Luca Fonnesu, Giacomo Marramao
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on

Furio Cerutti’s Global Challenges for Leviathan

A Rational Methodology for Global Challenges
Luca Fonnesu

Even if in the book it does not occupy much space, one of the important assumptions of Cerutti’s Global Challenges for Leviathan lies in the theoretical comparison with so-called post-modern thought that has flooded not only books on philosophy and professional journals, but also more distant fields, becoming a sort of topos of contemporary culture and the culture industry. I hope I wrong no one by observing that the term has encountered such varied and diversified hermeneutics that one wonders exactly in what post-modernity consists, and perhaps even more what are the characteristics that should, perhaps normatively, constitute its theoretic base. Cerutti doesn’t fall into the trap of the post-modern vulgate in any of its many forms and uses a plausible version primarily as a counterpart for his own political periodization. And clarity – it should be noted – together with conceptual order, is one of the characteristics of this book even when one doesn’t accept all the theses: even when it dips into diverse areas and disciplines, this is and wants to be a book of philosophy in the proper sense of the term (which implies some conscious “limits,” as we will see). The meaning of this should be evident: that the book procedes by arguments that are not only not at all immune to historical and historical-philosophical considerations, but the very question of contemporary periodization evidently presupposes a temporal placement and its characterization and therefore a comparison with tradition. Having said this, to move forward by arguments is to follow a path that needs to be taken into consideration in its theoretic value, coherence, and ability to construct consensus.

To return to the post-modern question, Cerutti thinks that his perspective has some traits in common with post-modern thought (apart from the grands récits, to see the end of which perhaps one needn’t have waited for Lyotard, if one considers philosophical thought around the turn of the 20th Century) but he points out convincingly that these theses (the end of the grands récits, the ambiguous nature of technical progress and its intellectual roots; that is, the Weberian Zweckrationalität that found a

strong outlet in Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s positions, and the refusal of monocular explanations on both the social plane – Marx – and the metaphysical – Heidegger) one can contrast more convincing and less doctrinaire theses to interpret the contemporary era, whatever one calls it. In doing this, Cerutti is aided by the limitation of his investigation to the political dimension of modernity and its crisis, and this allows him to place the accent on that which he rightly calls the horror rationis of post-modern thought (p. 169). Counter to the thesis that not enough comprehensible causal order is given to the objective world, Cerutti gives dignity to the idea that even if the Hegelian philosophy of history is dead, that does not negate the usefulness of understanding the structures of the objective world taken as a totality – criticizing the post-modern preference, or cult, of the fragmentary and of all that is instable, temporary, contingent: a reading of these structures can give indications as to the lines to follow. The selfsame centrality of the Self or Me, is subjected to doubt by the global threat, and thus the global challenges that mark the crisis of modern politics and the theory that has attempted, from the time of Hobbes, to legitimize it.

I have given quite a lot of space to the premises above because they form the whole theoretic frame of Cerutti’s thought, marked by a rationalist attitude that shys away from suggestion but tries rather to illustrate and reconstruct an historical and theoretical process, attempting to interpret it and point out its characteristics and risks and also take first steps towards indicating what theoretic mien to adopt. Cerutti does not illude himself as to the power of philosophy, but believes that the rational interpretation of reality and of its problems is among our duties: this notwithstanding the “limits of philosophy” contained in the title of the final chapter, which echoes the title of a famous book by Bernard Williams. He prefers to accompany, and hope for a change of attitude, of mentality, of Denkungsart on a theoretical level. Some indications of optimism, on the historical level, come from signs of change that seem to emerge in respect to certain threats. This is a Kantian attitude that calls on a duty to pursue the ends that we consider just, whether or not there be any providential guarantee – even on the plane of philosophy of history – as to their realization. But this does not excuse us from doing everything in our power.

So far I have said nothing about the content of this study dedicated to the global challenges singled out by Cerutti – justifying his own methodological choice – in the threats of nuclear war and global warming. The choice of these two problems is well reasoned and it would be wrong – and false – to limit their significance to the role of “expedients”; at least in part, however, these are occasions for much broader reflections, as in the pages dedicated to “fear” as an important category of political anthropology (see pp. 37-38, 47 ff., 164 ff.), or to those on the relation between technology and politics and between politics and science (see pp. 96 ff. and 171 ff.), where a balanced analysis of the problems of technology goes together with the recognition of the value of modern scientific tradition.

The book, in the author’s explicit declaration, does not have as its object the economic-social and communicative phenomenon of “globalization,” or the complete analysis of the dangers or traps it may contain (pandemics, unjust distribution, terrorism). Rather the aim is to consider global threats in the light of precise methodological choices and, also, a clear interpretation of the term “global”: first of all, the global challenges at the center of the work have a factual and objective nature – at least in
principle, and can be studied by the natural sciences or anyway by the instruments proper to them; in the second place, one is dealing with phenomena that are modifications induced by human activity and that affect all “humanity” rather than just a part, and that can be dealt with adequately only by all of humanity. This is one of the principle points: humanity must make itself the subject and assume the moral and political duty to face the global challenges. In this manner the very concept of humanity loses the character of pure concept, of simple notion, to become a real entity, the real subject of an agency, a practical subject.

This determination of method and content is directly connected to his philosophic, and more especially political-philosophic, character with its motivational ins and outs: only publicly or universally recognized dangers provide enough motivation to be dealt with. The necessity for a certain concreteness of perspective is a recurring theme; not, or not only abstract reasoning for the very sake of its philosophical-political importance and thus practice in this type of investigation. This is the key in which to read the emphasis on the need for proceeding through reasoning and avoiding any excess of strong or heavy assumptions which would not allow the formation of a consensus and might in future be subject to unpredictable modifications. In this minimal attitude, if I may call it thus, lies another of Cerutti’s important methodological traits. The position to be assumed vis à vis global challenges, and therefore the series of arguments that underline its urgency, must in sum attempt to reduce to a minimum one’s own assumptions in view of a broad agreement which is not too heavily dependent either on particular philosophical theories, and especially normative ethical theories, nor, or not even, on strong cultural identities that would impede the efficacy of the argument. The arguments, above and beyond their coherence, must be structured in such a way as to promote political strategy (p. 139) and a policy.

The philosophical consequence of this position is a sort of realistic recognition of the necessity to limit one’s own theoretical ambitions: the intent of the investigation, and the analytic and normative proposals contained in it, is limited to the plane of justification, with no founding pretentions: the search for a real and true foundation, with its claims of absoluteness, would not be useful to pursuing a broadly shared argument. The novelty of the panorama characterized by global challenges is pointed out by Cerutti in contrast with the European political order that has been the dominant state from the Peace of Westphalia up to the First World War: later events consist in a deep break marked by totalitarianism, concentration camps and gulags, and the final result lay in the possibility of a war of nuclear reciprocal destruction, particularly threatening during the Cold War, but still possible today after the extravagant hypothesis of the “end of history” has been shown to be what it is. At the center of this structural change in the relations between states is in fact war and the end of its former function in ius publicum europaeum: in this, as ius inter gentes, the balance and equilibrium between the various powers and war constituted the principal regulatory instruments of international relations. And war conserved this regulatory function independently of the constitutional or institutional set of the diverse states (see for example pp. 45 and 49-50). The possibility of nuclear war changes everything: nuclear war changes the very nature of war: it can no longer be a “resource” of the political system because of its destructive outcome, the idea of “victory” vanishes (it would be a collective defeat), and categories like neutrality and sovereignty enter into crisis (see p. 85). Obviously global
warming has different characteristics, with its roots in a lack of control of economic and industrial development substantially founded, Cerutti explains, on determinating suppositions – today in complete crisis – such as the idea that the earth holds unlimited resources, or the need for single states to acquire more power through technology, or lack of interest on the part of some states in the side-effects of technology (p. 126).

Two of the book’s central chapters (chs. 5 and 6) are dedicated to the questions of future generations and to the notion of “humanity” and then to the problem of “sense” (respectively p. 133 ff. and 161 ff): these are two chapters that deal more specifically with the “moral” questions. The question of future generations is by now a classic theme of contemporary moral philosophy, with a wealth of literature and with numerous intersections with political philosophy and theory of justice. The problem of the attitude of individuals “actually present” towards future generations, and thus towards possible moral obligations to them, begins precisely with the consideration of the various “global” challenges which in their effects and consequences broaden the geographic and, at the same time, the temporal horizon – from the near to the far distant future. Here especially Cerutti believes he must be true to his own methodological proposition of minimal normative assumptions, to justify the existence of moral obligations in respect to future generations. The moral obligation toward future generations is thus legitimized by the convergence of diverse aspects: from the parent-child relation extended into the future (thought important, but not sufficient), to the meta-imperative to do one’s own best to avoid that mankind end its own existence and civilization, to the minimal anthropological characteristics of Kavka that seem to remind me of the minimal natural law of Hart, and thus an idea of “human nature” (a notion that has regained some consideration in these last decades). Perhaps a little more attention could have been given to available ethical theories that he somewhat lightly pushes aside as though their inadequacy were obvious: it is the case of utilitarianism (Parfit’s “repugnant conclusion” cannot be taken as dogma, and has been criticised, and Parfit himself in Reasons and Persons,2 thinks utilitarianism the best available theory) but also of the Kantian perspective. Cerutti uses Kantian themes explicitly and implicitly, and says as much, but he frees himself too easily in this case from the possibilities to be found in Kantian ethics (notwithstanding the reference to Habermas-Apel and Rawls, who are today perhaps not the best exponents of Kantian ethics). If then the normative ethical theories are inadequate because normative, or too demanding, naturally one eliminates the problem, but if that is the assumption the analysis is superfluous.

Cerutti thinks he must integrate the ethical dimension and the investigation on “sense,” for which – somewhat curiously – he uses the term “metaethics”; this usage is completely different from the usual since its introduction in 1949 by A. J. Ayer. If I am not mistaken, the problem here is, at least in the first paragraph of the chapter that seems to correspond more closely to the title (Meaning and History under Global Threats, with an admitted reference to Karl Löwith’s lexicon) – is the insertion of an “existential” type of treatment. The following paragraphs are of a complex philosophical nature and quite successful, as I have already noted (concerning the relationship with

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post-modernism and the discussion of science and technology), while these pages do not seem to offer further arguments: in other parts of the book Cerutti maintains a discreet distance from suggestion, but in this section he seems to lose some control.

This is a book that requires attention, but it is not a difficult book: it argues carefully that philosophical theory can be a means of analysis and that the categories we use to interpret reality may be subject to even radical modifications without our necessarily perceiving them clearly. This could be even more useful if our Denkungsart must be modified, and attention to global challenges must be greater and well-founded in public opinion and especially in those who are responsible for decisions which inevitably touch all of us. Nor is it the case to put the question off: as Cerutti himself underlines more than once – for this sort of question, time is not an indifferent variable.

(Translated from Italian by Amanda George)

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Globality without Genealogy?
Giacomo Marramao

One should not be deceived by the allusion to the “cold monster” of the state in the title of this rigorously argued and well constructed book. The author is well aware – indeed he clearly announces this as one of the leading theses of his book – that the “Leviathan” is incapable of responding to the “global challenges” that face us. For the simple but decisive reason that this symbolic figure from ancient Mesopotamian mythology, of which the book of Job preserves only a few literary traces, might well suggest an image of total Power. But this is not how the figure appears in modern political philosophy, which in the wake of Hobbes has transformed Leviathan into a “Mortal God” that is capable of bringing Order and Peace. And yet, precisely by virtue of its own inner principle, the Leviathan of the post-Westphalian model – stylized from Hobbes to Weber as the sovereign nation state defined by its territorial boundaries, exercising a monopoly on legitimate violence (and thus on the sources of law) – appears constitutively incapable of addressing the novel challenges posed by a globalized world. It would in fact be futile to imagine that we could meet these challenges while still maintaining the logic of boundaries, of the clear distinction between the internal and the external, on which the modern state has been modelled: it is no accident, in Hobbes as in Weber, and in all the theorists of rationalism and juridical positivism, that the figure of Leviathan is a concept that can only be declined in the plural, in a system of states, as a plurality of Leviathans, whereas the hypothesis of a global Leviathan, one which no longer possesses any such borders or
lines of demarcation between internal and external, or domestic and foreign policy, would be literally unthinkable, or effectively nonsensical.

Arguing from a perspective that combines political philosophy with political and juridical science, and defines the characteristic space of the modern in terms of the adoption of this Leviathan-model, Furio Cerutti coherently endorses the thesis of the “end of modernity,” and situates his own approach within the space of the post-modern. And the cautionary hyphen here indicates that the expression should be understood in terms that are rather different from the opportunistic and euphoric tones with which we are familiar from the vulgar canonic form of postmodern philosophy that has tended to prevail in the international debate from around the end of the 1970s. But what precisely are the new challenges that announce the arrival of “post-modernity”? In answer to this question the author adopts a method of selecting and isolating specific issues that is based upon a certain drastic process of subtraction. The genuine global challenges are not, in the first instance, those associated with the problem of redefining the idea of democracy in the new “postnational constellation” (J. Habermas) – as we might have expected from an approach that is expressly focussed on the political dimension – nor those which derive from a dramatic acknowledgement of the growing pressures exercised by inequality, poverty, and famine in the world as a whole, nor indeed – from another perspective again – those that are posed by the new frontiers opened up by the life sciences, with the ensuing dilemmas regarding the use of biotechnologies that are capable in principle of moving the human species beyond our current anthropological threshold. For according to Cerutti the true and genuine global challenges are only two: the question of nuclear weapons and the question of global warming. Without remotely wishing to deny or to minimise the significance of both these problems, it is nonetheless difficult to avoid the impression that this represents a drastic reduction of the range of new global issues to those macroscopic aspects which are currently most evident. This inevitably results in a lack of attention to factors which are still only potentially global, but which are just as capable of exercising a significant impact upon the future of humanity as the factors which are privileged in Cerutti’s book. This focus of theoretical perspective upon the dangers of our global present, rather than upon the risky and “dilemmatic” character of various global possibilities (on p. 33 we read that “risk theory cannot be applied to global challenges” insofar as it is already epistemologically defined by the primary sociological orientation to the subjective perception of people living at the end of industrial modernity with a sense of precariousness and vulnerability), leads ineluctably to the idea of a politics of necessity – an idea which can ultimately be traced back, in spite of the author’s attempt to distance himself in this regard, to the philosophical perspective of the Dialectic of Enlightenment (an early “Frankfurt” influence on the author), as well as to the “heuristics of fear” of Hans Jonas, whose “principle of responsibility” is criticized here, but is also positively contrasted with Ernst Bloch’s “principle of hope.” But before developing these critical observations in more detail, I should like to summarise the general structure of the book and offer some specific comments on the theses which it presents.

The book is carefully constructed, as we have already pointed out, and, after a clarification of the general thematic of the work in the opening pages, the text falls into two parts. The first part is dedicated to “The Rise and Fall of Modern Political
Rationality,” and is divided into four chapters. We move from the conceptual distinction between risk and challenge to a reconstruction of the types of rationality characteristic of the modern political order (the “Hobbesian moment” plays a crucial, one might say “inaugural,” role in this connection); from the “end of political modernity,” which is marked by the advent of the nuclear threat (here Cerutti follows the periodisation suggested by Günther Anders), to the global challenge posed by the “greenhouse effect.” The second part is dedicated to “Philosophical and Political Perspectives,” and is divided into three chapters. The themes discussed here include the central relationship between present responsibility and future generations, the transition from a modern to a post-modern conception of the “meaning of history” (which involves an obligatory reference to the Meaning in History by Karl Löwith, who had been a teacher and friend of Cerutti’s in Heidelberg in the 1960s), and the task of developing a form of politics which could take us beyond the paralysing alternatives of realism and normativism, of “Empire” and “Cosmopolis.”

There is no doubt that we are dealing with a book of both impeccable argumentation and “tremendous erudition,” as Vivien Schmidt of Boston University points out in remarks quoted on the dust-jacket; with a book which, in the judgement of Volker Gerhardt of the Humboldt University of Berlin, “attempts not only to comprehend our global problems, but also to contribute to their solution.” But we should go even further. We are dealing with a book that moves along the “shadow line” between philosophy and political science, and thus allows us to focus specifically on those corridors, “passages,” and pathways, by means of which these two domains might interact in order to provide some constructive orientation for “policy,” for political practice (and, I should also like to add, to be oriented by the latter in turn: what we would need today is not so much a philosophy of politics as an understanding of the philosophical effects of political praxis).

Cerutti is well aware that a constructive relationship with the dimension of “policy” implies a sober recognition of the “limits of philosophy” (see Part II, chapter 7, section 5). For this reason he carefully avoids the temptation to provide epistemological plesantries of the sort: political philosophy without political science is empty, while political science without political philosophy is blind. His own approach always takes into account the knowledge effects of political practice. Maintaining an equal distance from the extremes of realism on the one hand, and normativism/idealism on the other, his own proposal can be characterised neither as a pragmatic orientation to the possible, nor as some sort of utopianism, but rather as a kind of ultimatum. Yet those very extremes which are kept at a distance in the theoretical proposal nonetheless end up intersecting in the process of argumentation, producing a sort of short circuit: while the diagnosis is thoroughly realistic, disenchanted in a Weberian sense, the proposed therapy deliberately runs against the current.

The diagnosis starts from an incontrovertible observation: the modern Leviathan-state, which arose from the imperatives of security and peace within the individual nations, is incapable of protecting future generations from the threats posed by nuclear war and by the catastrophic effects of global warming on the biosphere: threats which obviously recognise no territorial borders. How can politics redefine and reequip itself if it is to address the two authentically global challenges of our time? The response which his book attempts to provide — and with admirable intel-
lectual honesty Cerutti underlines the uncertain or, to use an expression dear to modern epistemologists, the merely “probabilistic” character of this response – moves in a double register: a general theoretical register and an analytical-operative register. From the general theoretical point of view Cerutti urges the necessity for re-focussing our attention from the level of “justice” (specifically of the kinds of normative political philosophy influenced by John Rawls) to the level of “survival.” From the analytical-operative point of view, far from contenting itself with “fundamental” categorical imperatives, the book furnishes political reflection with an entire range of valuable materials concerning the significance of the new relationship that our own generation must establish with future generations, thus producing a sort of asymmetrical and long term perspective on posterity that was unknown to the conceptual and practical constellation of modern politics. To this end the author takes up certain operative suggestions that have been politically envisaged to address the two global threats: 1) processes of nuclear disarmament pursued under the reciprocal oversight of different nations – a measure which, unlike complete denuclearisation, envisages a permanent controlled approach to nuclear deterrence, and the scientific expertise required to restart, where necessary, nuclear programmes capable of responding to possible cases of threat and blackmail; 2) the creation of a “civic defence” for future generations that could exercise control over legislation and administrative decisions that it is believed might produce a significant impact on subsequent conditions of life: such an arrangement would not have the power to block such measures, but it would be in a position to exercise a certain “moral suasion” to delay or impede the effects of their realisation (and above all to de-legitimise their authority).

These steps would be enormously encouraged by recognition of humanity’s fundamental right to survive in decent conditions (and here we catch the echo of the notion of the “decent society” specifically introduced into philosophical-political debate by Avishai Margalit, who is not actually mentioned in the book at all). It is quite astonishing, as Cerutti observes, that despite the vast proliferation of literature on human rights, especially in the last few decades, such simple but symbolically highly significant proposals have not been advanced before. The adoption of such measures, in the context of an increasingly trans-national constitutionalist approach, would help to create favourable legal preconditions for democracy, understood as the right of the members of a community not only to participate in determining the procedures involved in political decisions, but also to exercise an effect upon the content of these decisions themselves: especially when the decisions in question affect conditions of existence and survival on a global scale. The task of politics understood in this global sense is in fact concerned with what Cerutti calls “global commons” (see Part I, chapter 4, section 4): namely those goods which are indispensable for the survival of the human race, and which must be protected both from the threat of nuclear winter and from the destructive consequences of the greenhouse effect. Such an effort would be philosophically guided by a new conception of rationality (see Part II, chapter 6), which would have to be rooted in an implicit feeling for community based on a sense of solidarity (see Part II, chapter 5, Section 4). Solidarity as it is presented here (one that is very close, it seems to me, to the notion of Mitverantwortung or “co-responsibility” proposed by Karl-Otto Apel) cannot be based upon the all too fallible hopes that are entertained by every
form of “wishful thinking,” but only upon a realistic evaluation of the mechanisms that govern the functioning and the growth of the extreme evils and dangers that humanity must confront today, and of the countermeasures which are necessary to contain or to eliminate them. And here we come to the most compelling of the theses presented in Global Challenges for Leviathan.

The global challenges force us towards a radical redefinition of the way in which modernity has constructed the relationship between politics on the one hand and ethics and philosophy on the other. But this redefinition must not be understood in the sense that politics depends on ethics and philosophy: we have long since been alerted to the risks implicit in such a relationship by the harsh school of realism and the tragic experiences of the last century. The relationship between politics and philosophy can only be redefined if each of them is prepared to renounce its Totalitätsanspruch, namely the self-referential totalising claim that has characterised them in the past. The realm of politics can no longer sustain its proud claim to independence now that the global challenges in question have exposed its impotence to guarantee the very peace and security that the Hobbesian paradigm had expected from it. And philosophy, for its part, must relinquish the baleful delusion that it can create entirely new worlds insofar as it has shown itself more capable of legitimating than confronting the violent and “perverse effects” that its utopian projects have helped to produce. Thus philosophy too has its own transgressions to confess. And the pretensions of substantialistic rationalism are no less vacuous than the monopolistic claims of purely strategic rationality (see Part I, chapter 3, Section 5). The capacity to look beyond the horizon of one’s own immediate generation, and thus to reflect upon the survival of posterity, is the only aspect of the modern “project” worthy of being salvaged from the great shipwreck of modernity. We are dealing, and it is well to recognise the fact, with something that is exceedingly fragile and precarious here. But it is also necessary to recognise that what might be called postmodern “catastrophism” – and the resulting flight from the tasks that face a genuinely global politics – is simply the other side of a modernity now incapable of meeting the fundamental interest that the human species has in its own survival. The question, therefore, is to think out reasonable and practical institutions of protection, starting from a conscious renunciation of the emphatic vision of politics as a project aimed at realising the “good life” or at restoring the ancient “republican virtues.” If the logic of postmodernism (without the hyphen) is retained, with its apologia for the “fragmentary,” its hyperrealist legitimation of the existent, then cosmopolitanism appears as a kind of escapism: as a flight from reality which is incapable of grasping the tragic and inevitable complexity of a politics that would truly address the global challenges and attempts to redefine our existence in relation to nature and the conditions of our own being-in-the-world.

On reading this book it is difficult to avoid the temptation of seeing – behind the overt argumentation of Cerutti, and certainly beyond any of his explicit references – the silent operation of an Urszene, a primal scene of influence which goes back to the principal theme of the Dialectic of Enlightenment: the internal connection between Naturbeherrschung, the “domination of nature,” and the development – the increasingly catastrophic development – of Western “reason.” In spite of the distinctions on which the author insists, this perspective exercises a profound effect on the structure of Cerutti’s thesis, produces a sort of short circuit, as we have already indicated, with
the analytical politological approach he also adopts. If this expression is to be used in
the strict sense of the word, we have a short circuit when the electric current jumps
across the intermediate element that connects two wires: in this case the two sides
of the argumentational approach. With regard to the case presented by the book in
question: the missing link in the chain is a genealogy. And this accounts for my three
basic objections:

1) The work distances itself from much of the current philosophical-political
debate that is “culpably” polarised around issues such as secularisation, recognition,
multiculturalism etc. For someone, like the present reviewer, who has spent a lot of
time working on the first of these issues, the initial objection is evident: the concept
of secularisation, as a genealogical category, is essential not merely as an interpretive
key for understanding modernity, but as a means of identifying the roots of the logic
of that temporality which is linear, cumulative, future-oriented, and proceeds from
the assumption that nature “exists gratuitously,” as Walter Benjamin was to note in his
“Theses on the Philosophy of History.” This conception of temporality has produced
a critical mass of negative global consequences that cannot practically be addressed
unless they have been conceptually comprehended in terms of the (originally theo-
logical) mechanism that generated them in the first place.

2) If it is true that the radical redefinition of politics proposed in this book consists in
redirecting our attention to the constitution of co-responsible subjects who are capable
(with an asymmetrical investment) of protecting future generations and “taking respon-
sibility” for the survival of the human species on our planet, it follows that – precisely
for the purposes of such a process of constitution – the issues of recognition and inter-
cultural communication and understanding, far from representing a purely academic
pastime or a pointless diversion, certainly do play a decisive role in the last analysis.

3) The global challenges we face cannot be reduced to the most obviously threat-
ening dimension of the present, but also involve the more subtly “dilemmatic” dimen-
sion of possibility: for there are also challenges which – as contemporary science has
clearly revealed – harbour the potentiality of setting off irreversible “resonating effects”
with global implications (as in the case of the emerging biotechnologies).

In conclusion, the investigations which Furio Cerutti has undertaken in this book
must be welcomed as a salutary shock and a stimulus for us to work multilaterally
towards a global constitutionalism that is capable of thinking out and developing a politics
beyond the practical and conceptual horizons of the “Leviathan:” projecting such a
politics into the dimension of co-responsible choice, and the attempted realisation of
which would involve not simply the idea of mere survival, but a new way of conceiv-
ing the quality of life and of our shared existence in community.

And this in the clear awareness, to paraphrase René Char, that our inheritance,
like that of the generations yet to come, is guaranteed by no prior testament.

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Furio Cerutti’s *Global Challenges for Leviathan* 267

**Global Challenges**

Vittorio Emanuele Parsi

Furio Cerutti writes that “the problem we are facing […] is a collective action problem: how to motivate actors to join under a common rule, if these actors are the states which have so relied on sovereign self-help in security policy and asserted the priority of each one’s unlimited economic growth with regard to nature, technology, and future generations.” We are speaking here of “a collective action problem of a new type” since it should come “not from a bunch of particular actors, but from a universal one, humankind, who against what is common use in politics would take care of the interest of generations of the far future” (p. 233). In these remarks from the beginning of the penultimate section of his book, Cerutti summarises the significance of the challenge that he has tried to bring home to the reader throughout the preceding discussion. *Global Challenges for Leviathan* is a captivating work of philosophy which is capable of engaging with all serious students and practitioners of political science and international relations. In particular it repays close consideration from those scholars and academics who are specifically concerned with political science from an internationalist perspective, even if they do entirely share the author’s modes of argument or, above all, his concluding suggestions with respect to policy, which seem, in truth, to have been inserted at the end of the book perhaps more out of respect for convention than out of thorough conviction with regard to their effective practicability or capacity to resolve the problems that have been raised.

In a work of political science, the concluding recommendations, in fact, might well appear rather inadequate in relation to the great mass of literature which has been discussed in the preceding parts of the text, and to the elegance with which the theses of the book have been defended and the possible objections have been countered. But as the author underlines precisely in these concluding pages, his book remains a work of philosophy whose principal intention is to contribute to that “change in the political culture of elites and voters” without which it is impossible even to begin confronting the two genuinely global challenges which face us today (p. 205).

In his attempt to do so, however, Cerutti neither flees the sphere of politics nor seeks refuge in philosophy; and nor does he refuse to address the crucial question of legitimacy, which is intricately bound up, in a distinctive and “revolutionary” way, with the vicissitudes of the modern state and with that rationalist conception of politics that the modern age endorsed for about three hundred years, before noisily betraying this conception in the relatively short space of the 20th century: in “the age of extremes” (of totalitarian regimes, of genocides, of nuclear weapons, but also of the growth of institutions oriented to the international social order and the preservation of its peace and stability), if I might recall here the graphic title of an excellent book by Eric Hobsbawn. While Cerutti also maintains that ideological wars, acts of genocide, and the development of weapons of mass destruction have undermined the structure and legitimacy of modernity in its political aspect (p. 67), he takes a substantially different approach from that adopted by Habermas, while avoiding the sort of positions which have now come to resemble tired reformulations of the postmodernism of the later Baumann. Rather, he immerses himself in the material from which we might say the political thought generally pursued by practitioners is constructed, the kind of
political thought which accepts that it must engage directly with the reality of general political and state institutions – a reality that may indeed be insufficient and “anachronistic,” but is nonetheless directly relevant – and presents an extremely sharp but unprejudiced critique of the “idealist/normativist/liberal” approach and of that which is associated with so-called “utopian realism,” both of which Cerutti describes as “relics of a past modernity rather than timeless positions that can apply to the nuclear and global era as well” (p. 200).

But what is it that makes this book so interesting and striking? The answer lies in Cerutti’s claim that the only two effective “global challenges” that can properly aspire to this description (namely nuclear proliferation and global warming) involve far more than “a problem of simply shifting the balance in the unequal and conflict-laden distribution of divisible goods” and “are not fit to be the stakes of a zero-sum game, which has been the ground pattern of politics from the Trojan war till the Cold War, and remains obviously fundamental wherever politics means adversary distribution of scarce and indivisible resources.” (pp. 184-185).

These global challenges thus render obsolete the bases of legitimacy of state-centred politics (in the domestic and the international field alike) with respect to their original purpose, but they do not signal the absolute decline of the modern political order or the imminent downfall of the system of states: it is precisely the recognition of this ambivalent situation that enables Cerutti’s book to provoke reflection and engagement in so many respects. The competitive dimension of politics, including its adversary or “agonistic” character, still remains “appropriate” (if increasingly less so) with regard to many other questions in which damages, benefits, and costs can be negotiated and distributed between different polities, even if the challenges identified by the author, precisely on account of their nature as “existential threats,” can act as catalysts for those “modest signs of change in the political and legal culture” that could “introduce an attitude more appropriate to the scope of what we are confronted with,” while remaining fully aware that “neither politics nor philosophy can now be credited with providing us safe havens as solid and protecting as the modern Leviathan used to be.” (p. 183). But in addition, the burning relevance of these global challenges, and our vague general consciousness of their significance, may also be capable of “anticipating the future,” that is, of bringing us to consider, at least as an object for discussion, the possibility that “a ‘politics for the (far) future’ can exist,” and thus disabusing us of the conviction that “all politics is present” in the sense that it is only the projects and interests of contemporary actors that can properly be represented and safeguarded (p. 189).

The question concerning the future and the rights, or simply the interests, of future generations, and the intrinsic connection between the latter and what is transpiring in the present, returns in Cerutti’s arguments in relation to both politics and the market in the name, as it were, of human “survival”: “The novelty that I am trying to make evident here is that, just because they are under an unprecedented threat, individuals and states have now chances and reasons to become civilized and morally mature to as to take care of life and death not just for themselves, but for their posterity as well. They do so not because they are now heeding a deeper sense for justice and fraternity, but because they are more closely confronted with the possible self-inflicted death or ruin of themselves and their successors” (p. 193). And a little further on, the author pursues analogous reflections on the market, on this “institution” which, as
he rightly reminds us, is “typically a business among actual interest bearers” that “is not equipped to take care of the interests of market participants who are still far from being born” (p. 201). From the point of view of the specific character of political action, it can hardly escape our attention that to discuss the relationship between such action and the future, and thus the capacity of politics to render the future rather more predictable, is to bring a crucial aspect of its raison d’être into crisis since, as Gianfranco Miglio has observed, “the incentive which drives human beings to come together in political bodies is their anxiety regarding the future.”

Now if we continue to maintain that the fear of human beings with regard to the future, and specifically to the uncertainty and insecurity to which their social relations are exposed, can legitimately be considered as the ultimate ground of the relationship of political obligation, it is also possible to claim that a certain recognition underlies the constitution of any political community: namely that while the motivations which drive human beings to exchange goods are natural, and initially depend on the contingent distribution of resources and upon the interdependence of individuals, the conditions through which this exchange can take place with some guarantee of certainty and security are artificial. These conditions themselves are the product of a specific form of action that not only confronts the question of human fear, but also makes use of this fear in order to justify its own claim to extract resources from society, as Corey Robin has reminded us in his excellent recent book *Paura: storia di una idea politica* [Fear: the History of a Political Idea]. What is more, the reduction of uncertainty and insecurity can be said to constitute the “elementary” purpose of political action, as Mario Stoppani has pointed out. On the other hand, if the existence of the state represents the principal guarantee for the security of its own citizens with regard to every internal or external threat, then it is precisely the presence of a plurality of independent states that imperils the survival of individuals through their participation in that human activity whose consequences are amongst the most dangerous and uncertain of all, namely war. Cerutti observes that the novel situation which has been produced through the real possibility of nuclear war consist in the fact that “one of the main actors, the Leviathan, no longer seems able to match the unexpected challenge resulting from a historical development in which it played a major role as a fighter and collector of resources for fighting with other Leviathans” (p. 99). In other words, the changed nature of war would transform the latter from the principal justification of the existence of the state into the primary cause of its very “decline through the inadequacy that has befallen it.” This is certainly not the first time that attention has been emphatically drawn to the partial and progressive substitution of other things in place of defence against an external enemy as the foundation for the state’s claim to obedience and legitimacy in the later 20th century. And it is difficult not to acknowledge that broader and rather less specific notions of security (internal security and “social” security) have now come to play a very considerable role for the legitimization of the state as political actor.

“From warfare to welfare” is an expression which, simple and schematic as it is, effectively captures this re-articulation of the axes of political legitimacy in different domains of the life of the modern polity. Basically, the idea that “the states have made war, and wars have made the states,” to borrow the words of Charles Tilly, is an idea that gradually starts to fade as we enter the 20th century (with its very strong tendency to regulate international political relations too in some sort of legal manner) and the
more we move away from Europe and the West. It is by no means surprising that the fragile and sometimes the “failed” states of Africa are amongst those whose survival depends more on international principles and provisions (however illusory they may prove to be) than on their own capacities to secure anything for their unfortunate citizens or subjects. Despite the fact that modern Europe remains the forge and birthplace of the concept of international society that has been expressed so clearly by Hedley Bull, we must not forget that it has also presented the ideal theatre in which an almost Darwinian selection amongst the aspiring sovereign subjects has been played out, in a way that confirms Till’s remark.

Of course, Cerutti makes a very acute observation when he points out that the very period of the greatest “securitization” of the international agenda coincided with that in which sovereignty in Carl Schmitt’s sense, the capacity to “decide on friend and foe,” was the prerogative of only two subjects which, not by chance, were the two principal actors in the bi-polar and nuclear system of the Cold war era. “Peace is improbable, war is improbable,” as Raymond Aron observed almost fifty years ago now. And this effectively remained the condition of the international political system from 1948 until 1989. But it was also precisely during this “anomalous” period with regard to the vicissitudes of modernity that the theory of international relations was developed, and for a large part of this theory state sovereignty and international anarchy continue to furnish the conceptual pillars. It is quite true that “realism” in the style of Waltz or Mearesheimer looks just as anachronistic as the cosmopolitanism and liberalism which preceded it. But it is no accident that the more recent forms of neoliberalism and constitutionalism have actually accepted many of the premises of neo-realism and neoclassical realism (arguing from the concept of anarchy) in order to arrive at very different conclusions. And again it also appears particularly helpful to differentiate between areas defined by pure anarchy and areas characterised by “mature anarchy” as Barry Buzan has put it, or regions where the possibility of internal war has been removed and where the institutionalisation of relations between social actors has become the prevailing reality, even to the point of developing forms of true and genuine “governance.”

The question that really remains open is not so much that of how we may further improve “governance” where anarchy has already assumed a “mature” form, but how to bring those areas which are still trapped within an entirely anarchic context and dominated by the dilemmas generated by the quest for security towards this intermediate stage of development. There is no doubt in fact that the mere idea that further nuclear proliferation might somehow yield a new balance of terror capable of producing at least a kind of stable truce is profoundly disquieting if we consider state actors such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. And this is precisely the case that Cerutti cites in order to remedy the weaknesses of the neorealist solutions which suggest that such proliferation alone can create the conditions for genuine deterrence and thus for a new “(multipolar) balance of terror.” But if the danger inherent in such a scenario also and pre-eminently lies in the millenarian character of the regime and the pre-modern ideology that sustains it, and if the political future of religious fundamentalism appears to be anything but something actually in decline (p. 200), then it is difficult to imagine how the government in question could be involved in any concrete way with the “global governance network” (p. 205) that, according to Cerutti’s concluding
observations, should be concerned specifically with the right to survival of the human species itself, of that new “collective we” to which we all belong. And what we more, it is also extremely difficult to ignore the fact that precisely the great nuclear powers (the United States, China, and Russia) are those in which we are hard put to identify the premises for any voluntary reduction of sovereignty, and where, at least as far as the United States is concerned, the evocative power of republican virtues is still very much in evidence, even though Cerutti himself describes the revival of Machiavellian republicanism as “bizarre” (p. 185).

Cerutti concludes by summarising his general line of thought in two basic theses. The first is a “weak” thesis, according to which “global challenges redefine the modern relationship of politics with ethics and philosophy,” but do not lead to an overcoming of the modern conception of politics, as we are forcibly reminded “by the lesson of realism as well as by the little encouraging realities of the last hundred years” (p. 209). The second is a “strong” thesis for which politics “can still engineer reasonable institutions of protection, but can no more be credited to be able to shape the good life or to give rise to republican virtues, because both these notions of good old days make hardly any sense in this crude world; while human agency must renounce any pride of itself and any sense of evolutionary achievement.” And for this reason, having now moved out beyond modernity, we “have to look around in order to redefine our place in the world” (p. 210). For the present reviewer, at least, the weaker thesis would appear to provide a more reliable basis than the stronger one on which to try and build that “global governance” that is so crucial for the future of the human species as a whole.

(Translated from Italian by Nicholas Walker)

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