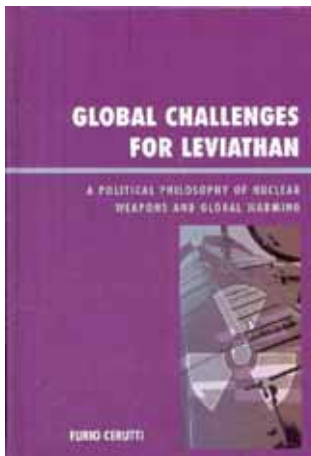


Book Review
Global Challenges for Leviathan
A Political Philosophy of Nuclear Weapons and Global Warming

Furio Cerutti
Lexington Books, Lanham (MD), 2007

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Global Challenges for Leviathan is a philosophical book or, to put it in the author's words, a "philosophical informed diagnosis of our time". Cerutti makes the main aim of his work clear, that is, to reflect on human condition under the threat of nuclear weapons and global warming. The author states that these «issues tell us more about the human condition now and in the future than explicit and current philosophical concepts and debates» (p. 1). At stake is the very survival of our civilization, not in terms of extinction, but at least of civilized coexistence: therefore, human beings are for the first time universally gathered under the same label "humankind", that is understood as a subject and as an object (or as target and actor). In other words, being seriously undermined by man-made threats in its very existence, "humankind" is no longer a notional and philosophical concept but a collective and hopefully *political agent*.

Moving from an interdisciplinary background (ranging from climatology and physics to international relations), Cerutti undertakes a series of reflections within the field of political philosophy. Global challenges are described as «physical facts bearing directly on the political order in which we live» (p. 18) and force us to revise the categories of the modern political realm. Political philosophy seems to claim that modern institutions, rooted in the Hobbesian sovereignty and in the nation-states system, can no longer deal with these ultimate threats. The Author claims that the *modern* nation-states system is ill-equipped to meet global challenges and it turns out to be even counterproductive.

But then does the fall of the modern political system end up with "a postmodernist exit from a collective"? Cerutti takes a firm stand against a postmodernist rhetoric throughout his work, under a twofold point of view. First of all, through an accurate analytical approach, the author advances a sharper conceptualization of global challenges, in particular differentiating them from the sociological concept of "risk". Secondly, the author remarks that, «much to the surprise of postmodernists» (p. 153), global challenges force the recognition of a holistic dimension of both the threats and the need of a collective political answer.

Throughout the whole book and more specifically in the concluding chapter, Cerutti remarks on the importance to establish a minimal set of institutions, meant as a «persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations» (p. 49). Moreover, Cerutti calls for cultural changes that enable us to tackle the global challenges.

The book is organized in two parts, *The Rise and the Fall of Modern Political Rationality* and *Philosophical and Political Perspectives*. The *Introduction* sets up the key-concepts and hence

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states research boundaries. Firstly, the reader is introduced to the definition of “global challenges” and the explanation as to why by this expression we can only refer to nuclear weapons and global warming. These actual threats may be turned into challenges if we grasp the chance to reshape our mind and reorganize our polity in order to contain them. At the core of this chance is the “Hobbesian moment” (see it in detail below): in contrast with other threats (such as AIDS, famine, tsunami) which do not reveal the same degree of duress and urgency, nuclear weapons and man-made climate change push «recalcitrant individuals into the process of establishing the polity» (p. 3). These unprecedented and ultimate threats “can generate forces” driving humankind towards a new political association, which does not stem from a sense of justice or from civilized and moralized attitudes but that emerges from a «new stage of confrontation with life-and-death questions» (p. 193).

In chapter 1, as mentioned above, against «a misleading image of late modernity as an era defined by the predominance of risk» (p. 23), author holds that this latter notion does not apply to global challenges. Nuclear weapons and man-made climate change «confront us with risks that outgrow the modern understanding of risk» (p. 28), meant as a “function” resulting from the “product of the probability and size of loss”. In the case of global challenges, given the impossibility of calculating our risks in numerical terms, we have to recognize that we operate “under conditions of uncertainty rather than under those of risk”. The author takes a “preliminary step” defining risks and challenges in order to shift the attention from a “generic feeling of precariousness heeded by people” to the «meaning of the effective, verifiable threat situation for the polity and its normative consequences» (p. 33).

Chapters 2 and 3 present a rich and brilliant 'journey' in modern political history from the outset, the birth of Leviathan, to the end defined by the appearance of nuclear era. Chapter 2 depicts two steps: on one side, the urgency of establishing political institution in order to reduce the fear; on the other side, the emerging westphalian system answers to a certain degree of rationality.

A central paragraph in the economy of the book is doubtlessly “The Hobbesian moment” (§. 2) where Cerutti describes the modern relationship between political power and society and between protection and legitimacy. According to Hobbes, the modern State emerges from the need of individuals to be protected from the violence of state of nature: therefore the legitimacy of such institutions is justified by their capacity to maintain peace and individuals' safety. From then henceforward, the modern political age will rely on this

basic anthropological and political rule that, whenever life is at stake, and whatever the (domestic or interstate) origin of the danger may be, individuals seek and actually receive protection under a common power, which provides the necessary order by creating peace internally and furnishing adequate defence against enemies from without. (p. 43)

The second main argument of chapter 2 claims that modern political order (at the international and domestic level) was characterized by a certain degree of rationality, or quoting Schmitt by “a realm of relative reason”. The modern *political* rationality emerges by the *ratio essendi* of the westphalian states system (“sovereign states + “bracketed war” + balance of power”) and by the attempt of rationalising political life. Furthermore, Cerutti recognises in modern politics a partial and temporary fulfilling of the claim of heading for greater rationality.

In Chapter 3, modern rationality is strongly undermined by the novelties appeared in the Twentieth century, from the 1914-18 First World War to the nuclear security dilemma. Modern rationality showed its first signs of weakness with genocide, total war and «ideologization of war» (p. 70). On the other hand, this unprecedented level of destructiveness also led to an «improved consciousness of how political life should be reasonably organized in



a peaceful way» (p. 71).

However, before stating peace as a political value, humankind experienced two age-marking events, such as Auschwitz and Hiroshima, which were both made possible by «scientific and technological *and socio-economic* developments» (p. 71, *my emphasis*). Nonetheless, the first failure of modern rationality occurred only when MAD, Mutual Assured Destruction, became the core structure of the international system, bargaining between stability (ensured by the sheer fear of self-destruction) and instability, caused by arms race.

The second failure of modern political order emerges with global warming (Chapter 4). Unlike nuclear weapons, global warming lacks “fairness” because it doesn't hit everybody and everywhere as in the case of a nuclear winter. Relying on authoritative documents of the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the author states that man-made climate change effects produce a twofold and diachronic asymmetry. Firstly, as in the way it affects underdeveloped and worse-off countries; secondly, considering also “inertia effects” of present gas emissions, as it will hit future generations. “Inertia effect” is crucial for developing an underlying argument in the book:

there is a disproportion between the strategic rationality that applies to business-as-usual (*there*, actors in arm race) and the lacking consciousness, cultural tools and imagination, that we may have already upset our planet. (p. 112)

However, as in case of nuclear weapons, Cerutti points out that strategic rationality cannot be simply erased; rather, it has to be limited by an appeal to responsibility.

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to strictly philosophical dilemmas concerning the global challenges previously discussed through an interdisciplinary approach. In these chapters, Cerutti moves from justifying obligations and responsibilities towards future generations, without relying on particular conceptions of value, history, and society. At stake are what the author calls “survival goods” rather than questions of distributive justice on wealth, freedom and welfare. Faced with global challenges, moral questions shift towards a very specific and essential set of goods such as

how to remain alive, not to be born with genetic deformities, not to be exposed to lethal pollutants and oncogenic radiation, not to be deprived of a vital amount of water, [...]. (p. 135)

As the goal is the very existence of humankind, moral theory has to be as sober as possible and *thin* rather than *thick*, that is, being as free as possible from particular theories of morality as well as their substantive values and goals. Normative morality is to be narrowed to a tiny and restricted end which is the anthropological continuity of human beings. From this background Cerutti claims that normative theories of morality have to introduce a preliminary meta-imperative to make sense of their moral imperatives: «Do your best to prevent the termination of human life and civilization by human ends» (p. 145).

Once a minimal ethical assumption on our obligation towards future generations is established, it «must be complemented by meta-ethical discourses» (p. 161): the above-mentioned meta-imperative may orient our conducts only if «we find that preserving our race makes sense for us and we have an interest in it» (p. 166). It is for this reason that we have to take seriously global challenges because they can undermine our intergenerational chain, which mostly makes sense of our individual and social identity.

The last chapter (7) outlines the kind of politics required to address global challenges. Cerutti dismisses the viability of both a democratic or tyrannical world state as well as *à la* Waltz a neo-realist position, this latter meant as “more (*nuclear weapons or market, in the case of emission*) may be better”. The author opts for a sort of “regulating anarchy” which



sounds more or less as the acceptance of the best “signs” of the current situation (§. 4). States system and any exclusively state-centred politics are obsolete and not able to take up the global challenges. These challenges should be met not solely by individual institutions but by promoting renewed collective actions. Cerutti stresses the need to overcome coercive and vertical institutional structure to a more inclusive and horizontal network of formal and informal institutions, namely the well-known paradigm of *governance*. In my opinion, the central concept at stake here is *reflexivity*: recalling author's words,

this is an important cognitive pre-condition for taking responsibility and for learning processes among individuals and institutions. (p. 203)

Reflexivity and reciprocal learning are crucial cognitive and behavioural features for the collective action of this ever-changing network of pieces of inter- and supra-national government, epistemic communities such as International Atomic Energy Agency and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, public opinion movements and environmental advocacy group.

Secondly, Cerutti sees in global governance signs of hopes, first and foremost, in an ongoing change of political culture, such as some listed legal breakthroughs regarding the formal acknowledgement of “humankind” as an agency in international treaties or conventions: for example, the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 states in Art. I that the «outer space shall be “the province of all mankind”» (p. 204). The change of political culture is reckoned as a precondition for the emergence of a well-adapted political will.

Cultural changes conduct us to a wider argument of the book about the role of *political* philosophy. Ceaseless breakthroughs in science and technology, particularly applied to military and economic purposes, have brought about a chronic delay of political institutions, which are lagging behind to understand and manage their consequences. Cerutti succeeds in the main task of the book that is to reduce this cultural gap by taking into serious consideration authoritative scientific studies on these physical facts, the global challenges, from a philosophical point of view.