



LYNN H. MILLER

GLOBAL ORDER

Values and Power
in International Politics

Westview Press

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Lynn H. Miller

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GLOBAL ORDER

To Nancy and Jim,
with hope for all their generation

Preface

This book is the product of a consciously normative and value-oriented perspective on world order problems. Often neglected in the standard texts on international politics, such an approach seems to me essential for a number of reasons. First, the normative framework is that in which the game of international politics is played. It provides the parameters within which international actors compete for power and influence. That framework is not an accident of nature but a human invention, created to rationalize and order the relevant social and technological capabilities of increasingly sovereign actors more than 300 years ago and consciously enlarged and adapted to respond to changes in those capabilities ever since. It therefore should not be regarded as merely a footnote or an afterthought in the analysis of international politics, but as the ordering ideal structure that both shapes international behavior and makes its evaluation possible.

Second, the value-oriented perspective also encourages analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the international normative system itself, which is particularly important now that its ability to maintain needed order seems more strongly threatened than at any time in the past. Politics shape the normative structure, but the normative structure also shapes politics, increasingly with potentially disastrous consequences in a world of sovereign nuclear capability. The structural reasons for our current peril need to be addressed in ways that are seldom possible in state-based analysis alone.

Third, this approach provides us as students with a critical orientation toward policy as well, for we are encouraged to judge international political phenomena on the basis of world order criteria. We are forced to examine our own values in the process and to consider their congruence or incongruence with what other individuals or groups in the world desire, and why. We are forced to think about global ethics as a result, and no doubt with more objectivity than is usually possible when our analysis is heavily state based or oriented toward the outlook of particular decision makers.

The basic purpose of this book is to provide a kind of normative guide to the examination of the most important issues on today's international agenda. That is the major substantive component of the book in Chapters 5 through 8, in which the principal agenda items are considered. Chapters 2 and 3, meanwhile, constitute an excursion

into the historical basis of our present condition. There the development and logic of the Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states is examined, from its creation at the end of the Thirty Years' War to the present. This component is intended to demonstrate the interplay between value and power in the creation and growth of the world's political system and to suggest what is mutable and what immutable in the way in which humanity historically has organized itself on the planet. Chapters 1 and especially 4 attempt to provide the reader with the basic tools for exploring the chaotic world of competing social and political forces as a world order system. They include discussion of the world order process in the contemporary period, the relationship between power and values and between power and authority, the relativity of both anarchy and order in the international system, and distinctions and connections between politics and law in society.

The manuscript has profited from the comments of a number of people, among whom Peter Bachrach, Robert W. Hansen, Lloyd Jensen, Robert C. Richter, and Burns Weston have provided particularly valued advice. David Bonnell was my committed and helpful assistant for one phase of my research. Among the many whose ideas have influenced me, Richard A. Falk has been my principal mentor. His work and that of a number of his associates at the World Policy Institute have left their imprint on these pages. Had it not been for my students, finally, it is unlikely that this book would have been written. Certainly they have had far more to do with its shape and contents than they can possibly imagine. None of those mentioned need share any of the blame for what follows.

Lynn H. Miller

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1

The Best and Worst of Times

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,
we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

These famous lines first appeared in 1859, and they have captured the imagination of readers ever since for the way in which they evoke the almost fantastic range of possibilities available in every human experience. Men and women have an enormous capacity for wisdom and enlightenment, an ability to learn all sorts of complex and useful things about the wondrous universe of which they are a part. From the time members of our species learned to domesticate plants and animals until their descendants first journeyed to the moon, humanity's progress in making the physical universe serve its commands has been remarkable, giving rise to hope, happiness, and the sense that we have everything before us. These are among the emotions and the experiences that provide every generation with its own best of times.

Yet humans are not gods, nor, as they generally have thought, are they destined to become them, for they are flawed by ignorance and misunderstanding and behave despicably toward each other in their quest for mastery over a confusing and chaotic world. They often inflict misery and death upon many while building marvelously complex societies. Still, the oppressors, like their victims, ultimately are vanquished by their own mortality, which has guaranteed to weak and strong alike their own worst of times.

These are brief descriptions of what appear to be the two extremes of the human condition. Not every human being who has ever lived

would describe those extremes in exactly the same way. Some generations have lived at times when the darker prospects for the species seemed to dominate the possibilities for happiness or human progress; others have been born into a world in which the opposite perception had fertile ground in which to take root and spread. Yet the appeal of Dickens's opening words to *A Tale of Two Cities*—words written in a time and society that we today tend to see as particularly optimistic—is that they seem an accurate depiction of what every man or woman has at some time known to be true.

PESSIMISTIC VERSUS OPTIMISTIC VISIONS OF HUMAN CAPABILITY TODAY

As we enter the waning years of the twentieth century, what sorts of things constitute the best and worst of these particular times? We should not expect them to be exactly those that would have occurred to Dickens's readers in Victorian England. When we look about for what we might list, we are likely to be struck by the sense that never before in human history have the best and worst seemed as extreme as they do today and for the near future. We may even wonder if the extremes are not now so great that we must redefine in fundamental ways what traditionally have been thought of as the nature and place of humanity on earth.

The best visions of what is possible for human life today actually seem to challenge the notion that our mortality is a boundary that we cannot cross. We live in a time when it is possible to save and prolong life through the use of wonder drugs and other medical and surgical techniques that were unknown a generation or two ago. Hearts and lungs and other vital organs, some artificially created, can now be transplanted routinely into the bodies of patients to make continued life possible where not long ago it would have been unimaginable. Not yet routine, but even more dramatic in their challenge to death itself, are the various developments in genetic engineering that could soon permit the cloning of any species—including human beings—so as to produce offspring that are exact genetic copies of their parents. In such a situation, does it make much sense to continue to think in terms of the “death” of a parent, when its carbon copy lives and can itself be cloned and so on, presumably forever? Or consider the geneticist's ability to transfer genes from an organism of one species to another. That power can only be considered godlike, for it suggests incredible possibilities for modifying species in ways that could turn humankind's natural enemies into benign creatures, thereby eliminating much disease, increasing our food supply severalfold, and, no doubt, accomplishing many other miracles as well. The imagination staggers.

These and other developments in the science of genetics may seem the most dramatic challenges to the very mortality of living things,

but in other areas, too, we are frequently assured that no problem faces us that cannot be overcome through some new or potential scientific advance. Granted, for example, that the day is fast approaching when no significant reserves of oil will be left underground to keep the world's industrial machine in operation, we shall develop alternative energy resources that are truly renewable so not to have to face the problems of resource scarcity again. The sun's energy can be harnessed for our benefit, as can the wind, the waves of the earth's oceans, and even the decaying organic matter, which is the waste of the entire life process. The sensible harnessing of such resources seems certain to provide future generations with virtually unlimited amounts of power to ensure the indefinite advance of material progress for the species. If these and a myriad of other technological advances do not grant immortality to each of us, they at least seem to promise that our descendants will live and flourish in ways we cannot yet imagine.

The worst of times? After these considerations, what a jolt it is to realize today's potential for the worst imaginable future for humanity that the species has ever had to face! The worst imaginable is, of course, no future at all—or at least none of a sort that we would recognize as truly human. At any moment we could end with the “bang” of a massive nuclear exchange that, if prolonged for days or possibly only hours, could annihilate outright much of the globe's human population and kill countless millions more in the aftereffects of radiation, the poisoning of the earth's food and water supply, and the devastating disruption of social organization everywhere. Now that we are several decades into this Age of Overkill, a handful of governments possess enough explosive power to bring death to every man, woman, and child on earth. Or, barring all-out nuclear war, we could end with the “whimper” of gradual ecological collapse, perhaps starting from an accident at a nuclear plant, the release of chemical or bacteriological weapons in some limited military conflict, the irreversible pollution of major portions of the oceans, or numerous other possible causes. Perhaps the whimpering end may result from factors already at work—booming growth in populations, desertification of the world's arable lands, the silent extinction of a growing number of animal species—all of which, or a host of other possibilities, already may be leading us toward our doom.

Whatever the form and duration of the forces that could end human life as we have known it, those of us alive today must live with the fact that in our lifetimes, as never before in the history of the planet, one species has the capacity to make the globe we share with thousands of other living species uninhabitable for us all, with the possible exception of the most primitive forms of plant and animal life. That capacity, too, is a godlike power, although one we traditionally would attribute only to a satanic god.

So there is something unique about our sense of the best and worst possibilities for humanity today. Never before have those opposites

extended nearly so far toward the unlimited; never have they been so unbounded by our physical weakness, which for earlier generations limited what was possible; never before have human beings had the power at their disposal to act in ways that our ancestors would have regarded, not as human, but as godlike, with all the terrible responsibilities such power inevitably brings.

THE ETHICAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGE OF OUR POWER

This uniqueness in our condition today reminds us of another distinctive quality of the extreme prospects in our time. As we think about both our best and worst capabilities, we are likely to find that our discomfort—horror even—at the satanic power we now hold looms larger than whatever comfort or satisfaction we might find in our capacity for good. What, we may ask, is the point of being awed at medical advances if tomorrow vastly more of us may be wiped out in the burst of a few terrible explosives than have been killed in all the plagues of history? Why should we exult in our ability to voyage through interplanetary space when we constantly risk making our home planet largely uninhabitable? Why should we take comfort in the prospect that limitless supplies of energy may soon be available when we consider the destructive potential of such massive amounts of energy?

The more we consider, the more likely we are to see that the worst possibilities we face are more hypnotizing and commanding than the best. If headlong disaster engulfs us, we shall no longer have the leisure to accomplish those marvelous advances in civilized life that otherwise seem to be within our grasp. We shall then have to cope, if we are able, with a human society that has retrogressed so drastically that basic survival values must take precedence over other, more advanced or “civilized” concerns.

But that is not our only or even our most troubling consideration. We increasingly suspect that the worst possibilities for humanity’s continuation on the planet are themselves the direct result of the same forces that have produced what we think of as the best prospects. If the Western world had not undergone its industrial revolution during the past two centuries—a phenomenon that brought dramatic increases in the general standard of living in mature industrial societies before it began to spread to other regions—it would not today have the technology to build atomic bombs as well as automobiles, to poison rivers and streams with pollutants while enabling a single farmer to produce vastly more food than his peasant ancestors, or to create the conditions for totalitarian political systems while producing computers and television sets.

We begin to notice that *all* the developments we list as characteristic of the “best of times” and the “worst of times” are somehow related

to accomplishments in science and technology. None can be traced to advances in ethics, humanistic studies, and the arts, or what philosophers call metaphysics. No one would dream of suggesting that the 1980s are the best of times because of breakthroughs we have made in getting human beings to live together peaceably, or in producing the greatest art the world has ever known, or in discovering how to rear children so that they all are smarter, happier, and better citizens than their parents, or because we have exhibited greater love for our neighbors than humans did in the past.

Conversely, when we think about the worst of human behavior, we may note that our century has brought forth some of history's greatest tyrants. But we would not say, when we considered it, that a Hitler or a Stalin established such grim records because they were inherently more evil than certain people in an earlier period. The scope of their evil deeds was possible because of the availability of technologies that permitted greater or more far-reaching ruthlessness, technologies that have refined spying to a high degree, controlled the movement of people, and made possible mass murder on a scale unknown to the ancients.

These examples of the power of modern tyrants should remind us of two fundamental facts about the world we live in. First, all our modern technologies are instruments of power. They serve to supplement the comparatively puny ability of even the strongest or most intelligent human being to have an impact on the material world. Every time we call sounds and pictures from the airwaves by turning on a television set or travel in an airplane or switch on an electric light, or do any of the countless other things that draw upon modern technology, we are asserting our mastery over some aspect of the material universe that far exceeds our natural ability. What separates us more than anything else from our primitive ancestors is this vastly greater power that we have acquired.¹

Second, the technologies themselves are morally neutral: They can be used either for good or for evil and themselves contain no guidelines, no instructions, to tell us which is which. The technologies that enable us to communicate almost instantly with other people throughout the globe can also be used to invade our privacy and otherwise control us in a myriad of ways; the technologies that let us travel faster than the speed of sound can also carry instruments of mass destruction to rain fire down from heaven; and the technologies that run the vast industrial machine that gives us wealth and power over so much of the physical world are also those that make possible both genocide and ecocide—terms that describe two ultimate, cataclysmic events that, not coincidentally, have entered the language only in our time.

Now we have come full circle as we see that those technological developments that today give promise of our best of times are also those that can provide the very worst. Not long ago many Americans

would have placed upon their best list the apparent promise that nuclear power soon would provide a virtually limitless, cheap, and nonpolluting source of energy for future generations. After the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979, many ceased to view that particular technology with such optimism. If the possibilities inherent in genetic engineering excite our imaginations today, we should remember that in addition to their beneficial prospects, they also have a dreadful potential to interfere in the life process with consequences no one can yet anticipate.² Little imagination is needed to grasp the possible dire consequences in the misapplication of virtually any technology that might also contribute to our list of wonderful developments. Moreover, we should by now begin to see that the unique capacity both our best and our worst lists have to push human capability toward godlike extremes in our time is the direct result of the very nature of technological development: i.e., it is cumulative and irreversible. As long as technology does not lead eventually to the destruction or radical retrogression of the human race, which we all know is more than a small possibility, it proceeds to build upon itself in directions that give its creators ever greater power, for good or evil, over the physical universe.

We have not learned to deal adequately with this situation; for many of us, much of the time, our response is no response at all. We try not to think about it while we go about the pressing business of daily living, which normally does not force us to treat matters of eschatology. Or we regard these matters as too weighty and important for anyone but an expert to treat (the fact that most people see themselves as nearly powerless in the face of the godlike possibilities open to the human race is an interesting paradox, whose implications we shall explore). We tend to be so much the children of a scientific age that we are tempted to say, when confronted with the dangers of our time, "Well, the scientists will discover something." If we use up fossil fuels, then someone will find replacements. If the metal ore necessary to keep the industrial machine going is all mined, then we will substitute plastics or other synthetics. If the earth's arable land has about reached the limit of what it can support, then we will develop aquaculture. If the planet gets too crowded, then, of course, we will colonize space. And if nuclear weapons threaten to annihilate us, then we will simply spend billions of dollars more on other high-technology weapons to protect us.

THE INADEQUACY OF SCIENTIFIC "SOLUTIONS"

These may not be impossible scenarios, though many of the best minds among us have their doubts. The problem with relying on such developments as solutions is that they are not solutions at all—not, at least, to the problems that really matter for the future of humanity

on the planet, because these are above all political and economic problems, problems related to the ways human beings live and prosper as individuals and in their relations with one another throughout the globe. Whatever power technological solutions may provide us for further mastery and control over our nonhuman environment will also give us additional power to destroy that environment and all the species, including *Homo sapiens*, that draw life from it. Every technological capability we may develop to do greater good for our own and future generations carries with it a capability for evil. What is worse, as we have realized, is that we have arrived at a point in our development when we realistically can expect that the dire, if unforeseen, consequences of these new powers will far outweigh their benefits.

Good and evil. We cannot seem to avoid using these terms whenever we consider the applications of our modern technologies. These terms have no meaning outside the realm of human thought and action, for they relate exclusively to how human beings live or try to live. Moreover, they are not concepts that have a place within the postulates of the scientific method, which proceeds from the assumption that the material world is paramount, that it must be studied and understood by one who proceeds agnostically, that is, without a priori prejudices or values to color what may be learned from the facts under investigation. This is not to say, of course, that scientists are more immoral than the rest of us; the greatest of them have been profoundly concerned with the moral issues of their time and often have shown a real sensitivity to the implications of their discoveries for good and evil in human life.³ Yet when a scientist is concerned with issues of human value, he or she has entered a realm outside that of science, one that encompasses politics and includes metaphysics.

That realm needs the attention of us all—scientists and nonscientists alike—and in a far more rigorous and serious way than typically is given if we are to save ourselves from the Faustian capabilities we now have at our command. If, in fact, humankind has a future worth hoping for—one in which we are no longer threatened by nuclear explosions, whether accidental or deliberately planned; one in which the genetic material of the species is not irreparably damaged by radiation or other poisoning; one in which mass murder, economic deprivation, and the most extreme forms of political oppression are at least considerably reduced, if not eliminated—it will be because, and only because, we have turned away from the mindless expectation that science will somehow save us and have moved seriously to try to save ourselves through the only means we have at our disposal: the careful examination of public policy choices, followed by action calculated to advance our chosen values.

The overriding need today is to learn to make ethically informed decisions about the nature and direction of our lives together on the