The Fracturing of the West?

John Fonte

A new ideological challenge to liberal democracy—transnational progressivism—is emerging from *inside* rather than *outside* Western civilisation.

Three weeks after the September 11 attacks on the United States, Francis Fukuyama stated in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* that his 'end of history' thesis[1] remained valid 12 years after he first presented it, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Fukuyama's core argument was that after the defeat of communism and National Socialism, no serious ideological competitor to Western-style liberal democracy was likely to emerge in the future. Thus, in terms of political philosophy, liberal democracy is the end of the evolutionary process. To be sure, there will be wars and terrorism, and challenges from those who resist progress, 'but time and resources are on the side of modernity'.[2]

Indeed, but is modernity on the side of liberal democracy? Fukuyama is probably right that the current crisis with the forces of radical Islam will be overcome, and that, at the end of the day, there will be no serious ideological challenge originating outside of Western civilisation. However, there already is an alternative ideology to liberal democracy within the West that for decades has been steadily, and almost imperceptibly, evolving. It is entirely possible that modernity, 30 or 40 years hence, will witness not the final triumph of liberal democracy, but a new challenge to it in the form of a transnational hybrid regime that is post-liberal democratic. I will call this alternative ideology 'transnational progressivism'.

Transnational progressivism

The key concepts of transnational progressivism could be described as follows:

1. *The ascribed group over the individual citizen.* The key political unit is not the individual citizen, who forms voluntary associations and works with fellow citizens regardless of race, sex, or national origin, but the ascriptive group (racial, ethnic, or gender) into which one is born. This emphasis on race, ethnicity and gender leads to group consciousness and a de-emphasis on the individual's capacity for choice and for transcendence of ascriptive categories, joining with others beyond the confines of social class, tribe and gender to create a cohesive nation.

2. *A dichotomy of groups: Oppressor vs. victim groups, with immigrant groups designated as victims.* Influenced (however indirectly) by the Hegelian Marxist thinking associated with the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and the Central European theorists known as the Frankfurt school, global progressives posit that throughout human history there are essentially two types of groups: the oppressor and the oppressed, the privileged and the marginalised. In the United States, oppressor groups would include white males, heterosexuals, and Anglos, whereas victim groups would include blacks, gays, Latinos (including many immigrants), and women.

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Multicultural ideologists have incorporated this essentially Hegelian Marxist 'privileged vs. marginalised' dichotomy into their theoretical framework. As political philosopher James Ceaser puts it,[3] multiculturalism is not 'multi' or concerned with many groups, but 'binary', concerned with two groups, the hegemon (bad) and 'the Other' (good) or the oppressor and the oppressed. Thus, in global progressive ideology, 'equity' and 'social justice' mean strengthening the position of the victim groups and weakening the position of oppressors—hence preferences for certain groups are justified. Accordingly, equality under law is replaced by legal preferences for traditionally victimised groups.

3. *Group proportionalism as the goal of 'fairness'.* Transnational progressivism assumes that 'victim' groups should be represented in all professions roughly proportionate to their percentage of the population or, at least, of the local work force. If not, there is a problem of 'underrepresentation' or imbalance that must be rectified by government and civil society. Thomas Sowell recently wrote— as he has for several decades—that many Western intellectuals perpetually promote some form of 'cosmic justice' or form of equality of result.[4] The 'group proportionalism' paradigm is pervasive in Western society: even the US Park Service is concerned because 85% of all visitors to the nation's parks are white, although whites make up only 74% of the population. The Park Service announced in 1998 that it was working on this 'problem'.[5]

4. *The values of all dominant institutions should be changed to reflect the perspectives of the victim groups.* Transnational progressives in the United States and elsewhere insist that it is not enough to have proportional representation of minorities (including immigrants, legal and illegal) at all levels in major institutions of society (corporations, places of worship, universities, armed forces) if these institutions continue to reflect a 'white Anglo male culture and world view'. Ethnic and linguistic minorities have different ways of viewing the world, they say, and these minorities' values and cultures must be respected and represented within these institutions.

5. *The demographic imperative.* The demographic imperative tells us that major demographic changes are occurring in the United States as millions of new immigrants from non-Western cultures and their children enter American life in record numbers. At the same time, the global interdependence of the world's peoples and the transnational connections among them will increase. All of these changes render the traditional paradigm of American nationhood obsolete. That traditional paradigm based on individual rights, majority rule, national sovereignty, citizenship, and the assimilation of immigrants into an existing American civic culture is too narrow and must be changed into a system that promotes 'diversity', defined, in the end, as group proportionalism.

6. *The redefinition of democracy and 'democratic ideals'.* Since Fukuyama's treatise, transnational progressives have been altering the definition of 'democracy', from that of a system of majority rule among equal citizens to one of power sharing among ethnic groups composed of both citizens and non-citizens. For example, Mexican foreign minister Jorge Castañeda wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1995 that it is 'undemocratic' for California to exclude non-citizens, specifically illegal aliens, from voting.

7. *Deconstruction of national narratives and national symbols.* Transnational progressives have focused on traditional narratives and national symbols of Western democratic nation-states, questioning union and nationhood itself. In October 2000, the British government-sponsored Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain issued a report that denounced the concept of 'Britishness' as having 'systemic . . . racist connotations'. The report declared that Britain should be formally recognised as a multicultural society whose history needed to be 'revised, rethought, or jettisoned'.[6]

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8. *Promotion of the concept of postnational citizenship.*
An increasing number of law professors throughout
the West are arguing that citizenship should be
denationalised. Invoking concepts such as inclusion,
social justice, democratic engagement, and human
rights, they advocate transnational citizenship,
postnational citizenship, or sometimes global
citizenship embedded in international human
rights accords and 'evolving' forms of transnational
arrangements.

These theorists insist that national citizenship
should not be 'privileged' at the expense of
postnational, multiple, and pluralised forms of
citizenship identities. For example, the Carnegie
Endowment for International Peace, under the
leadership of its president, Jessica
Tuchman Mathews, has
published a series of books in the
past few years 'challenging
traditional understandings of
belonging and membership' in
nation-states and 'rethinking the
meaning of citizenship'. Although
couched in the ostensibly neutral
language of social science, these
essays from scholars from
Germany, Britain, Canada, and
France, as well as the United
States, argue for new,
transnational forms of citizenship
as a normative good.[7]

9. *The idea of transnationalism as a major conceptual
tool.* The theory of transnationalism promises to be
for the first decade of the 21st century what
multiculturalism was for the last decade of the 20th
century. In a certain sense, transnationalism is the
next stage of multicultural ideology—it is
multiculturalism with a global face. Like
multiculturalism, transnationalism is a concept
that provides elites with both an empirical tool (a
plausible analysis of what is) and an ideological
framework (a vision of what should be).

Transnational advocates argue that globalisation
requires some form of transnational 'global
governance' because they believe that the nation-
state and the idea of national citizenship are ill-
suited to deal with the global problems of the
future. Academic and public policy conferences
today are filled with discussions of 'transnational

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organisations', 'transnational actors', 'transnational
migrants', 'transnational jurisprudence', and
'transnational citizenship', just as in the 1990s they
were replete with references to multiculturalism in
education, citizenship, literature, and law.

It is clear that arguments over globalisation will
dominate much of early 21st century public debate.
The promotion of transnationalism as both an
empirical and normative concept is an attempt to
shape this crucial intellectual struggle. The
adherents of transnationalism create a dichotomy.
They imply that one is either in step with
globalisation, and thus with transnationalism and
forward-looking thinking, or one is a backward
antiglobalist. Liberal democrats (who are
internationalists and support free trade
and market economics) must reply
that this is a false dichotomy—that the
critical argument is not between
globalists and antiglobalists, but
instead over the form Western global
engagement should take in the coming
decades: will it be transnationalist or
internationalist?

**Transnational progressivism's social
base**
The social base of transnational
progressivism could be labelled a rising
postnational intelligensia, the leaders
of which include many international
law professors at prestigious Western universities, NGO
activists, foundation officers, UN bureaucrats, EU
administrators, corporation executives, and practicing
politicians throughout the West.

The postnational intelligentsia is an eclectic group
but it would include an identifiable set of thinkers and
actors. For instance, British 'third way' theorist Anthony
Giddens, who has declared that he is 'in favour of
pioneering some quasi-utopian transnational forms of
democracy' and 'is strongly opposed to the idea that
social justice is just equality of opportunity',[8] writes
that 'the short-comings of liberal democracy suggest
the need to further more radical forms of
democratisation'. Instead of liberal democracy, Giddens,
using the language of Juergen Habermas, posits a
'dialogic democracy' with an emphasis on 'life politics',
especially 'new social movements, such as those
concerned with feminism, ecology, peace, or human
rights'.[9] University of Chicago philosophy professor

Martha Nussbaum has called for reinvigorating the concept of 'global citizenship', denouncing patriotism as 'indistinguishable from jingoism' in a debate several years back that set off a wide-ranging discussion among American academics on the meaning of patriotism, citizenship, and the nation-state.[10]

Complementary to this general (and diffuse) sentiment for new transnational forms of governance is the concrete day-to-day practical work of NGOs that seek to bring the transnational vision to fruition. When social movements such as the ideologies of 'transnationalism' and 'global governance' are depicted as the result of 'social forces' or the 'movement of history', a certain impersonal inevitability is implied. Yet 'transnationalism', 'multiculturalism', and 'global governance', like 'diversity', are ideological tools championed by activist elites, not 'forces of history'. The success or failure of these value-laden concepts will ultimately depend upon the political will and effectiveness of these elites.

A good part of the energy for transnational progressivism is provided by human rights activists, who consistently evoke 'evolving norms of international law' in pursuing their goals. The main conflict between traditional liberal democrats and transnational progressives is ultimately the question of whether national constitutions trump international law or vice versa. 'International law' here refers to what experts have called the 'new international law', which differs from traditional concepts of the 'Law of Nations'.[11]

Before the 20th century, traditional international law usually referred to relations among nation-states: it was 'international' in the real sense of the term. Since that time the 'new international law' has increasingly penetrated the sovereignty of democratic nation-states. It is, therefore, in reality, 'transnational' law. Human rights activists work to establish norms for this 'new international (that is, transnational) law', and then attempt to bring countries like the United States into conformity with a legal regime whose reach often extends beyond democratic politics.

The EU as a stronghold of transnational progressivism
Whereas ideologically driven NGOs represent a subnational challenge to the values and policies of the liberal-democratic nation-state, the EU is a large supranational organisation that to a considerable extent embodies transnational progressivism, both in governmental form and in substantive policies.

The governmental structure of the EU is post-democratic. Power in the EU principally resides in the European Commission (EC) and to a lesser extent the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The EC is the EU's executive body. It also initiates legislative action, implements common policy, and controls a large bureaucracy. The EC is composed of a rotating presidency and 19 commissioners chosen by member-states and approved by the European Parliament. It is unelected and, for the most part, unaccountable. A white paper issued by the EC suggests that this is one of the reasons for its success: 'The original and essential source of European integration is that the EU's executive body, the Commission, is supranational and independent from national, sectoral, or other influences.' This 'democratic deficit' is constantly lamented, and remains and represents a major challenge to EU legitimacy.[12]

The substantive policies advanced by EU leaders both in the Commission and the ECJ are based on the global progressive ideology of group rights discussed earlier that promotes victim groups over 'privileged' groups and eschews the liberal principle of treating citizens equally as individuals. European courts have overruled national parliaments and public opinion in nation-states by compelling the British to incorporate gays and the Germans to incorporate women in combat units in their respective military services.

In the June/July 2001 *Policy Review*, two Washington lawyers, Lee Casey and David Rivkin, argued:

> the reemergence [in Europe] of a pre-Enlightenment pan-European ideology that denies the ultimate authority of the nation-state, as well as the transfer of policymaking authority from the governed and their elected representatives to a professional bureaucracy, as is evident in the EU's leading institutions, suggests a dramatic divergence from the basic principle of popular sovereignty once shared by Europe's democracies and the United States.[13]

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Conclusion

Scholars, publicists and many others in the Western world—and especially in the United States, home of constitutional democracy—have for the past several decades been arguing furiously over the most fundamental ideas. Talk of a 'culture war', however, is somewhat misleading, because the arguments over transnational vs. national citizenship, multiculturalism vs. assimilation, and global governance vs. national sovereignty are not simply cultural but ideological and philosophical, in that they pose such Aristotelian questions as 'What kind of government is best?' and 'What is citizenship?'.

Since September 11, the forces supporting the liberal-democratic nation-state have rallied. Clearly, in the post-September 11 milieu there is a window of opportunity for those who favour a reaffirmation of the traditional norms of liberal-democratic patriotism. But the political will to seize this opportunity is unclear. Key areas to watch include official government policy statements for the use of force and the conduct of war; the use and non-use of international law; assimilation-immigration policy; border control; civic education; and the state of the patriotic narrative in popular culture.

In hindsight, Fukuyama may have been wrong to suggest that liberal democracy is inevitably the final form of political governance, the evolutionary endpoint of political philosophy, because it has become unclear that liberal democracy can withstand its present internal challenges. Despite military and ideological triumphs over national socialism and communism, powerful antidemocratic forces that were in a sense Western ideological heresies, Western liberal democracy will continue to face an ideological-metaphysical challenge from influential post-liberal democratic forces, whose origins are Western, but, which could, in James Kurth's words, be described as 'post-Western'.[14] ∎

Endnotes

1. Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).
2. Francis Fukuyama, 'History is Still Going Our Way', *Wall Street Journal* (5 October 2001).
3. James Ceaser, *Reconstructing America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 128.
4. Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
5. John Leo, 'Long on Diversity Division', *Washington Times* (21 May 1998).
6. Philip Johnson, 'Straw Wants to Rewrite Our History', *Electronic Telegraph* (10 October 2000).
7. See T. Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglass Klusmeyer (eds), *From Migrants to Citizens: Membership in a Changing World* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001); and T. Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglass Klusmeyer, *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001).
8. Kevin Dacey, 'Left Renewal', *New Times* (UK) (June 1999).
9. Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 2, 14-19, 90-91.
10. See Martha Nussbaum, 'Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism', *Boston Review* (October-November 1994).
11. These experts include John Bolton, Jeremy Rabkin, Jack Goldsmith, Lee Casey, and David Rivkin. See the *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Fall 2000 issue devoted to 'AEI Conference: Trends in Global Governance: Do They Threaten American Sovereignty?'.
12. See 'European Governance', white paper, Commission of the European Communities (Brussels: 25 July 2001), an earlier version of which is described by Lee A. Casey and David B. Rivkin Jr. in 'Europe in the Balance: The Alarmingly Undemocratic Drift of the European Union', *Policy Review* (June/July 2001), 41-53.
13. Casey and Rivkin, 'Europe in the Balance', as above.
14. James Kurth, 'The Real Clash', *The National Interest* (Fall 1994).

WHITHER THE 'WEST'?

The countries of the West share vast commonalities: a common history, culture and political values and institutions. It is in all this—the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, Christianity, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French and Industrial revolutions, representative democracy, the rule of law, the market economy—that many find the basis of Western unity . . . [But] a common civilisation is one thing, political unity is another, and they should not be confused . . .

Over the last half century or so, most of us have come to think of 'the West' as a given, a natural presence and one that is here to stay. It is a way of thinking that is not only wrong in itself, but is virtually certain to lead to mistaken policies. The sooner we discard it the better. The political 'West' is not a natural construct but a highly artificial one. It took the presence of a life-threatening, overtly hostile 'East' to bring it into existence and to maintain its unity. It is extremely doubtful whether it can now survive the disappearance of that enemy.

From Owen Harries, 'The Collapse of the West', *Foreign Affairs* 72:4 (September-October 1993).