

*The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914*, Immanuel Wallerstein, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011

### Abstract

The book continues Immanuel Wallerstein's historical narrative of the modern world-system. It focuses primarily on the social and political developments in the European core during the nineteenth century, tracing the rise of liberal hegemony, the growth of the administrative state, and the emergence of modern social science. It also examines the rise of anti-systemic socialist, feminist, and nationalist movements that challenged the liberal project. The book successfully illustrates how the world-systems framework can be used to analyse the intersection between the national and the international spheres. Through its historical critique of the human sciences, it also makes an effective case for the viability of world-systems analysis as an alternative mode of critical social-scientific inquiry.

### Keywords

world-systems analysis, liberalism, socialism, state and society, ideology

## I. World-systems analysis: a prologue

It has now been four decades since the publication of the first volume of Immanuel Wallerstein's groundbreaking project, *The Modern World-System*.<sup>1</sup> Upon its release, that work's breadth and ambition triggered substantial controversy and fervent debate among scholars. World-systems analysis challenged the increasing specialisation of research in modern social science by taking a macro-social approach in describing the origins and development of the capitalist global economy across the expanding boundaries of geographic space and the *longue durée* of historical time. Yet the eclectic foundation upon which Wallerstein grounded his study – drawing upon Marxian class analysis, dependency theory, and the *Annales* school of historiography – also opened it to a variety of sometimes contradictory critiques. As he wryly comments in a new Prologue to the 2011 edition of that work, 'If the post-1945 Weberians thought I was too Marxist, the "orthodox" Marxists thought I was not Marxist at all, but quite the opposite: "neo-Smithian."<sup>2</sup>

The neo-Smithian accusation referred to here was made by Robert Brenner, who argued that Wallerstein's analysis of capitalism was based on a faulty premise that traced the origins of the world-economy to intensified trade rather than the transformations in the modes of production.<sup>3</sup> Aside from Brenner, others on the left took aim at the metatheoretical problems behind the project, which was said to obscure the insights of a Marxian notion of the social division of labour in favour of Weberian rationalisation; was too reliant on an ahistorical conception of 'system'; and ultimately explained social change through random conjunctures rather than through immanent forces within social processes.<sup>4</sup> However, Wallerstein's critics were not limited to Marxists. Non-Marxian scholars who stress the importance of political and institutional factors alongside economic ones argued that world-

1. I would like to thank Jeffrey C. Isaac and the editors of *Historical Materialism* for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

2. Wallerstein 2011a, p. xix.

3. Brenner 1977.

4. Aronowitz 1981.

systems analysis reduced politics to being merely the direct reflection of market-oriented class interests.<sup>5</sup> And with regard to his method, some pointed to Wallerstein's difficulty in addressing certain historical developments that go against his theoretical framework, as well as his *a priori* dismissal of the influence of culture on economic activity.<sup>6</sup>

Wallerstein has responded to these and other criticisms over the course of his career, which has also included three more volumes of *The Modern World-System*, as well as a multitude of other books, articles, and research programmes (this discussion is also revisited in the Prologue to the 2011 edition of Volume I). Nevertheless, despite his incredible productivity and the successful establishment of the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University, today world-systems analysis largely remains outside the mainstream of social science. For one, it rejects the neo-positivist assumptions prevalent in social-science methodology in the United States. It is not a nomothetic enterprise that attempts to establish general laws or abstract principles; it does not apply the logic of case comparisons by abstracting national units out of the larger whole of the world-economy; and it approaches the notion of the world-economy itself not as an explanatory theory but as a construct or heuristic for conducting historical analysis.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Wallerstein has stated that world-systems analysis is neither a theory nor a paradigm, but rather 'a call for a debate about the paradigm'.<sup>8</sup> Rather than being a closed theory constructed out of numerous empirical observations, it is meant to serve as an open-ended research agenda through which scholars could pursue more particular research questions that can nevertheless be connected, in a dynamic manner, to a systematically integrated whole.

Furthermore, in subsequent works Wallerstein has described world-systems analysis as a unidisciplinary enterprise rather than a multidisciplinary one. According to him, multidisciplinary indicates an implicit assumption that the current separation of social science into individual disciplines (political science, economics, sociology) is legitimate, with them simply needing to be brought into closer collaboration.<sup>9</sup> The call for unidisciplinarity, on the other hand, highlights the historically contingent emergence of the social sciences as a set of ideological and institutional practices themselves linked to the systemic processes driving the capitalist world-system. Since the 1990s Wallerstein's focus has increasingly turned to the sociology of knowledge and to this task of challenging the epistemology of the contemporary social sciences. As I will discuss further below, this becomes the subject of a substantial portion of the latest, fourth volume of *The Modern World-System* reviewed here.

## II. The rise of liberal ideology

The current instalment picks up the historical narrative that previously concluded Volume III with the expansion of the capitalist world-economy up to the 1840s. Whereas the first three volumes addressed (with some chronological overlap) the emergence of capitalist

---

5. Skocpol 1977; Zolberg 1981.

6. Chirot 1982.

7. Tomich 2012.

8. Wallerstein 2011a, p. xxx.

9. Wallerstein 2004, p. 19.

agriculture, the development of mercantilism, and the industrialisation of the core European states, here Wallerstein mostly avoids repeating his earlier discussion of these topics. Thus a reader unfamiliar with the historical scope of the preceding volumes may initially be surprised that the current work, despite its subtitle indicating the rise of liberalism over the 'long nineteenth century', largely sidesteps the discussion about the monumental economic shifts that transformed the global relationships of production during that period.

Wallerstein explains this absence by pointing to the discussion of 'something called the "industrial revolution"' in the previous volume. This qualification is not surprising, since over the course of his career he has consistently rejected the idea that the origins of modern capitalism can be found in the economic and social transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Occasional references in his writings to the debate between Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb, which revolved around the question of whether the transition from feudalism to capitalism was spurred by trade flows from urban areas or by changes in the structure of production in the countryside, situate Wallerstein squarely in the former camp.<sup>10</sup> Wallerstein's world-systems framework thus contextualises the industrial revolution within the much longer origins of capitalism as an urban, trade-based phenomenon. Against the idea that the industrial revolution was a process first occurring in England and then replicated in other countries in accordance with their internal class structures, he argues that it involved the entire capitalist world-economy and that the significance of the upswing in mechanisation and production during that period is overstated.<sup>11</sup>

Due to this prior discussion in Volume III, here Wallerstein instead focuses on the creation of 'a geoculture for the modern world-system . . . largely fashioned around and dominated by what I am calling centrist liberalism' (p. xiii). While the strictly economic and material factors behind the development of the modern world-system remain in play throughout the narrative, occasionally being brought into the fold to underscore and contextualise the historical events being discussed, the research questions are now primarily directed toward the terrain at the intersection of ideology, social movements, and state policy. In other words, *Centrist Liberalism Triumphant* is primarily a history about the social and political changes that took place in the European core, and more specifically in Great Britain and France – the two epicentres of this liberal culture.

The book is effectively organised into five substantial chapters and a brief restatement in lieu of a Conclusion. It opens with an interesting, if somewhat sweeping, overview of the meaning of liberalism as an ideology, which Wallerstein identifies with universalism, centrism, and reformism. This is followed by chapters on the construction of the liberal state (1815–30), on its policies aimed at mitigating class conflict (1830–75), and on the tensions involved in the liberal conception of citizenship. The last major chapter traces the emergence of the modern social sciences out of the historical milieu of the liberal geoculture.

Beginning with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars in the second chapter, Wallerstein explores the ideological shifts that placed centrist liberalism as the dominant theoretical frame around which the ruling classes of the core countries increasingly organised the spheres of politics, society, and economics. At the centre of this shift was the

---

10. Wallerstein 1974, p. 393; Wallerstein 2004, p. 14.

11. Wallerstein 2011c, p. xv.

transformative power that the Revolution exerted over the old European order, heralding a definitive new moment in the transition of sovereignty from the monarchy to the people. As he writes, 'Ideologies are political metastrategies, and as such are required only in a world where political change is considered normal and not aberrant' (p. 1). The Revolution normalised change; and this new attitude towards change and the emergence of the masses as a political factor became two of the essential characteristics of modernity. In his words, 'This new language of the sovereignty of the people is one of the great achievements of modernity' (p. 11).

Noteworthy here is the near absence of any discussion of the early history of the United States as a prior moment where popular sovereignty was put to use as a legitimating claim for revolution.<sup>12</sup> To state as he does about the Declaration of Independence that in 1776 it was 'not at all clear (even to the signers of this declaration) how seriously one was to take the idea of popular sovereignty, and what its implications were' (p. 22), is to sweep over a voluminous amount of scholarly literature dedicated precisely to this subject.<sup>13</sup> While the signees of the Declaration of Independence and the framers of the Constitution certainly held reservations about democracy, notions of popular sovereignty had permeated the revolutionary discourse of the colonies by 1770, at the latest.<sup>14</sup> In the twelve years between the Declaration of Independence and the final ratification of the Constitution in 1788, the idea was taken quite literally by people who forcefully asserted it from below against the representative capacities of the local and state governments.<sup>15</sup>

Setting aside this question of conceptual history, however, it is certainly true that the French Revolution marked a drastic break with the past order. As Hobsbawm wrote, 'It was, alone of all the revolutions which preceded and followed it, a mass *social* revolution, and immeasurably more radical than any comparable upheaval.'<sup>16</sup> Liberal ideology developed during these years of transition, forming into a universalist, reformist, and centrist creed that embraced the prospect of gradual change, neither seeking to halt it as the conservative defenders of the pre-Revolutionary order like de Maistre and Metternich sought to do, nor wanting to speed it up as the radicals and democrats of the time did. Thus, Wallerstein argues, the basic strategy of liberals like Guizot was to negotiate a path between these two opposing doctrines.

While outlining the clashes between liberalism, conservatism, and radicalism during the course of the nineteenth century, Wallerstein emphasises throughout the book that these ideological currents were far from rigorous or clearly delineated. This is explained by referring to the relationships that emerged between the two newly-formed poles of state and society. With popular sovereignty having become a real historical fact after the Revolution,

---

12. Wallerstein does discuss the American Revolution in Volume III, where he supports the economic interpretation of the Revolution put forward by Charles Beard. No mention is made of revolutionary ideas in the colonies, however. See Wallerstein 2011b, pp. 234–9.

13. See for example Morgan 1988; Rakove 1996; Wood 1998.

14. See the discussion of sovereignty in Bailyn 1992, pp. 198–229.

15. Wood writes that 'The trite theory of popular sovereignty gained a verity in American hands that European radicals with all of their talk of all power in the people had scarcely considered imaginable except at those rare times of revolution... American liberty seemed in fact to have made revolution perpetual and civil disorder legitimate.' Wood 1998, p. 362.

16. Hobsbawm 2008a, p. 74.

each ideology oriented itself to the problem of clarifying the philosophical basis for this new ‘emergence’ of society; and in each case, he claims, the argument was for society and against the state. For liberalism, the individual became ‘the historical “subject” of modernity par excellence’ (p. 12); conservatism turned to traditional notions of corporate identity; and radicalism to ‘society’ as a whole, symbolised by the appeal to the will of the people.

There is a certain ambiguity in this account about the degree of interrelatedness between these three ideologies. The argument that neither the conservatives nor the radicals of the time ever operated independently of a liberal ideological framework appears controversial when considering the reactionary hostility with which de Maistre and Bonald met the Revolution and the opposition of the socialist movements to bourgeois liberalism in the years after 1848. A strong variant of such a claim would be that liberalism was so successful in creating a fundamental ideological break with the past that it redefined the terrain on which all future debates would be fought. A more nuanced – and, it seems to me, more accurate – claim would be to say that the flowering of liberalism problematised even further what was an already existing set of ideological reference points between the forces of change and of stability in society. The manner in which Wallerstein describes the shifting alliances between the three ideologies – thus giving rise to such unlikely combinations as feudal socialism – speaks to the instability and complexity of this period of transition.<sup>17</sup> At other times, however, his analysis tends toward a reductionism that collapses this set of relations into a single one: conservatives and radicals underwent a ‘de facto transformation into mere variants of centrist liberalism’ (p. 75).

Wallerstein perceptively notes that despite their anti-statist rhetoric, all three ideologies enthusiastically embraced the state as a locus of power through which to organise social relationships:

For socialists, the state was implementing the general will. For conservatives, the state was protecting traditional rights against the general will. For liberals, the state was creating the conditions permitting individual rights to flourish (p. 16).

As a theoretical approach, world-systems analysis has previously been subjected to strong critique for not giving the particular characteristics of state structures their due place in the development of the economic relationships between core and periphery.<sup>18</sup> Yet over the years this has increasingly been an unfair characterisation, as beginning with Volume II Wallerstein’s account had become more nuanced with respect to the role of state institutions in the development of the world-economy.<sup>19</sup> Reflecting his general emphasis on political factors throughout the book, here Wallerstein is quite clear that the state played a significant role in the liberal age. Whereas he sees the absolutist monarchies of the past as weak states that were not able to fully implement bureaucratic centralisation, the Revolution introduced the age of the strong, rationally-administered state: ‘It would only be in the post-1789 world-system’s atmosphere of normal change and popular sovereignty that

---

17. For a famous contemporary account of a variety of these tendencies, one need look no further than Section III of Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, titled ‘Socialist and Communist Literature’. See Tucker 1978.

18. Skocpol 1977; Gourevitch 1978; Zolberg 1981.

19. Garst 1985.

one could build truly strong states – that is, states with an adequate bureaucratic structure and a reasonable degree of popular acquiescence’ (pp. 111–12).

From 1815, ‘the politics of the next sixty years was to center around this effort to “rationalize” the role of the state – that is to say, to fine-tune [its] structure’ (p. 39). In England, the reformist state developed in the process of the competing interests between liberals and conservatives, neither of which hesitated to use administrative power for their own purposes. This point about the convergence of English conservatives and liberals over the course of the nineteenth century is important for illustrating the larger theme about the centrism of liberal politics. By some accounts the conditions for this development were set in the previous century, with the rapid adaptation of the conservative landed upper class to the increasingly influential commercial bourgeoisie.<sup>20</sup> At any rate, by the middle of the nineteenth century Toryism was no longer a reactionary ideology but had transformed into an attempt to conserve and secure the values of state-oriented liberal reformism instantiated with such policies as the Reform Bill of 1832.

### III. Geopolitics, state, and economy

The increased influence of liberal politics in the core countries could not have occurred without significant shifts in the interstate balance of power. Having won its struggle for European hegemony against France in 1815 Great Britain became the central cog in the expansion of the liberal order, yet it was in France where the ‘crucial, definitive battle over the creation of the liberal state was fought’ (p. 47). A weak France rid Britain of an important partner in the balance of power that was forming as Metternich consolidated the alliance between the autocratic trio of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The gradual domestic reforms that began with Louis XVIII issuing a Charter guaranteeing many of the gains of the Revolution, as well as France’s admission into the Quintuple Alliance in 1818, brought it into a closer geopolitical relationship with Britain. The latter quickly recognised the new monarchy of Louis-Philippe, which was swept into power during the three days of the 1830 July Revolution. By that time, liberals had already made their decisive shift to the centre; the support that Louis-Philippe received from the middle classes was a clear sign that liberalism had become deradicalised and instead ‘linked with a moderate status quo’ (p. 49).

Although this volume’s focus tends more toward the analysis of national politics and society, the cyclical upswings and downswings of the world-economy remain the driving factor in the background of the narrative. The simultaneous development of a dynamic economy and the growth of the liberal state were phenomena unique to the European core: England, France, and, later, Belgium (which was drawn into the core from the moment of its independence in 1830, since its ‘developed industrial base’ (p. 69) was necessary for meeting the demands of the growing world-economy). Thus a major part of the second chapter, ‘Constructing the Liberal State’, discusses the important role that protectionist economic policies played in the period between 1800 and 1840 for England and France while the liberal order at the core of the world-system was emerging. Contrary to the popular perception of

---

20. See Moore 1966, p. 30: ‘The strong commercial tone in the life of the landed upper classes, both gentry and titled nobility, also meant that there was no very solid phalanx of aristocratic opposition to the advance of industry itself.’

England as the advocate of free trade in the nineteenth century, competition stemming from the growing industrialisation of the United States and other parts of Europe, as well as the effects of the economic downturn of the 1820s, pushed it to rely on protectionism over free trade as late as 1850.<sup>21</sup> On this point Wallerstein's argument is directed against the persistent notion that the nineteenth century was the quintessential time of the nightwatchman state and *laissez faire* capitalism. Invoking Karl Polanyi's argument in *The Great Transformation* (1944), he is explicit that 'there is more myth than reality in the doctrine of *laissez faire*' (p. 100), and consequently that what arose in this time was a strong interventionist state, concerned with social legislation and the development of industry.

The repeal of the Corn Laws in England in 1846 served as the prelude to a stage of economic growth in 1850–73 that most closely resembled the liberal myth of the self-regulating market (protectionist tariffs once more became the norm by the end of the century). With the task of wheat production now shifting to semi-peripheral nations like the United States and Russia, industrial concentration intensified in the Western European core. The upswing of the world-economy and the incorporation of new trading zones allowed for a mid-century boom. The world-system began to recover from the economic depression of the 1840s and entered the upswing A-phase of a Kondratieff cycle. The example of the Corn Laws illustrates the refinement of Wallerstein's argument in light of criticism that world-systems analysis places an insufficient emphasis on the internal or national factors when discussing economic change.<sup>22</sup> While the repeal of the Corn Laws did not itself bring about the upswing in the world-economy (a liberal claim that Wallerstein challenges), it serves as an example of how world-systemic and national forces can be fruitfully reconciled within this analytical framework.

Yet even here the shift was not from protectionism to *laissez-faire*, but rather to state intervention in industry. The newly available administrative capacities of the liberal state were put into effect toward policies of capital accumulation, the procuring of external markets, and the restraining of the costs of labour. Alongside this emphasis on free trade, economic development, and the growth of technocratic management, the other face of nineteenth-century liberalism was the focus on social legislation and the problem of how to ameliorate the 'social question'. Liberal reforms in England and France transformed social relationships toward a more market-oriented policy while simultaneously incorporating the 'dangerous classes' into the vital centre. Reformist liberalism and the availability of state power as a means for the progressive transformation of society converged in the thought of Saint-Simon, who is identified here as one of the primary representatives of the new ideology and credited with developing the concept of class and class conflict, which would in turn influence Guizot in his project of laying the foundations for the liberal state.

---

21. In a previous work, Wallerstein ascribes the adoption of protectionist policies to an earlier time period for both countries: 'The creation of "national" barriers – generally, mercantilism – has historically been a defensive mechanism of capitalists located in states which are one level below the high point of strength in the system. Such was the case of England *vis-à-vis* the Netherlands in 1660–1715 [and] France *vis-à-vis* England in 1715–1815.' See Wallerstein 1974, p. 402.

22. See Brenner 1977; Navarro 1982. This view is also challenged in Denmark and Thomas 1988.

#### IV. Class struggle in the core

Liberal concessions to the working classes were limited up through the 1840s, as much of the focus went to securing the political position of the middle classes and to the repression of political movements calling for republicanism, socialism, or national independence. The policies that did exist for alleviating the hardships of the working classes through social reform were partially driven by a fear of mass-democratic rule that formed part of the inherited legacy of the French Revolution. Wallerstein points to the distinction initially made by Siéyès between passive (natural, civil) and active (political) rights to show the ambiguity that was inherent in the universalist language of the Revolution. The inclusivity and universalisation of political citizenship co-existed in a stark contrast with binary distinctions such as the continued separation between the public and private spheres, the racialised identities of European and non-European, and the segregated social duties of men and women. Passive citizenship that guaranteed the protection of one's person, property, and liberty also excluded those same individuals from participation in political life, since material conditions and labour relations were seen as belonging to a distinctly private sphere.<sup>23</sup>

The privileged strata in the core attempted to contain the sovereignty of the people and radical political change through the deployment of ideologies; the formation of new conceptual categories through which to describe the world; and the establishment of a network of organisations to act as both conductors and limiters of social change. As republicanism became the preferred discourse of radicals during the 1820s–40s, French liberals sought to avoid the more revolutionary political language of the sovereignty of the people, instead using the language of democracy primarily to refer to a *social* condition of equality, in which past differences of class and status were disappearing.<sup>24</sup> In this way, the Revolution's achievements were preserved and married to the liberal framework of representative institutions. The liberal order restricted active citizenship to those deemed virtuous, and various obstacles – juridical, political, economic, and cultural – were erected to maintain the new status quo.

However, these tactics and the minimal reforms put into practice to alleviate the social question were ultimately not enough to prevent the outbreak of the revolutions of 1848, which serve as a watershed moment in Wallerstein's narrative as the first world-revolution of the modern world-system. Two antisystemic movements emerged in that year: the social revolution, which sought the rights of citizenship for workers, women, and other underprivileged groups; and the national revolution, which focused on the fledgling independence movements in parts of Russia, Austria, and the Italian peninsula. The revolutions also marked the definitive break between liberals and radicals. They threatened the conservative liberal order that had emerged eighteen years earlier, and made even more necessary the task of further securing the domination of centrist politics.

Whereas the goals of socialists, communists, and other radicals were defeated, the technocratic ideas of Saint-Simon and his followers found a perfect stage in Louis Napoleon's Second Empire. Wallerstein treats the Bonapartist regime of Louis Napoleon as the political and social peak of liberalism in France, which he argues was not a Caesarist precursor to

23. Losurdo 2010, pp. 185, 188.

24. Craiutu 1999, p. 485; Costopoulos and Rosanvallon 1995.



fascism but rather a 'centrist regime, oriented to capitalist expansion, constructing a liberal compromise' (p. 92). Bonapartism relied on a definition of popular sovereignty that allowed for an authoritarian consolidation of power at the head of the state while at the same time integrating the masses into a liberal and a national state, linking the two identities together and laying the basis for popular acquiescence that became the mark of the strong state in the nineteenth century. The three pillars of the liberal world – the strong market, the strong state, and the strong interstate system – finally came to full prominence in the post-1848 landscape. During the middle part of the century, both the French and the British liberal states accomplished social reforms by simultaneously advancing economic growth and taming the dangerous classes.

Despite the liberal state's successful consolidation of power in the core, the following decades also saw the further organisation of antisystemic movements, consisting of workers, women, and national minorities, around demands for greater equality and the broader extension of the rights of citizenship. Beginning in the 1870s, the most effective of these movements were found in economically strong countries; yet it was also in those areas that labour unions and socialist parties were more susceptible to a general process of deradicalisation through bargaining with the ruling elites and political integration into the nation and as a class of citizens. The continuing exploitation of the periphery zones by core countries enabled national capitalists to reward workers with higher incomes and greater political rights, thus achieving a relative harmony of class relations.<sup>25</sup> In the late 1860s both Napoleon III and the British Conservative Party adopted policies that were more accommodating to trade unionism. The rise of the British Labour Party and the SPD in Germany marked the high point of socialist party politics, in which radical rhetoric was combined with moderation in practice and a 'negative integration' into the national communities (p. 179).

As mentioned above, Wallerstein's narrative is sometimes unclear on the extent to which the competing ideologies of the nineteenth century were fundamentally liberal. In his discussion of anti-systemic movements, including Marxism, there is little theoretical elaboration of whether those movements remained within the discursive matrix of liberalism and its corresponding notions of progress, reductive materialism, and technocracy. Thus one may raise the question of whether it was not only Saint-Simonism, but also the orthodox Marxism of late-nineteenth century Germany and Russia that can be considered symptomatic of a faith in industrialisation as part of an inevitable historical development linked to human progress.<sup>26</sup>

At one point, Wallerstein seems to suggest as much in referring to the Bernstein-Kautsky debate on the question of whether socialist movements should subscribe to reformist or revolutionary programmes, using it to illustrate a broader point about the gradual integration of the working classes into the state. From the 1870s on, the historical shift was toward socialist parties demanding protective legislation from the state, even while occasionally relying on revolutionary rhetoric. The SPD, as the model party of the European labour movement, spearheaded this trend, yet everywhere the pattern was one of 'organizing with some difficulties in the light of state repression, rhetoric that is often radical with practice that is on the whole moderate, and a sort of "negative integration" into the national

---

25. Chase-Dunn 1981.

26. This point is raised in Gerschenkron 1962, p. 25.

communities' (p. 179). By the time Bernstein published *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (translated as *Evolutionary Socialism*) in 1899, the SPD was in effect already a reformist party, upholding his claim that there was a contradiction between the theoretical premises of socialism and its manifestation in practice.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Wallerstein suggests that the disagreements between Bernstein's revisionist doctrine and Kautsky's revolutionary one (Kautsky having written a response to Bernstein in the same year titled *Bernstein und das Sozialdemokratische Programm: Eine Antikritik* [*Bernstein and the Social-Democratic Programme: An Anti-Critique*]) were of little practical importance.

Yet if ideology in the liberal age is an ever-present byproduct of a power-dynamic emerging from the relationship between state and society, to the point that anti-systemic movements themselves remained fundamentally liberal, it raises the possibility of losing the standpoint of critique against which social developments can be read. For a research programme seeking to bridge analytic and normative inquiry such as world-systems analysis, this can be a particularly thorny problem. Should we infer that immanent critique is the method by which bourgeois ideology is to be transcended, as was the method of Hegelian Marxists like Lukács, as well as the early Habermas? Or is Wallerstein ultimately adopting a Foucauldian position regarding the ubiquity of discursive power? And what does this say for the epistemological status of world-systems analysis as a form of sociological-philosophical critique? This aspect of Wallerstein's sociology of knowledge needs to be developed and clarified further.

The discussion of liberalism as ideology may have also been fruitfully linked to another subject mostly absent from the current volume: the question of the new, liberal imperialism and its role in affecting the domestic developments of the core. Tellingly, on this subject one finds a split between the radical and liberal camps of the Europe-wide socialist movement, again tied to the issue of revisionism and of whether Marxism was a liberal ideology at heart. It is worth mentioning that the more liberal Bernstein justified imperialism on the basis of the cultural and productive superiority of European civilisation; thus he wrote in *Evolutionary Socialism* that 'only a conditional right of savages to the land occupied by them can be recognized. The higher civilization ultimately can claim a higher right.'<sup>28</sup> Yet orthodox Marxists like Kautsky too held centrist views on imperialism in the years leading up to World War One, wishing to avoid an inter-imperialist conflict yet ready to support Germany if one was to occur.<sup>29</sup> However, despite such evidence actually bolstering Wallerstein's point about the hegemony of liberal ideas, the discussion of the accelerated imperialism of the late nineteenth century is missing from this volume.

This is not to say that imperialism is completely out of the picture. One finds brief discussions of Great Britain's support for Greek and Latin-American independence, of the French conquest of Algeria, of British 'liberal interventionism' that culminated in the Crimean War, and of Britain's transformation into a liberal *imperial* state coinciding with its economic decline in the 1870s. However, the bulk of the focus is once again on ideology rather than geopolitics. For example, the origin of the concept of 'the West' is traced to the period between 1815 and 1848 – a West 'militarily strong and economically dominant, and which laid claim to the banner of individual freedom against an economically backward,

27. Colletti 1974.

28. Mecklenburg and Stassen (eds.) 1990, p. 127.

29. Fletcher 1979, p. 248.

“unfree East” (p. 69). The rise of a new race discourse, linked to the concept of citizenship and of national homogeneity, also played a key role in this development, as states ‘justif[ied] their political domination of other states on the grounds that their particular homogeneous quality incarnated a higher degree of civilization than that of the dominated state, equally homogeneous but inferior’ (p. 211). Furthermore, this dichotomy was reinforced with the emergence of anthropology and Orientalism, discussed in the book’s penultimate and perhaps most provocative chapter, ‘Liberalism and Social Science’.

## V. Social science as social knowledge

Wallerstein’s goal in that chapter is to show how the economic and political structures of historical capitalism not only affected the material conditions of existence, but also brought forward their own epistemologies that served to legitimate the existing order. Such arguments have already been made in his previous works, sometimes with little variation from the current volume.<sup>30</sup> However, the discussion here is much more in-depth. It first surveys the evolution of the two distinct cultures of the social sciences and the humanities out of the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment – the origin of the separation between the nomothetic and the ideographic epistemologies; and second, argues that the origins of social science were not as a set of academic disciplines but rather as a social movement cultivated in various social-science associations in Great Britain, the United States, and Germany. Finally, Wallerstein links liberal ideology to technocratic management and the crucial role that the social sciences played in the professionalisation of knowledge.

As the French Revolution legitimated both the idea of popular sovereignty and the normalcy of change, public authorities became increasingly concerned with gaining policy-relevant knowledge about the social arena. This in turn allowed for the emergence of a professional class of academics who broke away from politicised institutions and turned toward the production of presumably apolitical, value-free research in universities. As they could no longer engage in direct advocacy, it became necessary to ‘cloak reform objectives in the garments of “objective” knowledge, knowledge that only the scientific experts were capable of establishing and offering to the public’ (p. 233). These developments not only took place in England and France, but also in the two countries that were emerging to challenge British hegemony in the core – the United States and Germany. In the former, liberal political reform found its political expression in the progressive movement; in the latter, social-science reform occurred first through the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, and then through the work of Weber and the German Sociological Society, which sought to resist the politicisation of social theory behind the call for value-neutrality. Yet behind this call for objectivity remained a power-dynamic that urged liberal social reform through the use of ‘knowledge that only the scientific experts were capable of establishing and offering to the public’ (p. 233).

The separation of the social sciences into three principal disciplines – political science, economics, and sociology – corresponded to the separation posited by liberal ideology into the supposedly distinct spheres of politics/the state, the economy, and civil society. This was an uneven development, dependent on national context and the particular historical

---

30. See Wallerstein 2004.

trajectories of European states. For example, insofar as the social sciences reflected the concerns of bourgeois liberalism, the unique constitution of German society, where, as Hobsbawm writes, 'bourgeois society inserted itself into the Bismarckian framework of aristocrats and bureaucrats', resulted in the Historical School holding on to the principles of political economy against the formalising and ahistorical methods of the new discipline of economics emerging out of England.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the establishment of political science as a discipline was primarily an American endeavour, with figures like the Prussian émigré Francis Lieber and his student John Burgess playing key roles in making the state the object of systematic investigation. Reflecting the dependence of social knowledge on the peculiarities of historical time and place, Lieber claimed that the state flowed from the sovereignty of the people and so was best expressed in a republican framework similar to the one in nineteenth-century America.<sup>32</sup>

Common to all three spheres, Wallerstein argues, was the connection between institutionalised knowledge and social reform – reform the task of which was to discover the regularities behind social change, and thus be applied to policy that could preemptively stem social movements threatening to upset the social order. Yet this argument leads to a central question that is inseparable from the disciplinary and institutional history of the human sciences: Is there progress in social science? Hobsbawm notes that in the heyday of the liberal belief in progress during the middle decades of the century, the social sciences shared with the natural sciences the same basic framework of research and theory – evolutionism, 'the study of the ascent of man from a primitive state to the present, and the rational understanding of the present'.<sup>33</sup> However, the untenable and unscientific premises of this doctrine led to a divergence between the two, with the natural sciences continuing to develop in accordance with technological progress while the social sciences, despite seeing refinement in techniques of measurement and observation, continued to lack a definitive paradigm that would serve as a groundwork for future research.

Moreover, the separation of the social sciences from philosophy and theology placed the question of the moral progress of humanity beyond the scope of the new disciplines. Thus, in his classic lecture 'Science as a Vocation', Weber spoke of rationalisation as leading to the disenchantment of the world, and reduced this tension between facts and values to an irreconcilable polarity between infinite scientific progress and ethical ambiguity: 'All natural scientists provide us with answers to the question: what should we do *if* we wish to *make use of technology* to control life? But whether we wish, or ought, to control it through technology, and whether it ultimately makes any sense to do so, is something that we prefer to leave open or else to take as a given.'<sup>34</sup> The crisis of bourgeois society in part stemmed from the fact that it had no answer to this question.

## VI. Against ideology

Wallerstein's tracing of the historical emergence of the modern social sciences and their functional separation into disciplines is a crucial contribution. One of the values of the

---

31. Hobsbawm 2008b, p. 316.

32. See Farr 2000, p. 73.

33. Hobsbawm 1987, p. 269.

34. Weber 2004, p. 18.

world-systems project is undoubtedly its breadth and vision; it remains one of the most comprehensive and synthetic models available to us today for conducting critical social science. It provides strong historical and theoretical evidence for the notion that both the objects of knowledge and the epistemic tools with which we seek to grasp reality are not independent of historical and material conditions. It also shows one way in which an inclusive, undisciplinary approach conscious of its own origin and epistemic status can serve as a satisfactory groundwork from which we can continue to study the social relationships and ideologies of contemporary capitalism. These reasons alone make it a scholarly enterprise worthy of continuing attention.

As for its future existence as a 'debate about a paradigm', Wallerstein has argued that world-systems analysis remains tightly bound to the transformations of the social context in which it has developed. Sympathetic critics have noted a variety of factors that have kept it out of the mainstream, including that what distinguished Wallerstein's method from other macro-sociological research is a blurring of the distinction between history and scientific analysis, with the resulting narrative being full of overdetermination and multicausality, with no distinct causal relationships becoming apparent between the multitude of factors in play in the political, social, and economic realms.<sup>35</sup> Others have also noted that one of the reasons for its occlusion in the academy has been its politicisation of social science, leading to the alienation of critics who held ideological differences.<sup>36</sup>

These are legitimate observations; yet they do not invalidate the world-systems perspective as a whole, and can be accounted for by its own self-justification. Wallerstein's scholarly method reflects his call for a social science that avoids both positivist formalism and the ideographic particularities of historical analysis. As he writes in the Preface, the book is 'simultaneously historical/diachronic and structural/analytic/theoretical', since 'social reality is always and necessarily both historical (in the sense that reality inevitably changes every nanosecond) and structural (in the sense that social action is governed by constraints deriving from the historical social system within which the described activity occurs)' (p. xi). Furthermore, the present volume's laying out of the relationship between mainstream social science, class relations, and the liberal administration of society is an important contribution for pointing out the politicisation of academic knowledge even under the auspices of value-neutrality.

What does world-systems analysis contribute to the Marxist tradition today? Its heterodox approach has drawn criticism for neglecting the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the origin of surplus value and the driving force behind capitalism, as well as for rejecting the distinction made by Marx between merchant and industrial capital. In turn, Wallerstein has responded in kind with his own objections. 'Orthodox Marxism', he has claimed, 'is mired in the imagery of nineteenth-century social science, which it shares with classical liberalism: capitalism is inevitable progress over feudalism; the factory system is the quintessential capitalist production process; social processes are linear; the economic base controls the less fundamental political and cultural superstructure'.<sup>37</sup> He argues that the progressive liberal narrative about the overthrow of the landed aristocracy was actually an ideological mystification of a historical process in which the aristocracy gradually integrated into the ranks of the bourgeoisie. However, Wallerstein suggests that Marx's

---

35. Goldfrank 2000, p. 184; Steinmetz 2012, p. 25.

36. Chirot 2012, p. 15.

37. Wallerstein 2004, p. 20.

idea of a proletarian revolution was itself modelled on this stepwise, teleological narrative, which cannot be grounded outside the realm of ideology. Thus, while world-systems analysis expands the theoretical framework of Marxism, it simultaneously tempers the historical expectation that the capitalist world-economy is guaranteed to be superseded by a better form of social organisation. The prospects for a classless society or a new hierarchical mode of production are equally likely; communism 'is not a historical prospect, but a current mythology. Socialism, by contrast, is a realizable historical system.'<sup>38</sup>

Of course, world-systems analysis is not the first approach grounded in Marxist theory to bracket away its teleological assumptions.<sup>39</sup> It is therefore one of a number of theories that challenged the philosophic postulates of orthodox Marxism in the second half of the twentieth century while building on the basic insights of historical materialism. Yet while Wallerstein may not believe that a global proletarian revolution is imminent, his analysis retains a different kind of teleology, seeing the capitalist world-system as having reached its maximum point of expansion and necessarily having to give way to a different order. Wallerstein has insisted that the outcome of these changes is 'both unpredictable and uncertain' – thus, it may not lead to the demise of capitalism but to the rise of a new hegemon and a drastic rearrangement of the geopolitical landscape.<sup>40</sup> Yet this kind of prognostication arguably still substitutes one form of teleology for another. The problem, as pointed out above, is that once the debate switches to the realms of epistemology and structures of thought, as it has with this volume, the world-systems framework still remains underdeveloped as a theory of science or knowledge not beholden to bourgeois ideology in its own right. As a consequence, the engagement with liberal ideology developed in the current volume could have been strengthened had it been grounded more firmly in existing critiques, such as those of Gramsci or the Frankfurt School, and had those critiques been turned toward itself. Wallerstein's call for a new kind of social science suggests that he is aware of this problem. Whether it will be addressed in his future writings remains to be seen.

In terms of *The Modern World-System* project, Wallerstein states in the Preface of the current volume that two more books would likely be needed to complete the narrative – a future Volume V to cover the imperialist scramble for Africa, the emergence of national-liberation movements, and the rise of Germany and the United States (roughly 1873–1968/89); and perhaps a Volume VI tracing the dynamics of the post-1945/68 world-system up to its present structural crisis, as well as its anticipated demise sometime in the middle of the current century. Considering the ambitious scope of the project, and the magnitude of the questions that remain to be tackled, one can only eagerly hope that the projected volumes see the light of day.

Rafael Khachaturian  
Indiana University Bloomington  
rafkhach@indiana.edu

---

38. Wallerstein 1983, p. 109.

39. For example, Althusser 2005 and Wright 1989.

40. Wallerstein 2012, p. 9.

## References

- Althusser, Louis 2005 [1965], *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster, London: Verso.
- Aronowitz, Stanley 1981, 'A Metatheoretical Critique of Immanuel Wallerstein's "The Modern World-System"', *Theory and Society*, 10, 4: 503–20.
- Bailyn, Bernard 1992 [1967], *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press.
- Brenner, Robert 1977, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *New Left Review*, I, 104: 25–92.
- Chase-Dunn, Christopher 1981, 'Interstate System and Capitalist World-Economy: One Logic or Two?', *International Studies Quarterly*, 25, 1: 19–42.
- Chirot, Daniel 1982, 'Review: The Modern World-System II. Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750', *Journal of Social History*, 15, 3: 561–5.
- 2012, 'Revisiting the Rise of the West', *Contemporary Sociology*, 41, 1: 12–15.
- Colletti, Lucio 1974, 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International', in *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Costopoulos, Philip J. and Pierre Rosanvallon 1995, 'The History of the Word "Democracy" in France', *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 4: 140–54.
- Craiutu, Aurelian 1999, 'Tocqueville and the Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires (Guizot, Royer-Collard, Rémusat)', *History of Political Thought*, 20, 3: 456–93.
- Denemark, Robert A. and Kenneth P. Thomas 1988, 'The Brenner-Wallerstein Debate', *International Studies Quarterly*, 32, 1: 47–65.
- Farr, James 2000 [1993], 'Political Science and the State', in *Discipline and History: Political Science in the United States*, edited by James Farr and Raymond Seidelman, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Fletcher, Roger 1979, 'A Revisionist Looks at Imperialism: Eduard Bernstein's Critique of Imperialism and *Kolonialpolitik*, 1900–14', *Central European History*, 12, 3: 237–71.
- Garst, Daniel 1985, 'Wallerstein and His Critics', *Theory and Society*, 14, 4: 469–95.
- Gerschenkron, Alexander 1962, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays*, Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press.
- Goldfrank, Walter L. 2000, 'Paradigm Regained? The Rules of Wallerstein's World-Systems Method', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 11, 2: 150–95.
- Gourevitch, Peter 1978, 'Review: The International System and Regime Formation: A Critical Review of Anderson and Wallerstein', *Comparative Politics*, 10, 3: 419–38.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, 1987, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914*, New York: Vintage.
- 2008a [1973], *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1848*, London: Abacus.
- 2008b [1975], *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875*, London: Abacus
- Losurdo, Domenico 2010, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, translated by Gregory Elliott, London: Verso.
- Mecklenburg, Frank and Manfred Stassen (eds.) 1990, *German Essays on Socialism in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Continuum.
- Moore Jr., Barrington 1966, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Morgan, Edmund 1988, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*, New York: W.W. Norton.
- Navarro, Vicente 1982, 'The Limits of the World Systems Theory in Defining Capitalist and Socialist Formations', *Science & Society*, 46, 1: 77–90.
- Rakove, Jack N. 1996, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*, New York: Vintage.
- Skocpol, Theda 1977, 'Review: Wallerstein's World Capitalist System: A Theoretical and Historical Critique', *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 5: 1075–90.

- Steinmetz, George 2012, 'A Liberal Leviathan: The Creation of the Strong State in Nineteenth Century Europe', *Contemporary Sociology*, 41, 1: 23–6.
- Tomich, Dale 2012, 'Rethinking Bourgeois Revolutions: Transformations of the World-System, 1730–1840s', *Contemporary Sociology*, 41, 1: 16–20.
- Tucker, Robert C. 1978, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition, New York: W.W. Norton.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel 1974, 'The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 16, 4: 387–415.
- 1983, *Historical Capitalism*, London: Verso.
- 2004, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, Durham, NC.: Duke University Press.
- 2011a [1974], *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2011b [1989], *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s–1840s*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2011c, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2012, 'Reflections on an Intellectual Adventure', *Contemporary Sociology*, 41, 1: 6–9.
- Weber, Max 2004 [1917], *The Vocation Lectures*, edited by David S. Owen and Tracy B. Strong, Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Wood, Gordon S. 1998 [1969], *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Wright, Erik Olin 1989, 'Marxism as Social Science', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 34: 209–22.
- Zolberg, Aristide R. 1981, 'Origins of the Modern World System: A Missing Link', *World Politics*, 33, 2: 253–81.