the recognized objectives of an empire while being unprepared to commit itself ideologically to imperialism, or to take the necessary measures to ensure that those objectives constitute a long-term success. Is that really so?

Before these questions can be answered, we need to answer a rather more fundamental one – namely, what is an empire? The word has been used to describe societies as diverse as Mesoamerican tribute-distribution systems (the so-called Aztec and Inca Empires), tribal conquest states (the Mongol and Ottoman Empires), European composite monarchies (the Hapsburg and Austro-Hungarian Empires), and even networks of economic and political clientage (the current relation of the First to the Third World) – not to mention the British Empire, which combined features of all of these. Faced with such diversity, simple definitions will clearly be of little use. It is, of course, possible to define the word so narrowly as to exclude all but the most obvious European (and a few Asian) megastates. On the other hand, defining it so widely as to include any kind of extensive international power runs the risk of rending the concept indeterminate.

So let me begin by saying that an empire is an extensive state in which one ethnic or tribal group, by one means or another, rules over several others – roughly what the first-century Roman historian Tacitus meant when he spoke of the Roman world as an "immense body of empire" (*immensum imperii corpus*).[3] As such, empires have always been more frequent, more extensive political and social forms than tribal territories or nations have ever been. Ever since antiquity, large areas of Asia were ruled by imperial states of one kind or another, and so too were substantial areas of Africa. Vishanagar, Assyria, Elam, Urartu, Benin, Maori New Zealand – all were, in this sense, empires.

All empires inevitably involve the exercise of imperium, or sovereign authority, usually acquired by force. Few empires have survived for long without suppressing opposition, and probably all were initially created to supply the

1 Quoted in Emmanuel Todd, *Après l'empire : essai sur la décomposition du système américain* (Paris : Gallimard, 2002), 22. Ironically – or perhaps not – she was justifying a missile attack on Iraq.

2 Niall Ferguson, *Empire : The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York : Basic Books, 2003), 317 ; Ferguson, *Colossus : The Price of America's Empire* (New York : Penguin Press, 2004), 3 – 7.

3 See P. A. Blunt, "Laus imperii," in Peter Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker, eds., *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1978), 159 – 191.

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metropolis with goods it could not otherwise acquire. In 1918, the great Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter described territorial expansion as "the purely instinctual inclination towards war and conquest" and relegated it to an earlier atavistic period of human history that he believed was now past.[4] He would have to wait another half century for the final dismemberment of the world's last significant colonial outposts. But he could see that in the new global economies that he projected for the world in the wake of the Great War, conquest would no longer be possible and that without conquest there could be no empire

But Schumpeter's view is only part of the picture. War and conquest would have achieved very little if that is all there had been. To survive for long, all empires have had to win over their conquered populations. The Romans learned this very early in their history.[5] "An empire," declared the historian Livy at the end of the first century B.C., "remains powerful so long as its subjects rejoice in it."

Rome had a lot to offer its conquered populations – architecture, baths, the ability to bring fresh water from distant hills or to heat marble-lined rooms in villas in the wilds of Northumberland. (The historian Tacitus acidly commented that in adopting baths, porticos, and banquets, all the unwitting Britons had done was to describe as "humanity" what was in reality "an aspect of their slavery.") Ultimately, however, Rome's greatest attraction was citizenship – a concept that, in its recognizably modern form, the Romans invented and that, ever since the early days of the Republic, had been the main ideological prop of the Roman world. Of course, not all Rome's subject peoples wished for such things; but if a substantial number had not, its empire could not have survived as long as it did.

All the later European empires did the best they could to follow at least part of the example Rome had set them. The Spanish and the French both attempted to create something resembling a single society governed by a single body of law. Similarly, the British in India could never have succeeded in seizing control of the former Mughal Empire without the active and sometimes enthusiastic assistance of the emperors' former subjects. Without Indian bureaucrats, Indian judges, and, above all, Indian soldiers, the British Raj would have remained a private trading company. At the Battle of Plassey in 1757, which marked the beginning of the East India Company's political ascendancy over the Mughal Empire, twice as many Indians as Europeans fought on the British side.[6]

It was this process of absorption – and with it the ambition to create a single community that would embrace, as the Roman Empire had, both the mother country and the indigenous inhabitants of its colonies – that allowed Edmund Burke to speak of the victims of the brutal regime of Warren Hastings, governor of Bengal, as "our distressed fellow-citizens in India."[7] Empire was a sacred trust, "given," as Burke insisted, "by an

4 Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, trans. Heinz Norden (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1951), 7.

5 This has been described most recently and with great brilliance by Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

6 Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600 – 1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 259.

7 "Speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts," quoted in Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 157.

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incomprehensible dispensation of Divine providence into our hands." To abuse it, as Hastings had, was not just morally offensive; more significantly for Burke, it threatened the very existence not only of the "British constitution," but of "the civilization of Europe."[8]

Yet the idea of empire based upon universal citizenship created a paradox. If all the inhabitants of the empire were indeed fellow citizens, then a new kind of society, universal and cosmopolitan, would have had to come into being to accommodate them. With hindsight it was possible to argue, as Edward Gibbon did, that in the second century, when "the Roman Empire comprehended the fairest part of the earth and the most civilized portion of mankind," a new kind of society had indeed arisen.[9] But in the eighteenth century, things did not look quite so harmonious. Instead of one world community, the European overseas powers had created what the French philosopher and economist the Marquis de Mirabeau described in 1758 as "a new and monstrous system" that vainly attempted to combine three distinct types of political association (or, as he called them, *esprits*): domination, commerce, and settlement. The inevitable conflict that had arisen between these had thrown all the European powers into crisis. In Mirabeau's view, the only way forward was to abandon both settlement and conquest – especially conquest – in favor of commerce.

He was not alone. For those like Mirabeau and his near-contemporary Adam Smith, what in the eighteenth century was called 'the commercial society' seemed to provide a means to create a new, more ecumenical form of empire that now would benefit all its members. For, in theory at least, commerce created a relationship between peoples that did not involve dependency of any kind and that, most importantly, avoided any use of force. In these new commercialized societies, the various peoples of the world would swap new technologies and basic scientific and cultural skills as readily as they would swap foodstuffs. These would not be empires of conquest, but "empires of liberty."[10]

But this vision never materialized because, as Smith fully recognized, the European empires were not, nor had ever been, merely means to economic ends; they were also matters of international prestige.[11] Smith knew that without colonies Britain would be nothing more than a small European state. The disparity in size between the mother country and the rest of the empire remained a constant worry. Furthermore, as David Hume pointed out, the "sweet commerce" in which Montesquieu and others had placed such trust was, at best, an uncertain panacea for the ills of mankind: in reality, even the most highly commercialized states tended to "look upon their neighbours with a suspicious eye, to consider all trading states as their rivals, and to suppose that it is impossible for any of them to flourish, but at their expence."[12]

8 Edmund Burke, *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, ed. David Bromwich (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 15 – 16.

9 Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. 3.

10 See Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500 – c.1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 178 – 187.

11 Adam Smith, "Thoughts on the State of the Contest with America," in Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross, eds., *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 383.

12 David Hume, "On the Jealousy of Trade," in Eugene F. Miller, ed., *Essays, Moral, Political, and*

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Hume's skepticism proved all too accurate. It was in the long run more profitable, as both the British and the Dutch discovered in Asia, to exercise direct control over the sources of supply through conquest than it was to trade with them. But the Enlightenment vision of the future transvaluation of empire was finally swept aside not so much by the actual practice of the "empires of liberty" as by Napoleon's attempt to build quite a different kind of empire within Europe itself.

Initially the very brevity and bloodiness of the Napoleonic ambition to transform Europe into a series of satellite kingdoms seemed to the liberals who had suffered from it – Alexis de Tocqueville and Benjamin Constant in particular – to have rendered all such projects unrepeatable. In 1813, with Napoleon apparently out of the way, Constant felt able to declare that, at last, "pleasure and utility" had "opposed irony to every real or feigned enthusiasm" of the kind that had always been the driving force behind all modes of imperialism. Napoleon, and, above all, Napoleon's fall, had shown that postrevolutionary politics were to be conducted not in the name of "conquest and usurpation," but in accordance with public opinion. And public opinion, Constant confidently predicted, would have nothing to do with empire. "The force that a people needs to keep all others in subjection," he wrote,

> is today, more than ever, a privilege that cannot last. The nation that aimed at such an empire would place itself in a more dangerous position than the weakest of tribes. It would become the object of universal horror. Every opinion, every desire, every hatred, would threaten it, and sooner or later those hatreds, those opinions, and those desires would explode and engulf it.[13]

Like Smith, Constant also believed that commerce, or "civilized calculation," as he called it, would come to control all future relationships between peoples. Nearly a century later, Schumpeter expressed, in characteristically unquestioning terms, the same conviction. "It may be stated as beyond controversy," he declared, "that where free trade prevails no class has an interest in forcible expansion as such."[14]

Ironically, in view of the similarity of these claims, what separated Schumpeter from Constant in time was a phase of imperial expansion that was more atavistic, more "enthusiastic" even than the one Constant hoped he had seen the last of. For what in fact followed Napoleon's final defeat was not a return to the Enlightenment status quo ante, but the emergence of modern nationalism. After the Congress of Vienna, the newly self-conscious European states and, subsequently, the new nations of Europe – Belgium (founded in 1831), Italy (1861), and Germany (1876) – all began to compete with one another for the status and economic gains that empire was thought to bestow. Public opinion, far from turning an ironical eye on the imperialistic pretensions of the new European nations, embraced them with enthusiasm. National prestige was, for instance, the main grounds on which Tocqueville supported the French invasion of Algeria in 1830.

Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 328.

13 Benjamin Constant, *The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and their Relation to European Civilization in Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 79.

14 Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, 99.

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The new imperialism turned out to be very different from the kind of empire of liberty for which Burke and Smith and Mirabeau had argued. No "sacred trust" was involved here – only, in Joseph Conrad's famous phrase, "the taking away [of the earth] from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves." In the new nationalist calculus, the more of this earth you could take away, the greater you became. By 1899, imperialism had indeed become, as Curzon remarked, "the faith of a nation."[15]

There was something else that was new about the new imperialism. With the exception of the Spanish, the earlier European powers had been only marginally concerned with changing the lives, beliefs, and customs of the peoples whose lands they had occupied. Missionaries – Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist – were present in British and French America, and even in British, French, and Dutch Asia, but their activities were always of secondary political importance and generally looked upon by the civilian authorities as something of a nuisance.

In the nineteenth century, however, Africa and even India became the testing grounds for a new missionary zeal. Driven partly by Christian ideals, partly by a belief in the overwhelming superiority of European culture, the new imperialists sought to make of the world one world – Christian, liberal, and, ultimately (since none of the virtues peddled by the missionaries could be sustained in any other kind of society), commercial and industrial.

In this vision of empire, the 'natives,' Rudyard Kipling's "new-caught sullen peoples, half devil and half child," had not merely to be ruled, they had to be ruled for their own good – however much they might resent it at first – and had to be made to recognize that one way of life was the inevitable goal of all mankind. This was empire as tutelage. Ironically, and fatally for the imperial powers as it turned out, it also implied that one day all the subjects of all the European empires would become self-governing.

"By good government," Lord Macaulay had declared as early as 1833, "we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that having become instructed in European knowledge they may, in some future age, demand European institutions." He did not know when this would come about, but he was certain that when it did, "it will be the proudest day in English history."[16] In practice, self-determination would be postponed into the remote future. But Macaulay was forced to acknowledge that, theoretically at least, it could not be postponed indefinitely.

Nationalist imperialism, however, brought to the fore a question that had remained unanswered for a long time: in the modern world what, precisely, was the nature of empire? Ever since 1648, the modern nation-state has been one in which imperium has been regarded as indivisible. The monarchs of Europe had spent centuries wresting authority from nobles, bishops, towns, guilds, military orders, and any number of quasi-independent, quasi-sovereign bodies. Indivisibility had been one of the shibboleths of prerevolutionary Europe, and one which the French Revolution had gone on to place at the center of the con-

15 Quoted in Harold Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919 – 1925: A Study in Post-War Diplomacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), 13.

16 Quoted in Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 34.

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ception of the modern state. The modern person is a rights-bearing individual, but – as the 1791 *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* had made clear – he or she is so only by virtue of being a citizen of a single indivisible state.[17]

Such a strong notion of sovereignty could apply, however, only within Europe. In the world beyond, things were very different. It had been impossible for any empire to thrive without sharing power with either local settler elites or with local inhabitants. As Henry Maine, a renowned jurist, historian, and legal member of the viceroy's council in India, had declared in 1887, "Sovereignty has always been regarded as divisible in international law."[18] Failure to cede this point had, after all, been the prime cause of the American Revolution, and, after 1810, of the revolt of the Spanish colonies in South America – and had almost driven the French settlers of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique into the waiting arms of the British.

Nowhere was the question of divided sovereignty so acute as in the British Empire, which by the early nineteenth century had become larger and more widespread, and consequently more varied, than any of its rivals or predecessors. "I know of no example of it either in ancient or modern history," wrote Disraeli in 1878. "No Caesar or Charlemagne ever presided over a dominion so peculiar." If such a conglomerate was to survive at all, it could insist on no single constitutional identity. It was this feature of the empire that led the historian Sir Robert Seeley in 1883 to make his famous remark that it seemed as if England had "conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind."[19]

Nothing, it seems, could be further removed from the present position of the United States. Is then the United States really an empire?

I think if we look at the history of the European empires, the answer must be no. It is often assumed that because America possesses the military capability to become an empire, any overseas interest it does have must necessarily be imperial.[20] But if military muscle had been all that was required to make an empire, neither Rome nor Britain – to name only two – would have been one. Contrary to the popular image, most empires were, in fact, for most of their histories, fragile structures, always dependent on their subject peoples for survival. Universal citizenship was not created out of generosity. It was created out of need. "What else proved fatal to Sparta and Athens in spite of their power in arms," the emperor Claudius asked the Roman Senate when it attempted to deny citizenship to the Gauls in Italy, "but their policy of holding the conquered aloof as alien-born?"[21]

This is not to say that the United States has not resorted to some of the

17 See Anthony Pagden, "Human Rights, Natural Rights and Europe's Imperial Legacy," *Political Theory* 31 (2003): 171 – 199.

18 Quoted in Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63.

19 Sir John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 12.

20 This, for instance, is the argument behind Robert D. Kaplan's *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (New York: Random House, 2002), and in a very different and more measured tone, Chalmers A. Johnson's, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004) – although Kaplan approves and Johnson disapproves.

21 Tacitus, *Annals* II, 23 – 24.

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strategies of past empires. Today, for instance, Iraq and Afghanistan look remarkably like British protectorates. Whatever the administration may claim publicly about the autonomy of the current Iraqi and Afghan leadership, the United States in fact shares sovereignty with the civilian governments of both places, since it retains control over the countries' armed forces. What, however, the United States is not committed to is the view that empire – the exercise of imperium – is the best, or even a possible, way to achieve this.

In a number of crucial respects, the United States is, indeed, very unimperial. Despite allusions to the *Pax Americana*, twenty-first-century America bears not the slightest resemblance to ancient Rome. Unlike all previous European empires, it has no significant overseas settler populations in any of its formal dependencies and no obvious desire to acquire any. It does not conceive its hegemony beyond its borders as constituting a form of citizenship. It exercises no direct rule anywhere outside these areas; and it has always attempted to extricate itself as swiftly as possible from anything that looks as if it were about to develop into even indirect rule.

Cecil Rhodes once said that he would colonize the stars if he could. It is hard to image any prominent American policymaker, even Paul Wolfowitz, even secretly, harboring such desires. As Viscount James Bryce, one of the most astute observers of the Americas both North and South, said of the (North) Americans, "they have none of the earth-hunger which burns in the great nations of Europe."[22]

The one feature the United States does share with many past empires is the desire to impose its political values on the rest of the world. Like the 'liberal' empires of nineteenth-century Britain and France, the United States is broadly committed to the liberal-democratic view that democracy is the highest possible form of government and should therefore be exported. This is the American mission to which Madeleine Albright alluded, and it has existed in one form or another ever since the creation of the republic.

In addressing the need to "contain" Communist China, Harry Truman – comparing America to Achaemenid Persia, Macedonian Greece, Antonine Rome, and Victorian Britain – claimed that the only way to save the world from totalitarianism was for the "whole world [to] adopt the American system." By this he meant, roughly, what George W. Bush means by freedom – democratic institutions and free trade. Truman, knowingly or unknowingly, took the phrase "American system" from Alexander Hamilton, who firmly believed that the new republic should one day be able to "concur in erecting one great American system superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence and able to dictate the terms of the connections between the old world and the new."[23] "For the American system," Truman continued, could only survive "by becoming a world system."[24] What for Hamilton was to be a feature of international relations, for Truman was to be nothing less than a world culture.

But even making the rest of the world adopt the American system did not mean, as it had for all the other empires Truman cited, ruling the rest of the

22 Quoted by Arthur Schelsinger, Jr. in "The Making of a Mess," *The New York Review of Books* 51 (14) (September 2004): 41.

23 Federalist 11 in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 133 – 134.

24 Quoted in Ferguson, *Colossus*, 80.

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world. For Truman assumed, as has every American administration since, that the world's 'others' no longer needed to be led and cajoled until one day they finally demanded their own democratic institutions. American values, as Bush put it in 2002, are not only "right and true for every person in every society" – they are self-evidently so.[25] All humanity is capable of recognizing that democracy, or 'freedom,' will always be in its own best interest. All that has ever prevented some peoples from grasping this simple truth is fanaticism, the misguided claims of (certain) religions, and the actions of malevolent, self-interested leaders. Rather than empire, the United States' objective, then, is to eliminate these internal obstacles, to establish the conditions necessary for democracy, and then to retreat.

There can be little doubt that this assumption has been the cause, in Iraq as much as in El Salvador, of the failure to establish regimes that are democratic in more than name. Humanity is not, as Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, destined to find democracy more enticing than any other alternative. You may not need to be an American to embrace 'American values' – but you certainly need to be much closer to American beliefs and cultural expectations than most of the populations of the Middle East currently are. Tocqueville made a similar point about Algeria. It would have been impossible to make Algeria into a modern nation without "civilizing" the Arabs, he argued, a task that would be impossible to achieve unless Algeria was made into not a "colony," but "an extension of France itself on the far side of the Mediterranean."[26] The French government chose to ignore him and made it into a colony nonetheless.

But such an arrangement has never been an option for the United States. If only because the United States is the one modern nation in which no division of sovereignty is, at least conceptually, possible. The federal government shares sovereignty with the individual states of which the union is composed, but it could not contemplate, as former empires all had to, sharing sovereignty with the members of *other* nations. Only very briefly has the mainland United States ever been considered an empire rather than a nation. As each new U.S. territory was settled or conquered it became, within a very short space of time, a new state within the Union. This implied that any territories the United States might acquire overseas had, like Hawaii, to be incorporated fully into the nation – or returned to its native inhabitants. No American administration has been willing to tolerate any kind of colonialism for very long. Even so resolute an imperialist as Teddy Roosevelt could not imagine turning Cuba or the Philippines into colonies.[27] The United States does possess a number of dependent territories – Guam, the Virgin Islands, Samoa, etc. – but these are too few and too small to constitute an overseas colonial empire. The major exception to this rule is Puerto Rico. The existence of a vigorous debate over the status of this 'commonwealth' – a term which itself suggests

25 Quoted in Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire : Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston : Beacon Press, 2004), 3.

26 "Rapport fait par M. Tocqueville sur le projet de la loi relative aux credits extraordinaires demandés pour l'Algérie," in Seloua Luste Boulbina, ed., *Tocqueville sur l'Algérie, 1847* (Paris : Flammarion, 2003), 228.

27 Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 75.

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that Puerto Rico is an independent republic – and the fact that the status quo strikes everyone, even those who support its continuation, as an anomaly, largely proves the rule.[28]

Those advocating a more forceful U.S. imperial policy overlook that if America is in denial, it is in it for a very good reason. To become a true empire, as even the British were at the end of the nineteenth century, the United States would have to change radically the nature of its political culture. It is a liberal democracy (as most of the Western world now conceives it) – and liberal democracy and liberal empire (as Mill conceived it) are incompatible.[29] The form of empire championed by Mill existed to enforce the virtues and advantages that accompanied free or liberal government in places that otherwise would be, in Mill's language, "barbarous." The time might indeed come when the inhabitants of such places would demand European institutions – but as Mill and even Macaulay knew, when that happened, the empire would be at an end.

By contrast the United States makes no claim to be holding Iraq and Afghanistan in trust until such time as their peoples are able to govern themselves in a suitable – i.e., Western – manner. It seeks, however imperfectly, to confer free democratic institutions directly on those places, and then to depart, leaving the hapless natives to fabricate as best they can the social and political infrastructure without which no democratic process can survive for long.

In the end, perhaps, what Smith, Constant, and Schumpeter prophesied has come to pass: commerce has finally replaced conquest. True, it is commerce stripped of all its eighteenth-century attributes of benevolence, but it is commerce nonetheless. The long-term political objectives of the United States, which have varied little from administration to administration, have been to sustain and, where necessary, to create a world of democracies bound inexorably together by international trade. And the political forms best suited to international commerce are federations (such as the European Union) and trading partnerships (the OECD or NAFTA), not empires.

In *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, Robert Kagan boasts that whereas the "old" Europeans had moved beyond "power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation . . . a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Immanuel Kant's 'perpetual peace,'" the United States

> remains mired in history, exercising power in an anarchic Hobbesian world where international rules are unreliable, and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might.[30]

It is difficult to know just what Kagan takes the words 'Kant' and 'Hobbes' to stand for. But on any reasoned understanding of the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant, he would seem to have inverted the objectives of the Europeans and the Americans. For it

28 See Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, eds., *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

29 On this term, see Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003), 11.

30 Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), 3.

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is the Europeans (or at least the majority of them) who – by attempting to isolate the European Union as far as possible from all forms of external conflict that are considered to pose no immediate domestic threat – are the true Hobbesians. And in most respects the objectives of Kant's conception of a "universal *cosmopolitan existence*" – which would constitute the "matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop"[31] – is, mutatis mutandis, what the current U.S. government claims to be attempting to achieve.

Kant argued that the peoples of the world would never be at peace so long as the existing world powers – what he called "universal monarchies" – were locked into internecine competition with one another. They had, he said, to be persuaded to join a league for their own mutual protection. To make this possible, however, it was not enough to rely on international trade agreements or peace treaties, because in the long run the parties to such agreements would honor them only if they perceived them to be in their interests. A true world federation could only come about once all the states of the world shared a common political order, what Kant called "representative republicanism." Only then would they all have the same interests, and only then would those interests be to promote mutual prosperity and to avoid warfare. The reason he believed this to be so was that such societies were the only ones in which human beings were treated as ends not means; the only ones, therefore, in which human beings could be fully autonomous; and the only ones, consequently, in which no people would ever go to war to satisfy the greed or ambition of their rulers.

With due allowance for the huge differences between the late eighteenth century and the early twenty-first, and between what Kant understood by representative republics and what is meant today by liberal democracies, the United States' vision for the world is roughly similar: a union of democracies, certainly not equal in size or power, but all committed to the common goal of greater prosperity and peace through free trade. The members of this union have the right to defend themselves against aggressors and, in the pursuit of defense, they are also entitled to do their best to cajole so-called rogue states into mending their ways sufficiently to be admitted into the union. This is what Kant called the "cosmopolitan right."[32] We may assume that Truman had such an arrangement in mind when he said that the American system could only survive by becoming a world system.

For like the "American system," Kant's "cosmopolitan right" was intended to provide precisely the kind of harmonious environment in which it was possible to pursue what Kant valued most highly, namely, the interdependence of all human societies. This indisputably "liberal order" still depended "on the possession and use of military might," but there would be no permanent, clearly identifiable, perpetual enemy – only dissidents, 'rogue' states, and the perverse malice of the excluded. Kant was also not, as Kagan seems to imply, some kind of high-minded idealist, in contrast to Hobbes, the indefatigably realist. He was in fact very suspicious of high-mindedness of any kind. "This

31 Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in Hans Reiss, ed., *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 51.

32 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 156.

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rational idea of a *peaceful*, even if not friendly, thoroughgoing community of all the nations on the earth," he wrote, "is not a philanthropic (ethical), principle, but a principle *having to do with rights*."[33] It was based quite as firmly upon a calculation of reasonable self-interest as was Hobbes's suggestion for exiting from the "war of all against all."[34]

Kant, however, was also aware that bringing human beings to understand just what is in their own self-interest would always be a long and arduous task. In order to recognize that autonomy is the highest human good, humans have to disentangle themselves from the "leading strings" by which the "guardians" – priests, lawyers, and rulers – have made them "domesticated animals." Only he who could "throw off the ball and chain of his perpetual immaturity" would be properly "enlightened," and only the enlightened could create the kind of state in which true autonomy would be possible.[35] Because of this, the cosmopolitan right still lay for most at some considerable distance in the future.

It still does – few states today fulfill Kant's criteria. And of course Kant never addressed the problem of how the transition from one or another kind of despotism to "representative republicanism" was to be achieved (although he seems to have thought that the French Revolution, at least in its early phases, offered one kind of model).

Kant's project for perpetual peace has often been taken to be some kind of moral blueprint for the United Nations. But in my view, it is far closer to the final objective of the modern global state system in which the United States is undoubtedly, for the moment at least, the key player. It is also, precisely because it is a project for some future time, a far better guide to the overall ideological objectives of the United States than anything that now goes under the name of 'empire.'

33 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 158; Anthony Pagden, "Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism and the Legacy of European Imperialism," *Constellations* 7 (2000): 3 – 22.

34 Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in Reiss, ed., *Political Writings*, 112.

35 Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in Reiss, ed., *Political Writings*, 54 – 55.

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