LESSONS OF EMPIRE

IMPERIAL HISTORIES AND AMERICAN POWER

EDITED BY CRAIG CALHOUN,
FREDERICK COOPER,
AND KEVIN W. MOORE
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10. EMPIRE AND IMITATION

SHELDON POLLOCK

The invitation to think about the new American empire and historical experience raises a number of important and hard questions especially for students of the non-modern non-West.[1] I will address just three in this essay, and only in a very schematic (and unavoidably reductive) manner. The first concerns historical knowledge itself, a problem that can only be registered and not resolved, except insofar as registering goes some way to resolving it. The second has to do with comparative history of the empire form, whether such a thing is even possible, and if so, what it might look like. Connected to this is the last and most difficult question: Can such a history, assuming it is possible, help us find our political way forward between the Scylla of the American empire and the Charybdis of the order of nation-states, its one apparent alternative? Can it point us toward some different, non-coercive mode of global power-culture, some cosmopolity perhaps, which might appear less hopelessly utopian if history could show that some people somewhere may once have lived in something like it?

I

Contemporary discussions of the lessons past empires may have for present ones make several assumptions that must come as a surprise to anyone who has followed the debates on historical knowledge over the past few decades. One is that we really can acquire true knowledge of history; another is that this knowledge is useful to us, that we will benefit by acting upon its truth. Since its recent near-death experience—having been reduced to mere storytelling by literary critics and to sheer ideology by philosophers, and this after long and cruel neglect by social science—history hasn't had it so good in a generation.[2]

The contradictions in the critique of historical knowledge were never very far beneath the surface. Hayden White could reduce history writing to tropes (metaphor, metonymy, and so on) and modes of emplotment (romance, tragedy, and the like),

yet he never seemed much worried that the truth of the history he wrote of the rhetoric of history writing might be undermined by its own rhetoricity. Edward Said could praise Hayden White and still believe that he, too, was writing factuality and not fictionality when writing the history of orientalism. Subaltern historians need historical truth—they're not novelists, after all—and Ranajit Guha undoubtedly believed he was seeking the truth about the history of elementary aspects of peasant insurgency even when arguing that "ideological neutrality" is a myth "central to liberal historiography." It's not clear how anyone could actually subscribe to these critiques—*andere Schichten, andere Geschichten,* different tropes for different folks—and still imply, as everyone most certainly implied, that the history they were offering was true. The problem here was not bad faith; it was overlooking the contradictions rather than looking them in the eye and showing us how to live with them. And this recognition, that objectivity resides, if it resides anywhere, in the open acknowledgment of our untranscendable subjectivity, seems the one way to exorcise the ghost of metaphysics that philosophical hermeneutics finds haunting all historicism.[3]

The question whether we can know the truth of history is compounded by another concerning the relationship between knowledge and action, especially historical knowledge and political action. Even supposing we somehow come to grasp the real lessons of the past, what enables us to act on them, let alone guarantees that we will act responsibly? It has often seemed to me far easier to argue that it isn't those who forget the past who are condemned to repeat it, but, on the contrary, those—in Ayodhya, Belfast, Jerusalem, Kosovo, or Washington—who remember it. And this makes it clear that we have not made much progress in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of history for life.

Yet somehow all these worrisome problems have suddenly disappeared and once again scholars are invited to offer truths from yesterday relevant to the dilemmas of today. The problem, an Indian colleague once said to me, is not that American thinkers are so quick to take up new theories, but that they are so quick to drop them. But that may not be a bad thing in the present instance. The literary and philosophical critique of historical knowledge was an interesting trip to a dead end. And as for acting on such knowledge, people have learned and will continue to learn lessons from history without needing historians to teach them. In fact, one thing a comparative history of empire demonstrates is that it is only by looking at past empires that people have learned how to be imperial at all, since empire is a cultural practice and not some natural state. Moreover, the very project of learning, or unlearning, the lessons of empire—including the project of this book—forms part of a history of imitation of the sort I examine in what follows. We needn't any longer bemoan the impossibility of knowing the past or learning from it. What we do need are new pasts to know, with their potentially new lessons.

Yet, even if we can agree to forget that historical truth isn't available to us and may not be advantageous for life anyway, and are emboldened to proceed with a consideration of past empires, we are still not in the clear. What exactly is this unit of analysis, "empire"? What historical eras of empire are meaningful to the present, and why those? The concept of empire is notoriously vague, and the major works on the topic over the past fifty years haven't done much to lessen the imprecision epitomized in the standard dictionary definition, "supreme and extensive political dominion."[4] After all, what constitutes "dominion," and how dominant does it have to be—and how extensive is extensive enough and how supreme supreme enough—for dominion to count as empire? The term has become so elastic that scholars can speak, without qualification, of a Swedish or a Maratha empire in the seventeenth century, a Tibetan or a Wari empire a millennium earlier.

Nor is it by any means obvious, if we ask how deep in the past to go to learn the lessons of empire, that we can provide a coherent answer. Many believe the lessons of modern European empires, like that of the British in India, are pertinent to the contemporary United States. But what about the lessons of a modern Eurasian empire like the Soviet Union in Central Asia, or of an East Asian empire like that of the Chinese in Tibet, or of an early-modern European empire like that of the Portuguese, or of an early-modern South Asian empire like that of Vijayanagara . . . and so on back to the Neo-Assyrian? What disqualifies any of these from providing object lessons, and why? How narrow must the time frame be to permit inferences to be drawn, and what value, if any, can be attributed to inferences drawn from wider ones?

Comparisons across huge expanses of time are problematic, because of course things do change. Capitalism entered history, so did Enlightenment rationality and the Rights of Man; modernity with its novel ideas of the sovereign state, territoriality, development, and the like; and not least, unprecedented technologies of war. Undoubtedly all this has enabled new empires to actualize things old empires could only dream of, and to dream of new things to actualize (although no one yet seems to have charted precisely how such elements of newness have modified the very notion of empire over time). While all this may readily be admitted, it is arguable that something of the idea and practice of empire has remained stable over the long term, with earlier ideas and practices sedimenting in later embodiments successively. After all, the very talk of "American empire" presupposes a readiness to slot it into some longer lineage—and perhaps even a cognitive necessity of doing so. But it's not only this kind of sedimentation that speaks in favor of a deeper history lesson. So does the possibility of learning, from a potentially radically different imperial past, other lessons in the service of a radically different future.

That there were such different imperial pasts, real inflexions in the imitative

process, is part of what I try to show in what follows, despite the conceptual difficulties that stand in the way. One of these has already been alluded to, the problematic category "empire" itself, which requires discursive prudence and careful distinctions, between say overseas empire and state-as-empire, or between external and internal colonialism. Another is the conceptual apriorism the term carries. For good reasons, which are made even better once we grasp the history of imitation, the Roman Empire has long been the archetype in the West for thinking about empire as such. But the problem with archetypes is that they tend to prestructure perception and to prevent us from even seeing what may be different about other, nonarchetypal kinds of extensive power-culture formations, with their other, potentially redeemable legacies.[5] You can't compare empires let alone learn their lessons if you don't know what counts as empire, or if all that does count is what was done by whoever did as the Romans did.

So with respect to the unit of analysis and historical depth, as with historical truth and the uses of history for life, I adopt here a purely pragmatic approach. You do what you can do and take what you can get—no guarantees, no absolutes, no boundaries.

II

As a category of analysis empire may be vague, but in a number of the most important political formations in southern Eurasia from about 500 B.C.E. to the coming of colonialism and beyond, empire can be said to have formed a coherent category of practice.[6] This is so precisely because the empire form was continuously re-created through historical imitation, a process that seems to have run along two axes: vertically in time (through historical memory), and horizontally across space (perhaps through what archaeologists have named peer-polity interaction).[7] The vertical and horizontal course of imperial imitation could be plotted among a range of embodiments: the Achaemenid version in Iran beginning around 500 B.C.E. (followed by the Sasanid from the early third century C.E., and perhaps the Ghaznavid of eleventh-century Afghanistan); the Hellenic-Macedonian (followed by Byzantine); the Roman (followed by the Carolingian and Ottonian; the overseas imperial version of the early modern era, Dutch-English-French-Portuguese-Spanish, and twentieth-century Fascist); the Maurya version in India (followed by the Kushana, and Gupta, and perhaps also the Khmer of Angkor in Southeast Asia). Other empires were joined in other networks of vertical and horizontal linkages: the Central- and Inner-Asian version, for example, connected the Xiongnu, Turkic, Uighur, Mongol, and ultimately Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman polities.

Historical imitation as such is a widespread, even central, social and political dy-

namic, though little systematic attention has been paid to it. We don't get very far trying to explain it from an externalist perspective like that of Marx, for whom political actors seem nothing but con artists who "anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past," using "time-honored disguise and borrowed language." Marx may well have been aiming here, as Sartre believed, at a "difficult synthesis of intention and result" and offering a new theory of human action, but this seems never to have been elaborated by Marx or anyone else. Modern sociological theory might be said in part to begin—if Emile Durkheim begins it—with questioning the very place of imitation in motivating social action, since it was contra Gabriel Tarde's notion of imitation in the case of suicide that Durkheim offered his theory based on group characteristics. But imitation has remained an element in this theory; it has been used for example to explain the presence of similar bureaucratic structures in varied national settings ("institutional isomorphism").[8] From within the subjective horizon of premodern actors, with their different mimetic standards and logics of organization, such behavior might be thought of as a kind of ethnotheory of practice: there are certain things you must do to become an imperial person.

Recent scholarship has carefully explored the imitative nature of the new-world European empires, which, descending from visions of imperial antiquity attempted "to perpetuate the traditions and the values of the empires of the ancient world."[9] But it is important to note that the traditions in question, Hellenic and Roman, themselves derived from notions of empire that arose across southern Eurasia in the latter half of the first millennium B.C.E, when a new model of polity first came into being that envisioned governance as essentially and necessarily translocal rather than local. The originators of the model were the Achaemenids (c. 550–330 B.C.E), whose political world-empire, the first in history, was beheld by their contemporaries with astonishment (in 440 B.C.E Herodotus marveled at Xerxes' intention to "extend the Persian territory as far as God's heaven reaches"). The imperial lineage that began with the Achaemenids includes both European and Indian imitators: on the one hand, Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E), regarded by recent scholars as the last of the Achaemenids, followed eventually by Rome of the Principate (27 B.C.E–c. 425 C.E.); on the other, the Mauryas (c. 320–150 B.C.E), followed eventually by the imperial Guptas (c. 320–550 C.E.).

There has no doubt been actual convergence in the development of the empire form across time and space because of the imitative dynamic of empire building, just as there has been convergence in the nation form through the imitative dynamic of nation building. Yet if the repertory of ways of being imperial has had a certain regularity, the imitative process itself has never been rigidly rectilinear and homogeneous. For one thing, we can identify some mixing across lineages of imperial emulation. Thus in India the Mughals adopted from their Hindu predecessors not only

components of symbolic authority but also specific practices of rule, whereas the British started out by imitating the Mughals before going Roman.[10] For another, and far more significant than these kinds of fusion, stark differences can be demonstrated in the Indian and western forms of imperial imitation. Empire makers in the two worlds made a very varied selection from the imperial toolbox first assembled by the Achaemenids.

This may hardly seem like news in itself, but scholars tend to think of premodern empire in far more undifferentiated terms. Some trace the very roots of the form itself to a new conception, in the so-called Axial age, of the relation between the political order and "the higher transcendental order," which is accordingly supposed to be co-present with the development of empire.[11] Less clearly expressed but still common is the assumption that early Eurasian empires, emerging out of this putative causal matrix of a transcendental breakthrough, were all basically alike as culture-power formations: in respect of territorial infinitude, the "extreme centralization" of the political structure, or the "absolute power" and divinization of the emperor.[12] This assumption is, I believe, incorrect in the case of India, as a comparative analysis of the early empire form can show. Several components of such an analysis have already been suggested: ideas about imperial space; modes of rule; and religion, specifically the role of a universal God. An additional and especially salient diagnostic is communication, in particular imperial language, which may be taken as representative of cultural practices more generally. (Political economy is omitted only because insufficient data are available for pre-Mughal empire in India.) A comparison of Indian and western empire according to these criteria demonstrates how significant deviation from the standard model was.

Around 519 B.C.E. the Achaemenid emperor Darius invented a new form of imperial communication, the monumental inscription, that would become a standard feature of the empire form reproduced across Eurasia for centuries. Ashoka, third of the Maurya kings of India, imitated the royal idiom of the Achaemenid records when introducing the epigraphical habit into India around 260 B.C.E. The cultivation of an imperial language was still a long way off in both worlds, and linguistic pluralism reigned: Darius like his successors issued inscriptions in Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite, whereas Aramaic, which is entirely unrelated to Persian, served as an important language of state. Ashoka employed a demotic register of Middle Indian, which he had no more interest in promoting as an imperial literary idiom than Darius had in the case of Old Persian. Cultural homogeneity, at least in communication, appears to have been a matter of equal indifference to both.

Measured by our three other criteria, however, Ashoka's empire radically modified the received Achaemenid model. First, in terms of territoriality, the Persians had sought power as far as power could be sought; theoretically there was no limit to

empire. For Ashoka, power may have been conceived of as "extending to the horizons," as for all subsequent Indian overlords, but that was the horizon of subcontinental space. The apparent paradox of such limited universality is one of several that marked Indian empire. Second, governance for the Achaemenids was characterized by administrative uniformity regulated everywhere by Persian aristocrats, the "dominant ethno-class."[13] And thus it is unsurprising that ancestry and ethnicity were repeatedly celebrated by the Achaemenids in their royal documents. For Maurya India, except perhaps in core areas where members of the imperial family ruled, the political order cannot be characterized as an ethnically restricted and bureaucratically homogeneous patrimonial state. Ashoka never once mentions his lineage, and ethnicity as a political value finds no place in his conceptual scheme. A political ideal of encouraging local rule—of "uprooting" but then "restoring" local power elites—that would be reaffirmed for centuries to come was likely already in play. The element of violence in the exercise of political power in early India should not be minimized, to be sure. But where else in the ancient world, or in the modern world for that matter, has any agent of state violence ever declared in public the remorse Ashoka expressed over the "one hundred and fifty thousand persons carried away captive, the one hundred thousand slain, the many times that number who died," in a record issued expressly to dissuade his sons and great-grandsons from ever "thinking of new conquest" by arms? Our last diagnostic reveals equally great divergence. The Achaemenids regarded their vast empire as having come to them thanks to the once narrowly tribal and now transcendent deity, Ahuramazda, the "Wise Lord." "By the grace of Ahuramazda am I king," Darius proclaimed. "Ahuramazda has granted me the kingdom." The assumption that a religious plan—promoting a universalist Buddhism—underpinned Ashoka's quasi-universal empire has rightly been discarded in contemporary scholarship, and the new consensus emphasizes the political-moral over the religious (let alone sectarian) nature of the doctrine of *dhamma* (*dharma*). Even had Ashoka been following a more strictly religious plan, he betrayed no sense whatever of having divine guidance in doing so.

Subsequent inheritors of the model first elaborated by the Achaemenids were Rome of the Principate and the polity of the imperial Guptas. Again, important parallels testify to the model's reality, and important variations to its adaptability. When in 14 C.E. Divine Augustus proclaimed his "achievements," "by which he brought the circle of the lands under the empire of the Roman people"—this from his last testament carved on his Tiber-side tomb—he was imitating Alexander (and ultimately Darius), just as it was in imitation of Ashoka (and in the last instance Darius) that around 375 C.E. Samudragupta, "the great king of kings . . . who has no adversary equal to him on earth, whose fame is tasted by the waters of the four oceans," proclaimed his conquests on a victory pillar set up on the banks of the

Ganges. The novel element in both cases is not where or what they spoke but how they spoke.

The imperial Romans and the Guptas alike fostered a new literary language, for the former, one invented at the end of the First Punic War (240 B.C.E.) when Rome achieved hegemony in the western Mediterranean; for the latter, one invented around the beginning of the Common Era, with stimulus from the courts of the Indo-Scythians and Kushanas, new power seekers who had immigrated into the subcontinent from west and central Asia. From that point on, cultural homogeneity in terms of literary language would become a core practice of empire—indeed, empire's *compañera,* as the first Castilian grammarian Nebrija famously put it to Queen Isabella in 1492—and a key mechanism of transculturation. But all this unfolded in completely different ways in the two worlds. Compulsion and reductivism, or so I have argued, characterized the spread of Latinity (if more as imperial process than policy), whereas volition and pluralism can be seen in the spread of Sanskrit culture. In the western empire, the local languages of continental Europe and North Africa, from Celtic to Punic, attained no literary existence and eventually perished. When in the first century Pliny wrote that Italy was "chosen by the power of the gods . . . to gather together the scattered realms . . . [and] unite the discordant wild tongues of so many peoples into a common speech so they might understand each other, and to give civilization [*humanitas*] to mankind, in short to become the homeland of every people in the entire world," he was describing a cultural-political project that would have been incomprehensible to his contemporaries in India. Sanskrit was voluntarily cultivated across southern Asia, and it was through the mediation of Sanskrit that local languages from the Deccan to Java first achieved literacy, eventually to emerge as cultural-political competitors of Sanskrit as the age of empire waned with the start of the "vernacular millennium" around 1000 C.E.[14]

The two empire forms also differed profoundly according to our other analytic criteria. Territorially, the Guptas represented themselves as universal sovereigns—they achieved a "conquest of all the earth," after all—but with two important qualifications. Like Ashoka's, theirs was a finite universalism, which recognized Bharata Varsha, "the Land of Bharata" (a new conceptual space developed in the early centuries C.E.) as constituting the limits within which political power made sense: "It is only in the Land of Bharata that the logic of legitimate force [*dandaniti*] pertains," says a medieval Sanskrit text on statecraft, adding, "and this logic is something to be studied by Indian people of all four social orders in the present and the future as it was in the past."[15] Yet, this geobody was not *emplaced,* so to speak, but could be and was moved all across southern Asia as far as Champa in today's south Vietnam: holy

Ganges Rivers, golden Mount Merus, and legendary Fields of the Kurus (where the *Bhagavad Gita* is set) began to appear everywhere (including elsewhere in India itself). People in tenth-century Angkor or Java could see themselves as living, not in some overseas extension of India, but inside "an Indian world."[16] The impulse here was captured perfectly by Xuanzang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited India in the seventh century: "People of distant places with diverse customs generally designate the land that they admire as 'India.'" By contrast, in Roman imperial space a single *urbs* (city) lay at the heart of the *orbis terrarum* (circle of lands), with a *limes,* or frontier (often a very hard, walled, frontier) around its edges. In governance, the Guptas continued the old pattern noted earlier of incorporation of local elites; Samudragupta "favored all the kings . . . by releasing them after capture," in order to rule their own domains in subservience to him. Roman imperial governance meant bureaucrats and a military apparatus spread over endless territory, the selective award of citizenship as a device of elite cooptation, the ubiquity and homogeneity of Roman law. Indeed, this last component serves as a synecdoche of *imperium* and offers another strong contrast with precolonial *rajya* of South and Southeast Asia, where law remained largely local, as no doubt did actual rule.

A last distinction, and the most arresting when measured against orientalist presuppositions, pertains to religion. In early India, kings may have been endowed with a numinous aura, embodying as they did portions of the deity, according to conventional political theology. But they never became the center of divine cults as such; on the contrary, they were often celebrated as the most devout worshippers (like Samudragupta himself, *paramo bhagavatah,* the "great devotee of Vishnu"). The supreme deity, for its part, was hardly interested in political outcomes at all—it never directly granted heavenly mandates or awarded parcels of land like celestial real-estate agents elsewhere—and most certainly was never identified with the god of a political ethnic group. In fact, before the early modern period, peoples in South Asia cannot even be said to have formed ethnic groups at all, as modern social science understands these and with which the history of Europe abounds: communities of common descent with shared memories and horizontal solidarities. It's therefore unsurprising that no Indian ruler or people claimed anywhere at any time that God had chosen them or given them a land or provided them guidance or enabled them to conquer other peoples or lands. In the Roman thought world, belief in the providential nature of the *imperium,* as something universal and willed by the gods, is widely attested at least from the end of the third century B.C.E. When on the eve of the birth of the Principate Cicero wrote that it was "by the will of the gods that we have overcome all peoples and nations," he was expressing an idea long resonant in the minds of Romans—and one that again would have been unintelligible

to contemporary political thinkers in India. It also found its complement in the imperial cult of the divine emperor.[17]

Empire makers in post-Gupta India and in post-Roman Europe would adopt many features of these two different imperial styles. Other contributors to this book describe in their own ways how in respect to territoriality, governance, communication, and religion, the Christian empires down to the modern period were often characterized by universalism, centralization, homogeneity, and singularity. In India, patterns set by the Maurya and Guptas continued to be reproduced by later rulers, if only in aspiration and imagination as the actualization of empire became less frequent. Governance over the Indian geobody, for example, could increasingly be asserted by multiple overlords simultaneously; all of them were *chakravartis*, those who "turn the wheel" of universal power over the world. This world would continue to be thought of as the "imperial field" (*chakravarti-kshetra*)—even in the absence of a unified empire—that was coterminus with the "Land of Bharata." Such multiple universal polities, no less than the multiple Indias mentioned earlier, were not mutually exclusive nor was their coexistence seen as illogical or unreal. Indian political life simply allowed for a different logic and alternative reality.

A thousand years later, many of these political values found their final reembodiment in the last imperial polities of precolonial India, the Vijayanagara *rajya* (c. 1336–1565) and the Mughal *saltanat* (c. 1526–1858). With respect to visions of territoriality and modes of governance this meant the limited universalism and layered sovereignty of ancient stamp. With respect to culture and communication Vijayanagara (for the most part ruled by Kannada- or Tulu-speaking kings) evinced a pluralism that acknowledged the realities of the new vernacularization of South Asia, publishing records in all the southern regional languages (as well as occasionally in the old imperial language of Sanskrit) and patronizing literature in all these idioms. Among the Mughals, a comparable nonethnic cosmopolitanism prevailed: as language of court and state the Mughals adopted Persian, which was foreign to them (they were originally speakers of Chaghatay Turkish). With respect to religion Vijayanagara observed a policy of support for all spiritual orders, Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Jaina, and certainly tolerated Islam as well (permitting a mosque to be built in the core of the capital city). The Mughals too maintained the careful "social balance" of a multiculturalism *avant la lettre,* such that in 1600 Badayuni, a Mughal court historian, could describe India as a place where "no one interferes with another's business, so that every one can do just as he pleases." This was not to last, however. When a century later the anomalous attempt was made to absolutize this older model—to the extent that Aurangzeb could call the "main pillar of government" the collecting of information about its people—the empire began to crumble.[18]

III

It would be going too far to reduce all imperial practice in the West to the territorial universalism, dynamic centralism, compulsory culture, ethnocentricity, and certitude of divine superintendence inherited from Rome and, in part, ultimately from Persepolis. As they continually learned lessons from the past, European empires oscillated between remaking the world in one image and attempting to conserve difference under an imperial umbrella. And various mechanisms were developed, dual monarchy, indirect rule, and so on, which were meant to address the general imperial problem of how to rule large and differentiated dominions at acceptable cost with acceptable levels of conflict.[19] Nonetheless, a set of convictions continued to be shared across many imperial formations: that power had to be extended as far as power could be extended; that metropolitan culture was in the end the single sustainable culture; that differences in language, law, and belief could and often should be planed away; that given peoples had political destinies as imperial peoples; and that a universal god mandated the extension of their empire and was to be worshipped everywhere their empire went. With their program of *colonisation de l'imaginaire* in Mexico and the conviction embodied in the dynastic device of their founder, the Holy Roman emperor Frederick III (AEIOU, *Austria Est Imperare Orbi Universo,* that is, "Everything on earth is subject to Austria"), the Habsburgs no less than their near contemporaries the Mughals were learning lessons from the past—if from a very different past.[20]

The new American empire no doubt differs too, and dramatically, not only from the Roman prototype, but even from Rome's more recent Spanish or French or British descendents, first and foremost in respect to its mode of actual dominion. Various equivocations represent this as consensual, informal, or virtual empire, or empire by invitation, though it seems rather more coercive, formal, actual, and gatecrashing given that the United States has troops stationed in more than 140 countries to ensure that its 5 percent of the world's population may continue to consume 30 percent of the world's resources.[21] We're also told that republics don't make good empires, and that American imperial ambitions have always been constrained by American isolationism.[22] Yet again, in other respects, continuities link the American empire form with past imperial practices. In its drive to monopolize authority it has eviscerated many other forms of supranational global power; witness the almost complete abasement of the UN over the Iraq war. Manifestations of America's assertive universalism in terms of political ideology, culture, and religion are ready to hand. The *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2002) acknowledges only one "sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy,

and free enterprise" to now exist in the world (though bringing "the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world" will occur only as permitted by "the union of our values and our national interests"). This state discourse is intertwined with a political theology of apocalyptic Christianity, where history is the unfolding of a divine process ("the loving god behind all of life and all of history" as the 2003 State of the Union address puts it)—a theology pervasive in American life and that, especially in the form of Christian Zionism, it would be unwise to view as mere opportunism on the part of the governing elite.[23] And complexly intertwined, too, with more diffuse processes of cultural homogenization.[24]

As the United States becomes gradually more at ease with such continuities and settles into the lethal embrace of empire, the convictions of old-style imperial practice increasingly shape policy recommendations. With respect to governance, only one political path is open to the non-West, toward U.S.-style liberal democracy, imposed from outside and top-down, no matter what the local costs. "It will take time to educate and train a modernizing and liberal elite," reads a recent Hoover Institution publication on Iraq. "Eventually, patronage through tribe and kin will have to be stamped out in favor of an educational and bureaucratic meritocracy."[25] It's an old logic of western empire: truly successful dominion lies not in exercising direct coercive power over them as in turning them into us: Roman citizens, Christians, constitutional parliamentarians.

The model for imitation much recommended these days to U.S. policy makers is the British Empire in India. (The British colonialists themselves, especially after the 1857 Rebellion, had learned how to be imperial by studying Rome, a referent ubiquitous in British discourse of the Victorian era.).[26] The truly great British achievement to be emulated by America, we're now being told, lies in the political sphere: the implantation of parliamentary democracy. "Few scholars dare acknowledge"—again the Hoover publication speaks—"that, for all the problems, British rule did in fact make India's modern democracy possible. What are we to make of the fact that one of the key British rationalizations for empire turned out, in large measure, to be true?"

Here is not the place, nor have I the competence, to analyze the history of democracy in India; but some assumptions in the above account may be questioned. For one, we cannot be certain that British imperialism was the necessary precondition for the birth of Indian democracy, and that it could never have arisen autonomously. Leave aside the fallacy that post hoc must be propter hoc, and the disregarding of the role of the nationalist movement in India and its search for common rules.[27] Inconvenient enough is the corollary of this logic: that British imperialism would have to be credited as well with creating the military dictatorships of Pakistan

and Burma, and the state of continuous nationalist war in the region since 1947. A second unstated assumption is that actually existing Indian democracy is in fact good for India. We can't of course know whether it's an improvement over forms of governance that might have developed out of traditions of Indian statecraft and polity of the sort mentioned above. But we do know that western-style democracy has been no unalloyed benefit. It has been inseparable from violence, and it has brought to power—perhaps even created—the BJP (Indian People's Party), which many observers feel justified in regarding as a Hindu Falange.[28] Yet perhaps the most astonishing, even imperial, myopia here lies in the belief that the people of Iraq or anywhere else should aspire to a national politics of the sort now on offer in the United States, which produced an illegitimate and mendacious presidency capable of waging an illegal and immoral war.

Whether the most recent episode of American imperialism is following some necessary logic, continuing a longer-term historical pattern (as several chapters in this book argue forcefully), or is instead the responsibility of a particularly reckless and bizarre ruling clique, I won't hazard to guess; scholars of empire and imperialism, like scholars of history generally, are always debating structure versus agency.[29] What is clear is that the new empire poses a grave threat to world peace and must be resisted everywhere it manifests itself: in its attempt to weaken all autonomous institutions (while creating various submissive groupings like the vaguely evangelical "coalition of the willing"); to raise ever higher its own *limes* to keep out the new barbarians, transnational migrants; to generate ever more constrictive forms of universalization authorizing only preapproved forms of power and culture.

At the same time, resistance to empire does not necessarily entail accepting the dichotomous thinking that appeals to the sovereignty of the nation-state, though many who offer multinational alternatives to empire seem strangely unmoved by nationalism's demonstrated menace. The nation-state is as much a historical fossil as coercive empire. Viewed from the long history of empire, its life has been, not only nasty and brutish and short, but entirely anomalous.

For postnationalists there seems to be no other alternative than a new cosmopolitan order of culture-power. There has been much talk of this ideal recently, indeed of some new kind of empire replacing the failed empires of old. Discussion has not always been marked by a satisfactory appraisal of where we are now and how we get from here to there.[30] Yet some elements of the current visions can provide bearings on a compass for where we might head. After all, we need to learn not just negative lessons, about the inevitability of resistance to empire, for example, but positive lessons for a cosmopolitan politics. Part of what I always find lacking here are grounds for hope of the sort that utopia derives from once-existent *topoi*, those real places and real practices of the past that show how malleable are the supposed

iron laws—ethnicity, "linguism," nationhood, and the like—of culture and power. What if we could assure ourselves that there once were people who inhabited a conceptual universe not so dissimilar from cosmopolis, however paradoxical modernity has made such a habitation seem? A universe of imperial centers without peripheries, because the center could be everywhere in general and nowhere in particular; of peoples without ethnicities—a real "multitude" instead of ethnicized and nationalized subjects—whose movements were never stopped by frontiers; of a universalism that knew its limits and did not stand in fatal contradiction with either cultural or political particularisms?

Of course empire is not just a matter of ideas about space, rule, culture, or god. It's also "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind." But as Marlow goes on to say in Conrad's classic text, "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to."[31] The history of empire in the West has usually been a history of imitating certain of these supposedly redeeming ideas, of territorial totality, governmental centralization, cultural uniformity, and the providence of a political god. Yet other models have existed, like the Sanskritic cosmopolitanism of Bharata Varsha and the Islamic cosmopolitanism of Al-Hind, which suggest however faintly some alternatives. These are no doubt anomalies—like India itself, "the strangest of all possible anomalies," in Macaulay's unintentional tribute. But anomalies are not fantasies, and these can be shown to have been lived realities in the past of the nonmodern non-West. And this new past might point toward the possibility of a new future, a kind of Empire that might finally end the numbingly repeated imitations of empire.