

Critical Essay: Power and Politics in Globalization
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Howard H. Lentner presents a persuasive argument against current globalization theories in his book *Power and Politics in Globalization*. While the author offers numerous underlying theses, his central line of reasoning contends that the state is the fundamental unit of analysis when considering international relations. Lentner discusses some common perceptions of globalization and the implications of each. He notes that Lockean theory generalizes that the market supersedes the state and makes it irrelevant. Another claim is that in the face of globalization, there is community decline and individual isolation. Another argument is for the establishment of a transnational civil society in which universal principles, such as freedom and contractual relations, are aspired toward. Lastly, he introduces the notion of a global governance system in which human rights and international laws are enforced.

Lentner discerns two implications from these common globalization outlooks. He notes that they have a normative, ideological bend and that they assume politics in the future will make a major departure away from historical precedents. He concedes that technological developments have opened up the door to rapid cultural and economic exchanges across international borders. Yet, he does not believe that the international or global level is the appropriate unit of analysis for international relations theory. The author argues that the institutions which facilitate the global liberal political economy exist within conditions

structured by power. He advocates for scholars to analyze the power that underlies them, agents operating and vying with them, and values and aspirations at work in managing the arrangements.

The author delves into a pure line of liberalism and dispels its functionality on the basis that it lacks a common endeavor or “higher purpose” in which individuals and communities can relate. As he unpacks Liberalism, he exposes its exclusionary perspective that individuals only have economic motivations for interacting with one another, and that it does not allow for antagonistic relations. The author constructs his critique of liberalism in a manner that allows him to establish a case for maintaining the public sphere, promoting necessary dialogue and political behavior between states in order to maintain the dominant liberal free trade ideology.

Lentner views the most powerful countries as members of a coalition coordinated and lead by the United States. They advocate an ideology which minimizes the involvement of the state in economics by pushing private enterprise and opening economies to free flows of investment capital. This initiative is institutionalized and facilitated by NGOs and IGOs that create policy and provide an infrastructure of support. The coalition of the powerful shapes the rules and agendas of these international institutions under the guise of promoting international community. The author considers several “discrete political issues” at play in the struggle of global politics; power, institutions, ideas

and ideology, authority, democracy, human rights, law, justice, equality, regimes, legitimacy, sovereignty, citizenship, civil society, and violence.

When considering the theoretical frameworks of international relations, Lentner's book fits nicely into the third wave of liberalism. His book seeks to explain the current global political economy, while simultaneously offering a normative agenda to "guide" the future. Unlike traditional, pure liberalism, which glorifies the triumph of the market over the state and asserts the global free market as the highest manifestation of human creativity and democracy, Lentner's book looks deeper. First as mentioned above, he contests the pure line of liberalism for the reason that it does not reach beyond the superficiality of economics. He asserts a liberal theory, recognizing the prevailing neo-liberal ideology that structures the international economy. Counter to traditional liberal theory, Lentner argues that careful consideration must be given to developing countries (China and Islamic Nations) if the ideology is to maintain its prevalence, as well as consideration of politics (human rights, law, citizenship, etc...). Traditional liberal theory would exclude these concepts from analysis.

Where traditional liberalism posits that the market can render the state irrelevant, Lentner argues that the state and the economy coexist in a symbiotic relationship. However, he maintains that the state is the primary actor in creating the institutions and frameworks through which the free flow of capital and development effectively operate. To Lentner, the notion of economic

dominance over the state is a dangerous flirtation with totalitarianism, corruption, and violence.

He advocates for vigorous political dialogue at both the domestic level and in international venues to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to voice their concerns. States are acting in their own self interest. The political process via international institutions serves as a mechanism to mediate and maintain peace between actors within the neo-liberal political economy and preserves the ideology by preventing the emergence of a possible ideological contender.

Lentner fits into the liberal institutionalist framework in that he supports the concepts of complex interdependence, regime theory, and hegemonic stability. No place does he argue that the state is the sole actor, rather he accepts that there are additional actors that influence global politics, such as NGOs and transnational corporations. He fully embraces the notion the United States is the global hegemonic power, responsible for organizing, coordinating, and regulating the global political economy. Throughout the book Lentner refers to the United States role as the hegemon, especially to its recent post-9/11 behavior and how it has been potentially threatening to the current global order. Even though the U.S. is dominant, unilateral actions are dangerous because they elicit distrust from other major powers in the neo-liberal coalition. Such questionable behavior could incite war between liberal democracies and upset the global economy.

Lentner is also consistent with liberal institutionalism because there is a strong consideration of regimes in his argument. Consistent with Krazner's regime theory, Lentner discusses the sets of rules, norms, principles, procedures, and expectations around which actor interests revolve. There is a strong institutional dimension in Lentner's book, and the United States is the stable hegemonic enforcer. Through these international organizations, cooperation among states is possible because there is mutual gain to be had.

The notion of reciprocity is present in Lentner's argument. The idea of defection and penalty necessitates caution regarding the Taiwan situation. China views Taiwan as a rogue successor and wants to reassert its territorial rights over the nation. The U.S. has huge economic interests in Taiwan. If diplomatic negotiations are not judiciously adhered to, the result could be military action between the United States and China, which could prove to be a catastrophic loss in terms of human lives, economically, and destructive to the global balance of power.

Lentner is consistent with structural liberalism because he argues that the hegemon is crucial. While institutionalists argue that once a hegemon dies, the institutions created live on, structuralists argue that the hegemon is essential because you can not have peace without them to punish and reward other actors in the system. The United States, as Lentner points out on multiple occasions, uses the various institutional apparatus it has established according to the situation and its needs at that moment in time. If the institutions were powerful,

then the U.S. would not move so fluidly from one to the next. Like the structuralists, Lentner argues that the U.S. role is to shape and mold the the policies and institutions. The United States creates the democratic zone or separate peace. As well, Lentner argues that in order to maintain peace and the global balance of power, the democratic zone must continue to expand, thus being sensitive to incorporating and meeting the needs of developing countries.

Lentner is consistent with liberal reformism because he advocates for democracy on the international level. He believes this is essential to maintaining the balance of power. He calls for citizenship and public space in globalization. He argues that a neo-liberal agenda postured solely to serve and reinforce elite private interests which destroys civil society and erodes social solidarity will not survive. The role of the state is to represent the missing element of "common interests" that traditional liberalism ignores. Lentner believes that the state serves as the "ethical realm that unites citizens in freedom beyond their pursuit of selfish interests." To him, individuals need to have political venues to gain protection or to develop through.

Lentner would not be considered a liberal cosmopolitanist. Whereas the liberal cosmopolitalist theoretical framework advocates for the unit of analysis to be taken down to the individual level, Lenter is rigid in his position that the state is the primary unit of analysis. Cosmopolitanism argues that reformism is not radical enough. Lentner's book is not radical in any sense of the word. He advocates common sense normative principles, not for the destruction of the

state system, which cosmopolitanists view as oppressive and unnatural. Lentner does mention accommodation for developing countries but he basically ignores the weak. He does not suggest that anyone other than the hegemon should be charting the course of the liberal coalition. Where cosmopolitanists would argue for complete democracy and a restructuring of international institutions, Lentner accepts neo-liberalism as the status quo and prescribes tactics for preserving the current world order.