

## Discussion

### **Derek Sayer:**

I found the presentation very compelling and I was suspicious precisely because of that. It was the clarity, the simplicity, the elegance of it which came across so strongly, but I wonder can you do that when you are talking about 2000 years of European history and contrasting it with the rest of the world? Can you compass that complexity within so simple an argumentative framework, within a single theory? I want to try to pin you down by asking three simple questions to which there is a follow-up.

The simple questions are: first, what is Europe?; second, where is the West?; and third, when was modernity in terms of this argument? And here is the follow-up: at one point I think we were dealing with the possible objection that the Islamic world is also one where you had a common cultural framework and a variety of states. I found your response to that on empirical grounds rather dubious, which was that you qualified your thesis by Europe being distinctive in terms of competition between long-lasting states. You then exemplified with England and France. Now, for England and France I agree with you; the problem I have is finding any other state which between medieval, early modern, and modern Europe has that kind of stability etc. Because I think, contrary to you, you may need to talk about uniqueness. If we are to talk about uniqueness, I think, it has to be very specifically focused on Britain rather than this rather abstract conception of the Western Europe.

### **Erdal Yavuz:**

My comment will rather be a defence of Mr. Hall. I think most of the counter-arguments base themselves on a certain misunderstanding. I do not see from where they have got the conviction that Mr. Hall analyses 'ideal types'. On the contrary, his analysis is an elegant description of the dynamics

of social formations. Mr. Hall says that the reproduction of social formations is the norm and non-reproduction is atypical. So, those formations which continue to reproduce themselves are typical formations, and the 'uniqueness' of European transformation is due to the fact that it could not reproduce itself as did the Eastern formations. Now as to Huri İnan's argument concerning the problem of political competitiveness, I think the problem in the non-European formations is one of vertical competition while in Europe, political competition among independent state formations, either within the European state system or among groups or classes within individual societies, is a horizontal one.

**Huri İslamoğlu-İnan:**

May I just make a small suggestion? If it is not that damaging to your argument, it is probably more helpful to use the term specificity rather than uniqueness, which is a loaded term.

**John Hall:**

China to begin with. The outburst of capitalism had taken place largely during a period of disunity. What interests me most is the fact that the restoration of the empire sees a curtailment of this economic dynamism. Another point about China that comes to mind when thinking of inventions is the fact that gunpowder, created by the Chinese, comes to be so controlled by the state that one of its key uses comes to be for fireworks. This did not matter in military terms, for the sheer size of Chinese armies could defeat nomad armies to the north even when the nomads had gunpowder. But such a ban on invention would simply not be possible in Europe, for state competition meant that the refusal to stay at the leading edge of technology would lead to disaster.

Secondly, questions to do with the West and the nature of modernity. Most of the time I have in mind northwest Europe, that is, the area from North Italy, up the Rhine, and including southeast England and the Paris basin which sees an increase in trade and a specialisation of economic function well before the fifteenth century. Now I would not wish to deny that a Martian looking at the world in 1500 would find more similarity than difference between the agrarian civilisations; still, my talk was concerned with locating the seeds from which great difference eventually sprang. In the end the key difference seems to me that of intense interaction and co-operation between state and society. Paul Langford may correct me on this,

but what strikes me about eighteenth century Britain is the massive extent of state power. One way in which this can be measured quite easily is in terms of the very large proportion of national product available for common purposes. Another indicator is the creation of shared national feeling very early on. It is possible for me to understand Shakespeare's language but not Chaucer's, at least with equivalent ease, and this indicates early nation-building. By the eighteenth century shared national stereotypes are already in place.

Finally, I would like to say that my stylised model does seem to me to be based on fact. Therefore, I cannot accept what Huri İnan says. The Chinese empire collapsed, and so too have Ottoman and Soviet empires. Something seems to be going on here which is worth-explaining.

**Fuat Keyman:**

What you have suggested is that we think of the state in relation to other states, and of modernity not simply in a cultural framework, not simply in an evolutionist framework, but, as you argued, in an institutional framework. So, let us talk about institutions.

If we do so, then we have to ask two questions. This actual framework is important to understand world history in terms of power networks. Hence, it is possible to understand what sort of functions the state has performed in world history.

It is important to do so, because what we can do is to explain world history, to explain the uniqueness or specificity of the West on the basis of the state. You told a story of the West and in this story the main actor was the state. The state is not only one simple power network, one important institution, but the institution that explains the production and reproduction of societies. But this might suggest an institutional essentialism in which the state becomes the centre of this framework which explains other relations. Then if you ask questions about ideological or cultural frameworks, you end up explaining those not in terms of their own right, but in terms of the state because we already accept the state as the main actor of the story. This is my first question.

The second question. If we do what you propose, it becomes a bit problematic when we look at, for instance, the Third World states. For the way the state acts in the context of the First World does not work for the Third World. We do not have that kind of state in the Third World, we do not have that kind of a nation-building or state-building process in the Third World.

**John Hall:**

These are very interesting questions. First, is the state given special status, privileged as an agent? Well, the answer to this is probably positive. It strikes me that the basic identity of most people now derives from their nation-state, and it is this that lies behind my bias. This is not to say that I doubt that there is a logic to other sources of social power. Still, I privilege the state because some of those logics have their character influenced by the political. Thus many social movements gain their character from the states with which they interact. Secessionist demands tend to be made against authoritarian states, whereas more liberal ones can make nationalism cultural rather than political by means of federal and consociational arrangements. Similarly, working classes have been most radical when faced with an authoritarian state excluding them from the right to self-organisation. People take on the state when the state interferes with them: peasant rebellions and popular movements in Europe, as Tilly has shown, has most to do with conscription and fiscal extraction. And remember, too, that the dream of nineteenth century social theory –of peace and the spread of capitalism– fell before geopolitical conflict between 1914 and 1945. All these matters make me a bit of a statist –but I think I should be, because my bias reflects reality.

**Fuat Keyman:**

But, when you privilege the state you are undermining the importance of the society in which the state is embedded.

**John Hall:**

No, I am not completely denying the power of society, not the least because states themselves are complicated. For example, it is noticeable that working classes tend to be caged inside states whereas capitalist classes to some extent are not so caged. It is noticeable that states in Europe, in the nineteenth century as much as in the eighteenth century, understood each other fairly well, conducted their affairs in the common language of French, indeed felt part of a single world. I imagine something like this is true today: Bill Clinton says something to his people that he surely does not believe, for his language and thought processes are those of someone who is part of an international elite. So there are levels of society at work: some are caged within nation-states, others partially inhabit a larger society within which states have to swim.

Another point raised concerns the Third World. I want to be very careful

here. My talk was concerned with a very particular problem: the endogenous creation of a multipolar capitalist world. This happened only once, with everyone thereafter seeking to copy and having something that they could copy. Of course, the exact recipe for success changes: at the start people felt that one needed parliaments and secular schooling, whereas these are largely ignored by forced developers today. So the situation is utterly different in this way. I would love to talk about the Third World on another occasion, but that has not been my concern today.

**Paul Langford:**

There is a major problem of relating the dynamic of competition between states to the growth, whatever we mean by modernity, of capitalism and so on, to processes that were seemingly favourable to capitalist development. The place of war in this context is particularly problematic. There is a whole historiography about the economic consequences of war, pretty nicely balanced. It is often argued that war directed capital from more productive activities, however beneficial the side effects for specific industries.

**Huri İslamoğlu-İnan:**

First of all, the fact is that some areas failed whereas others did not. It is a commendable position to take, it is a realistic position and it is very fashionable to be realistic these days, but then there is a problem here. The development of capitalism as a global system of competitive states and generalised commodity exchange relations is a highly complex problem, ridden with all kinds of conflicts, struggles, contradictions on all levels. One contradiction was between the centralising states as actors in interstate competition, trying to tax their populations and the commercial interests. Commercial interests were not always compatible with those of the state. If you take the case of Germany, there were certain limitations on the development of private property, alienable and disposable, because the state wanted to maintain the integrity of peasant holdings as taxable units. In that sense the interest of the modern state in terms of its ability to tax, conflicted with the interests of commercial classes. Moreover, outcomes of such conflicts and contradictions could not be predicted. I think your analysis in terms of continuities, in terms of trying to explain the rise of capitalism by tracing certain features to the medieval period, detracts from this highly complex and contingent process. My argument is that the failures, as well as the successes should be seen in the context of this complexity and contingency. On the other hand, your theoretical apparatus regarding the state

is perhaps more suitable in studying the modern state *per se*. And rather than stretching this process backwards into history we should perhaps confine our discussion, within the terms of your analysis, to a discussion of the modern state or at least to an after the fact account of the development of the modern state.

Another point related to what Paul Langford said on issues of competition and taxation. For instance, beginning in the seventeenth century when we look at the Ottoman state it was very much involved in struggles with different European states and that competition affected certain changes in military technology which, in turn, affected changes in the modes of taxation, and in the land tenure system. If we take competition in the interstate system as a prerequisite for the "Great Transformation" that characterised the West, then one might ask why did it not happen in the Ottoman empire. My argument is by no means that. I do not adopt such a Third Worldist defensive position. And I have never said that it could have happened elsewhere; no, it could not have happened. It happened in Western, in North-western Europe because of a certain very peculiar configuration of political, economic, social circumstances. But, I think it is a weakness in your argument which provokes speculations about where else it might have happened. Because your argument compels us, that is, those of us who are involved in the study of the so-called empires, to bring forth examples of, say competitive political and economic structures capitalism developed. What I am trying to push forth is the question of why capitalism developed in Europe. To suggest that it could have developed elsewhere would be dealing with a counter-factual situation and we are not interested in that. We are simply interested in what actually happened. We are also interested in what will happen since the system is not a closed one. This brings us to the question of imitability. Tales of success or failure are by no means pre-determined and that we know well by now. I am thinking of what is happening in East Asia and China. In order to accommodate the facts of our times to the questions we ask of history, I think, we need to pose your argument in a different way; in terms of specificities, perhaps.

**John Hall:**

There are slightly different things going on here. I thank you for helping me to see it clearly that one of my questions is really why it was that some of the capitalist dynamic was not destroyed. My answer there really does concern the absence of a single state. I would agree that industrialisation is very much the business of states in a later period. But that industrialisation

is largely caused by war: state elites wish to have industry so that they can have modern weapons which will allow them to achieve security.

Another point that I would like to make is that the centre of capitalism has never stayed in the same place for long. The leading edge has moved from North Italy to Holland to England to Germany to the United States and now, perhaps, to East Asia.

Lastly, yes, there does seem to me to be something special about England. For one thing, they had coal, and could move forward –at least if Tony Wrigley is to be believed– whereas Holland was stuck because it has exhausted its supplies of peat.

I do not want to say much about Japan, about which the degree of my interest does not match with the paucity of my knowledge. What does strike me though, not least as the result of Samuel's book on the Japanese state, is the extent to which different sources of power point in the same direction in a 'politics of reciprocal consent'. The way in which strength is created by interlinking of state elite and capitalist class almost reminds me of eighteenth century Britain.

**Derek Sayer:**

Who is copying?

**John Hall:**

Everybody wishes to copy after England had invented a new system of economic and so of political power. Eighteenth century France is the first developing society, with Germany looking still more like a late developer in the nineteenth century.