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CHAPTER SEVEN

Good things and bad things: the new front

Progress or not?

The front between developments that were beneficial for mankind and those that were not was constantly moving. The previous chapters painted a rather dark picture of developments in the practice of capitalism affecting people in modern states in the early twenty-first century. But there were related changes in circumstances and modes of thinking that could increase or diminish human happiness in the longer term. Some of these amounted to an anti-renaissance captured in the rather unfortunate term denaissance; others seemed to be a step towards a new enlightenment and a more civilized existence.

In this chapter an ambitious task is attempted in finding an answer to the following question: What were the developments that were conducive to a more civilized existence, and which were not? Very few of them were entirely positive. They covered a wide range, from direct gains and benefits for the individual to international and transnational gains and benefits which affected the individual indirectly. An overall evaluation of the positive developments which might justify the view that there has been progress is worth attempting. Something has to be said about the other side of human achievement other than that captured in John Gray's depressing account of humans as straw dogs.¹ The case for the positive is discussed in the following sections.

Improvements in incomes and lifestyle

It was undeniable that in Britain and the rest of the world, more people were able to earn incomes that could be regarded as comfortable. But it was also clear that this increase went along with an increase in the numbers of those who were living in absolute poverty. The increase in average incomes, driven by economic take-off in China and India, went along with greater absolute poverty in Africa.

In the developed world too, the number of those in absolute poverty was not going down. This was true of the United States and of the United Kingdom. A study reported on 15 November 2007 said that in Britain one

in three children lived in poverty, a total of 2.8 million, and many of these did not have enough to eat.² This was not the 1930s, when certainly there were children who starved and went barefoot in Britain, but there were still too many near the breadline. As indicated in previous chapters, the idea that wealth would trickle down from the rich to increase everyone's income was not true. In a number of developed countries there was a further problem: that the difference between the incomes of the middle group of earners and those of the top group had greatly increased. It seemed likely that this difference would continue to increase, with implications for pensions and health, and possibly for the stability of states.

But anyone living in the developed world would have to report a range of improvements in standards and lifestyle. There had been a ban on smoking in most developed countries, despite the lies and prevarications of the tobacco companies. This undoubtedly saved many lives. In most developed countries outside the United States, including the whole of the EU, the barbaric practice of capital punishment had been abolished. More women could get jobs. They could also take on mortgages, which in Britain amazingly had not been possible for most women until the 1970s. Men and women could no longer, in most developed countries, be imprisoned because of their sexual orientation. Despite the fears of the doom-mongers, television and the Internet had led to more books being published than ever before.

Improvements in medicine

Health care and diet for most people in the developed world had greatly improved since the Second World War. Life expectancy had steadily increased. There were, however, departures from the highest standards in the Anglo-Saxon world. In the United States those who could not afford health insurance were denied treatment, unless they were entirely lacking in resources or were elderly. For those who had average income, ill-health was the biggest cause of personal bankruptcy. In the United Kingdom, under the National Health Service, although treatment was available to everyone, there were certainly areas of the country where treatment was likely to be below average. There were also instances where treatment or drugs were denied for reasons of cost-effectiveness. Once again an overall improvement, perhaps most clearly seen in dentistry, had to be qualified. In some parts of the country it was very difficult to get access to National Health Dentistry, as most dentists had gone private. As pointed out earlier, the better off were likely

to benefit more than the less wealthy. One dystopic vision was of a world of super-medicine, involving, say, nanotechnology, which hugely extended the lives and comfort of the super-rich and was denied to the increasing number of those who were beyond the pale.

In 2007 there were also reports of failures to continue with vaccination programmes in developed countries as well as the least developed. People thought, usually mistakenly, that they might cause other illnesses. In Britain many parents mistakenly decided that the single vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella was a cause of autism and refused it for their children. In consequence, cases of measles increased and became a matter of national concern in 2008–9. In some cases, medicines were being used carelessly so that the illness they were intended to cure got worse rather than better. For instance it was observed that failure to use antibiotics properly in treating tuberculosis encouraged the appearance of more resistant strains of the disease. Antibiotic-resistant strains of tuberculosis had reappeared in some US cities. In Africa the retroviral drugs used for treatment of HIV were misused, and in consequence, new and resistant strains of the virus began to appear. There was still a serious shortage of effective and affordable retroviral drugs in the poorest countries, and the drug companies constantly dragged their feet on this. There was also the problem of obesity in the United Kingdom and the United States, and its associated illnesses, which was caused by excessive consumption of fast foods and insufficient exercise.

Greater levels of literacy and cultural engagement

In most developed and developing countries, the number of people who could read and write continued to increase. In some areas, such as Kerala in India, the education of women was particularly stressed as a way of improving the educational level of children and contributing greatly to family welfare. In developed countries the fear that television and the Internet would lead to fewer books and less reading proved to be unfounded. But the fear that cultural standards were in decline seemed valid. Attention spans seemed lower. Changes in the programming of television and radio supported the view that they were dumbing down.

The insertion of advertising made it more difficult for high culture to be effectively presented. One imagines the cultural dissonance of placing an advertisement for Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Lamb in a television performance of *King Lear* immediately after the scene where Gloucester

is blinded. This had not quite happened, but the increasing incidence of television advertising made it seem possible. Advertising certainly played a part in dulling cultural sensibility. Indeed, in the message statements of the broadcasting companies and other media, that they were there to entertain and enlighten, it was the former that increasingly dominated. There had always been broadcasts aimed in a rather condescending way at a mass audience, even directly at workers,³ but the commercialization of culture meant that enlightenment took second place to generating profit outside a small number of regulated channels.

A developing popular activism

There was an increasing degree of activism by groups and individuals committed to improving living conditions and stopping abuses of human rights. A number of well-funded non-governmental international organizations concerned with humanitarian crises, such as Oxfam, Amnesty, Save the Children, Christian Aid and Caritas International, functioned throughout the world. These had become skillful and rich particularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century. They benefited massively after the early 1990s from the development of information technology, which brought reports of human suffering closer to home. In consequence, their budgets had vastly increased. It was now more likely that human rights abuses and natural disasters would be widely reported and the public conscience stirred. This development was usually named after the current affairs specialist television channel, CNN, which had scored a major coup in remaining in Baghdad during the first Gulf War of 1991 – the CNN effect. Populations were more likely to be moved to demand action from their governments, though of course, this might have no effect. Of course the development of the Internet was also a part of this. As Gordon Brown said in his Mansion House speech on 12 November 2007, ‘it is possible in this century, for the first time in human history, to contemplate and create a global society that empowers people’.

There were also an increasing number of interest groups which focused on specific causes within the state, such as civil rights, child poverty, cancer relief and environmental issues. In Britain these included organizations such as Liberty, which dealt with infringements of civil rights, and environmental groups such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund. There was an increasing amount of less organized popular activism and protest about environmental issues, the treatment of farm animals, planning problems,

road building, green belt development, countryside issues and war. Overall it looked as if the civil society of developed states had been enthused and organized to promote the interests of individuals.

But against this was the opposite tendency summed up in the title of the book *Bowling Alone*.⁴ Some people were more involved; others were more isolated. Many elderly were living further away from their families. In developed countries, changing work patterns meant that those in work were often relocated away from their families. More carers, particularly women, were unhappily left in isolation by the social services to cope with the sick and the elderly by themselves. It was easy to be trapped on a metaphorical desert island. More were involved, but the number of those who were cut off had also increased.

Since the 1980s, international institutions in the UN system had been better organized to deal with economic development and humanitarian crises, whether caused by wicked or incompetent government or by natural disaster. This was a real step towards a true international community, marked by a capacity to act effectively in tragic circumstances. The institutions in this list included the UN's new Department of Humanitarian Assistance, and its successor in Geneva, the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance. They also included the so-called Funds and Programmes, UNICEF, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UNCTAD and UNFPA, which Kofi Annan made more effective in his Track Two reforms. The logistics of aid provision had also been greatly improved by the World Food Programme. The development process was pushed forward by the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals at the millennium meeting of the Security Council and by the follow-up meeting in 2005, despite the best efforts of the Bush appointee to the UN, John Bolton.⁵ This is not to say that development was now well advanced – it was not. But it does reveal that for one reason or another, including the pressures generated by rock stars like Bob Geldof and Bono, the world did continue to organize for the development of the poorest states.

Global health monitoring was improved by the World Health Organization. The UNFPA promoted more responsible population planning policies. Considerable effort was made in the area of developing and applying core labour standards, and a number of conventions were agreed in the UN framework to prevent abuses of human rights, such as those on the rights of women and children, child labour, torture and genocide. It should not

be assumed that this was all political posturing. The increasing anxiety of governments to see that such codes were upheld, and their reluctance to be found out in their breach, was an indication that they were becoming global norms. To be found out in their breach was never without cost, though some governments might be prepared to pay the price. George Bush's administration became anxious that it should not be seen to be in favour of torture, though it did so partly by attempting to redefine what torture meant. But no one was fooled into believing that water-boarding was not a form of torture.⁶

Countries in regional groupings of states such as the EU were subject to both formal, legally enforceable codes as well as informal ones that indicated a desirable standard. Legislation on gender equality in the workplace would not have happened in Britain had it not been for the EU. Compliance with regulations on the use of food additives was a EU matter. But there were also informal standards. New Labour Ministers constantly referred to EU norms when they discussed the amount spent on health care or the standards attained by the graduates of state schools. The absence of membership of a similar regional agency in the United States meant that there could be a more relaxed attitude to such matters. External comparisons were less likely to be made, and unlikely to be published if they were unfavourable to the United States.

Democratization and international organizations

Since the late 1980s, international organizations, including the UN and the EU, had become more directly involved in helping the emergence of democracy. This was an activity which was motivated both by reasons of interest and by reasons of morality. It was possible because of the end of the Iron Curtain and the happy coincidence of power and liberal democracy in western states. But it was also related to the changing concepts of order and, indeed, to the process of globalization.

A letter from the EU to the UN Secretary-General picked up a theme which was increasingly visible in UN and UN-related documents, namely support for enhancing the role of the UN in helping the development of a civil society in states that had experienced internal crises.⁷ The use of the term *civil society* was striking: it was now often found in UN documents, but had rarely been found before the late 1980s. It appeared in this case in the context of support for the recovery of states in which there had been serious humanitarian crises, but it often had a wider reference: support for actively promoting democracy.

By the early twenty-first century, the major development international institutions, the World Bank, the UN system and the EU, were making the adoption of more democracy a condition of their support. The then head of the UNDP, Gus Speth, stated in 1998 that 40 per cent of the resources of his organization were spent on activities that had an element designed to improve governance. The Commonwealth devoted most of its funds and activity to the furtherance of democracy. The human rights mechanisms were also directly involved in this process, stressing the introduction of liberal judicial and governmental procedures. They had an impact in a few states in the Middle East, like Bahrain, and in Latin America.

The EU urged that democratization, police training and institution building should be an essential part of peacekeeping operations and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. There should be long-term planning to support the building of stronger civil society.⁸ The EU imposed what was called *multiple conditionality* in its relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries: strings were attached to economic support, which included democratization.⁹ This approach also became a part of the strategy towards those states in Central and Eastern Europe which were seeking membership of the EU. The change in this direction could be traced to the mid-1980s when Margaret Thatcher became the first European leader to attempt to build human rights conditions into provisions for European Community aid to ACP countries under the Lome Conventions.

The setting up of an International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998 took this further by creating an international jurisdiction under which criminals, including those accused of war crimes, could be tried. Rather surprisingly, most states agreed that this further level of judicial action could be placed above their own. One of the exceptions was the United States, which remained implacably opposed. It took a fundamentalist view of the superiority of its own laws and procedures, which many thought were misplaced. But the US government also feared that its soldiers and generals might find themselves brought before it. There was, however, success in setting up a more specialized international court to try those accused of war crimes in ex-Yugoslavia. It found ex-President Milosevic, and a number of other Serbian leaders, guilty of war crimes. Later, as mentioned in Chapter 9, the ICC achieved what could be regarded as a first: it issued a warrant for the arrest of President Bashir of Sudan for his part in war crimes committed in Darfur.

Peacekeeping

Although the use of peacekeeping forces goes back to the UN action to separate Israel and Egypt after the Suez crisis in November 1956, they were more widely used and more forceful after the end of the Cold War. Peacekeeping forces were part of a spectrum of involvements in failing states.

Increased use of peacekeeping started with the involvement in Somalia, went on to include involvement in ex-Yugoslavia, culminating in the action to protect Kosovo against the activities of the Federal Yugoslav Army. The first Gulf War was also illustrative of peacekeeping. The second Gulf War was a different matter. It departed from the model, in that it was run by two lead states and had no authorization by the UN Security Council. This is discussed further in the second part of this chapter.

The value of greater interventionism has been disputed. One reaction was that it had done more harm than good and that it would be less costly in terms of life and resources if warring groups within states were allowed to fight it out, until one side or the other had prevailed or there was mutual exhaustion. Intervention by the UN, it was argued, had only served to create a series of interludes in which the parties to a dispute could rearm and prepare themselves for further onslaught. An example of this depressing argument was put forward in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer of 1999 by Edward Luttwak.¹⁰ The key question in this discussion is: Is peacekeeping a positive development?

The arguments *against* the opt-out view are as follows:

- The development of a crisis cannot be foreseen in advance, and to decide to do nothing at the outset of a crisis is an evasion of responsibility. The safer course must always be to strive to reduce suffering: to have a general assumption that there will be action to alleviate suffering.
- Those who supported the opt-out position argued that the record was disastrous. True – there have been too many cases of doing nothing in the face of crying human need, most recently in Darfur and the Congo. But in Cambodia there was a high degree of success. In Cyprus there was success in the sense that the UN forces seemed to have succeeded in keeping the warring Greeks and Turks apart, even though the island remained divided. In Somalia there had been a period in which things seemed to be moving the right way but then a new descent into chaos brought very mixed results. In the series of crises involving Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, there were phases of appalling failure. But overall the UN actions seemed at least to have given some cause

for pause to the Serbs who would surely have killed far more people in the absence of an international presence. The new state of Croatia emerged from the turmoil reasonably well founded, and the Dayton Agreement appeared to give Bosnia Herzegovina a deal which, though flawed, had potential for success. In Angola the intervention by the UN seemed to have succeeded, despite continued action by the forces of Jonas Savimbi.

The various outcomes did not demonstrate the total failure of the actions of the international community through the UN or associated regional organizations. Rather they indicated some successes and some failures. The lesson from all of this could not be that it had to stop, but rather that much was to be learned about how to improve the process.

- In his article, Luttwak remarked that the natural sympathy of observers with the suffering of others was a 'frivolous' reason for government action to help (p. 38). One difficulty was knowing exactly who the others were. Were they folks from the next village or the neighbouring state in the region, or from another continent? The difficulty was to decide the extent of the backyard.
- The logic of the opt-out position suggested a course of action which could have been recommended by Jonathan Swift, the seventeenth-eighteenth-century satirist, who had suggested that the Irish could solve their economic problems by selling their babies as meat for the English table.¹¹ Outsiders could supply both sides equally with as much military material as possible so that the war would be fought to a standstill in the shortest possible time. Perhaps the international community could find a way of offering credit to the warring parties to facilitate this process and, of course, low-cost export guarantee coverage for arms exporters!

The conclusion can only be that, though flawed, peacekeeping has achieved something and that it should be made to work better rather than abandoned. In the second part of this chapter, attempts to do this are discussed.

Developments in the denaissance

In the first part of this chapter, developments have been identified which seemed to be positive from the point of view of individuals. The message was not always clear. Mostly there were positive as well as negative elements even when the overall direction of development was favourable. But there were also a number of darker developments.

The new political science

The second half of the twentieth century and first years of the twenty-first century also saw movements in thinking, which some marked as a return to the dark ages. (We need not go back as far as the fascist movements of the first half of the twentieth century.) If the Renaissance had been the time when Europeans rediscovered a search for knowledge and enlightenment, the late twentieth century saw the appearance of increasing numbers who supported fundamentalist religion, who denied the hard won discoveries of science, and who sought secular power to force those who took different views to conform. In the West, especially in the United States, the religious right became a political force to be reckoned with, closely connected with right wing Republicanism; in Islam, fundamentalism, especially Saudi Arabia-based Wahabism, led to anti-Western terrorism; and in India, a land long marked by religious diversity and tolerance, there appeared more assertive practitioners of Hinduism, organized in a powerful political movement, the BJP, prepared to step up the use of violence against Muslims.

It was not merely the reappearance of intolerant religion. There also appeared a new denial of scientific truth, the true anti-renaissance, which began with an arrogant refusal to understand anything about what was involved in scientific method. The new ignorance led to the appearance of people who believed anything from that the earth was flat to that the universe, and all it contained, was created by an individual inventor, God, about 4,000 years ago. In some schools in Britain – a small number of so-called academies – and in some states in the United States, it was decreed that the theory of evolution, as developed from the ideas of Charles Darwin, had to be taught alongside theories of creationism and intelligent design. The folks who insisted on this were probably sincere believers, but they were ignorant about the nature of scientific truth.

Others were less scrupulous. Many in the United States, in particular, took up what can only be described as the new political science, according to which science could be denied or accepted according to political interests. Accordingly, right wing Americans decided that ideas about climate change were mistaken and cleverly exploited the views of the small number of dissenting scientists to uphold their view. It was not that they had made a careful evaluation of the evidence and decided reluctantly to reject the idea of climate change, but rather that they sought whatever evidence they could scrape together to justify policies against climate change. Hence,

it was OK to continue as the world's main producer of carbon dioxide, it was OK to exploit the Arctic wilderness to tap into new supplies of oil and other raw materials, and it was OK to ignore the evidence of melting ice caps resulting from increasing global temperatures. This was short-term political expediency, which allowed a desperate search for power to dominate over hard-won scientific truth. It was one of the consequences of what Krugman called *movement conservatism*.¹² One result was the appearance of an increasing number of thoughtful denunciations of religions of all kinds, especially the organizations through which they were promoted. The election of President Obama seemed to mark a defeat for this kind of political science, but across America the religious right and the deniers of science remained a powerful force.

People were more vulnerable to the blandishments of the unscrupulous because schooling was now more about teaching a box of tricks for succeeding in the marketplace than it was about gaining enlightenment. It became easier for the greedy because more people were gullible: they had no intellectual anchor or sense of history to set against the lies of the anti-intellectuals. The appearance of US mega-churches was an excellent illustration of this. Individual religious leaders realized that they could get rich quickly by talking persuasively about faith and getting their congregations to give generously. In America a large number of these leaders were exposed as not just greedy but also immoral frauds. It was reported that the religious organizations were becoming major economic actors in the United States, rather like the army in Pakistan, Turkey or Franco's Spain. There were now 1,300 giant churches that were expanding, at the expense of their congregations, into the world of business.¹³

The new darkness also involved an increasing laxity in what was considered intellectual progress. The new sciences of management led to new obscure languages and the use of mumbo jumbo, which concealed more than it revealed. The language of politicians and hawkers of books on self-improvement was marked by neologisms, which amused and annoyed those who were concerned about accuracy in the use of words. A new breed of people were adept at the use of such useless inventions as mission statements, rafts of policies, best practice, benchmarking, interfacing, line manager, engaged and participating strategy, a broad brush piece, governance, dialogue, closure and, in particular – usually a way of avoiding action – holding a great debate. In December 2007 the Centre for Policy Studies published a comprehensive

list and claimed that they debased modern politics.¹⁴ These afflicted the likes of politicians, businessmen and university teaching quality assessment officers alike. Francis Wheen noted with glee that those who wrote books about how to succeed in business had usually failed at business themselves.¹⁵ Naomi Klein wrote a deservedly successful best seller about the use of the logo in branded goods. In a sense the name of the product became more important and valuable than the product itself. This was the Nike world.

The new black arts of politics

In politics there was more mystification, more obfuscation and more denial of the truths which were important for individuals, both for their current existence and indeed for their survival. Much of the malpractice was a consequence of the increasing role played by money in winning elections in the United States and the United Kingdom. One area of political management began to look like a challenge to democracy itself. Political fixers such as Karl Rove became masters of techniques that went back to Joseph Goebbels, including the well-known maxim that if you tell a lie often enough, people will believe it. The new US politics included such devices as push polling, which involved phoning voters to ask if they would vote for a rival if they knew that he or she was a liar, a lesbian, a paedophile, a drunk, or any other form of undesirable, regardless of whether there was any truth in the accusations. The answer would be no, but the impression would be left that there might be some truth in them. Another scam was simply to invent and broadcast known untruths about an opponent, a practice known as *swift boating*. The foundations and think tanks endowed by deeply conservative family trusts in America were particularly fond of these methods and were guaranteed amplification in the right wing press. It was notable that such trusts, often made up of religious right-wingers, had no scruple about lying for political advantage.

In the United States, another way of defeating the arguments of political opponents was to assert that they derived from an underlying prejudice and should therefore be dismissed. Hence, criticisms of the Israeli government's policies were countered with the accusation that they arose from anti-Semitism. When Jews criticized the Israeli government's policies, they were labelled as self-hating Jews. Criticisms of US policies were labelled as anti-American. The accusation that a critic was a *liberal* immediately cast doubt in the public mind on his or her views. Whether or not these accusations were valid was immaterial: they were simply a rhetorical device

to undermine the opposition. It got to the point at which no reasoned criticism was possible: there was no such thing as a conclusion fairly drawn from the available evidence. It was all a matter of an underlying prejudice.

The same technique was applied to other matters. When Hans Blix, the head of the Iraq Weapons Inspections Team, concluded in 2002 that there was no evidence to suggest that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, the reaction of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was to look covertly for ways of impugning his integrity. Was there some cause or prejudice which would lead him to draw a conclusion they disliked or which devalued his conclusions? Those who concluded that the evidence suggested that man-made pollution caused climate change were accused of visceral anti-capitalism. A good phrase to describe this neo-Goebbels technique remains to be invented. Strangely, however, it was rather like the techniques used by the Nazis to denigrate anything achieved by Jews. What they had achieved, in science or the arts, was bound to be suspected simply because they were Jews. Any criticism of the US health system was bound to be invalid if its author was shown to be a liberal.

It was hard to understand why such an approach could be successful. One explanation could be that large numbers of Americans were themselves possessed by deep-seated and often irrational prejudices, which had been strengthened by people like the right wing shock jocks on American radio. In the United Kingdom it was a method frequently used by right wing writers in newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, or even *The Times*, especially with regard to those they could label as liberals. One favoured insult used by the right about their critics was the phrase 'bleeding heart liberal'. The technique could work only if the accusation of prejudice was aligned with the prejudices that already existed. It was noticeable that the technique was used by right-wingers in a number of countries – in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. One conclusion from this has to be that the denaissance of the twenty-first century – the success of anti-science, or political science, and the demeaning of political debate – was a feature of right wing politics. It became an aspect of the campaigns of movement right wing parties in a number of countries. It might be used by the prejudiced left as much as the right, but in the early twenty-first century, it featured more in the rhetoric of the right.

Rudi Giuliani, once Mayor of New York, in an election broadcast in the New Hampshire primary campaign in 2007 said that only 44 per cent of prostate cancer victims recovered under the British National Health Service, when the

truth was that 74 per cent did. He was anxious to prove that private insurance health provision in America was superior to what Americans called socialized medicine and conveniently forgot that 40 million Americans lacked the insurance to obtain the kind of early treatment he or she received. Much to the irritation of those who complained in the United Kingdom, the Giuliani camp's reply was that he had got these figures from a magazine article. No attempt was made to correct them in the United States. The Giuliani lie was allowed to stand. It was appealing because it relied on the now popular US prejudice that liberalism was a bad thing and that so-called socialized medicine was a low point of its expression.

These devices were common practice in American elections. They had also been used by Rove and his acolytes in Australian and British elections in the cause of right wing parties. Behind all of this, of course, was the role of enormous sums of money in winning elections in the United States. It was hard to say that elections so skillfully and unscrupulously bought could be a part of a working democracy. Did the United States indeed deserve to be called a democracy when elections in effect went to the highest bidder?

It was not just that there was a new trickery available to get into office. Once in office – to some extent in the United Kingdom, but particularly in the United States – a whole box of tricks was available to control public opinion and fix the next elections. At least in Britain it was not possible for the party in power to redraw constituency boundaries to suit itself, which was the case in the United States. In America the old technique of gerrymandering was still alive and well. But in both countries, governments managed information to get their messages across in the techniques which became known as spin. The methods included burying bad news by releasing it at a time when other more prominent events dominated the agenda. A British spin specialist was fired when she sent an email on 11 September 2001, the day of the Twin Towers disaster, which said it would be a good day for the government to release bad news. The classic case of unscrupulous spinning was connected with the events leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The evidence that there was an imminent danger of Iraq's using weapons of mass destruction was always known to be very weak and indeed was taken in Britain largely from an unpublished Ph.D. thesis. But when this point was made by a BBC reporter Andrew Gillingham, the organization was pilloried, in an assault led by the government's spin master, Alastair Campbell. One Defence Ministry official, David Kelly, committed suicide rather than lie for the government.

One spin master described Kelly, an honourable man, after his death as a Walter Mitty character.

There were two public enquiries – one on the dodgy dossier and one on the suicide of the official – under terms of reference that were carefully crafted to avoid any conclusions which laid blame on the government. Despite the enquiries' duly-reaching conclusions which let the government off the immediate hook, the evidence was clear. It quickly became the general conclusion that Gillingham had been right, that the dossier had indeed been dodgy and that the evidence had been fixed to justify the war. The one point which came out of the enquiries, which was directly critical of the government, was that under Tony Blair too many decisions had been taken by too few people. These techniques were serious abuses of the democratic process and were entirely detrimental to the interest of individual citizens.

The abuse of peacekeeping

It rightly deserved to be seen as a good that there was a greater preparedness and capacity to help people in distress. But any progress made in this area, in the interest of individuals, arguably up to the first Gulf War, must be set against the events of the second Gulf War. The conclusion has to be that progress made up to then actually made it easier for the regime of the neoconservatives under George W. Bush to pursue their own agenda in Iraq.

The Bush people arrogantly asserted US global dominance in their new security strategy for preemptive action on their own account. They stated that they would work with the UN only if it suited their interests, and their extraordinary UN Representative, John Bolton, did his best to bring that institution to its knees. The US administration said that the UN Security Council approval of its use of force against Iraq was irrelevant to its decision to act. This was a blow to one of the key principles of peacekeeping: that it should be approved by the international community, even though in the past this had never been quite explicit. The usual formula was an expression that could be interpreted as granting approval, such as that used in the Security Council resolution on the first Gulf War. The governments of the countries in coalition with the government of Kuwait then used the expression 'all necessary means' to cover military action against Saddam. The Security Council resolution on the Kosovo action needed more interpretation to be understood as a licence to act. But in the second Gulf War, this was impossible.

More than ever before, the US action in Iraq looked like a ruse to establish US strategic dominance in the Middle East, to strengthen their Israeli allies, to create a pro-American regional power and particularly to establish a dominant claim to Iraqi oil. One of the complaints lodged against Saddam Hussein was that he had exploited the funds released by the UN through the oil-for-food arrangement. A charge had also been brought against Kofi Annan's son that he had benefited from the scheme. In the event the biggest beneficiaries of all were American companies after the invasion. The enormous revenues from Iraqi oil simply disappeared into their coffers. The company of which Vice-President Cheney had been chief, Halliburton, was awarded reconstruction contracts without the benefit of competitive bidding.

The events after the declaration of victory were a testament to the incompetence of the Bush administration and its ruthless greed. There were no preparations for the governing of Iraq after the war; the endless civil war was not anticipated. The Iraqi adventure was a disastrous example of the dangers of near-unilateral action undertaken in a moment of hubris by the dominant world power under the management of a group of corrupt and misguided politicians, namely the neoconservatives Perle, Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld and others, all under the guidance of the ideologue Norman Podhoretz. This was the nadir of movement conservatism. Yet it has to be admitted that the preceding interventions of the UN made it possible. All the United States had to do was to say that it had been done before, but as the UN would not approve, the United States would act for it.

Nevertheless, the positive remarks about peacekeeping in the first section of this chapter remain valid. It was important to protect the emerging norm of intervention so that people could be helped when necessary, and the chance of war between states reduced. The British Prime Minister Gordon Brown encouraged this view in his speech on British foreign policy on 12 November 2007. He argued that it was 'to the shame of the whole world' that it failed to prevent genocide in Rwanda. There should be 'procedures to prevent breakdowns of states and societies' and more should be done to link peacekeeping with stabilization reconstruction and development, already part of the UN mandate. Jonathan Powell, who had been Tony Blair's chief of staff for ten years, with a particular responsibility for foreign policy, took the same position in a long article in *The Observer* on 18 November 2007. It was to be hoped that the terrible experience of the second Gulf War, for

which George W. Bush and Tony Blair were mainly responsible, would never be repeated. In Chapter 9, some of the more positive developments affecting the UN are discussed. These took place in the latter period of the Bush administration – even he was brought to realize that the UN was necessary.

The new medievalism: torture, rendition and abuses of civil liberties

The point has already been made – it is worth repeating – that dealing with the threat of terrorism led to the use of techniques on the part of the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, which were incompatible with the values of a civilized country. These methods included torture, imprisonment without trial or legal defence, the suspension of habeas corpus, the method known as rendition and the holding of suspects for questioning for periods of time that were difficult to defend. It was hard to understand how a Western state that had long regarded torture as one of the most bestial of human practices could find it possible to tolerate its practice by an ally, especially when it had a long experience of terrorism on the part of the Irish Republican Army, without resort to torture. The explanations that occur are that the new torture was of brown people, not white people, who could be treated more roughly. There was certainly no difference between the quality or quantity of the new terror compared with the older version. But it seemed to be more feared and to justify an uncivilized response that was not made to the earlier threat.

The British government certainly colluded with the technique practised by the United States, known as rendition. This was an outsourcing of the torturing process to countries which had special skills, and it allowed the United States to treat accusations of using torture as deniable. The British knowingly permitted CIA planes carrying victims being taken for torture to land and refuel at UK airports as was admitted, after considerable media and political pressure, in the House of Commons. It seemed likely that proof of this would appear from other sources.¹⁶ A British resident released from Guantanamo Bay in early 2009 stated that British officials had been complicit in his torture. This was denied, but in a way that was transparent legalese. But the government was pushed to the point of accepting that there should be an enquiry – after the withdrawal of British forces from Iraq in July 2009. It was probable that British security officers had been directly advising those who were actively carrying out the torture. The ex-US Secretary of Defence,

Donald Rumsfeld, had cheerfully admitted that unusual methods for extracting information were now justified.

The techniques of questioning now favoured did not apparently involve the medieval rack or the iron maiden. But they did involve the repeated immersion of victims to the point of being near death from drowning, sleep deprivation, constant bombardment with high levels of noise, the use of aggressive dogs and various forms of electrical torture. Much of this went on in the US base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, which, being outside US territory, allowed US authorities to deny the protection of the US legal system to the prisoners. At the same time the US authorities argued that the people held, whom they labelled as enemy combatants, were not subject to the laws of war. The prisoners found themselves in a kind of legal no-man's land. Eventually the US courts judged that US legal process must apply, but the administration used every delaying tactic it could to avoid this. This was not happening in Britain, but it was known to the British government and, like the forms of the new capitalism, was tolerated.

The anti-terrorism procedures extended from the denial of legal process to a wide range of infringements of personal liberty in both the United States and the United Kingdom. There was a vast increase in the collection of personal data about all individuals, as described in Chapter 4. At the time of writing, immigration authorities in the United Kingdom had been authorized to stop and check individuals at the country's main railway stations. In general, young brown men were increasingly likely to be stopped. It was reported that it planned to question travellers both when they left and when they returned to Britain and that up to 53 pieces of information would be collected. Those flying to the United States had already been told that their travel plans had to be reported in detail in advance to the US authorities, and these included how the ticket and travel had been paid for. One cynical civil liberties commentator suggested that the next step in Britain would be exit visas.

There was rightly an energetic search for illegal immigrants, for instance by stopping and searching trucks entering the channel ports. Illegal immigrants should, in principle, always be pursued and sent home. But the policy should be applied in a humane way, with generous acknowledgement of mitigating circumstances. As it was, the process of exclusion used techniques which were a disgrace to a society that claimed to be civilized. Equally, care should be taken to prevent the exploitation of recent immigrants. Eighteen Chinese immigrants were drowned when picking cockles in Morecambe Bay on

5 February 2004. Gang masters had exploited their lack of English, ignorance of the dangers of fast-moving tides and willingness to accept low wages.

International crime and terrorism

A development which should certainly be placed on a list of new dangers facing citizens in modern developed states is certainly terrorism. There may be better dentistry and health care, but there was also a greatly increased chance of being killed in terrorist violence.

International crime and terrorism challenged the states' monopoly of force, and their agents were capable of enforcing codes of behaviour and systems of private taxation, which were alongside or hostile to those of the state. They clearly challenged the security of individuals and threatened order within the states and had an obvious international dimension. It could amount to a special form of warfare: in some cases, states orchestrated the use of violence in other states through groups or individuals which had been infiltrated into the territory of another state. Modern technology and sophisticated skills in evading recognition could make it very difficult for the target state to identify such individuals: all of these were features of the Al-Qaeda group responsible for the September 11 attacks.

The impact of such forces on the civil order, and life and property, in the targeted state could be very serious, and for the initiating state, it would have the effect of war without the need to acknowledge responsibility. Of course, comparable developments had occurred in earlier periods, such as the infiltration of Soviet Communist elements into capitalist countries after the Second World War, which actively pursued the goal of fermenting revolution and the overthrow of the government. But the new practices were different in that they involved a preparedness to use deadly force in the pursuit of private gain and influence, or particular systems of ideas and values, on a scale not seen before. They were also qualitatively different in that the agents of violence were now often prepared to sacrifice their own life. Suicide bombers were a feature of modern terrorism.

The September 11 attack strengthened the case for more multinational approaches to deal with crime and terror. International cooperation between police forces had to be strengthened, and better coordination instigated. States and their individual police forces were likely to find dealing with criminal and terrorist groups separately and individually impossible precisely because the crime was transnational. The criminals were capable of withdrawing from one

state and regrouping in others only to be reactivated in the target state later. It was also difficult for police forces in particular states to gain access to the command and control structures of the organizations in other states without themselves transgressing the rules of exclusive national jurisdiction.

Sometimes members of other governments or police forces might have direct links with the criminals and profit from their operations. In this case the weight of an extraterritorial authority would be a great asset. Modern crime and terror were not like earlier forms, as they could have strong international connections requiring strong international responses. They were on a continuum extending from the problems of disorder within the state, and those dealt with by new forms of peacekeeping, to security problems of a more traditional kind.

Sophisticated investigative techniques were needed, which could work on an international basis and which could, if necessary, demand answers from individuals who were close to governments. The new information techniques also demanded a greater degree of transnational penetration of the various civil societies, both those acting within the law and those acting outside it. The new terrorism was in fact an aspect of the development of international civil society, and in order to cope with it, it was necessary to promote the appearance of adequate countervailing forces within that society. The individual in the modern state needed defence from criminal and terrorist groups as well as from traditional intra-state aggression. Defence against the former indicated a transnational police force which would have a presence in what used to be entirely domestic arrangements.

The EU was one group of states where advanced police cooperation existed and was being strengthened.¹⁷ Of course, most crime was rightly the exclusive responsibility of national police forces, but other crime was transnational and therefore the proper responsibility of a higher police authority. In the modern age, the individual needed protection against both kinds of threat.

Conclusions

This chapter has been about the moral setting of individuals in a modern, purportedly liberal country such as Britain. It has of necessity covered a broad front since the impression has to be conveyed that in the early years of the twenty-first century, there was a unique mixture of beneficial trends for individuals and trends that could be harmful. The moral setting has elements of what is good as well as what is bad. There were indeed obvious

improvements in the lives of individuals and stronger agencies for dealing with crises within their society and in international society. There were new opportunities for strengthening international order and helping individuals to do better. The gloom had to be set beside the possibility of enlightenment. A transcendent gloom about the idea of progress is certainly much more tolerable if one has the benefit of modern dentistry and antibiotics.

It should not be forgotten that efforts to improve the economic circumstances of the poorest in the world and to promote peace and security, and human rights, have been maintained and indeed extended. The efforts in this direction might well have been driven by mixed motives – it was ever thus – and the techniques used dangerously wrong-headed. But they have persisted through national, regional and global machinery and have been extended rather than reduced. It would be wrong-headed to dismiss all of this as meaningless.

And yet there have been an increasing range of discomforts and challenges. These are not the products of uncontrollable developments for all the attempts of politicians to pretend otherwise. The economic crisis may be a global phenomenon, but it is not natural, as politicians would like us to believe. It was produced by failures of individuals. People can be and have been misled. Going with the flow is a dangerous inclination if the current leads to the whirlpool.

Is there any way of reaching the comfort zone in this challenging world? Can there be an effective resistance to the blandishments of the über-capitalists? The strategy must involve an adjustment of personal ambitions and entitlements. It must involve a redesign of the comfort zone, as well as the construction of a new framework of norms and rules to keep it safe. These are discussed in the next chapter.

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