Introduction

This third volume of my trilogy fulfills the rash promise I made in *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (2003) to produce a theory of order. It seeks to explain, at least in part, how and why orders form, evolve and decay. I attempt to show the utility of my theory in case studies of democracy in the United States and authoritarianism in China. Toward these theoretical and practical ends, I draw on literature in political theory, history, comparative and international politics, ethology, psychology, and literature.

My book builds on the epistemological foundations and substantive arguments of the two previous volumes – *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (2003) and *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (2008). In *Tragic Vision of Politics*, I adopt Thucydides' strategy of tacking back and forth among orders at the individual, state, and regional levels of society to better understand how they function and influence one another. Ancient Greeks framed the problem in a manner not dissimilar from our notion of fractals; they thought orders revealed the same patterns at different degrees of magnification. For Thucydides, and for Plato, order and disorder, balance and imbalance, and growth and decay are roughly similar for people, poleis, and Hellas.

This symmetry across levels of analysis may have characterized late fifth and early fourth-century Greece. In traditional societies, political, economic, and social orders were largely coterminous, as they still are in some societies in the Amazon Basin and New Guinea. With modernity, these domains have become increasingly distinct, although never insulated from one another. The disciplines of anthropology, economics, sociology, and political science rest on the conceit that they can be studied independently of one another. Nobody today would follow the ancient Greeks in treating social and political spheres as inseparable. It would, however, be a mistake to deny deep connections between individuals and their domestic society, and between order and disorder at the personal, state, regional, and international levels.

A Cultural Theory of International Relations elaborates the Greek understanding of the psyche and demonstrates its relevance to foreign policy and international relations in a series of case studies. Its principal claim is that *thumos* – infelicitously but unavoidably rendered in English as "spirit" – has been neglected by modern social science yet remains an important source of human behavior. It captures the Greek insight that self-esteem is an important human need, and one that often rivals and trumps appetite. For Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle people achieve self-esteem by excelling in activities valued by their society; we could add family and peer group to the list. They feel good about themselves when they win the approbation of those who matter to them. People often project their needs for self-esteem on to their states and *thumos* accordingly encourages the striving for national status and distinction. It is a major source of national solidarity and international conflict.

A Cultural Theory of International Relations develops a paradigm of politics based on *thumos* and presents it as an ideal type that can be used to understand international relations. I maintain that *thumos*, along with appetite and the emotion of fear, generates distinct logics of conflict, cooperation and risk-taking, and gives rise to different kinds of hierarchies. *Thumos*- and appetite-based hierarchies appeal to different principles of justice: fairness versus equality. In the real world – in contradistinction to the ideal type worlds of my theory – appetite, *thumos*, and fear are always present to some degree and responsible for domestic and foreign policies that sometimes appear contradictory. The relative importance of these three motives is a function of the degree to which reason restrains and educates *thumos* and appetite. Fear rises in importance as reason loses control of either and self-restraint gives way to self-indulgence. At a deeper level, changes in the relative importance of appetite and spirit are due to shifts in values and material conditions within societies. I discuss this evolution in Chapter 3.

My epistemology is further developed and elaborated in *Why Nations Fight* (2010), *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactual and International Relations* (2010), and *Max Weber and International Relations* (2017). They are components of a broader project that seeks to reframe our approach to international relations, and social science more generally. It embeds the study of political behavior in psychology, history, and philosophy. Psychology offers insights not only into individual and group behavior, but also into human motives beyond appetite. It also problematizes the concept of reason and situates it in a cultural context. History reveals how culture and epoch determine which human drives dominate and how they are channeled. Yoked to psychology, it alerts us to how each culture and epoch confronts different kinds of challenges that have

profound implications for political behavior. Political philosophy directs our attention to the big questions of human existence, most notably, how should society be organized and who should rule?

I treat these origins, evolution, and decay of orders at a very abstract level because I believe, *pace* Weber, that micro and macro outcomes in the social world are context dependent. Context is determining because decisions and policies are generally path dependent. Outcomes in turn are often the product of path dependence, confluence, accident, and agency. Even when actors behave rationally – not always the norm – they may be framing their decisions in terms of other problems and goals, making their choices appear less than fully rational. Outcomes and their follow-on effects are the products of complex, often non-linear, interactions among multiple actors. For this reason, actor expectations, even if the result of careful assessments, may be confounded. And understanding why actors behave as they do is only a starting point; we also need to know how their choices and behavior are aggregated.[1] The best analytical strategy is to develop ideal types and use them as starting points for narrative explanations or forecasts that build in context.

My trilogy has normative as well as theoretical goals. I wrote the first volume, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, at the end of the Cold War. The United States, under President Bill Clinton, was showing an increasing lack of restraint in its dealing with other actors in a world some realists now triumphantly described as "unipolar." I sought to recapture the wisdom of what I called classical realism. Imbued with a tragic understanding of life, its proponents, beginning with Thucydides, warn of the effects of hubris, emphasize the practical value of goals and means consonant with the ethical values of the time, and consider great powers their own worst enemies. The book was published in 2003, the year the United States and Britain invaded Iraq. In conception, planning, and execution this intervention was a textbook case of hubris. Instead of consolidating US authority around the world, as the Bush administration expected, it seriously eroded its standing and influence. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq further destabilized the Middle East, promoted the rise of ISIS, and were indirectly responsible for follow-on humanitarian disasters in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

This volume is equally timely. It appears in the aftermath of Donald Trump's presidential victory in the United States and the Brexit referendum in Britain. Many Americans believe their constitutional order is at risk, and many Europeans believe their supranational project is threatened. The two crises share some important causes. They also feed on one another in a variety of ways. NATO intervention in Libya and the Syrian civil war prompted a flood of refugees into Europe. Right-wing,

anti-EU nationalists have exploited this phenomenon to dramatically increase their share of the vote in some half-dozen countries. They oppose European integration, the European Court, and the free flow of people and ideas. They are supported by an American president who also opposes immigration, and worries other Europeans by tweeting his admiration for President Putin of Russia and doubts about the viability of NATO.

Most studies of the viability of the postwar order understandably address the threats to it; they are interested in their immediate causes, and often, in their shorter-term consequences. I direct my attention more to the causes of these causes, which have developed or unfolded over decades, or even centuries. Maestro Seiji Ozawa recalls that Herbert von Karajan told his assistant conductors that it was their responsibility to create long phrases. "Don't just read individual measures; read longer units," he insisted. Ozawa says that they were accustomed to reading four to eight measure phrases at the time, but that Karajan sought order and purpose in sixteen, even thirty-two measures. Nothing in the score indicated the need to do this, but he believed that it provided deeper insight into the meaning of the music.[2] I attempt something similar by offering a longer read of the underlying causes and mechanisms responsible for the fragility of Western domestic and regional orders and their Chinese authoritarian counterpart.

To the extent that scholars look for underlying causes of disorder they often turn to economics and focus on the growing disparity between the rich and the rest in the developed world. Thomas Piketty, among others, has documented this disturbing phenomenon and helped to raise public consciousness about it.[3] Scholars and pundits have also sounded the tocsin about the negative consequences of globalization. Most of these analyses consider inequality as de facto destabilizing without considering the broader context in which it is understood and evaluated by the people it most affects. This is one focus of my book. I develop a theory of order that posits a set of relationships among values, hierarchies, and principles of justice, and identifies the underlying conditions of resilience and fragility. This includes the subset of conditions in which inequality is most unacceptable. They have to do with the relative importance society puts on appetite versus honor and equality versus fairness, the thickness of the rule packages governing elite behavior, and the extent to which they conform to them.

Such an understanding of political order indicates that wealth and its display assume different meanings – positive and negative – in different social contexts where they may also have divergent consequences for political stability. To fathom these relationships, and others important for order and disorder – and more importantly, for human fulfilment – we

must go beyond economics to sociology, political science, philosophy, and history, and beyond theories that attribute outcomes to so-called structural factors, whether they be the market or the balance of power. Attempts to explain the behavior and contentedness of people in terms of their economic interests and relative affluence do not take us very far and blinds us to the more important question of what values and goals people adopt and pursue. This is equally true of politics, where leaders and peoples make different choices. Goals and strategies are culturally and historically specific, not something that is universal and readily specified.

I have a second, parallel agenda that has to do with political theory. I offer my book as an example of how to repair the rift between political science and political philosophy. The latter owes its origins to the fact that no one can make a rule and expect others to follow it without providing some kind of reasoned argument about why it is necessary or advisable. Every argument gives rise to a counter-argument, and every claim a counter-claim. There is no politics without argument, not even war is an alternative because once hostilities cease argument resumes. Arguments, moreover, are more than window dressing for rule by fiat. Good arguments – defined in terms of their appeal – are an important source of influence.

There is no political order without an argument that explains why that order is worthwhile. And no political order is immune from counter-claims by those who want to replace or reform it. A key concern of these arguments is who should rule. In this respect, political theory is political science because arguments about who should rule are part of the explan-ation for who does rule.

This idea is at the very heart of the book. It is the kind of political theory that is political science, and the kind of political science that is political theory. It harks back to Aristotle whose political science deeply informs my project. It is also apparent in the great works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century political theory and political science, many of which I also draw on. I nevertheless differ from Aristotle and some modern philosophers in an important way. I do not believe that politics is the key to the good life or should be considered a higher form of activity that any other. I follow Michael Oakeshott in believing that politics should aim no higher than "making arrangements for society."[4] Oakeshott doubted we could ever figure out the "right" way to live, even as individuals, let alone as a society. This was because we were multiple selves, "a seething mass of unresolved contradictions."[5] I make a similar argument in *The Politics and Ethics of Identity*.

Yet the deep connection between political theory and political science seems to have been largely severed in the postwar era – with the recent development of international political theory a notable exception. Partly

this is because political science overvalues arguments about methods, especially statistical or rationalist ones, often at the expense of talking about or trying to understand politics. And partly it is because political theory has isolated itself. Some political theorists too readily assume that their task is solely to ascertain how things should be, and to communicate this "guidance" to the political world. They believe that if we reason well about politics, we will arrive at the truth about how politics should go, and there is no reason why the real political world cannot be brought into correspondence with the truth. These assumptions are mistaken, even arrogant.

Pre-Kantian political theory was more interpretative and less didactic. It was humble about our ability to ascertain the truth about politics and justice, it saw the partial truth on different sides in arguments about justice. It saw how these arguments serve to persuade and to legitimatize; it recognized the empirical force of ideas, often very flawed ideas. This book returns to that older practice of political theory – a practice that integrated political theory and political science by tending to the real-world force of ideas and arguments. Nothing is more elemental than political order, and nowhere is the force of ideas more apparent and important. The core argument of this book is that there is no political order without an argument about why that order is just – an argument that works, that persuades, at least some. And there is no political order that is invulnerable to counter-arguments, which is why no political order is permanent. In short, ideas and arguments about justice are the fundamental cause of political order and disorder. By bringing this elemental and profound insight back into focus for a new generation of readers, this book gives hope of rejoining political science and political theory.

How should you read this book, as it is neither traditional political science nor political theory? It poses a larger set of questions than most political science research, finds only partial and plausible answers to them, and at a level of analysis that does not lend itself to many testable propositions or policy prescriptions. It asks questions more appropriate to political theory, but not with the intention of arguing the right or just way of doing something. Rather, the book inquires into beliefs people hold about justice and how they affect their behavior. The theoretical "meat" of the book is found in the first instance in the four theoretical chapters that pose a novel way of looking at political orders and evaluating their robustness. They develop a framework for thinking about this problem and how it should be studied. They elaborate multiple, initially divergent but ultimately convergent, pathways to disorder. They identify their triggers and likely consequences. They attempt to make them more comprehensible and vivid through short historical illustrations drawn from different epochs and cultures.

One of Cambridge's readers described *The Rise and Fall of Political Orders* as "a very Lebowish book" that turns to art, literature, music, and philosophy to elaborate foundational concepts. It supplements traditional argument with "playfulness" to construct a "strong statement for political understanding and action." This kind of writing hopes to invoke what the late eighteenth-century German poet Novalis [Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg] called *den Zauberstab der Analogie*, literally "the magic wand of analogy." He envisaged it as an effective vehicle of education, and ultimately of reconciling man and nature. I accept his first claim, and toward this end make connections between art and politics throughout the book. My artistic and philosophical references, and historical examples from the classical world or Middle Ages do more than illustrate my arguments. They enable them in the sense that my engagement with these works of literature and philosophy provided the perspective on life and politics that made this book possible and the two that preceded it in the trilogy. I hope at least some readers will find it an effective and rewarding strategy.

One of my former PhD students, Felix Berenskoetter, now a prominent international scholar in his own right, asked me for whom I was writing. Who did I want to read my book? I had to confess that I had not posed this question, at least explicitly. I thought I was writing for myself. I wanted to know more about why people lived in political orders and why they prospered and declined, sometimes grew stronger and sometimes failed. These were not only the central questions of political science – in the traditional understanding of the term – but were made even more timely by recent events. Upon reflection, I realized that I imagined former mentors as my prime audience, among them Isaiah Berlin, Karl Deutsch, Herman Finer, John Herz, Hans Morgenthau, and Melvin Richter. They shared my interests – more properly, I shared theirs. I learned from them to root my research in big, important questions and not to be afraid to look outside my own field for my insights and answers. Writing what would win their approbation – and might appeal to younger scholars who think like them – is my goal.

Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 attempts to define order and disorder. I suggest that order can be defined as legible, predictable behavior in accord with recognized norms. Robust orders also require a high degree of solidarity among their members. The two conditions are related because it is social cooperation that produces legible and predictable patterns of behavior. Any

definition of order must accordingly incorporate the organizing principle of social rank. It is another source of norms and solidarity, but also of conflict. Finally, we must recognize that orders are based on, and draw strength from, their ability to advance fundamental human needs, which include physical and material security, self-esteem, and social contact. We might define order as a hierarchical arrangement, supported by most of its members, that fosters security, self-esteem, and social contact, encourages solidarity, and results in legible, predictable behavior.

I distinguish between top-down and bottom-up orders. Top-down orders – governments, bureaucracies, and military organizations generally qualify – rely on rules and procedures that have originated with central authorities, or are otherwise sanctioned and enforced by them. Bottom-up orders are the product of an iterative and self-correcting process of trial and error with multiple feedback loops and branches in logic. They are on the whole an emergent property. Top-down and bottom-up orders are ideal types as they rarely exist independently of each other and generally penetrate one other to some degree. Most social orders incorporate and rely on both forms. Their coexistence may be necessary for any large social-political unit, but it is never unproblematic. Each kind of order meets particular needs, and problems can arise where the two intersect.[6]

They are ideal types in a second sense: every society has multiple top-down and bottom-up orders, and both may be highly fragmented. Carlos Noreña describes the administration of the Roman Empire in Nero's time as "for the most part cumbersome, sluggish, and sub-divided into many moving (and disconnected) parts, the overall structure of imperial government was largely insulated from the particular impulses of this or that emperor, or the short-term developments that occurred during this or that reign."[7] This account applies equally to many contemporary top-down orders.

I go on to make the case of process theory and a serious recognition of the importance of agency. I counter the principal objection raised to my multi-volume project: that it relies on ancient Greek thinkers who have a parochial and western understanding of the human psyche and the nature of political order. I then explore the relationship between order and freedom, arguing that the latter depends on the former, although it is by its very nature to some degree in conflict with it. Robust orders find ways of channeling and exploiting these tensions so that they serve as powerful, and necessary, sources of change. I conclude by noting the increasing importance of the principle of equality in the modern world and the challenges and opportunities it presents to modern political orders.

Chapter 2 analyzes the nature of order and the similarities and differences between physical and social orders. It argues that equilibrium

is inappropriate to the study of social phenomena and that the most stable orders are those that undergo significant, incremental change. Given the open-ended nature of the social world, political orders and their evolution cannot be understood in isolation from their economic, social, and intellectual contexts. For the same reason, universal, falsifiable propositions about order are all but impossible. We can nevertheless identify some general reasons for the construction, evolution, decline, and reconstitution of orders and some of the dynamics associated with these processes. Toward this end, I rely on Weberian ideal-type descriptions of societies. The reasons and dynamics I identify can serve as starting points for narratives that analyze specific societies and take into account relevant features of context.

My analysis rests on four substantive assumptions. First, disorder at the top-down level is the default, and all robust orders at this level are temporary; second, robust orders, top-down or bottom-up, must be justified with reference to accepted principles of justice; third, orders become threatened when those principles are challenged, or the discrepancy between them and practice becomes apparent and unacceptable; and fourth, orders require solidarity to soften the consequences of hierarchy.

Principles of justice are central to my analysis of the rise, evolution, decline, and reconstitution of orders. Justice is a fundamental human concern, but so too is order because of the security, material, and emotional benefits it can provide. If justice is the foundation of order, order is necessary for justice. In an ideal world, they would be mutually reinforcing, but this is never the case. They are always to some degree at odds, and difficult trade-offs must be made between them. Those who advocate reforms on the grounds of justice invariably meet opposition from those who assert that the status quo is essential to order and stability. The difficulty of predicting the consequence of changes and a general preference for the evils we know over those we do not, may help explain why people are often willing to put up with orders they consider unjust.

I contend that by far the two most important principles of justice are fairness and equality. There are other principles, but they are more limited in scope and most can be reduced to fairness or equality. Commutative justice refers to relations between individuals or institutions regarding contracts and the equitable exchange of goods. It is restricted to a specific domain, and the norms and laws governing it rest on the principles of fairness or equality, usually some combination of the two. The same is true of procedural justice that refers to the methods used to settle disputes and allocate resources. Here too, norms, laws, and arguments are invariably justified, or invoke, in the case of arguments, principles of fairness or equality.

Chapter 3 examines the origins of social and political orders. It is pos-
sible that hominids of all kinds inherited a propensity to live in social
groups because it greatly enhanced their prospect of survival. For apes
and other primates, social groups provide security and facilitate hunting.
Human communities may have arisen for the same reasons. Social orders
among humans and animals require high degrees of cooperation, and
appear to rest on behavior we associate with the principles of fairness and
equality. Different primate groups and human societies rely on different
degrees and combinations of these principles.

Among humans, interest, honor, and fear generate different logics of
cooperation, conflict, and risk-taking. They also provide different motives
for adherence to rules and norms, which I elaborate. They need to be
theorized in tandem because of their interaction effects. Compliance
for reasons of fear, interest, or honor can over time make it habitual.
This, in turn, can make enforcement easier for either top-down or
bottom-up orders. The relative importance of each mechanism for com-
pliance varies within both kinds of order but there is much more vari-
ance among top-down orders. Modernity has also affected them in more
fundamental ways. Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson rightly observe
that "modernity generates diversity that is always conflictual."[8] To get a
handle on this change, I review the expectations of key nineteenth-cen-
tury sociologists and the theoretical assumptions on which they were
based. None of them refer specifically to top-down or bottom-up orders,
but implicitly make this distinction. Their expectations about their basis
and relative importance vary considerably. Their approaches are useful
starting points for mine.

Chapter 4 analyzes the decline and collapse of orders. They are fra-
gile because they are hierarchical. Stratification encourages exploit-
ation. Elites have power and prestige that they can usually translate into
material, social, and sexual rewards. Those at the bottom have little to no
power or prestige and must labor more and receive less. Why do people,
or collective agents, accept, endorse, and offer up their labor, wealth,
even their lives, for orders in which others reap most of the benefits?

I believe answers are to be found in the powerful emotional and sub-
stantive rewards that orders provide. Most people believe they are more
secure, better off and have higher status within orders than they would
outside of them, even though they may be worse off relative to many, per-
haps most, other members of their society. Social integration confers iden-
tity, enhances self-worth and enables social relationships and intimacy.
Elites, moreover, are generally astute enough to propagate discourses
with the goal of legitimizing the orders from which they benefit. These
discourses invoke metaphorical carrots and sticks, the latter by raising