

INTRODUCTION

Growing Apart?

America and Europe in the Twenty-First Century

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As the Cold War drew to a close, most students of international politics had come to believe that the relationship between the United States and Europe was much more than an alliance of interest. The “West” was also a set of ideas: liberal democracy, human rights, and welfare state capitalism were more than just temporary expedients. Taken together, they were the key institutional expressions of the shared values of the West. It is true that the West has never been a unified and homogeneous entity. Still, most of us believed that there was a common project and, whatever our differences, what held us together was far more important than what divided us. Indeed, many of us believed that the countries of the industrialized West were also becoming more alike in their basic values, their models of political economy, and their modes of foreign policy.

Of course, it was never politically correct to assert this, and many of us offered ritual critiques of “the end of history” thesis.¹ Yet it was sometimes difficult to see things otherwise. The louder the protests against the assertion of the final triumph of liberalism, the more inevitable it all seemed. It was hard to deny that Western democratic liberalism won out because this system was simply better than all the alternatives. Consequently, the American–European alliance would dominate the world for as long as any reasonable analyst could foresee. The attacks of September 11, 2001, drove home this consensus. When terrorists brought down the World Trade Center in New York, it was understood that this was not just an attack on America. It was an attack on the very idea of the West.

Who would have thought that only a few years later this basic consensus would be brought into question? Rather than confidently predicting the

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1992).

inevitable spread of liberal values and institutions across the globe, many have come to question whether these institutions are even appropriate for much of the world.² Whereas the 9/11 attacks at first invoked enormous support for the United States, a sense of common identity and declarations from European allies that “We are All Americans,” such sentiments gave way within a few short years to blossoming anti-Americanism and a new “Transatlantic Divide.”³ Relations between the United States and its traditional European allies quickly recovered from the low point reached in the months before the war in Iraq in early 2003, but the periodic attempts since then to recapture the lost essence of the Cold War partnership have only highlighted the fact that something has changed.

The purpose of this book is to offer a deeper understanding of the sources of cohesion and division both within and between the developed democracies in North America and Europe. To explore these issues, we have brought together a diverse group of experts, each of whom has been asked to examine various dimensions of the growing divide between America and its historical friends and ideological allies. This book does not offer a singular and straightforward answer to complicated questions. Instead it offers a set of fascinating essays, each of which probes different dimensions underlying America’s increasingly strained relationship with its democratic neighbors.

Typically, those who have written on the strained relationship within the West focus on foreign policy and speak to these issues as if they were exclusively problems of international relations. The central idea motivating this book is different. This book is premised on the belief that in order to explain what is happening *between* democratic states of the West, one must first understand what is happening *inside* these countries. By focusing our analysis

² This is especially true of the disappointment with democracy promotion. See Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2002, pp. 5–21; idem, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2004).

³ The literature is large. On the attitudes preceding the invasion of Iraq, a good statement is Charles Kupchan, “The End of the West,” *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2002; on the impact of the Iraq War, see Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004); Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, *Alliance at Risk: The United States and Europe since September 11* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Peter H. Merkel, *The Distracted Eagle: The Rift between America and Old Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Bruno Tertrais, *La Guerre Sans Fin: L’Amérique Dans L’Engagement* (Paris: Édition du Seuil et La République des Idées, 2004); on anti-Americanism, see Andrei Markovits, *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

on what is happening inside Western democratic states and exploring the divergent trends within them, we can gain far greater insight into how, why, and whether the West is truly growing apart.

We approached the design and contents of this book in an intuitive way. We asked ourselves: what are the most important social forces and policy areas shaping democratic capitalist states today? The answers were obvious: the persistence of religion as a force in public life in America and Europe; changing social values within democratic states; the decline of traditional news media and the growth of “new” media in its many forms; the increasing economic competition between states for capital, labor, and jobs in a globalizing world economy; the role of neoliberal economics and the privately financed think tanks that promote free-market ideals; immigration and the consequent growth of ethnic diversity in rich democracies; and last, but certainly not least, the divergent interests and identities of different North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations after the demise of the Soviet Union. We believed that only by looking deeply into each of these different policy issues and social trends could one truly gauge whether the United States and its democratic allies are in fact growing apart. But from the outset, we understood that no single author could examine all of these diverse issues in anything but a superficial manner. Thus, we sought out some of the world’s leading experts in each of these social and policy arenas and specifically asked them to explore how, why, and whether America is different from its democratic neighbors and also where they saw these countries heading.⁴

Are we growing apart? All of our contributors point to differences between the United States and Europe that were in place well before the crisis in transatlantic relations of 2003 over the invasion of Iraq. The different place of religion and immigration in the United States and Europe, the different level of trust in the market as the primary means of distributing resources, and the varying degree of commitment to multilateralism all reflect long-term institutional, creedal, and power differentials across the Atlantic.

Where our contributors disagree is on the matter of trajectory. For the most part, those who concentrate on domestic politics and society maintain that the divide is in fact growing. The United States and Europe are increasingly different. At the same time, however, these domestic analyses also stress deep divides *within* the societies of the West that in some ways rival those between them. On the other hand, our two contributors who

⁴ This group met first in Boulder, Colorado, in early June 2005, and again in Toronto, Ontario, in October of that same year.

focus on transatlantic relations maintain that the divide on foreign affairs between the two continents exists, but the evidence of it deepening is scant at best. In short, the story is one of the United States and Europe growing apart as societies and polities but also managing to find enough common ground to survive, not only as an alliance but even as a community of nations on the global stage.

Whether divergent societies will be able to sustain their close alliance into the future must remain an open question. It is worth thinking through, however, the forces that caused the question to be posed in the first place. What we find is not the narcissism of small differences between the United States and its democratic allies but a reconsideration of the meaning and importance of these differences in light of a changed world at the end of the Cold War.

After the Cold War

The collapse of the Soviet Union was certainly a victory for liberal democracy. It was, however, a victory especially for the United States, the leader of the West and the most significant exemplar of the liberal creed. In the eyes of many, it was American liberalism, not European social democracy, that brought down the Berlin Wall. This fact (or at least this interpretation of the facts) has carried enormous consequences. In the United States, the end of the Cold War demonstrated the essential benevolence of the American way of doing things and proved how much the rest of the world needed U.S. leadership.⁵ For Americans, this point in time marked the beginning of a new era in which U.S. influence could guide the world toward ever greater peace, prosperity, and freedom. Indeed, for most Americans, the defeat of communism was proof that market economies are not just more efficient than state-dominated ones, they are also morally superior. The economic and political collapse of communism reaffirmed American faith in individual liberty and economic liberalism. Clearly, not everyone saw it exactly this way, but this was the dominant view in the United States.

Europeans, it turned out, drew quite different conclusions from communism's demise. For many, the end of the Cold War engendered a profound ambivalence about America's role in the world and a deep concern for the future of their social order. Yes, the West had become rich under benevolent American hegemony. But what would the world look like with only one superpower? Would the United States always use its unchallenged power

⁵ In the words of the Clinton administration, the United States was the "indispensable nation."

wisely? Who would stand up for the welfare state if there were no systemic rival challenging the market economy? Who would preserve the hard-won victories of social and Christian democracy in Europe? With these questions in mind, many Europeans came to view the European Union not merely as a large market but as a potential economic, political, and perhaps even military counterpoise to the United States.⁶ In short, the victory of the market over the state at the end of the Cold War created a profound intellectual and moral challenge within the West. It is precisely this challenge that raised the question of whether Europe and America are growing apart.

These dilemmas of domestic politics and society were mirrored in the realm of foreign policy. In an ironic twist of fate, at the very moment when American power appeared to be at its zenith, it became superfluous for many Europeans. Absent the threat from the East, Europeans soon questioned the need for the American shield that had so long protected them. Moreover, although it was obvious that capitalism was victorious over communism, it was far from obvious that America's version of capitalism was preferable to European social democracy. The spread of the American economic model (under the rubric of "globalization") was increasingly perceived by many (although not all) Europeans as a threat to the embedded capitalism that had stabilized politics and society after World War II. What was before considered American political leadership was now seen in many parts of Europe as American unilateralism and what was considered American economic leadership was now thought by many to be rapacious neoliberalism. Of course, not everyone perceived the American unipolar moment as a threat, and not all European leaders shared then French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine's characterization of the United States as a *hyperpuissance*, but many, perhaps most, did.

A New Great Transformation?

The end of the Cold War laid bare a set of political, economic, and social challenges that in important ways recalls those of an earlier era so brilliantly described by Karl Polanyi in his seminal work *The Great Transformation*.⁷ In that study, Polanyi showed that the triumph of liberal capitalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the product of political will and economic interest. He argued that capitalism did not win out because

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "Why Europe Needs a Constitution," *New Left Review*, September–October 2001.

⁷ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

it was simply more “natural,” or because it better reflected human nature, but because those who promoted this system had become economically and politically more powerful than their opponents. Perhaps Polanyi’s greatest insight was to show that the victory of liberal capitalist ideas and institutions was destined always to remain partial. Capitalism’s victory engendered its own antithesis in the form of the twin rejectionist ideologies of communism and fascism. In the long run, after two world wars, the desire for a pure liberalism was blunted and the global order could be stabilized by international institutions, democratic politics, and social policies, the historic compromise that political scientists referred to as embedded liberalism.

There are of course crucial differences between the post–Cold War world and that of the first half of the twentieth century. But there are important parallels, too. Once again, there are those with significant political and economic power at their back who see this moment as a time to push forward to an ever more ideal version of what has made modern capitalism so successful. And once again there is a countermovement. These forces should not be understood as simply America versus the rest of the world. In contrast to this, the evidence within this book points to the existence of a “two-track movement”; the centrifugal and centripetal forces playing themselves out today can be seen not only between but also within the states of the democratic West.

Are we once again in the 1930s? Clearly not. One of the key differences is that at this moment free-market capitalism is typically identified with one country, the United States. Furthermore, even within the United States, liberal capitalism has been restrained by calls for social justice. Like its European counterparts, the United States also witnessed an historic social compromise in the last half of the twentieth century. But America’s compromise was always different from Europe’s. The vast open spaces, unimaginable natural resources, and the near constant flow of disaffected European immigrants seemed to confirm the belief that it was the market itself, unguided by the state, that created wealth. Thus even while a compromise was struck, the balance in the United States always tilted in favor of the market.

The Europeans, by contrast, never shared the Americans’ unbridled enthusiasm for the market. Yet, as long as the Soviet Union remained a threat to Western Europe, the differences between the American and European models of capitalism seemed more differences in degree than in kind. The Soviet threat also made American leadership, and especially American military power, a matter of existential importance for most Europeans. In short, notwithstanding transatlantic differences in views about how society should be organized, throughout the 1980s and even the beginning of the 1990s,

the American economic model appeared to be particular to the United States and American power seemed to most citizens on both sides of the Atlantic to be benign, even benevolent.

Yet, just as Polanyi could discern a countermovement against market society, a countermovement that took on multiple ideological forms from left to right, so too can one now identify a multifaceted countermovement to the victory of the American economic model and the singularity of American power that started to take shape towards the end of the 1990s and in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Instead of opposition to market society alone, however, the new countermovement encompasses opposition to a much broader array of freedoms that have developed since Polanyi's time. Although outside of the West this opposition has occasionally taken on violent forms, even within the West it is precisely the questions of how free, how liberal, and how democratic society should be that are at the core of our understanding of the divide within the West.

Perhaps most illustrative of the new countermovement is the reshuffling occurring in the conventional views of what is “left” and “right” in both America and Europe. Consider, for example, the continuing debates over free trade, immigration, democracy promotion, and religion. Much of the most biting criticism of outsourcing and wage competition now comes not from its traditional home on the left but from the populist right. Perhaps more surprising, much of the most sustained criticism of immigration and the free movement of people across international borders has emerged not on the nativist right but on the environmentalist left. Democracy promotion has become the *bête noir* not only of the anti-imperialist left but of the realist right. Finally, on questions of religion, it is not only the right that argues for a place for religion in public life (for Christianity) but also the multicultural left (for Islam).

European and American populism, of both the right and the left, appear increasingly cut from the same cloth. Democrats and liberals across America have gnashed their teeth over Thomas Frank's polemic “What's the Matter with Kansas?” The problem set out by Frank is that people in the middle of the country apparently vote against their self-interest. The conservatives have duped these hapless red state voters, Frank maintains, by talking about moral values but enacting policies that these people should not favor.⁸ Rarely do these same liberals wonder what is the matter with France (or Norway or Denmark), where economic nationalists of the left and xenophobes of the

⁸ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004).

right are leading some of the most popular parties in these countries. This suggests that American fans of Lou Dobbs on CNN and working-class Jean-Marie Le Pen supporters in France are products of the same phenomenon, a backlash against the triumph of liberalism. The key differences in political expression are not so much the products of different frustrations, but of different political institutional structures that channel these sentiments in different ways.

Of course, from the standpoint of Africa, Latin America, or Asia, what potentially divides America and Europe may seem trivial compared with what unites them. Both are rich and powerful compared to the other continents. The bulk of world trade flows back and forth across the Atlantic between Europe and North America. Yet, even with a smoothly functioning West in the eyes of much of the rest of the world, the opponents of the West remain keenly aware of the fissures within and between the societies of America and Europe. Whether they are able to exploit these fissures to divide the West from without will depend, in part, upon whether the West is already growing apart from within.

Religion and Public Values

One of the most surprising trends across the West has been the sustained and even growing impact of religion on political life. In the United States, a country founded with a constitutional separation of church and state, religious leaders are both active and influential in political campaigns and public policy. Indeed, politicians seem compelled to profess their faith in order to get elected. In Europe, the growing appeal of Islam among immigrants from the Muslim world has become one of the most difficult political and moral challenges facing these putatively Christian nations.

These developments are surprising because modernity and secularism were supposed to go hand in hand. Judeo-Christian teachings may have helped lay the groundwork for capitalist modernity, but social theorists since Max Weber have maintained that organized religion would decline in importance across the West. This expectation was founded on the belief that as societies modernize, citizens should become more rational and less superstitious. Though rarely stated explicitly, the implicit argument here is that religion *is* superstition: Religious belief grows out of the unknown and, as science advances, people should look for increasingly rational explanations for the natural world around them rather than mystical or “irrational” ones. The inevitable result, so the argument goes, is that religion would slowly die off everywhere.

In Europe we do indeed see a secular decline in religious institutions, church attendance, and the role of organized religions in public life. But we also see a countermovement. To be sure, political Islam may currently constitute a small ripple in Europe's political landscape, but scholars and journalists alike now view this as a potential tsunami due to both demographic trends and because Christianity *is in fact* deeply institutionalized into European politics and identity. In institutionally secular America, one can also see the rise of politicized religion as a countermovement to the social liberalism that has dominated cultural life since at least the 1960s. Although it is not true that Americans on the whole are more religious today than they were several decades ago, it is clearly the case that religion is an increasingly powerful force in American public life. Whereas churches in Europe are more likely to be filled with tourists than worshipers, American churches are thriving, many offering four or five services every Sunday to congregations that measure in the thousands.

What accounts for these differences? Steven Pfaff's fascinating analysis begins by noting that there is no evidence that Americans have become more "spiritual" in recent years. Neither do they value spirituality more than their European counterparts. On the contrary, he believes that there is a market for "spiritual goods" in every society. This demand is met outside of traditional churches in most of the advanced world. In the United States, with its unregulated religious marketplace and fierce interdenominational competition for adherents, spiritual leaders are more likely to satisfy the needs of their constituents. In Europe, on the other hand, traditional church leaders draw a state salary whether they meet these needs or not. As a result, Americans go to church and Europeans do not.

These institutional differences are important because they may have political consequences. As anyone who has attended fundamentalist religious services in America will know, pastors do not restrict their sermons to spiritual matters. Of course, people of all denominations attend church at least in part because they want to understand the world in which they live. In the United States, however, religious leaders increasingly use the pulpit to espouse political and not simply worldly advice. (This was equally true of Reverend Martin Luther King as it was of Reverend Jerry Falwell and the local imam.)

What do people "learn" in churches? What should we make of the fact that Americans go to church more often than Europeans, but both are equally spiritual? We want to suggest that the prominence of religion in America is important not only because of the political activism of its religious leaders, but also because of what happens *in* the church. In other words, religious leaders convey social and political messages. As Pfaff notes, in America

religiosity is closely correlated with positive attitudes toward the free market, whereas in Europe religiosity tends to correlate with critical attitudes toward the market.⁹ The exact explanation for this difference is unclear, but it is certainly reasonable to think that churches that provide a large number of social services and educational facilities in the United States regard the state provisions of these services as competition.

The logic of this analysis casts an entirely new light on the growing religious divide in Europe. If we accept that the separation between church and state has made American religious entrepreneurs more competitive and better at catering to the needs of their “customers,” then it stands to reason that the institutional discrimination against the Islamic leaders in Europe will also work to sharpen their entrepreneurial skills. Moreover, at the same moment when the traditional welfare state is under intense fiscal strain (as Mark Blyth discusses in Chapter 5), these newly emerging Islamic “religious firms” stand waiting in the wings anxious and willing to fill in the void. As the American case shows, once their customers are in the pews (or on their prayer mats), spiritual leaders do not restrict themselves to matters of spirituality. As this is the case, we may indeed be “growing apart,” but in ways that might make Europeans just as uncomfortable as any liberal American.

The increasing sophistication of political/religious leaders helps explain why American politics has become so polarized in recent years. American values are in fact dividing into two broad groups. Significantly, as the chapter by Christopher Cochrane, Neil Nevitte, and Steve White demonstrates, the values within each group are becoming *more coherent*. Whereas for Christians in Europe religiosity and moral values have essentially decoupled, in the United States those who define themselves as religious have become ever more traditionalist in their moral outlooks while those with secular orientations are growing more permissive.

Cochrane et al. convincingly demonstrate that people with strong religious beliefs are systematically different from their secular counterparts on a broad palette of cognate values, and these differences are increasing. Perhaps most significantly, the relationship between traditional religious values and attitudes toward distributive justice is diverging in America. While in Europe there does not appear to be an association, in the United States “left” and “right” are increasingly “bundled” with traditional religious values. As they note:

[K]nowing where an American stood on moral values meant that one could predict with increasing accuracy where he or she stood on economic justice, left-right

⁹ Cochrane et al.’s findings in Chapter 2 of this book support this contention.