

## Editor's Note

**I**n these days after the Gulf War and after the Cold War, the word of the moment is “new”—as in “new world order” and “new international society.” These great clichés tempt not only editors, pundits, and policy makers, but even the most parsimonious of theorists. As old assumptions and aspirations lose their relevance, it seems that no one is able to resist projecting their own interpretation on the empty slogans that are commanding so much attention.

The very fact that so many of us resort to (and respond to) phrases such as “new world order” says much about our present situation. Everyone is asking the same questions: How can we organize our thoughts about a world no longer dominated by the ideological and geopolitical stalemate to which we had become accustomed? How can we retool ourselves to deal with a world so dramatically changed?

With the stakes so high, it is a pity that our prevailing analytical tools are so weak and our organizing principles so poor. As Irving Louis Horowitz points out, the predictive power of our social sciences has been dealt blow after blow in recent years. The spectacular analytical failures regarding the demise of the Soviet Union and activities in the non-Western world are merely the most visible examples. In the humanities, divisiveness over the issue of multiculturalism has taken a toll. The best that can be said is that the current ferment may be laying the ground work for improved syntheses in the future.

It is here where *Ethics & International Affairs* seeks to make its mark. Unable to resist entirely the trend of the moment, it enters the fray to offer its own approach to thinking about the world after the Cold War. The approach is not novel; in fact, it is as old as political philosophy itself. We begin by asserting that the study of normative standards is an indispensable analytical tool. By normative standards we mean the prescriptive principles of desirable behavior to which most nations can and do agree. Normative standards embody the ideals and principles by which a community—even a world community—defines itself. Their evolution tells us as much or more about world history and our current situation than any other approach.

Today one sees normative standards expressed in ideas such as democracy, human rights, and economic development. This journal asserts that people are moved by ideas and aspirations such as these, and that the study of these principles is central to the study of international relations today. As Michael Smith mentions in his review essay, it was precisely this point that was “forgotten by the planners of the August 1991 coup in the Soviet Union.” Communism collapsed not only because it did not work, but because it lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the Soviet people.

James Rosenau provides an overview of normative issues confronting us at the end of the twentieth century. “The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” writes Rosenau, “is the story of convergence around ever more encompassing political entities in order to preserve individual values in the context of collective needs and wants; but today the process of community building has been reversed.” He concludes that, “Today, the story is one of fragmentation, of people opting for individual and subgroup needs and wants, and neither citizens nor leaders have any experience in adapting their traditional values to the demands of subgroupism and the increasing ineffectiveness, even the breakup, of whole systems.”

Ralph Buultjens addresses the problem of integration and fragmentation in considering the cyclical patterns of democracy and the question of whether or not this most recent democratic moment will hold. His work builds on Rosenau’s basic question as to how citizens and leaders can “adhere to the middle of the road paved by traditional values when the course of history is moving groups and nations toward narrowly defined, self-serving solutions.”

Buultjens finds some reasons for optimism in the new political realities that are potential sources for constructive integration. He cites the strong effects of increasing financial interdependence, as well as the increased currency of ideas such as human rights. He discusses the future prospects for democracy by asking whether the present “democratic starburst” can be translated into durable systems and working institutions.

Like Buultjens, Charles Kegley and James Turner Johnson consider political culture. Kegley asks whether in a culturally pluralistic global community it is possible to find “a common normative principle that statesmen from diverse ethical traditions might embrace to discipline democratic behavior.” He sets the stage for a discussion of ethical precepts that transcend artificial boundaries between East and West, North and South. Johnson continues in this vein by providing a close analysis of the Western tradition of liberal democracy. His question “can it travel?” speaks to both its cultural uniqueness and its universal aspects.

Whatever the pillars (or ruins) of the new world order turn out to be, concep-

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tions of history, power, and the bases for interstate relations will all be major factors. Any prospect for the strengthening of universal values must begin with reassessments and reevaluations of the best of existing traditions. Much of what follows in this volume is in this spirit of reevaluation, with the hope that lessons learned can help in self-understanding and provide constructive ideas for the future.

Jarat Chopra and Thomas Weiss address perhaps the fundamental issue in international relations today: the sacrosanct status of sovereignty. Lisa Anderson applies similar insights in evaluating recent developments in the Middle East, where great-power politics and local traditions have proved an explosive mix. John Farrenkopf's piece on Spengler and John Diggins's piece on Niebuhr both remind us of deep intellectual resources that already exist within the modern Western tradition for analyzing power and power politics. And it is a particular pleasure to include in this volume the winner of the first annual *Ethics & International Affairs* Student Essay contest. Steve Brinkoetter's "The Role for Ethics in Bush's New World Order" is yet one more example of how powerful a tool a normative analysis can be.