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# WORLD POLITICS AND THE QUESTION OF PROGRESS<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Since 1989, a number of counter-narratives to the realist accounts of international politics, which dominated academic theorizations of international relations in the 1945-89 period, have proliferated.<sup>2</sup> A common, central thread in these counter-narratives is the reconceptualization of international political time in terms which admit the possibility of transnational or global historical progress. Examples include the revival of versions of liberal internationalism, cosmopolitanism and historical materialism. Within certain of these arguments the idea, variously specified, of an historically unprecedented phenomenon labelled 'global civil society' plays a prominent role. The focus of this paper is on narratives of world political time as a time of progress, which make use of the idea of global civil society to explain the direction of contemporary world politics. The ultimate aim of this paper is to raise critical questions about ways of thinking the political temporality of world politics, which utilise the idea of global civil society, and which in turn rely on modernist philosophies of history.

The paper falls into four main sections. In the first section, I will look briefly at the fall and rise of speculative philosophy of history in the understanding of international politics. In the second and third sections of the paper, I will sketch out two influential counter-narratives to realist international political time, which each make a claim to capture the meaning and promise of global civil society. These are the theories of *cosmopolitanism*, exemplified here by the work of Andrew Linklater, and *post-marxist postmodernism*, exemplified in Hardt's and Negri's notion of empire/ counter-empire (Linklater, 1998; Hardt & Negri, 2001). I see Linklater's work as embedded in a reading of history characteristic of the liberal enlightenment, most obviously derived from Kant. Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, offer an explicitly post-Marxist interpretation, but one which is heavily informed by a Deleuzian conception of desire and a Foucauldian account of power and subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> In both cases I will show how these theories frame particular interpretations of global civil society, both analytic and normative. In the fourth section of the paper, I will suggest that neither cosmopolitanism nor empire provide adequate frameworks for the analysis and judgement of the developments in world politics which are identified with the concept of global civil society. Moreover, it will be argued that the inadequacy of these frameworks is due to the specific kinds of closure inherent in the modernist philosophies of history on which they rely. In conclusion, it will be suggested that the very category of global civil society is misleading in the way in which it fixes a myriad of complex, interconnected and contradictory practices under a single heading. Contemporary world politics requires a mode of theorization which keeps the idea of political progress in world politics in question, rather than always already resolved.

## Section One: The Fall and Rise of the Philosophy of World History

*Our concept of history, though essentially a concept of the modern age, owes its existence to the transition period when religious confidence in immortal life*

*had lost its influence upon the secular and the new indifference toward the question of immortality had not yet been born.* (Arendt, 1961: 74)

Arendt's account of the emergence of the modern conception of history (which she argues culminates in Marx's historical materialism) is a familiar one, and chimes with most standard accounts of the distinctiveness of modernist conceptions of political time, in comparison to classical and Christian ideas. Koselleck draws the contrast between three understandings of history as political time, drawn from the early modern to the enlightenment periods in Europe: firstly, the cyclical view of secular history found in thinkers such as Machiavelli in which history is infinitely repeatable and political life is therefore always the same; secondly, the powerfully eschatological vision of early Protestantism, in which prophecies of an imminent end to secular politics were crucial (Luther); and thirdly the 'history' of modernity, characterized by a future oriented conception of the present, which defines itself as both 'new' (not repetition) and secular (with no imminent or certain end) and in which political action can change its own conditions of possibility (Koselleck, 1985: 7-17). Philosophical history (or the speculative philosophy of history) emerges in the later 18th century as a response to this new appreciation of political time. In the absence of the certainties of either secular repetition or other-worldly end, philosophers began to tell new stories about how the past, present and future of humanity could be understood in universal terms. The extent to which philosophical history is simply the secularisation of a Christian millenarian vision is debatable, but Koselleck suggests that enlightenment philosophical history should be read, not as an attempt to straightforwardly replace God's plan by the workings of 'providence' but rather to deal with the uncertainties as well as possibilities of having both embraced the demand for future good and abandoned its guarantor. In one sense, modern conceptions of history mean that the last judgement is infinitely postponed. In another sense the crisis of that judgment is always already upon us, a philosophical conception which is taken as confirmed politically by the French Revolution as the archetypal modern experience, in which history is taken into human hands and a new calendar is instituted.

The dynamic of the modern is established as an element *sui generis*. This involves a process of production whose subject or subjects are only to be investigated through reflection on this process, without this reflection leading, however, to a final determination of this process. A previously divine teleology thus encounters the ambiguity of human design, as can be shown in the ambivalence of the concept of progress, which must continually prove itself both finite and infinite if it is to escape. (Koselleck, 1985: 103-4)

The philosophies of history that we find in the work of thinkers such as Kant and Marx are very different. But there are certain features which they have in common and which, I would argue, are distinguishing characteristics of the modernist understanding of political time.<sup>4</sup> Three features are of particular importance. Firstly, the idea that modernity, the 'new' time of the present, is *revolutionary* time, that is to say the time in which progress through human intervention is possible, if not inevitable. Secondly, the *telos* of this revolutionary present is understood in terms of an ideal of freedom. The meaning of this freedom in both principle and practice, and therefore of the implicit 'end of history', clearly differs between different thinkers, but it always refers back to an ideal of self-determination in which human beings, individually and/ or collectively control their own destiny. Thirdly, modernist philosophy of history assumes that the political time of modernity has a world-wide destiny. This means that Europe, as the cradle of modernity, is also, as it were, the 'carrier' of world- political time. The mechanisms through which the *telos* of world history will be achieved, as with the form that the 'end of history' will take, are understood differently by different thinkers. Nevertheless, in all cases, the argument involves a complex interrelation between material and ideal forces, and a constant shifting on the philosopher's part between the realms, to borrow Kant's terminology, of 'empirical' (events in the world) and 'philosophical' (theorizations of world events) history (Kant, 1991: 51-53).

The idea of Europe as 'ahead' of other parts of the world in the end of history stakes came to be a taken for granted premise of theorizations of world politics in the 19th century. Thus, we find thinkers such as J. S. Mill happily combining liberal and colonialist arguments in his work. For Mill the non-contemporaneity of the

contemporaneous nations of Britain and India is an obvious fact, which straightforwardly justifies paternalist imperialism in India (Mill, 2002: 488). The same kind of thinking helps to legitimise liberal internationalist principles enshrined in the post-1918 international order, with its promise of a future time in which all nations could grow up and join the adults already at the table. Whether explicitly or implicitly, modernist philosophy of history haunts the ways in which international politics are understood into the early part of the twentieth century. And even after the ascendancy of historicism in both philosophy and social science is radically challenged in the aftermath of the inter-war years and the 1939-45 conflict, its influence is by no means entirely excised from the western academy's accounts of politics both within and between states.

For example, in the context of intra-state politics, in its dominant Anglo-American mode, political theory presents itself as both practiced in and concerned with the present as such (as an intellectual pursuit it distinguishes itself firmly from activities such as the history of political thought). However, even when it initially presents itself as universal in scope, the 'present' of political theory turns out to be spatially delimited and to mean the present of liberal democratic or of liberal multicultural states. Political theory can contemplate liberalism's present as 'the' present because it is implicitly assumed that this is the direction in which all states are (and ought to be) developing, it is what *matters* in the present. Similarly, and even more obviously, there are the discourses applied in the field of international political economy, of 'modernization' or 'development' on the one hand, and of 'world system' and 'core/ periphery' on the other. Underpinning these discourses we again find progressivist theories of history, in which both empirical analysis and policy prescriptions are premised on an idea of what the end of history will be and ought to be.<sup>5</sup>

Having said this, however, it is important to distinguish between the modernist narratives which have never ceased to mark the dominant understandings of politics within states from those which dominated the understanding of politics (as opposed to economics) between or across states in the latter half of the 20th century. During this time, the most powerful voices offering accounts of international or world politics in the Western academy insisted on a deep dis-

inction between politics internal to states and politics external to states. This can be seen in classical realism, which tended towards a pessimistic reading of world political time in a manner reminiscent of the Lutheran conception identified by Koselleck above (Morgenthau, 1985). It is even more evident with the rise of neo-realism, which insists on a sharp cut between intra and inter-state politics (Waltz, 1979). Intra-state politics could be understood in terms of progress and/ or regress according to a modernist measure, whereas inter-state politics occupied a distinct temporal dynamic that had more in common with the early modern, proto-classical Machiavellian notions of political time than the revolutionary time of Kant and Marx. For the dominant political realist or neo-realist conception of international politics, states might or might not change for the better, but regardless of this, the ways in which they operated internationally would remain the same, reflecting a primordial political temporality of ongoing struggle, victory and defeat, which admitted of no end or escape.<sup>6</sup> This way of thinking world-political time excludes the notion of world political progress by definition. It is also resistant to taking seriously any internationalist or globalist movements or ideologies which aim to put world political progress on the international agenda. Such movements and ideologies, from a realist point of view, are either irrelevant or else can only be understood as masking the *real* power interests of which the stuff of international politics is made. The progressivist narratives I am going on to discuss explicitly contest the understanding of the political temporality of the international realm on which political realism/ neo-realism relies and hark back to the earlier modes of thinking international politics in which world-historical progress is a taken for granted possibility, and one to which the theorist holds the key.

## Section Two: Global Civil Society and Cosmopolitan Time

Over the past ten years a rapidly expanding literature in international political theory and ethics has argued for the development of cosmopolitan democracy and citizenship as both a normative ideal

and an immanent potential of world-historical development. This literature clearly offers a counter to the realist conception of international political time. In its place, it puts forward an analysis of international, transnational and global politics in terms of the progressive transformation of the political temporality of inter-state relations into the global political temporality of humanity as a whole. My exemplary figure for this kind of counter-narrative is Andrew Linklater and his 1998 book *The Transformation of Political Community*. Linklater draws explicitly on the legacies of Kant and Marx in his work, mediated through Habermasian critical theory. Unsurprisingly, therefore, he offers a narrative strongly reminiscent of the distinctive features, outlined above, of a modernist account of the historical meaning of the present.

In Linklater's argument modernity is revolutionary time, in the sense that it is defined by a principle of universalizability which successively challenges limits to the moral and political progress of humanity. In a more specific sense, the present is revolutionary as the Westphalian international order is in the process of transformation into a new form of political community in which citizenship is no longer confined by the boundaries of states. The telos towards which the transformations analysed by Linklater are leading is that of self-determination, understood along the lines of Kantian autonomy in which individuals become self-legislating. For Linklater, this means that the end of history takes the form of a cosmopolitan, egalitarian, dialogic democracy. The mechanisms through which progress happens are not assured. Linklater essentially relies on two such mechanisms, both of which reflect the importance of Europe as the carrier of world-political time. Firstly, there are the material mechanisms of globalization which lead to the increase of economic interdependency, which are abetted by advanced communicative technologies with global reach, and which necessitate the development of increasing inter and trans-state co-operation in global governance and regulation. However, these material processes are by no means straightforwardly progressive. On the one hand, they facilitate the recognition of the commonality of the situation of humans across the globe; on the other hand, they exert fragmenting as well as unifying pressures, alienating those at the sharp end of global inequalities and deepening rifts between rich and poor,

dominant and subaltern cultures (Linklater, 1998: 30-32). It is therefore the second mechanism which is much more important for Linklater's theory of history, this is the non-material process of moral learning, in which both individuals and collectivities absorb and proselytize the universalising lessons of enlightenment reason (Linklater, 1998: 118-119). Linklater borrows strongly from Habermas here, for whom progress at the 'phylogenetic' level is tied to the emergence of reflexive modernity, first instantiated in Europe and in the liberal capitalist West. Linklater's most powerful example of moral learning draws on Marshall's theory of the development of citizenship rights, in which the logic of universality implicit in liberal citizenship pushes forward an increasingly inclusive understanding of both who is included as a citizen and the kind of rights that he or she bears (Linklater, 1998: 184-189). Although progress cannot be guaranteed, the theorist's analysis confirms that it is moral learning which is the *sine qua non* of progress. In so far, therefore, as the theorist points out and reinforces the moral lessons of modernity, he is acting as a good global citizen. The demand to read history as if it were progress becomes a categorical imperative.

Promoting the Kantian vision of a universal kingdom of ends, and the parallel enterprise of realising the neo-Marxist ideal of overcoming asymmetries of power and wealth, form the essence of cosmopolitan citizenship (Linklater, 1998: 212)

In Linklater's analysis, civil society is the arena in which political actors challenge the unjustifiable exclusions inherent within states and in inter-state relations. Feminist and multiculturalist movements are taken to exemplify the way that Habermasian performative contradictions within liberal states, in which states act in contradiction with their own grounding principles, provide revolutionary opportunities for social and political transformation. The same logic which pushes the extension of rights within states, challenges the validity of the distinctions drawn between those within and those without state borders. The development of global civil society is therefore a logical development of enlightenment reason, as is the European Union (Linklater, 1998: 189-211). On Linklater's interpretation the analysis of global civil society is necessarily linked to

his broader progressivist narrative, in which liberal enlightenment reason plays the crucial role. This does not mean that Linklater is claiming that all activity in global civil society is necessarily progressive. But he is providing a way of distinguishing between the progressive and reactionary within civil society movements, and putting the emphasis on the positive logical weight carried by progressive developments. It is therefore also the case that an idealised version of global civil society itself, as a public sphere of open and inclusive dialogue, becomes an integral part of the historical telos of modernity.

Given the degree to which the most high profile developments within global civil society are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements which espouse egalitarian and universal rights based programmes, it is not surprising to find that cosmopolitanism has been the most significant framework of analysis in the burgeoning literature on global civil society (Falk, 1995; Kaldor, 1999; Archibugi, 2003). An example of this influence can be seen in the work of Mary Kaldor, who has been one of the foremost theorists of the 'new' time of global civil society, and who is also one of the editors of the *Global Civil Society Yearbook*.<sup>7</sup> In her recent book *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War*, Kaldor begins by laying out five different interpretations of what global civil society means, all of which, she claims, contain both analytic and normative dimensions. These five conceptions draw on competing traditions of thought about the meaning of civil society in general. In the list are: *societas civilis*, in which civil society is identified with the rule of law; 'bourgeois society' in which civil society is the space between the state and the private sphere; 'activist version' in which civil society is defined as a public sphere in which different groups can participate in uncoerced dialogue; 'neo-liberal version' in which civil society is the space for market and non-governmental organizations to operate; and 'postmodern version', in which civil society is defined in fundamentally pluralist terms and is suspicious of enlightenment universalism (Kaldor, 2003: 7-12). Although she argues that her definition encompasses elements of all five, her emphasis is on what she calls the 'activist' version. According to this version, global civil society is primarily about 'civilizing' globalization, by enabling the free and rational dialogue between different civil society actors and

interests to take place, and thereby encouraging global legality, justice and the empowerment of global citizens (Kaldor, 2003: 12). Kaldor, like Linklater, links the idea of civil society to the ideal of a Habermasian, dialogic public sphere and sees enlightenment reason as carrying the transformative potential of the present of global civil society. Like Linklater again, Kaldor is not suggesting that progress is inevitable, but she is tying her own analysis to the interpretation of civil society in emancipatory terms. As an activist theorist, Kaldor is being a good global citizen in so far as she highlights and reinforces the ways in which global civil society is, and might become more, progressive. The key to progress is the emancipatory force of ideas, which are inherently universal. One of these ideas is the idea of civil society itself.

- the argument that civil society was invented in Europe and that its development was associated with conquest, domination and exploitation still does not negate the emancipatory potential of the term. Ideas have no borders and the evolution of human knowledge is characterized by an endless borrowing and mixing of concepts and insights. (Kaldor, 2003: 44).

What then are the implications of Kaldor's emphasis on the 'activist version' for the analysis and normative judgement of global civil society? Analytically, there are obvious constraints on what can count, by definition, as global civil society activity, so that, for instance, violent activity of any kind is excluded. For Kaldor, the most basic aspect of any view of civil society is that it is literally the realm of 'civility', beyond the state of nature. In addition, by defining global civil society in terms of voluntary and participatory activity, Kaldor puts into question the civil society status of certain kinds of groups or movements, notably those she labels as 'new' nationalist or fundamentalist movements (Kaldor, 2003: 97-101). There are also more subtle implications for what is foregrounded and what is under-emphasized in Kaldor's analysis. A very wide range of actors and developments are acknowledged as part of global civil society, but in general it is movements in which the goal of emancipation is explicit which are highlighted as core to the meaning of global civil society. The normative parameters of Kaldor's account are made very clear, and they provide

definite criteria for judging what is to count as progressive civil society activity – that is to say activity which preserves civil society itself. The crucial criterion here is universality, organizations and movements which are in any way exclusive and closed to open debate with other civil society actors act contrary to the ‘civility’ which is central to Kaldor’s ideal. Kaldor’s moral clarity also underpins her willingness to support a framework of law, governance and policing, based on principles of universal human rights, to sustain the operations of global civil society. Although Kaldor is explicitly sceptical of global democracy – her account of what global civil society needs to sustain it, clearly invokes the traditional liberal state/ civil society distinction and relation. And it suggests a global order which is modelled in terms of a liberal constitution, in which key moral principles are enshrined and may be enforced (Kaldor, 1999: 210; 2003: 128-141).

### Section Three: Global Civil Society and the Time of Empire

The account of global politics in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* appears radically different to that of Linklater and other cosmopolitan theorists and owes significantly more to Marx than to Kant or Habermas. Nevertheless, like the cosmopolitan theories of Linklater and Kaldor, it presents a clear challenge to realist or neo-realist political temporalities and locates international relations firmly within the modernist political time of the speculative philosophy of history. In this case, the present is revolutionary as the unprecedented time of ‘empire’, which as the decentred accumulation of global economic and political power (as ‘bio-power’) nourishes and harbours the revolutionary forces of counter-empire. Empire, although it is to be transcended, is understood as a progressive force because of the ways in which it has dismantled the mediations (such as those of nation-states and the civil societies of nation-states) of earlier capitalist eras and brings the population of the globe (in Hardt and Negri’s terms, the ‘multitude’) face to face with imperial power as such (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 8-13; 392). The telos of Hardt and Negri’s account of history harks back to the communist ideal of a world in which freedom is grasped by humanity in and for itself. The meaning of

this telos in practice is not spelled out, though by implication this will be a holistic, undifferentiated social condition in which the breaking down of boundaries initiated by empire will be carried further. This is gestured towards in two of the immediate aims suggested by Hardt and Negri for the multitude, that of the right to free mobility for labour and a global minimum wage (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 396-403). The means by which the telos is attained, as with Linklater's argument, are twofold. First, Hardt and Negri suggest that internal tensions or contradictions within the mechanisms of empire will push forward revolutionary change, for instance through the forced globalization of labour. This is clearly a re-working of the Marxist notion of capital harbouring the seeds of its own destruction. Secondly, change will come about through the political demands and resistance of the 'multitude', as its consciousness is politicized (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 394-396). In contrast to Linklater's emphasis, typical of cosmopolitanism, on the power of reason, here the emphasis is on resistant action, in which the generative power of desire which empire has both relied on and exploited is turned in novel directions (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 406). This means that on this model the ideal of a discursive politics, common to the cosmopolitan view of global civil society, is replaced by an ideal of revolutionary practice.

Hardt and Negri claim that models of post-Westphalian world politics which treat it as analogous to, or as an extension of, the politics of the modern capitalist state are mistaken. For this reason they reject cosmopolitan narratives in which global civil society mediates between global governance and humanity, as civil society had traditionally been seen to mediate between the state and the private sphere (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 7). In addition, they argue that the category of 'global civil society' is far too broad and encompasses developments that are both pro and counter empire. For instance, they argue that global civil society in the form of humanitarian NGOs sustains rather than subverts imperial bio-power (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 313-314).

These NGOs are completely immersed in the bio-political context of the constitution of Empire; they anticipate the power of its pacifying and productive intervention of justice. It should thus come as no surprise that honest juridical theorists of the old international school (such as

Richard Falk) should be drawn in by the fascination of these NGOs. The NGOs demonstration of the new order as a peaceful biopolitical context seems to have blinded these theorists to the brutal effects that moral intervention produces as a prefiguration of world order. (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 36-37)

It is clear, therefore, that Hardt and Negri are suspicious of the kind of links which Linklater and Kaldor draw between moral universalism and historical progress. Nevertheless, this moral universalism, manifested in the development of humanitarian NGOs in global civil society, is linked to progress for Hardt and Negri, because it represents the breakdown of the mediating role played by the civil societies of nation-states, which in the past protected certain populations against the full consequences of global imperial power. This breakdown is a stage on the way to a different kind of change, in which 'the multitude' directly confronts empire. Exemplary cases of the latter kind of revolutionary practice on Hardt and Negri's account take the form of some manifestations of anti-globalization politics and some cases of indigenous revolutionary movements (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 54-57).

The difference between the 'imperial' and 'counter-imperial' aspects of global civil society for Hardt and Negri, is reminiscent of the traditional Marxist distinction between a class 'in-itself' and a class 'for-itself', in which a transformation in political consciousness makes an objectively existing socio-economic group into a revolutionary subject (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 60-61).<sup>8</sup> Whilst humanitarian NGOs confirm 'the multitude' as a global entity, in acting on behalf of humanity as such they also confirm the passivity of the multitude. Whereas anti-globalization protests and indigenous revolutionary politics are the multitude acting in and for-itself, albeit in a fragmentary and uncoordinated way. In the final section of the book, Hardt and Negri address the question of what the politicisation of the multitude, in which its revolutionary energies would become genuinely global would mean. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this revolutionary change is associated with the demand for global citizenship as the right to free immigration and a social wage, as well as with the expropriation of property, an odd mixture of traditional class based politics and the kind of language spoken by

contemporary global civil society activists of the more radical sort (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 393-413).

Although cosmopolitan frameworks have tended to dominate work on global civil society, there is a counter-trend which reflects something of the mix of post-marxism and postmodernism in Hardt's and Negri's position.<sup>9</sup> This approach to global civil society is sceptical of cosmopolitan enlightenment, and of the universalising claims of dominant Western based NGOs and looks instead to more particular modes of resistance in the non-state sphere to exemplify the genuinely radical potential of global civil society. At the same time, however, it holds on to a universalising commitment to an ideal of freedom and is as suspicious of the 'new' nationalisms and fundamentalisms as cosmopolitan theorists such as Kaldor (Walker, 1994, 1999; Baker, 2002; Mignolo, 2002; Calhoun, 2003). This is the kind of argument made in Gideon Baker's book *Civil Society and Democratic Theory: alternative voices*, which claims that cosmopolitan arguments, whether they explicitly invoke the notion of a global democratic structure or not, are inherently blind to the meaning of the political embedded in the practice of actual global civil society activists:

Whether from the standpoint of cosmopolitan democracy or global civil society theory, then, transnational civic action loses its self-determining character and, with this, its ability to reshape our understanding of the political. This is a particularly regrettable failure in theory since it is precisely this re-enacting of the political that many groups in global civil society identify as their practice. (Baker, 2002: 129)

The emphasis in Baker's account, as with Hardt and Negri, is on the ideal of revolutionary practice as the distinctive mark of genuine civil society activism. On this account there is an agonism built into the politics of global civil society, in which movements have to hold onto the radicalism by which they were initially inspired, and which is threatened by any form of institutionalisation within the current world order. For instance, Baker is critical of the hegemony of rights language as the way to articulate the goals of global civil society actors, because he sees it as confirming a top-down, sovereignty based approach to politics. Underpinning this distrust of the cosmopolitan position is a particular account of the meaning of freedom. The

normative commitment of post-marxist postmodernists is to a freedom which cannot be identified with any particular content and which, whenever it does take on a fixed meaning, inevitably betrays its own ideal. This means that the criterion by which progressive and regressive dimensions of global civil society are identified is as much a matter of form as of content. All global civil society actors may be challenging the status quo, but only those which embody the goal of freedom within their own praxis as political actors provide the appropriate vision for what global civil society should mean.

The implications for the analysis and judgment of global civil society of approaches such as that of Hardt and Negri are similar to those of cosmopolitanism in some ways, but also clearly differ in important respects. The link between global civil society and a universal ideal of self-determination remains, as does the rejection of new fundamentalisms and nationalisms. However, post-marxist postmodernist arguments are less sure about the exclusion of violence from genuine civil society activity, given that revolutionary movements such as that of the Zapatistas have exemplary status within their discussion (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 55; Baker, 130-144). In addition, on this kind of account, grassroots political action becomes the exemplar for global civil society activity, and larger scale, more formally organized movements, which reflect universal liberal norms and interact with state and inter-state institutions, are seen as increasingly co-opted by that system, and as falling outside of the genuinely non-state sphere. Unlike theorists such as Kaldor, Hardt and Negri are in principle opposed to the idea of humanitarian intervention, and see the governance of global civil society as an aspect of empire, rather than as a counter-imperial strategy. Above all, the vision of the 'end of history' implicit in the analysis is different. In place of a rule governed world order, which frames the ongoing dialogue of diverse civil society actors, we are presented, in John Keane's terms with:

A future social order unmarked by the division between government and civil society, an order in which the 'irrepressible lightness of joy of being communist' – living hard by the revolutionary values of love, cooperation, simplicity and innocence – will triumph, this time on a global scale. (Keane, 2003: 65)

## Section Four: Critical Reflections on the Time of Global Civil Society

The theories of Linklater and Hardt and Negri are examples of counter-narratives to realist accounts of world politics, which reclaim the international onto the ground of modernist political time, in principle the time of humanity as a whole as opposed to that of discrete political communities. In doing this, they offer certain tools for understanding and interpreting the phenomenon which has become labelled as global civil society. In both cases, political action, of certain kinds, within the non-state sphere of voluntary association and resistance to global power is identified with the transformative potential of the present. In both cases also, we are given ways of discriminating between those political actions which are genuinely progressive and those which essentially preserve the status-quo or are more profoundly reactionary. In the discussion so far, I have treated the meaning of 'global civil society' in the terms of the thinkers whose work has been under review. However, if we take 'global civil society', in the most general terms, to mean the full range of non-state organizations, movements and activities which are transnational in their operations and aims, then the terms of cosmopolitanism and empire clearly foreground some aspects of global civil society and under-emphasize or occlude others. I will go on to argue that the problems inherent in the terms in which cosmopolitanism and empire grasp global civil society can be labelled under three headings: *exclusivity*; *hubris*; and *either/ or*. These problems are bound up with assumptions about the relation between past and future which characterize modernist philosophies of history.

Let us begin with the problem of *exclusivity*. Why is the exclusivity of these approaches to understanding global civil society a problem, given that all conceptualisations will set up stipulative definitional criteria which are exclusive? The answer to this, in my view, lies in the ways in which the lines are drawn between what is to count as genuine civil society activity and what is not. In the case of both cosmopolitan and empire arguments there is a peculiar, ongoing trade off between the empirical and the normative which fixes the parameters of analysis. Because of this, the ideals of rational dialogue

and of revolutionary practice respectively exert unnecessary closure on the concept of global civil society and therefore on the ways in which it can be analysed or understood. The effect of this closure is to occlude both interconnections between what is counted as inside civil society and what is excluded, and to occlude the possibility of recognizing ambivalences internal to that which is counted as inside. Thus, following the cosmopolitan path, we are diverted from theorizing the connection between civility and violence, even when it is acknowledged that coercion play a necessary role in sustaining civil society. We are also encouraged to see the distinction between violence and civility as clear cut, so that identifying ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ within global civil society is relatively unproblematic. In the case of empire, although they reject the terminology of ‘global civil society’, Hardt and Negri similarly divert us from considering the link between the moral humanitarianism of the NGOs, which they see as implicated in empire, and the resistant practices of anti-globalization protestors or indigenous social movements. We are only permitted to see the former as an aspect of the material conditions for the latter, but not the actual and ongoing interplay between grass roots movements and transnational organizations. At the same time, the ‘multitude’ is presented as necessarily pure in its generative power in sharp distinction to the corruption and crisis of empire, and we are encouraged to think that the distinction between empire and counter-empire is somehow straightforward.

In the yearbook *Global Civil Society 2002*, Neera Chandhoke asks the question: “To put it bluntly, should our *normative* expectations of civil society blind us to the nature of *real* civil societies whether national or global?” (Chandhoke, 2002: 37). Like Chandhoke, I would answer that they should not, but that one of the reasons that they are able to, is because of the way in which the relation between the normative and the empirical is configured in the modernist philosophy of history. The exclusions in both post-Kantian and Post-Marxist accounts of global civil society are particularly powerful because they are not simply reducible to wishful thinking. Instead they reflect a way of thinking about the world in which the theorist is doubly invested in reading history as progress. The theorists of cosmopolitanism and empire have normative standards which the world fails to live up to, but they also understand history in such a

way that they are obliged to read the world as if it were developing in accordance with their normative telos, because, even if they don't see progress in world history as inevitable, they know that one of the ways in which progress will happen is through the intervention of the theorist, insistent that this progress is visible and that he or she knows how it works. This responsibility of the theorist derives from the modernist assumption that self-determination is the key to progress, and that to the extent that this isn't apparent to social and political actors, it must be foregrounded by the theorist him or herself. Thus, Linklater is himself part of the rational dialogue which pushes moral learning forward, and Hardt and Negri are part of the transformation of the multitude from a class in itself to a class for itself.

The *hubris* implicit in theorizing global civil society within a modernist framework, is not only apparent in the way in which modernist theorists take on the mantle of the revolutionary for themselves. It is also apparent in the unselfconscious way in which their normative criteria are presented as a global telos. I call the former 'unselfconscious', because it is so quick to ignore or sidestep the question of the identification of what progress means with Western modernity. This is only possible, on my view, because of the implicit reliance on an interpretation of the present in which the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous is taken for granted. Such an interpretation only makes sense because a modernist philosophy of history is presumed, and it works to disguise the fact both that this is a normative stance *and* that it is a stance which implies not just the inferiority but the outmoded nature of the ways of life which most of the world's population are living. As with Mill, the commitment to freedom becomes easily compatible with the paternalist condemnation of non-modern ways of life. It is much easier for the theorists not to take seriously ways of thinking or political goals which do not fit with their own normative agenda, if those ways of thinking or political goals are understood as essentially past.

The combination of the assumption of normative standards at work in history and the supposedly demonstrable (but rarely demonstrated) superiority of a those normative standards presents us with a pattern

typical of modernist philosophy of history. It invariably works on a twin track approach in which the analysis constantly shifts from a claim about morality (the ideal) to a claim about politics (the real) and *vice versa*. The mechanisms through which global civil society develops are identified with enlightenment reason or revolutionary action respectively, but this is presumed rather than demonstrated through empirical investigation. The fact that the explanation for progress is always already known clearly has strong prescriptive implications, but it also has implications for the description and explanation of events, closing off possibilities which don't fit with the criteria. It is this point which lies behind Chandhoke's argument as to the dangers of neglecting important aspects of global civil society in contemporary theorizing (Chandhoke, 2002).<sup>10</sup>

The latter point brings us to the final set of problems, which I have labelled under the heading of *either/or*. In the cases of both post-Kantian and post-marxist approaches, global civil society comes to be interpreted in essentially Manichaeian terms. I have already suggested above that this has negative implications for the analysis of global civil society, since it blocks the possibility of reading the interconnections between the inside and outside of global civil society, and also puts paid to a 'both and' (ambivalent) reading of the normative implications of particular civil society developments. It also encourages sectarianism in analysis, in which cosmopolitan and empire theorists compete unhelpfully over claims as to who has identified the *genuine* heart of global civil society activity, and the *genuine* key to progress. Most importantly of all, however, it pre-emptly arguments *either* for a less purist understanding of both morality and politics *or* for moral pluralism. Modernist philosophy of history precludes anything other than an essentially linear account of global historical development. This linearity lines history up to either succeed or fail according to a singular understanding of what success and failure mean. But it is only if one has bought into this framework of interpretation in the first place (whether consciously or not) that this is the choice with which those trying to analyse and judge world politics under the heading of global civil society are faced.

## Conclusion

I have argued above that frameworks for understanding global civil society, which depend on modernist philosophy of history pose a variety of problems. This is important because so much of the theoretical work which utilises the concept of global civil society replicates assumptions embedded in post-Kantian and post-Marxist approaches to the interpretation of the present and the future. The problem is that, from the standpoint of Western modernity, Kant and Marx provide ways in which it is possible to think the present in terms of at least the possibility of progress, not just in the sense of the short term peaks of a Machiavellian cycle, but as a lasting and reliable improvement of the human condition. The alternative to cosmopolitanism or empire would appear to be a lapse back into realism, in which notions of progress are a priori discredited, and many of the non-state actors and organizations in world politics can therefore only be understood as victims of false consciousness in their struggles for positive political and economic change. However, I would argue that this is misleading. The problem does not lie in the invocation of progress *per se*, but in the tying of the idea of progress to a unifying temporality, which is posited as universal and is therefore able to ignore (de-historicize and de-politicise) its own particular historicity and politics.<sup>11</sup>

The terms of the choice between Machiavelli and Marx or Kant themselves reflect an essentially modernist understanding of history and progress, in which world politics and progress can only be thought together through a particular unifying strategy in which a purist understanding of the mechanisms of progress is somehow embedded in the world as a whole (Spivak, 1998: 333). Refusing this choice does not close off debates either about 'world' or 'progress', but it does demand a reconceptualization of both and of their relation to one another. A first step in this task, would be a greater degree of self-consciousness in theorists of world politics as progress, of the origins and political effects (intended and unintended) of the vocabularies in which their analysis is conducted. A second step would be to be more open to the possibility that not only is the notion of *progress* highly contested, but that even where there is

agreement on its meaning, the question of *how* it comes about should not be short-circuited by the presumption that we already know how progress happens and therefore what the end of history could be. Perhaps most importantly of all, however, a third step would be to pay more attention to the philosophical problem of how to conceptualise world politics in terms which are not singular, reductive and reliant on binary conceptual oppositions. In place of modes of thinking world political time which settle the question of progress in advance, we need a thinking adequate to the complexity, inter-connection, division, plurality and hierarchy by which world politics is characterised.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Another version of this paper, under the title 'Global Civil Society: Thinking Politics and Progress' will appear in D. Chandler & G. Baker (eds) *Global Civil Society: Contested Futures* (London, Routledge, forthcoming 2004).
- <sup>2</sup> I am using the term 'realism' in the sense that it is used in anglophone international relations theory. Within this context, realism is associated with accounts of politics which are sceptical of the possibility of progress. Canonic realist thinkers within anglophone international relations theory include Thucydides, Augustine, Machiavelli and Hobbes. This realist tradition is seen as being revived (in contrast to liberal utopianism) in the work of thinkers such as Morgenthau and as being given a more social scientific form in the work of Waltz (neo-realism). Although it is not the case that the only ways of thinking about world politics in the Cold War period were realist or neo-realist, I think it is fair to say that the anglophone academic study of international relations was dominated in the 1950s and 60s by the broadly speaking pessimistic temporalities of realism exemplified by Morgenthau (1985) and from the 1970s onwards by the more 'scientific' vision of structural or neo-realism, exemplified by Waltz (1979), in which the temporality of international politics takes on a more static, Machiavellian character, see below.
- <sup>3</sup> Hardt and Negri are unusual in that they formulate a systematic post-marxist postmodernist theory of globalization, which is explicitly grounded in a theory of history. Few theorists of global civil society would subscribe to Hardt's and Negri's theory *in toto*. However, as I will argue below, work on global civil society which is influenced by Marxism and postmodernism implicitly relies on features of the modernist

philosophy of history which we find at work in Hardt and Negri, and this has similarly occlusive effects on the analysis and judgment of global civil society.

- <sup>4</sup> Within the space of this paper, it isn't possible to provide a full justification for my account of the distinctive features of modernist philosophy of history, though I would argue that they are in keeping with Koselleck's account discussed above. I am also clearly being selective in picking out Kant and Marx as the key exemplars, rather than, for instance, Hegel or Herder. The reason for this is that it is the legacies of Kant and Marx that are most clearly reflected in contemporary work on global civil society. See: Kant 'Idea for Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' and 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch' (Kant, 1991); Marx & Engels *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1970), 'The Communist Manifesto' (Cowling, 1998) and Marx 'Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy' (Marx, 1975).
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, in the case of political theory introductory texts such as Kymlicka (2002) and Mulhall and Swift (1996). For an overview of theories of international economic development, see Brown (2001: 194-217) and Thomas (2001).
- <sup>6</sup> See Morgenthau (1985) and Waltz (1979) for exemplars of realism and neo-realism respectively.
- <sup>7</sup> This is a recently inaugurated series of volumes (beginning 2001) which seeks to analyse, chart and measure the development of global civil society in successive years. References in this paper are to the 2002 volume (Glasius, Kaldor & Anheier, 2002).
- <sup>8</sup> It's important to note that the distinction cannot be the *same* as the 'in-itself'/'for-itself' distinction in Marx, since Hardt and Negri presuppose a Foucauldian account of subjectivity which is at odds with Marx's account of the revolutionary subject. Nevertheless, the Hardt/ Negri distinction is clearly analogous to Marx's, both in its meaning and its function within the argument.
- <sup>9</sup> It's important to stress, see Note 3 above, that I am not suggesting that any of the theorists mentioned below endorse Hardt's and Negri's argument as such. However, I am suggesting that the leftist critique of cosmopolitanism, which we find in the work of theorists such as Walker and Baker, shares elements of the post-marxist legacy in Hardt and Negri's thought, most notably, an implicit philosophy of history which then exerts a particular influence on how global civil society is analysed and judged.
- <sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that empirical analysis of global civil society often gives a much more complex and interesting picture than we find in theoretical work. One of the most important developments in global

civil society organizations and movements in recent years has been the ways in which conceptions of progress, and problems of the Western domination of political agendas have become contested within those organizations and movements (Edwards & Gaventa, 2001).

- <sup>11</sup> One attempt to refuse the choice between realism or cosmopolitanism/ empire can be found in John Keane's theorizing of global civil society as 'cosmocracy' (Keane, 2003). Keane aims for a more inclusive and normatively pluralist account of global civil society than that provided by either Linklater or Hardt and Negri. I am in sympathy with much of his account and it goes a considerable way to addressing the shortcomings I have identified in post-Kantian and post-Marxist approaches. It is interesting, however, that he succumbs to the typically modernist temptation of identifying 'cosmocracy' as 'new' time (Keane, 2003: 97).

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