

# Editorial

The scope, compass and nature of the United States of America's power in the post-9/11 context has run as a thematic thread through recent issues of *Theoria*.

This edition begins with a provocative challenge by Raymond Geuss, in 'The Politics of Managing Decline', to the claim that the United States is a 'hyperpuissance' on the scale that some have assumed. For Geuss 'the U.S. is in fact now far too weak to play the role it attributes to itself, and which many European countries were happy to allow it to play in the past.' It has, he argues, 'succeeded in projecting a semblance of power, both to its own population and to the rest of the world, which no longer corresponds to reality'. For, as Geuss sums up his case: 'If power means ability effectively to attain desired outcomes—rather than mere ability to wreak havoc—then American power is now very limited indeed.' Several aspects of its limits may be identified. First, there is a disparity between the military dimension of U.S. power on the one hand and the political, diplomatic and economic dimensions on the other. Second, there is the problem of legitimation occasioned by capacity constraints: 'If the military machine is the most advanced in the world, why is it incapable of controlling a small Third World country like Iraq?' Third, there is the question of the appropriateness of America's conventional military power in relation to perceived threats. While it 'was a reasonable defence against possible attack by the Soviet Union and its allies in the 1950s', it is no longer as relevant. 'Terrorism' as Geuss notes, is 'a completely different kind of threat'.

Finally, there is the matter of *relative* power. Geuss notes that 'in the competitive world of international politics it is *relative* vigour and weight that is most important, and the period of clear and overwhelming American economic predominance of the kind Washington enjoyed in the 1960s, and the afterglow of which lasted until the 1990s, does seem now gone for good.' To this end he adverts to the prospect of Chinese power and the role that China's rise might play in giving 'form to a genuinely poly-centric world'.

Geuss concludes his article by posing the question of how the United States' inevitable decline will be managed and cautions, in a trenchant critique of British foreign policy, that, 'Realism is not

compatible with basing one's foreign policy on unconditional subservience to a Hegemon who no longer has the power to protect us, and whose illusions endanger us all'.

In his article 'Freedom from, in and through the state: T.H. Marshall's trinity of rights revisited,' Zygmunt Bauman reflects on the transforming global context for the practice of human rights, personal, political and social—T.H. Marshall's famous 'trinity'. Nearly half a century ago, Marshall conceptualized human rights as tied inextricably to states and as embedded in the claims of nationality. Because essential qualities of humanness could not ensure the attachment of rights to individuals, these had to be bestowed or won through institutional political channels. Marshall's pragmatism was that of his times; the sovereignty of states over demarcated territories was a firm global reality, with national liberation struggles seeking justice expressly through state-capture, and with the new United Nations presiding as a guardian of the sovereignty and peaceful co-existence of states. States arbitrated human rights: there was no other possibility on offer.

The nature of the state, however, has changed with increasing market globalization. With others, such as Neal Lawson, Bauman considers how the state's new role as a 'hand-maiden' of global neoliberal capitalism affects the prospects for personal, political and social rights. At the current juncture, in which people increasingly look to the market for provision and security, and in which communal solidarities have been traded for consumer identities, the state's mediating role has shifted, rather than diminished. Social fallout from market deregulation and failure requires the interventions of government to minimize damage, a reactive rather than proactive posture. Bauman notes that, in this context, the discourse of social rights has shifted from their location in *ethics* to that of *interest*, as welfare is transformed into something that must be earned rather than simply something needed. The crafting of recent British migration policies indicates the state's tendency to bestow rights on those viewed as 'deserving', with 'redundant' individuals facing deportation while potential contributors to a nation's productivity are offered residency. This, says Bauman, signals the prospects also for citizens considered 'redundant' in the market economy. Meanwhile, political rights are more difficult to guarantee since communalism and solidarity movements have diminished, and personal rights may follow.

Finally, Bauman considers the fate of Marshall's trinity of rights, and the question of what institutional referee might replace the functions

Marshall hoped the state would serve. Bauman argues that political rights will remain unfinished as long as social rights have not been won, and that only a planetary response can meet current planetary challenges—but the institutions necessary to mediate human freedoms and human rights are as yet nowhere in sight.

J. Paul Narkunas, in ‘Capital Flows Through Language: Market English, Biopower and the World Bank’, explores the ideologically driven policies of the World Bank. The bank proffers English as ‘disinterested capital’. Following Phillipson, Narkunas argues that the bank’s reliance on English is a form of ‘linguistic imperialism’ or, at the very least, that its hegemonic status in bank policies implies a moral import to learning and speaking English. The ‘common sense of economic development’ suggests it is for ‘the good’ of humanity that all do so and thus elides the political implications of adopting English monolingualism. Narkunas is critical of the discourse of humanism that informs the bank’s nominal ethical commitment to aid the developing world through educational prescriptions. He argues that humanism is an ineluctable, yet flawed, concept. He thus argues that ‘[n]ew tools are needed to struggle with this ‘utilitarian humanism’ that recognizes how populations, states, nations, and languages are not mutually co-extensive, or territorially defined’.

Centrally, Narkunas wishes to clarify to the reader ‘how parastatal organizations like the World Bank increasingly affect the self-recognition and cultural identities of human communities by using fluid networks of indebtedness’. In flexing what Foucault termed ‘biopower’ over the impoverished world, the World Bank sets up a scenario whereby ‘governments wilfully auction their sovereignty to the World Bank’. This implicitly forces such countries to change their educational and language policies, and in so doing, to change their concept of ‘people’ and what life is ‘worth living’ (with the ability to be a ‘global human’ who is ‘freed from the determinate horizon of the nation’ being prized). The justification for such quasi-imperialist policies is both utilitarian and humanist. More nefariously, such policies may even be underpinned by a ‘paramount concern [for] U.S. economic predominance through neoliberalism’—an opinion that Narkunas defends with reference to the appointment of both Robert MacNamara and, more recently, Paul Wolfowitz, to the presidency of the World Bank.

The comparison of these bank presidents is interesting in other ways, too. Wolfowitz’s role in Iraq can be compared to MacNamara’s role in Vietnam, both of which just preceded their presidency of the

bank. Indeed, Narkunas makes Vietnam—and World Bank policies towards it—a case study for his argument. Vietnam is touted by the World Bank as a developmental ‘success story’ because of its tremendous economic growth. What this ignores is the increased gap between the rich and the poor Vietnamese, a disparity that is at least partially informed by proficiency in English. Vietnamese graduates who are proficient in English earn, on average, more than those who are not. Those Vietnamese who are literate—but not in English—effectively become redundant in commercial terms because of their inability to work with transnational corporations. Narkunas urges us to reconceptualise language in the light of his arguments, as something other than that which is the ‘primary mechanism for recognising human life’, as something that consists of ‘several co-existing regimes of signs’ where ‘the referent does not hold’. Narkunas concludes that this reconceptualisation will be useful to engage with the ‘perpetually emerging global system’ that mistakenly relies on the redemptive qualities of language to release impoverished states from the cycle of indebtedness to the World Bank.

In unpacking the debates around technological development, Gunnar Njálsson argues that there exists a range of quite different theories, and that policy analysts are obliged to struggle with the daunting task of developing a coherent, causal, subject-oriented and systematic framework for describing, comparing and even creating public technology policies. Njálsson begins this process by arguing that technology policies can be differentiated by the extent to which they see technological development as either socially determined or autonomous. Those that affirm the social he terms ‘socio-determinist’ and locates at the end of a spectrum furthest from ‘tech-deterministic’. The latter see technological development as free from social relations. In addition to grappling with these debates, Njálsson advocates that scholars of technology policy would do well to explore the various ways that interests and elites are involved in the definition and structuring of public technology policy. Such elites, it is argued, are in turn guided by their occupationally-related problem-solution mindsets in addition to their interests. Further, the article underlines the need for development of a causal and systematic theory of public technology policy development; a theory involving human subjects with motives, intentions and visions—which visions upon adoption by significant sectors of society eventually become reality for most or all citizens.

In ‘Postmodernism, Pragmatism, and the Possibility of an Ethical Relation to the Past’, Gideon Calder cautions against the dangers

inherent in what he sees as the (intentional or unintentional) destruction, by postmodernism, of history and an ethics of remembrance. While sympathetic to the anti-foundationalist thrust of much postmodern theorizing, his primary concern in this article is with Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatism and Keith Jenkins's postmodernist treatment of historiography. Rorty's and Jenkins's approaches, he argues, amount to a kind of linguistic idealism, which, in so far as this denies or empties-out historicity, offers us inadequate critical purchase on such pressing ethical questions as whether or not the Holocaust took place.

Disputing the claim that postmodern historiography liberates us from absolutist metanarratives, he suggests that it may in fact offer succour to conservative and anti-progressive forces. Calder accepts that, for Rorty, language is not entirely arbitrary, nor is the world merely a creation of language; and allows, with Jenkins, that there is no unmediated access to the events of the past. Nevertheless, he argues that postmodernism, in denying 'the possibility of an adequate distinction between description and *misdescription*', shares with positivism a distinction between what happened and what we know happened, and ultimately, between fact and value.

The last third of the article explores the implications of this 'sort of extreme Romanticism' with reference to Rorty's reading of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and more particularly to the issue of those who, collapsing ontology into epistemology, deny that the Holocaust took place. Calder concludes that, without access to some 'thick, adhesive, messy' and accurate description of the past, we will be unable to declare that some descriptions are misdescriptions, or hold anyone responsible for such descriptions.

THE EDITORS