

Culture, Values, and Identities

The Great Questions of Our Time and the Future of the Liberal Order

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What are the great questions of our time as they relate to the future of the liberal order? This is the question we posed to a diverse group of social scientists, inviting reflections based on their intellectual interests, curiosity, and expertise. In 1963 Dahrendorf ([1963] 1969, 51) famously wrote, "As the court-jesters of modern society, all intellectuals have the duty to doubt everything that is obvious, to make relative all authority, to ask all those questions that no one else dares to ask." Nearly sixty years later, we wonder what the questions are today, and what possible answers might be.

The contributions in this special collection are in the spirit of this probing, questioning essence of intellectual life that Dahrendorf demanded so passionately. As part of the [Dahrendorf Forum](#), a collaborative project of the [Hertie School](#) and [LSE Ideas](#) of the London School of Economics and Political Science, we wanted to honor the legacy of Dahrendorf and invited contributors to address uncomfortable, nagging questions. We therefore left the format of the various contributions open. Some contributions are commentaries in essay form, others are more conventional research articles, and others yet are somewhere in between.

We also launched a competition for PhD students inviting research papers on what they, from the point of view of their academic discipline, regard as a pressing question of our time, how they propose one could find answers, and what possible answers might be. In the spirit of Dahrendorf, we reminded them that posing the right question is as important as finding the right answer. In addition, we asked members of the *Global Perspectives* Emerging Scholar Forum to comment on the various contributions.

ON RALF DAHRENDORF AND HIS LEGACY

Dahrendorf (1929–2009) rose to academic fame in postwar Germany as a leading social scientist with a wide range of interests in sociology and political thought. As a professor at the University of Konstanz, he entered politics in the late 1960s, first as a liberal member of the Landtag of Baden-Württemberg in 1968 and then as a member of the German Bundestag in 1969. In 1970 he became a commissioner in the European Commission. From 1974 to 1984 he served as director of the LSE, and from 1987 to 1997 he was warden of St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford. He was appointed a member of Britain's House of Lords in 1993. During the last years of his life, he was also a senior member of the Social Science Center Berlin.

Liberalism and the liberal order were at the core of Dahrendorf's intellectual and political concerns. Today,

Dahrendorf's vision of a democratic, liberal order remains as relevant as it was during the Cold War period and in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of communism. Pandemics, climate change, growing inequality, the rise of populist movements, and autocratic temptations as well as other recent developments have profound and far-reaching implications, affecting economies, entire societies, and their political culture.

Central to Dahrendorf's intellectual approach was the insight that liberal market societies are prone to tensions and conflicts of many kinds, and yet, at the same time, they are also in a better position to handle them. Unlike statist and autocratic forms of governance, liberal societies prevent conflicts from being bottled up. Instead, social and economic tensions become creative elements that allow societies to move forward. Smart forms of governance turn potential conflicts into opportunities and actual conflicts into solutions. If this is to happen peacefully, societies need some form of conflict management, an agreement among stakeholders that legitimate and viable solutions can be found.

What is the source of conflict in modern societies? For Dahrendorf, it is more than the obvious fact that individuals have different interests and expectations. Rather, it is the outgrowth of unavoidable tensions that modern societies have to negotiate and balance between the competing values of justice, liberty, and economic well-being, and between economic efficiency, identity, and security. How can societies become just, open, and prosperous? How can they aim for efficient economies where people have a sense of community and enjoy internal as well as external security?

Managing such tensions at the national level is hard enough under the best circumstances. It becomes even more challenging in a European Union of diverse member states, or in a United States that is divided along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. If we add to this the complex layers of subregional and international governance, the United Nations and transnational regimes, it becomes clear that such tensions exist at multiple levels. Identifying latent and manifest tensions at these different levels, their conflict potential, and the options that present themselves for managing and resolving conflicts—that is the essence of Dahrendorf's thinking about the future of the liberal order.

Reflecting on the 1990s globalization spurt, Dahrendorf (1995) argued that growing and globalizing economies would create "perverse choices" for liberal democracies, which became known as the Dahrendorf Quandary: over time, staying economically competitive required either adopting measures detrimental to the cohesion of civil so-

ciety or restricting civil liberties and political participation. Later, Rodrik (2011) formulated a version of the Quandary in the form of a trilemma, which rests on the incompatibility of democracy, national sovereignty, and global economic integration: any two can be combined, but never all three simultaneously and in full. Is this indeed the case?

Dahrendorf feared a vicious cycle: economic globalization, increasingly decoupled from national processes, undermines the nation-state, hence national sovereignty, and, in turn, threatens democracy through loss of legitimacy and the rise of populist opposition groups. While neomercantilist economic policies may strengthen the nation-state, even democracy, they may also ultimately lessen economic growth and competitiveness. By contrast, while open economies may benefit some parts of the population, usually those with higher socioeconomic status, they may at the same time undercut the prosperity of others, even entire regions, weakening social cohesion and commitment to liberal democracy, even though the gross domestic product increases.

Some twenty-five years ago, Dahrendorf anticipated grave dangers in these tensions and saw the shadow of growing authoritarian temptations arising in increasingly

divided societies. Dahrendorf's (1995, 4) great question of the early twenty-first century was and is, How could countries manage "to square the circle between growth, social cohesion and political freedom"?

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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