

The Anglosphere Challenge: Why the English Speaking Nations Will Lead the Way in the Twenty-First Century

By James C. Bennett

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On the morning of September 11, 2001, three hijacked airliners struck the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the most audacious declaration of hostilities since the attack on Pearl Harbor almost 60 years before. Australian Prime Minister John Howard happened to be on an official visit to Washington that day; Great Britain's Tony Blair was one of the first leaders to call President George W. Bush and offer his country's support. So was born the Coalition of the Willing, a group of countries that over the next three years would forge ahead in the war on terror and the subsequent grand project to liberate Iraq and, more broadly, 'drain the Middle Eastern swamp' that for too long has bred and nurtured the pilots of the ill-fated airliners-turned-battering rams.

It did not take the observers long to notice that the core of the Coalition of the Willing consisted of three English-speaking liberal democracies: the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. The fact was most famously celebrated by the 'Three Anglos' cover of America's premier conservative magazine *National Review*. Suddenly, journalists and pundits worldwide—or at least those wanting to appear to be on the cutting edge of the debate—were forced to take note of the work of American entrepreneur and amateur political philosopher James

C. Bennett. Bennett has been for years bandying about his theory that the future belongs to the Anglosphere, a loose network of free market democracies sharing the heritage of English language and the Common Law tradition. The aftermath of September 11 made Bennett's theories sound suddenly relevant.

Soon, and predictably, the Anglosphere has joined the esteemed company of 'the end of history' and 'the clash of civilisations', having quickly gone from an intellectual novelty to a subject of scorn, ridicule, derision and conspiracy-mongering, while skipping altogether the in-between stage of understanding and rational debate. Some critics saw the concept as another unhealthy example of Anglo triumphalism at best, or barely disguised racism at worst. For others it seemed an ahistorical attempt to revive the British empire with a healthy dose of IT hogwash thrown in for good measure.

Now, James C. Bennett himself finally joins the fray with the first book-length exposition of his theories. *The Anglosphere Challenge* is a multi-faceted work; an apologia and a blueprint for Bennett's theories, but also, since they have been in the public domain for quite some time already, a much needed correction of many common misunderstandings surrounding the term. Part Gingrichian futurology, part historical journey in the footsteps of Fukuyama (as well as McNeill, Macfarlane, Landes and many others) to discover what makes the Anglophonic civilisation so successful, *The Anglosphere Challenge* is an ambitious project for all of its 290 pages.

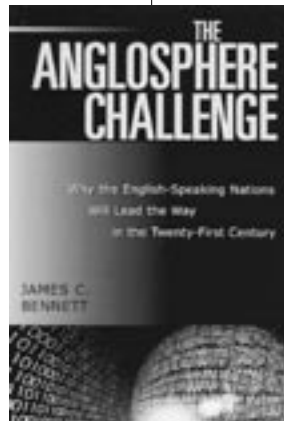
Boiled down to its basics, Bennett's thesis doesn't seem particularly controversial, and all its individual elements will have a familiar ring to

any reader who has been following major intellectual debates of the last 20 years. Moving from the general to the specific, the argument is as follows: Bennett sees the international political alignment of the future as neither the continuation of the world of nation-states, nor the advent of the vaguely utopian borderless world of dissolved sovereignty and transnational governance. Instead, he foresees the rise of what he terms 'network commonwealths':

The network commonwealth would consist of overlapping sets of institutions, alliances, agreements and standards aimed primarily at easing and facilitating the interchange of information and information-related goods and services among political communities.

Network commonwealth is not a nation-state (nor indeed, a superstate), Bennett writes, but a way of communities coming together to find alternative means of fulfilling traditional state functions. To the uninitiated, the European Union might sound like one such ambitious attempt to construct a continent-wide network commonwealth. Not so, or at least not quite, as Bennett says:

A network commonwealth [of the future] would resemble the EU in promoting free movement of people, ideas, and capital throughout its internal area. It would seek to promote cooperation in all areas where existing commonalities permit greater cooperation between similar cultures. It would seek, as far as possible, to create a common economic, informational and residency space for the citizens of its member nations. It would differ from the EU in not attempting to dictate the social policies of its members, not attempting to relocate executive agency power in community-wide bodies, and not maintain large cross-community subsidies



to help member of governments resist needed restructuring. Thus, a network commonwealth emerges not as a megastate or a federation—and not quite an alliance—but more of a loose network of cooperation between states and communities sharing common interests.

How would such networks be created? Bennett, an information technology enthusiast, thinks that a necessary 'self-assembly protocol' can be supplied by shared cultural affinities: communities which share common values or common heritage will find it easier to coalesce together into network commonwealths, a process which will be further advanced by the explosive growth and penetration of internet and other communication technologies. This is essentially a Huntington Lite argument without all the blood and gore.

The Anglosphere is one international community—arguably the most developed one—out of which a network commonwealth could emerge in the future. According to Bennett,

'The Anglosphere is more than the sum of all persons who have learned the English language. To be part of the Anglosphere implies the sharing of fundamental customs and values at the core of English-speaking cultures: individualism, rule of law; honouring of covenants; in general, the high-trust characteristics described by Francis Fukuyama... and the emphasis on freedom as political and cultural value.'

As Bennett is at pains to stress, the Anglosphere is not a racial or ethnic concept; one does not have to be a certified Anglo-Saxon in order to sign up. What matters is the commitment to a set of ideas and common culture (Bennett, after Dawkins, calls it a memetic, rather than genetic, identity). Thus, some of the most successful Anglospheric societies,

like Australia and the United States are also the most ethnically diverse, and historically have been the most successful at assimilating migrants from all corners of the world to partake in the Australian or the American Dream.

In addition to the Anglosphere Bennett sees many other communities which could eventually build on their cultural and linguistic ties to form their own network commonwealths, including the Francosphere and the Arabian network to name just two (Here Bennett differs from Huntington who sees only seven basic civilisations. For Bennett a 'civilisation' is too broad and general a category to usefully work with).

The last aspect of Bennett's argument is perhaps the most controversial one: just as the 19th century was the British Century and the 20th century the American Century, so will the Anglosphere remain the leading international force throughout the current century, as its very advanced civil society continues to provide vitality and high levels of trust and openness essential for sustaining growth and innovation in the future.

This brief summary does not do justice to *The Anglosphere Challenge*. There is much more in this book to stimulate a wide-ranging debate, as it boldly charges from distant past into the future, spins around the whole globe, and through numerous disciplines (where else can you find techno-futurist jargon like 'Political self-assembly protocols: a tool for the Singularity Revolution' next to a discussion of the origin and influence on the Magna Carta). As Bennett himself admits, 'I am not presenting this book as a work of scholarly research, but rather in the nature of a connected series of essays suggesting some new perspectives and their consequences,' which is why the book sometimes feels disjointed and unstructured.

Is *The Anglosphere Challenge* worth reading? Yes. Will his vision

be realised? Certainly, common ties of history, language, culture and tradition facilitate economic and security cooperation, in part by reducing some of the transaction costs. However, while the developments in communication and transportation technology have made it easier for the cultural kin to get together, even if only virtually, they also made it possible to break down barriers between different cultures as well. Thus, Australia might have free trade agreements with the United States and New Zealand, but most of our major trading partners are still in Asia.

Which for many is just as well, since there is a good universalist argument that overemphasis on what unites us with some can all too easily lead to focusing on what makes us different from others. Most observers would agree that replacing the rivalry between traditional nation-states and alliance with rivalry between network commonwealths would not be much of an improvement on the 20th century.

Conversely, one should not underestimate contempt bred by familiarity. For a variety of historical and political reasons, not all birds of a feather flock together, which exposes some of the limitations of the idea of an Anglospheric (or any other) network commonwealth. The members of the Anglosphere might indeed share common heritage, but that should not disguise significant differences both between and within the countries in question. But for the Liberal government being in power in Australia over the recent years, there would only be two, instead of three Anglos, and the shared language and legal tradition did not prevent Canada and New Zealand from largely staying away from the Coalition of the Willing. In fact, these two countries, as well as large sections of the 'blue America' seem to feel far greater comity with continental Europe than with other parts of the Anglosphere. This, in essence, is the political limitation of the idea;

one that we are unlikely to ever remedy due to Bennett's insistence on undesirability of any overarching political authority within a network commonwealth. Thus, when all is said and done, a network commonwealth essentially emerges as a glorified free trade area, and not surprisingly *The Anglosphere Challenge*, while written after September 11, in many ways reads like a blast from the 1990s past, with its techno-optimism and economic exuberance.

Writes Bennett:

This book started out as a look at what the Internet and subsequent technologies would do to the world economy. It began as an exercise in imagining a 'borderless world' and an investigation into 'the end of nation-state' and similar themes. However, my research on the issue convinced me that this was not what was happening at all. Yes, there is going to be a borderless economy in the sense that obstacles to flow of capital and technology and goods will continue to diminish. But even though this process will lead to the end of the economic state, it's not going to be the end of the nation-state, because nations—in the sense of cultures and institutions—will count more than ever in this environment.

Bennett's book shows us how and why we should get there. Only time will tell if we will, and if we do, if it has been worth it.

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Conversations with the Constitution: Not Just a Piece of Paper

By Greg Craven
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Is it possible to write a readable book on the Australian constitution? My housemate certainly didn't think so. When he came across my copy of *Conversations with the Constitution* on the coffee table, he shot me a disgusted look and remarked, 'That must be riveting.' I turned away shamefaced; defending myself almost seemed hopeless. However, my housemate would have been surprised if he turned a few pages of Greg Craven's latest book. It's a lively and entertaining read.

Above all else, *Conversations* is a defence of the Australian Constitution. Craven argues that the Australian Constitution has produced a century of safe, stable, democratic government, and in a world riddled with failed states the success of the Australian Constitution should not be treated lightly. Craven clearly loves the Australian Constitution. It may not have been born from a dashing revolution or contain a fashionable bill of rights, but it does have a rare moral authority stemming from its democratic origins. Moreover, Craven says it is interesting, alive and quirky—the sort of constitution you could imagine having a beer with.

In introducing a mass audience to the Australian Constitution, Craven employs his considerable wit. He is particularly good on the attack, satirically mocking those who inhabit funky shoe shops in Brunswick and attend rallies for a solar-powered Tibet. If nothing else, reading *Conversations* is a great way to improve your witty insults. Judicial activists are one group that comes under the Craven blowtorch. He likens the way they interpret the constitution to the way Attila the Hun rampaged through Italy. He thinks that some of the

'rights' and 'limitations' judicial activists have found in the text are logically as spurious as a Confederate bond. So I was surprised to find that Justice Kirby, a relic from the activist Mason High Court, spoke at the *Conversations* book launch. What could Justice Kirby see in a book that is as alien to his views of the Australian Constitution as Phillip Ruddock is to Amnesty International? Kirby praised *Conversations* for getting Australian citizens thinking about their constitution. But he was disappointed in the lack of balance. In Justice Kirby's opinion, there are heresies and outrageous opinions in every chapter. Craven's skilful rhetoric can be dangerous if taken at face value.

In chapter 2, Craven describes constitutional debate as a war between 'old constitutionalists' and 'new constitutionalists'. Craven is an old constitutionalist. He gives precedence to Parliament, defends federalism, dislikes judicial activism and is suspicious of constitutional change. New constitutionalists, in contrast, are irreverent of tradition and bullish about constitutional change. The distinction between the warring tribes resurfaces in chapters dealing with federalism, the High Court, the debate over an Australian bill of rights and the possibility of an Australian republic.

Federalism is a key feature of the Australian Constitution. Craven defends it on several levels. He says the states are different and should be governed by locals rather than remote heartless governments. He argues that federalism ensures that one government cannot exercise total control across Australia, an inherent good in the eyes of liberals like Craven who view unrestrained power with suspicion. And he points out that state governments provide a forum

