

# Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus: An Answer to Robert Kagan

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Grotius in 1625: ‘Man neither was, nor is, by nature, a wild unsociable creature’.<sup>1</sup>

Hobbes in 1651: ‘And the life of man [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I revisit some of the arguments from the beginnings of modern political theory in order to examine Robert Kagan’s claim that ‘today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus’.<sup>3</sup> Kagan’s argument about the difference between Anglo-Saxon and Continental political attitudes is close to the mark, but *not*, as he would have it, because of the respective psychological dispositions of Americans and Europeans, whose differences in the possession of power are supposedly at the root of their comportment towards, for example, the war in Iraq. I will show how these differences can be traced to the modern political philosophies.<sup>4</sup> However, it is not the purpose of this paper to offer another explanation as rigid as Kagan’s. Instead, I point towards the different models of society which underpin the origins of modern political philosophy and show how in Kagan’s work the language of power overrides the language of rights. I suggest that Kagan’s view is seriously misguided. The language of rights *must* govern the use of power.

In 2002, Kagan published an article titled ‘Power and Weakness’. A year later, he extended it into the short book *Of Paradise and Power*.<sup>5</sup> According to Kagan, Europeans

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<sup>1</sup> H. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace. Including the Law of Nature and of Nations* (1625), trans. A. C. Campbell, Washington & London, M. Walter Dunne, 1901, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. C. B. Macpherson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, Part I, chapter 13.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power. America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> For an extended argument, see Part II in L. Ucnik, ‘European Discourses on Rights’, *Multiple Europes*, no. 21, Bern, Frankfurt, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2003. Some word of caution is required. I do not want to claim that the French, Russian and German opposition to the war in Iraq is, strictly speaking, as innocent as if they were following the Kantian spirit. A few hundred billion US dollars in debts is at stake. Indeed, their recent support to end the United Nations’ economic sanctions against Iraq, after the war, is a case of *a posteriori* acknowledgement of the right of the US occupation. Yet this does not invalidate my explanation of differences between the European and Anglosphere positions.

<sup>5</sup> It would be interesting to explore further the semantic shift in Kagan’s change of title — ‘Power and Weakness. Why the United States and Europe See the World Differently’, *Policy Review*, no. 113, 2002 to *Of Paradise and Power*.

— mistakenly — subscribe to the Kantian notion of ‘Eternal Peace’ and a strategy involving negotiations, while Americans, ‘mired in history’, tarry in an uncertain ‘Hobbesian world’ where the only means to security is unrivalled military power.<sup>6</sup> His argument is based on Hobbes’ foundational allegory which inaugurated modern Anglo-Saxon political theory. For Hobbes, to avoid death in the lawless state of nature, the only secure sphere for individuals is the state ruled by the iron hand of Leviathan. Outside of its borders, according to Hobbes, the same scenario prevails. By way of the pathetic fallacy, states become individuals, possessing human attributes such as envy, avarice and a desire to preserve their ‘lives’. The non-existence of international laws forces these ‘anthropomorphic’ sovereign states, taken as individuals, to co-exist in a state of nature, where a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of all against all, rages under Behemoth and where each state must singularly make sure that it is strong enough to protect its borders to survive. Given that we are living in a global village, as Marshall McLuhan famously declared, and that we are told that the idea of economic globalization presupposes the end of the nation-state, where does Kagan’s way of thinking belong? If we accept that the logic of the free market ruled by an invisible hand is another gospel of globalization, supposedly eliminating national boundaries in the name of free trade, it seems that Kagan’s appropriation of the Hobbesian metaphor goes against the grain of that order in defending the idea of the American nation-state.

After World War II, Kagan implies, American power enabled the states in continental Europe to enter onto a ‘postmodern’ political stage where European nations would no longer be concerned with power but rather with the ‘transcendence of power’.<sup>7</sup> In short, Americans see the world as a constant struggle to survive while Europeans live in an illusory world where all conflicts can be resolved by diplomacy. As he declares, Americans and Europeans ‘agree on little and understand one another less and less’. Hence, for Kagan, ‘when it comes to setting national priorities, determining threats, defining challenges, and fashioning and implementing foreign and defense policies’, the United States and Europe went their separate ways.<sup>8</sup>

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*America and Europe in the New World Order* in 2003. All references to Kagan hereafter are to *Of Paradise and Power* unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> Kagan, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Kagan, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Kagan, pp. 3–4.

An analogous recognition of differences between Europeans and Anglo-Americans is expressed in the conviction that mutual understanding is possible only within the so-called ‘Anglosphere of Influence.’<sup>9</sup> Given Kagan’s reasoning, it is understandable that for Mark Steyn, for example, the French and German opposition to the use of military power against Iraq is not, as one might mistakenly suspect, an attempt to safeguard peace, but rather a result of European military impotence. ‘Old Europe’, presenting its own ‘arthritic defects as a virtue’ tries to reclaim this powerlessness as ‘the new global norm’.<sup>10</sup> Steyn buttresses his ‘analysis’ by statistics and faith. If it is not the high ‘US fertility rate’, then it must be the ‘US’s religiosity ... unique in the Western World’ that generates the American will to live. This willpower is reinforced by the political friendship of the ‘Three Amigos’ — George W. Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard<sup>11</sup>— who realized that to secure peace in the world it had to be renounced in Iraq. All of a sudden, world security depended on the ‘liberation’ of Iraq. As Harold Meyerson writes, ‘from the folks who brought us preemptive war, here comes preemptive peace’.<sup>12</sup> After all, according to Kagan, eternal peace is a sign of weakness. If the world is blinded by European short-sightedness, the ‘alliance of the willing’ has the foresight to shoulder world security on its own.

For Kagan, after the collapse of the Soviet ‘Evil Empire’, American power is the only guarantee of the peaceful functioning of a world threatened by terrorism. One could object, of course, by pointing out that terrorism is not a new phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> When an oppressed group does not have the means to confront the oppressing power, the only likelihood of resistance is by recourse to subversive tactics to undermine such power. Various European resistance movements such as that against Nazism, the French in Algeria, the Spanish in Basque territory, or the Russians in Chechnya, to name just a few, all stand witness to desperate clandestine opposition in the face of overwhelming dominance. To reduce *every* resistance movement to terrorism is to refuse to listen to the pleas of subjugated populations and to wage perpetual war. It is to declare all the dominated inhabitants’ demands to be, by definition and without question, terrorist ultimatums, with all the concomitant attributes of illegality, irrationality and immorality. As Jacques Rancière notes, “‘infinite justice’ states exactly what’s at stake: the assertion of a

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<sup>9</sup> R. Ponnuru, ‘Anglosphere of Influence’, *The Australian*, 17 March 2003.

<sup>10</sup> M. Steyn, ‘Europe Abdicates’, *The Weekend Australian*, 15-16 March 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Steyn, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> H. Meyerson, ‘Preemptive Peace’, *Washington Post*, 8 April 2003.

right identical to the omnipotence hitherto reserved for the vindictive God. All traditional distinctions end up by being abolished with the erasure of international forms of law'.<sup>14</sup> The reduction of every resistance to terrorism is a recipe for disaster, creating perpetual instability in the international community. Yet this is not the way Kagan sees it. Turning the tables, he argues that it is not American power that renders international law ineffective, it is *because* of the impotence of international law that American power is required. In the end, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy, given the United States' flagrant disrespect of the United Nations' opposition to the invasion of Iraq. Disregarding the United Nations, the United States tried to make it irrelevant as an institution.<sup>15</sup>

It may be timely to recall the historical trajectory of international law. Henry Sumner Maine wrote that it is an entirely modern mistake to conflate the notions of 'Law common to all Nations, and *international law*'. According to his interpretation, international law is neither effective nor impotent, since *Jus Feciale* is 'the law of negotiation and diplomacy'.<sup>16</sup> It is not a mechanism used by a dominant power to regulate a different people's conduct.

To return to Kagan, since international law is ineffective, for him, the prototype for the new political arrangement can be found not in the international order, but in the American Western *High Noon*.<sup>17</sup> A moral sheriff decides to save his town from an evil gang whose leader is returning from the jail to which he sent him some years previously. Likewise, Americans, as Kagan puts it, 'can still sometimes see themselves in heroic terms — as Gary Cooper at high noon. They will defend the townspeople, whether the townspeople want them to or not'.<sup>18</sup> Staying with the film narrative, one can point out that the sheriff's wife 'pre-emptively' shoots a gang member in the back while he is reloading his gun,<sup>19</sup> thus securing the final victory of the moral sheriff. Strictly speaking, then, the heroic act of the sheriff is not that heroic after all. In the end, by killing off all

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<sup>13</sup> Some even argue that it was the French Revolution that introduced the word 'terror' into the political vocabulary.

<sup>14</sup> J. Rancière, 'Prisoners of the Infinite. Guantanamo, Justice and Bushspeak', *CounterPunch*, 30 April 2002. Available: <http://www.counterpunch.org>. It must be noted that although the term 'Infinite justice' was deleted from the official vocabulary of the Bush administration (only after a public outcry), the drive behind that sentiment continues.

<sup>15</sup> Recently Alexander Cockburn commented, 'the UN, now more than ever [is] reduced to the servile function of after-sales service provider for the United States, on permanent call as the mop-up brigade'. See A. Cockburn, 'The UN: It Should Be Late; It Never Was Great', *CounterPunch*, 6/7 December 2003.

<sup>16</sup> H. S. Maine, *Ancient Law. Its Connection with the Early History and Society and its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861), London, Oxford University Press, 1931, p. 43, italics in original.

<sup>17</sup> *High Noon*, dir. Zinnemann, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment (UK) Ltd, 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Kagan, p. 95.

the villains, any interrogation into the ethical conduct of this fight is rendered superfluous. No living combatant remains to question the means employed.

The film *High Noon* belongs to the genre which André Bazin calls a myth. It might be helpful to recall Bazin's thesis that the Hollywood western is couched in the myth of 'strong, rough, and courageous men' who must be 'just as strong and just as daring as the criminals', while 'the administration of justice which, if it is to be effective, must be drastic and speedy — short of lynching, however ... must ignore extenuating circumstances, such as alibis that would take too long to verify'.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, the United States disregarded calls for weapons inspections to continue and went to 'liberate' the Iraqis without wasting time to looking for proof of Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction, rendering all international efforts to maintain peace futile.<sup>21</sup> However, this war is illegal because it violates the *principle* of international law. Might does not make right! It may well be, as the United States assumes, that the blessing will come *a posteriori*. As far as the United States is concerned, the war is over. Now we are one step ahead; as Secretary of State Colin Powell has said, 'the international tension over UN authorization of the war is "all behind us now"'. The task in front of us is to secure the new Iraqi government, so 'let's not re-fight old battles'.<sup>22</sup> Thus, American policy is, once again, a *fait accompli*.<sup>23</sup> The 'efficacy of power' reigns supreme.

It is here that we should look closely at Kagan's argument. Americans *might* be from Mars and Europeans from Venus — whatever that means — but given his premises, it is not a foregone conclusion. This proverbial and irreconcilable difference between Europeans and Americans makes sense only if we accept a Manichaeian vision of the world, where diplomacy is understood to be a sign of weakness and where power is the only means to survive. And that is precisely Kagan's postulation. Strong American power

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<sup>19</sup> Thanks to Garry Gillard for pointing this out.

<sup>20</sup> A. Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Western', trans. H. Gray, *What is Cinema?*, Vol. 2, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, pp. 145–6.

<sup>21</sup> As Michael Evans explains, 'the United States launched the biggest mismatched contest in modern warfare, not unlike the world heavyweight boxing champion taking on a bantamweight. For sheer firepower and military sophistication, the Americans have the capability to crush whatever Saddam puts in the way of their advancing divisions'. See M. Evans 'Heavyweight Americans Take on Bantams of Baghdad', *Times Online*, 21 March 2003. Available: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk>.

<sup>22</sup> K. DeYoung and G. Frankel, 'Bush, Blair Seek Accord on Postwar Iraq', *Washington Post*, 8 April 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Meyerson writes, 'The Defense Department intellectuals who have emerged as the dominant force in U.S. foreign policy had it all mapped out. While the debate raged over whether to go to war in Iraq, they dispatched a couple of hundred thousand troops to the region, establishing a fact on the ground that ultimately made the war unstoppable.'

must not only guard against the dangerous Hobbesian world as the ever-present threat, but also defend weak Europeans.

Kagan's political syllogism runs something like this: the world is treacherous, 'divided between good and evil, between friends and enemies' and 'international laws and rules are unreliable'.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, given that 'true security' means 'the defense and promotion of a liberal order' (*à la* the American way of life<sup>25</sup>) to save the world from itself, America's 'strategic perspectives'<sup>26</sup> must 'depend on the possession and use of military might'.<sup>27</sup> The rest of this article will try to show the tacit presuppositions in this kind of argument reminding readers of some of the lessons of modern political theory.

## **Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus**

'Fighting for Truth, Justice and the American Way.'<sup>28</sup>

In order to assess Kagan's argument, some questions posed by Michel Foucault might be pertinent. For example, 'What types of knowledge are you trying to disqualify ...?' or rather, 'What theoretico-political vanguard are you trying *to put on the throne* in order to detach it from all the massive, circulating, and discontinuous forms that knowledge can take?'<sup>29</sup> I suggest that to answer the first question one needs to look at the history of political thought, while to provide the background necessary to the second, it is important to acknowledge that Kagan, co-founder with William Kristol of the Project for the New American Century, belongs to the neo-conservative faction which is in charge of the present US administration.<sup>30</sup>

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Now, while the debate is just beginning over the nature of the interim government in postwar Iraq, they have dispatched a postwar government of their choosing to the Kuwait Hilton'. See Meyerson, 'Preemptive Peace'.

<sup>24</sup> Kagan, pp. 3–4.

<sup>25</sup> As Rancière explains, 'the law increasingly tends to be the record of a community's lifestyles ... What the American response asserts is the unmediated likeness of law and fact in the way a community lives... the ethical identity between a particular lifestyle and a universal system of values'. See Rancière, 'Prisoners of the Infinite'.

<sup>26</sup> Kagan, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Kagan, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> The motto of *Right Wing News*: <http://rightwingnews.com/>.

<sup>29</sup> M. Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, trans. D. Macey, ed. M. Bertani and A. Fontana, Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–76, New York, Picador, 2003, p. 10, italics added.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, 'American Dreamers', *Four Corners*, 10 March 2003, <http://www.abc.net.au/>; T. Purdum, 'The Brains Behind Bush's War', *The New York Times*, 1 February 2003; D. Carr, 'White House Listens When Weekly Speaks', *The New York Times*, 11 March 2003; M. Kakutani, 'How Books Have Shaped U.S. Policy', *The New York Times*, 5 April 2003. See also, G. Schmitt, 'Memorandum to: Opinion Leaders', *The Project for the New American Century*, 20 May 2002, <http://www.newamericancentury.org/>

For Kagan, the respective attitudes towards power determine the psychological make-up of the United States of America and Europe. As he says, ‘strong powers naturally view the world differently than weak powers’.<sup>31</sup> Citing senior British diplomat Robert Cooper, Kagan claims that Europeans live in some kind of a ‘postmodern system’. This system is not based on a ‘balance of power but on “the rejection of force” and on “self-enforced rules of behavior”’. In Europe, the dismissal of ‘raison d’état and the amorality of Machiavelli’s theories of statecraft’ is replaced by the reinforcement of ‘a moral consciousness in international affairs’.<sup>32</sup> A cursory look at the history of political thought reveals that these are exactly the Kantian ideas of moral precepts and international law, and Kant can hardly be accused of postmodern tendencies. However, Kagan — unquestioningly appropriating Cooper’s argument — extends it by providing a further argument: European fear is not conditioned by the American unilateral use of power. Rather, Europeans are alarmed at a dismissal of their ‘new sense of mission’, allegedly ‘born of their own discovery of perpetual peace’.<sup>33</sup> Kagan’s diagnosis is that Europeans have a deep psychological defect: for them ‘a threat to one’s beliefs can be as frightening as a threat to one’s physical security’.<sup>34</sup> As Kagan sees it, eternal peace, negotiations and diplomacy lead to the absurd political stance taken up by the weak, psychologically impaired Europeans, leaving it to a strong American military power to secure peace in the world.

## **The Modern Spectre of Power and the State<sup>35</sup>**

It can be argued that the modern conception of power was born with the idea of the individual in the Hobbesian state of nature. As Foucault notes, until then, power over others was not an issue in a society ruled by divine commands. In the Greek world, it was as much the case of ruling others within the political sphere as being ruled by them.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kagan, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Kagan, p. 57. According to Robert Cooper, we live in the era of the ‘new liberal imperialism’ when it is time for us to embrace ‘the idea of double standards’. We, presumably civilized, people must uphold law while to those living beyond our legal domain we may apply ‘the rougher methods’, such as ‘force, pre-emptive attack, deception’. In short, ‘whatever is necessary’ to defend ‘the global economy and ... the virtuous circle of investment and prosperity’. R. Cooper, ‘The New Liberal Imperialism’, *The Observer*, 7 April 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Kagan, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Kagan, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> The following argument is an abridged version of chapter 3 from L. Ucnik, *European Discourses on Rights*.

<sup>36</sup> See M. Foucault, ‘The Political Technology of Individuals’, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988; M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure. The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2 trans. R. Hurley, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1987. See also H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958), 2nd ed, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1998 and H. Arendt, ‘Expansion and the Philosophy of Power’, *Sewanee Review*, vol. 54, October 1946.

Even a Greek tyrant had first to be able to rule over himself, and only then would he be fit to rule over others.<sup>37</sup> Machiavelli was the first to articulate opposition to this model, specifically against the Pope who assumed worldly *and* spiritual authority. And yet, it was not *power over* people that Machiavelli was interested in. Rather, Machiavelli was concerned with the intricacies of power in the sense, for example, of how the Prince might retain his power in the face of the power of the church. Here power is defined as a property and this definition is still retained today, but it is employed more extensively. Lord Acton's dictum that 'power tends to corrupt'<sup>38</sup> speaks to our modern world where, since Hobbes and his theory of a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, we are likely to understand power as a property belonging to every individual, not only to the Prince.<sup>39</sup>

It is this post-Machiavellian concept of power which engenders liberal doctrines of the state. We are all equal in the state of nature and, according to Locke's 'strange Doctrine', we *all* have 'Executive Power' prior to our entry into the state.<sup>40</sup> Although after the signing of the covenant we transfer our powers to the state, somehow our power, now embedded in the state, is by liberal logic turned against us. If we follow this reasoning, then each individual delegates representatives who stand for the separate interests of individuals. But suddenly those elected representatives become the personification of the state. If we take the state as the political domain set against the putative private sphere of the individual, then there is no space left for citizens to have their say, at least not effectively.<sup>41</sup> The disregard by Bush, Blair and Howard of citizens' opposition to waging

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<sup>37</sup> See Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. H. N. Fowler, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., London, England, Harvard University Press, 1936, 783d-e.

<sup>38</sup> 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely': letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 5 April 1887 in J. Daintith et al (eds), *Bloomsbury Thematic Dictionary of Quotations*, new ed, London, Bloomsbury, 1990, p. 310.

<sup>39</sup> See J. Taminiaux, *Dialectic and Difference: Finitude in Modern Thought*, trans. J. Decker et al, ed. J. Decker and R. Crease, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Humanities Press Inc., 1985, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Locke suggests that 'this strange Doctrine, viz. that *in the State of Nature, every one has the Executive Power* of the Law of Nature' should be an incentive for men to seek '*Civil Government* [which] is the proper Remedy for the Inconveniences of the State of Nature'. J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett, revised ed, New York, The New American Library, 1965, p. 13, italics in original.

<sup>41</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau: 'The English people believes itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as the Members are elected, the people is enslaved; it is nothing'. J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (1762), trans M. Cranston, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968, Book III, chapter 15.

the war in Iraq is just one example of this logic.<sup>42</sup> Here, the concept of the state is insidiously intertwined with the idea of power.<sup>43</sup>

Kagan's 'efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power'<sup>44</sup> can be traced to the beginning of modern political theory. Neither are American and European understandings of power the outcome of the suppressed military and international status of Europe achieved by the United States after the Second World War, as he seems to suggest, nor is European psychological weakness shaped by its diminished military might. Nevertheless, Kagan is right in this respect. There is a division between the Anglo-Saxon countries<sup>45</sup> and the Continent. However, the reasons for this difference can hardly be sought in European's lack of power or a supposed weakness which Kagan says produced their debilitating 'return to the fearful mentality of the 1930s'.<sup>46</sup> I suggest that the division that Kagan claims to be 'deep, long in development, and likely to endure'<sup>47</sup> is better understood if we look at the historical development of modern political thought.

There are two ways to understand the concept of the individual, a basic tenet of our Western political culture. Starting with Thomas Hobbes, the individual is posited as living prior to society in a constant struggle against everybody else to survive, while Hugo Grotius hypothesizes that this individual is always-already social. One model imagines this individual — possessing natural rights prior to the entry into society — as asocial, apolitical and psychologically inscribed, competing in the free market environment. This is also Kagan's starting position, although his theory of power cannot be reconciled with the concept of rights. Neither international law nor human rights figure in his theoretical celebration of American power. The other model acknowledges that the notion of individual rights does not make sense unless those rights are recognised by the society in which the individual lives. One version speaks of the Hobbesian state of nature where there is always a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, which ends only by the signing of a covenant; the other speaks of the notion of sociability.

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, P. Tyler, 'A New Power in the Streets', *The New York Times*, 17 February 2003; R. Stevenson, 'Antiwar Protests Fail to Sway Bush on Plans for Iraq', *The New York Times*, 19 February 2003; A. Cowell, 'Around the World, Thousands Protest the War', *The New York Times*, 23 March 2003, Internet, The New York Times Company; 'Scrapbook: Through Middle Eastern Eyes', *The Australian*, 28 March 2003.

<sup>43</sup> For a different account of the concept of power, see B. Hindess, *Discourses of Power. From Hobbes to Foucault*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

<sup>44</sup> Kagan, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Where I count the United Kingdom, while Kagan does not.

## Grotius and Hobbes: The Social vs the Atomistic Individual

Our modern understanding of society is individualistic. The only way we can make sense of ourselves is within a framework of ideas including notions of democracy, self-determination, autonomy and freedom. As I have suggested, there are two different ways to understand this relationship between the individual and society. While both approaches are predicated on the idea of a separation of state and society,<sup>48</sup> one theoretical line privileges the individual as always-already atomistic, originally existing *outside* of society, and regards the state as intrusive but necessary for the preservation of life, liberty and property. The other goes back to Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, positing the individual as always-already living in relation to others.<sup>49</sup> Both hypotheses are predicated on the idea of the individual. One favours the negative freedom of the atomistic individual, with its commitment to safeguarding the private-social sphere; the other emphasizes the equality and freedom of the individual within society and the political sphere.

It is important to note that the nuances between the two conceptual articulations of the individual are not usually acknowledged. They mark not only differences between Grotius' and Hobbes' arguments, for example; they also modify interpretations of the notion of the individual and her relation to society. There is no doubt that modern thinkers are concerned with the notion of the individual. Still, there is a world of difference between starting from a society and proceeding to the individual, as Grotius and Pufendorf do, and starting from the individual as the basic unit or atom of society, as Hobbes and Locke do. In the first instance, individuals are always-already in a society, while in the second you need to explain why humans are originally anti-social. This explanation is usually achieved by reference to psychological traits that indicate the 'unsociability' of men. Alternatively, there are economic motivations. For example, one individual works harder than others to acquire his property, and so his sole right to property precedes the formation of society and the state, setting him apart from others

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<sup>46</sup> Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Kagan, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Manent suggests, 'the foundation of liberalism is the distinction between civil society and the state: the latter is the representative instrument of the former'. P. Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 65–6.

<sup>49</sup> See S. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law* [1673], trans. M. Silverthorne, ed. J. Tully, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, (1673) 1991; S. Pufendorf, *On the Natural State of Men. The 1678 Latin Edition and English Translation* [1678], trans. M. Seidler, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, (1678) 1990.

who are lazy. Only when you psychologically and economically single out this imaginary industrious and desiring individual in opposition to everyone else can you proceed to find some justification for the amalgamation of those dispersed individuals into a whole, say by means of a covenant. In a way, these individuals need to be saved from destroying each other since they are pursuing only their own singular psychological and economic goals and desires. However, once propounded, those psychological and economic traits stand in the way of explaining why people might join together in society.<sup>50</sup>

Regarded by many as the successor of Grotius,<sup>51</sup> Hobbes is the first to conceive of society as composed of individuals seen as free-floating atoms, whose actions are to be understood according to the new physical laws discovered by Galileo.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, he also modifies the account of natural law to fit his antisocial state of nature. Hobbes writes:

The Right Of Nature, which Writers commonly call *Jus Naturale*, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.<sup>53</sup>

So in Hobbes' writing, the natural law, *Jus Naturale* — which in its original formula guides our moral conduct in the world — is transformed into a right which each individual possesses by virtue of her humanity.<sup>54</sup> We move from the general set of laws valid to all humanity to the individual's singular entitlement, a right that is, further, defined as power. In short, the right to self-preservation becomes the right to use power whenever necessary to protect one's life. Hobbes' account unambiguously starts from the individual, who is in perpetual war against everybody else. As Taminioux tells us, for

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<sup>50</sup> As Rousseau explains, 'Sometimes our theorists confuse all the parts and sometimes they separate them ... It is said that Japanese mountebanks can cut up a child under the eyes of spectators, throw the different parts into the air, and then make the child come down, alive and all of a piece. This is more or less the trick that our political theorists perform — after dismembering the social body with a sleight of hand worthy of the fairground, they put the pieces together again anyhow'. Rousseau, Book II, chapter 2.

<sup>51</sup> See K. Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 31. See also S. Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991; J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998; R. Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories. Their Origin and Development*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932), Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1979.

<sup>53</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 14.

<sup>54</sup> See also L. Strauss, 'Modern Natural Right: Hobbes', *Natural Right and History*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Hobbes ‘man is apolitical, asocial, and amoral by nature’.<sup>55</sup> Thus, ‘there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies’. The Hobbesian man ‘has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers [sic] body’ because ‘every man is Enemy to every man’.<sup>56</sup> By comparison, Grotius defines a human being as having ‘a spontaneous and natural inclination towards friendly intercourse’.<sup>57</sup> In the work of Grotius, a person is defined by ‘sociableness’.<sup>58</sup> For Hobbes, ‘the condition of Man’ implies ‘a condition of Warre of every one against every one’,<sup>59</sup> inevitably leading to his life being ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, for Grotius, ‘among the traits characteristic of man is an impelling desire for a society, that is, for social life’.<sup>61</sup>

In opposition to Grotius’ vision of sociability, for Hobbes only ‘certain living creatures, as Bees, and Ants, live sociably one with another’ because they neither compete with each other nor are able to communicate verbally. If those living creatures can live amicably together, how is it that ‘Man-kind cannot do the same’? Hobbes’ answer is that in their lives, first, men strive ‘continually in competition for Honour and Dignity’ only to accomplish ‘Envy and Hatred, and finally Warre’. Second, they are never satisfied, always measuring their achievements against others, so they ‘can relish nothing but what is eminent’. Third, man’s capacity to reason is responsible for ‘Distraction and Civill warre’, since ants, bees and other ‘creatures, having not (as man) the use of reason’, cannot ‘see any fault, in the administration of their common businesse’. On the contrary, men ‘thinke themselves wiser, and abler to govern Publique, better than the rest, and these strive to reforme and innovate’, in the process, achieving nothing else than desolation. And so it goes on to the fourth point, where men by the power of their speech purposefully misrepresent Good as Evil. The fifth is that man wants to control the Commonwealth, and hence is hungry for power. The last remark is the most important for my argument. According to Hobbes, these problems among individuals arise simply because men do not want to live in a society. The ‘agreement’ between ants, bees and the like — that is, between living creatures which lack ‘speech’, reasoning capacity and competitive natures — ‘is Naturall’. By comparison, men — defined by the opposite

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<sup>55</sup> Taminioux, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 14.

<sup>57</sup> Grotius, p. 80.

<sup>58</sup> H. Grotius, *Prolegomena to the Law of War and Peace* (1625), trans. E. Dumbauld, New York, The Liberal Arts Press, 1957, p. 6. See also Buckle, *Natural Law*, p.19.

<sup>59</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 14.

<sup>60</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 13.

<sup>61</sup> Grotius, cited in Buckle, pp.18–9.

attributes of language and reasoning capacities — can live together only by signing the ‘Artificiall’ covenant.<sup>62</sup> No wonder then, that at every possible occasion, ‘Warre’ is just around the corner, unless Leviathan rules this state of unsocial men with an iron hand. Where for Grotius ‘the first condition of happiness is good deeds; the second, good repute’,<sup>63</sup> for Hobbes, there is only ‘Envy and Hatred, and finally Warre’.<sup>64</sup>

## **Kagan, State of Nature and History**

Given Hobbes’ understanding of society, we are now in a position to reflect on Kagan’s use of Hobbes. Kagan’s ‘anarchic Hobbesian world’ where there are no laws or rules and where only ‘the possession and use of military might’<sup>65</sup> can give us security, is *not* Hobbes’ understanding of the state but, instead, the description of the Hobbesian hypothetical state of nature which is lawless *because* initially men do not want to recognize any law that can obstruct their use of power. Only when men realize that their life is in danger and sign a covenant, transferring some of their powers to the artificial state, will they be able to live in a secure world protected by laws. The ‘defense and promotion of a liberal order’,<sup>66</sup> as Hobbes knew, can only be achieved in a legal state where everyone obeys rules and laws and the unlimited power of each is constrained by the Leviathan. Otherwise,

[there can be no] place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth, no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; ... no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death.<sup>67</sup>

In such a state, the ‘nature of War’ encompasses not only the ‘actuall fighting’. Rather, it refers to an ever-present awareness of a prospect of war that could erupt any time. Hobbes explains that ‘the known disposition’ to wage war any time is a part of war itself. For Hobbes, in these circumstances, there is no possibility to determine what is justice or injustice, what is right or wrong. If there is no law, there is no common agreement as to what ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ mean. There are only ‘the two Cardinall virtues’ that Hobbes

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<sup>62</sup> Hobbes, Part II, chapter 17.

<sup>63</sup> H. Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas or The Right which Belongs to the Dutch to Take Part in the East Indian Trade* (1608), trans. R. Magoffin, ed. J. Scott, New York, Oxford University Press, 1916, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Hobbes, Part II, chapter 17.

<sup>65</sup> Kagan, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Kagan, p. 3.

calls ‘Force, and Fraud’. The only way to avoid such lawlessness is by ‘*common Power*’ and ‘Articles of Peace’.<sup>68</sup>

In Kagan’s reading, Hobbes’ fable of the state of nature becomes the present international situation. This sleight of hand also eliminates individuals from his theoretical picture. Kagan only considers states as players in the world. Each state becomes the atomistic individual in the hostile imaginary Hobbesian universe. The language of human rights and international law likewise disappear from this type of hypothesis. Individuals are now superfluous; they are taken as nothing more than individuals ruled by Leviathan. Kagan speaks about a higher order. Multiple Leviathans — states — are fighting against each other for their own preservation. And it is in this vision of the world where Kagan can claim that the American Leviathan is the strongest. As I noted above, in the face of globalization, the rhetoric of the free hand of the market, and its concomitant abolition of trade barriers, Kagan’s scheme presents the opposite scenario. It is the military strengthening of the American nation-state, with its unilateral power, that is of utmost importance for security.

So, if we take the Hobbesian state of nature as an expression of current world politics — as Kagan does — then it is no wonder that the United States refuses to follow the United Nations mandate. Or to put it differently, if the United Nations insists on the right to independence, refusing to be demoted to the role of a mouthpiece of the United States, the United States will take on sole ‘responsibility’ for the world, assuming the power of a ‘world government’ and exercising power as it deems necessary. If the United Nations will not heed orders given by the United States, it will be made inconsequential. At least, this is the stance of the present US administration. Already, two hundred years ago, Kant mused, ‘it is therefore to be wondered at that the word *right* [*law*]<sup>69</sup> has not been completely banished from military politics as superfluous pedantry, and that no state has been bold enough to declare itself publicly in favour of doing so’.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 13.

<sup>68</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 13, italics added.

<sup>69</sup> In German (as in French *droit*, Czech or Slovak *právo*), the word *recht* can mean both ‘right’ and ‘law.’ See B.-P. Frost and R. Howse, ‘A Note About the Translation’, A. Kojève, *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000, pp. xiii–xv. See also O. Barfield, *History in English Words*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1962, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup> E. Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch’, trans. H. B. Nisbet, in *Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, 2nd ed, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991 p. 103, italics in original.

International law is law designed to be valid for every nation regardless of military or economic power. However, when power aspires to replace law, the international order is in jeopardy. The problem is, as Donald Rumsfeld also realized, that our civilization depends on international laws, whether we like it or not. We might sneer at some laws, we might ignore others, but at times we realize we need them. In time of war there are many instances where we want to recall international law to protect our soldiers, for instance, when some become prisoners of war. So suddenly, the Geneva Convention is invoked, while only a year ago it was denied those incarcerated in Guantánamo Bay.<sup>71</sup>

I think there is a lesson to be learned from the loose interpretation of the use of power. Despite the illusions of the current US administration, Leviathan is an artificial God whose power is dependent on the signatories of a covenant. The state of nature is *not* a historical event but a foundational metaphor used to explain the beginning of a *lawful* state, and Hobbes' project was *not* a celebration of power, but exactly the opposite — finding means to restrict the use of power to secure lasting peace, and not only within the state, but hopefully in the world at large.<sup>72</sup>

## **Kant and Perpetual Peace**

This was also Kant's project. For him, social and political considerations are of the first rank. In order to live in a peaceful state, lawlessness must be renounced and we must recognize that there are certain rights and duties that we need to obey. So, it is neither the result of a post-World War II development, nor some kind of a psychological *ressentiment* that leads Europeans to endorse a model of society based on “the rejection of force” and on ‘self-enforced rules of behavior’.<sup>73</sup> Kagan *might* be right in his belief that ‘the Europe of today is very much the product of American foreign policy stretching back over six decades’;<sup>74</sup> and that Kant could never solve the problem of ‘how nations could achieve perpetual peace without destroying human freedom’.<sup>75</sup> Yet reading Kant's precepts from 1797 I am sceptical about the accuracy of Kagan's Kantian scholarship.

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, P. Tyler, ‘Iraq Broadcasts Images of Prisoners — U.S. Assails Ruses’, *The New York Times*, 24 March 2003; D. Schemo, ‘Iraq Violates Rules of War, U.S. Complains’, *The New York Times*, 24 March 2003; J. Hawkins, ‘The Mark Steyn Interview’, *Right Wing News*, 31 March 2003; and Rancière, ‘Prisoners of the Infinite’.

<sup>72</sup> Hobbes, for example, writes, ‘The benefit ... for which a body politic was instituted’ is ‘the peace and preservation of every particular man’. T. Hobbes, *The Elements of Law. Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, Part II, chapter xxiv, Section 1.

<sup>73</sup> Kagan, ‘Power and Weakness’, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Kagan, ‘Power and Weakness’, p. 22.

The ‘postmodern rules’ that supposedly express the European anti-bellicose stance seems to have been written a long time ago. According to Kant,

the first decision the individual is obliged to make, if he does not wish to renounce all concepts of right, will be to adopt the principle that one must abandon the state of nature in which everyone follows his own desires, and unite with everyone else (with whom he cannot avoid having intercourse) in order to submit to external, public and lawful coercion. He must accordingly enter into a state wherein that which is to be recognised as belonging to each person is allotted to him *by law* and guaranteed to him by an adequate power (which is not his own, but external to him). In other words, he should at all costs enter into a state of civil society.<sup>76</sup>

Thus to enter into ‘a state of civil society’ in which we always live with others, we must renounce our lawless freedom and the use of power. The only legitimate conduct is one that responds to law. Far from failing to offer a model for the possibility of perpetual peace, Kant realizes that the only way to ensure the peaceful co-existence of nations is through ‘a general *agreement* between nations’.<sup>77</sup>

For Kant, *inter*-national law is based on diplomacy. Thus, ‘the Kantian paradox for the Europeans’<sup>78</sup> was not solved by American power, as Kagan declares. After the horrors of so many wars, European nations realized that in order to institute everlasting peace they had to submit to a ‘particular kind of league’ that, in the eighteenth century, Kant named ‘a *pacific federation*’. As Kant says, ‘if the concept of international right is to retain any meaning at all, reason must necessarily couple it with a federation [of nations]’.<sup>79</sup> So, for Kant, it could *never* be ‘the creation of a world government’,<sup>80</sup> as Kagan puts it. Kagan is right in saying that Kant regards the singular power of a singular state ruling over all others as ‘an even greater threat to human freedom’.<sup>81</sup> Kant also recognizes that it is a propensity of each state, or its ruler to seek domination of the world ‘in accordance with *their* conception of right’ in order to secure their own idea of peace on earth.<sup>82</sup> As he sees it, ‘a universal monarchy’ is the greatest violation of freedom for every other state. We all live in this world with others, yet we are all different; we speak different languages and

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<sup>75</sup> Kagan, ‘Power and Weakness’, pp. 23–4.

<sup>76</sup> E. Kant, ‘The Metaphysics of Morals’, in *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. H. Reiss, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 44, italics in original.

<sup>77</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 104, italics added.

<sup>78</sup> Kagan, p. 57.

<sup>79</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, pp. 104–5, italics in original.

<sup>80</sup> Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, p. 57. Incidentally, Kant speaks of ‘a universal monarchy’ in ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 113).

<sup>81</sup> Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, pp. 57–8.

worship through different religions. Therefore, the ‘idea of international right presupposes the separate existence of many independent adjoining states. And such a state of affairs is essentially a state of war, unless there is a federal union to prevent hostilities breaking out’. To secure the freedom of each and every nation, there must be a federation of nations. For Kant, this federation is based on negotiation, while world government is about the use of power over others. Thus, instead of ‘universal despotism which saps all man’s energies and ends in the graveyard of freedom, this peace is created and guaranteed by equilibrium of forces’.<sup>83</sup> As Kant wrote in 1795,

The concept of international right becomes meaningless if interpreted as a right to go to war. For this would make it right to determine what is lawful not by means of universally valid external laws, but by means of one-sided maxims backed up by physical force. It could be taken to mean that it is perfectly just for men who adopt this attitude to destroy one another, and thus to find perpetual peace in the vast grave where all the horrors of violence and those responsible for them would be buried.<sup>84</sup>

Contrary to Kagan’s accusation that it is the European Union, with its ideal of perpetual peace, that endangers world security by its aspirations to be the world government, according to the Kantian formula of ‘a universal monarchy’,<sup>85</sup> the danger lies rather in the United States’ drive to impose, single-handedly, its own version of security on the world.

When a state is elevated to the position of the ‘world’s sole superpower’,<sup>86</sup> not only in terms of its empirical standing but also in terms of the theoretical justification for it, Kagan’s conclusion is understandable. The United States does not need to worry about diplomacy or international laws. As Kagan notes, Americans today are ‘powerful enough that they need not fear Europeans’. When the United States comes to terms with its power and realizes that it cannot be limited by others, then it can show the benevolence towards ‘Lilliputians’ and even re-embrace ‘what the founders called a “decent respect for the opinion of mankind”’.<sup>87</sup> Once again, Kagan is not concerned about individual citizens and their rights.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, pp. 103–4, italics in original.

<sup>83</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, pp. 113–4.

<sup>84</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 105, italics in original.

<sup>85</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 113.

<sup>86</sup> Kagan, ‘Resisting Superpowerful Temptations’, *Washington Post*, 9 April 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Kagan, pp. 102–3.

<sup>88</sup> Thus, subsidiary to this argument but flowing from it, which I have no space to pursue here, is a concern about the erasure of civil rights, already expressed from both sides of the political spectrum — by the conservative Norman Mailer and the Leninist Slavoj Žižek. In order to maintain the military might to pursue its aggressive policy of exporting

To promote the status of the United States as a superpower you need to consider it as the monolith. However, there is a fine line between the control of the world and the illusion of securing the order of the world. So, does power bring security? If ‘America is the most magnanimous imperial power ever’,<sup>89</sup> surely, a new question arises: who will be in charge of this supreme power? Who will guard the guardians of the Platonic ‘Republic’ if the philosopher king is unavailable?<sup>90</sup> As Salid Gomaa fears, ‘they could come for us next’.<sup>91</sup> The worry, which government will be earmarked as the next rogue state unwilling to heed Uncle Sam’s orders, becomes a legitimate question — especially now, after the so-called victory over Iraq, when Vice-President Dick Cheney is warning other states that this type of military action is ‘likely’ should the United States ‘have to deal with’ other rogue nations and Defence Secretary Rumsfeld says that ‘in removing the terror regime from Iraq, we send a very clear message to all groups that operate by means of terror and violence against the innocent’. His message is that ‘We have the capacity and the will to wage war on terror — and to win decisively’.<sup>92</sup>

So the problem returns. Should we accept the American scenario of a strong military power, where the United States is judge, jury and executioner on the world stage, or should we insist that in today’s globalized world the only way to security is by strengthening international laws. Peace in the world will not be preserved by the use of unilateral power, as Kagan argues, but by enforcing and supporting a ‘pacific federation’ or, as we call it today, the United Nations. Peace can only be guaranteed if all nations, big and small, have a forum in which to present their points of view. The aim should be to

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so-called democracy to the rest of the world, the United States will need considerable resources. In order to be able to do whatever the government wants to do, without opposition from its citizens, the individual liberties of those citizens must be restricted. The further slashing of money allocated to social agencies, health and education, and the curtailing of social and civil liberties are already being enacted. I suggest that the policies of the present government of the United States are consistent not only with the traditional understanding of a conservative ethos, according to which people must be taken care of, but are also indicative of the new political creed as expressed, among others, by Kagan. Once you shift your attention to the higher level of ‘individualism’, now represented by the state, the civil rights of the population must be subsumed (if not erased) in the name of ‘Leviathan’. See N. Mailer, ‘Am Not For World Empire. A Conversation with Norman Mailer about Iraq, Israel, the Perils of Technology and Why He is a Left-Conservative’, *The American Conservative*, 2 December 2002; N. Mailer, ‘Only in America’, *The New York Review of Books*, 27 March 2003; S. Zizek, ‘Today, Iraq. Tomorrow ... Democracy?’, *In These Times*, 18 March 2003; See also, E. Lichtblau, ‘Republicans Want Terror Law Made Permanent’, *The New York Times*, 9 April 2003.

<sup>89</sup> J. Heer, ‘Operation Anglosphere. Today’s most ardent American imperialists weren’t born in the USA’, *The Boston Globe*, 23 March 2003.

<sup>90</sup> As Plutarch asks: ‘Who, then, shall rule the ruler?’, *Moralia*, 780c.

<sup>91</sup> E. Wax, ‘Arab World is Seeing War Far Differently. Media, Mistrust of U.S. Helps Shape Perspective’, *Washington Post*, 28 March 2003.

<sup>92</sup> R. Eccleston and P. Wilson, ‘Tyrants Beware’, *The Australian*, 11 April 2003.

preserve the equilibrium of forces, rather than be afraid of a unilateral ‘awesome military power’.<sup>93</sup> For Kant,

[a] war of punishment (*bellum punitivum*) between states is inconceivable, since there can be no relationship of superior to inferior among them. It thus follows that a war of extermination, in which both parties and right itself might all be simultaneously annihilated, would allow perpetual peace only on the vast graveyard of the human race. A war of this kind and the employment of all means which might bring it about must thus be absolutely prohibited.<sup>94</sup>

Here we should recall Hobbes’ warning that the state of war is not only the ‘actual fighting’, but also awareness that war can start any time. In that situation, it is easy to replace law with ‘Force, and Fraud’.<sup>95</sup>

## **The Melian Dialogue: ‘The Moral Problems of Empire and Power’**

In conclusion, with Hobbes’ translation of *The Peloponnesian War* in mind, it is fitting to recall Thucydides’ account of that war and the Athenian belief that only self-interest guides humans in the world. This was also Hobbes’ conviction, hence his endeavour to find a way to establish a secure society for individuals. So let me tell a story recounted by Thucydides in his Book Five. The story is about the Athenian Empire and its aspiration to rule others in order to provide security for its own citizens.<sup>96</sup>

The dialogue begins by setting up the international scene, so to speak. Thucydides explains that Melos, a Spartan colony, has refused to join the Athenian Empire. At first, however, the Melians were neutral. After Athens forcefully destroyed their land, they ‘had become open enemies of Athens’. At the time of the dialogue, the Athenians land on Melos, proposing to reach a deal with the Melians. But, given that the Athenians brought ‘thirty of their own ships, six from Chios, and two from Lesbos; 1,200 hoplites, 300 archers, and twenty mounted archers, all from Athens; and about 1,500 hoplites from the

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<sup>93</sup> M. Costello, ‘I’m Sorry, This Isn’t What We Ordered’, *The Australian*, 28 March 2003.

<sup>94</sup> Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 96

<sup>95</sup> Hobbes, Part I, chapter 13.

<sup>96</sup> M. I. Finley, a respected Greek scholar, questions the historical authenticity of the Melian Dialogue. For Finley, the dialogue is not historical in a sense of a concrete event but seems to be Thucydides’ composition, expressing his judgement on ‘the moral problems of empire and power’ at the time he lived. See, Finley, *The Peloponnesian War*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972, Appendix 3: ‘The Melian Dialogue’, pp. 614–6.

allies and islanders’,<sup>97</sup> the Melians note that any agreement under ‘the present threat’ is hardly just or legal, because it will be made under ‘the certainty’ of impending war.<sup>98</sup> As the Athenians’ reply makes it clear, it is *power* that provides legality to their military action, because ‘the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept’.<sup>99</sup> To put it in our modern vocabulary, might is right! Let me cite the following exchange in full.

*Melians:* Then in our view (since you force us to leave justice out of account and to confine ourselves to self-interest) — in our view it is at any rate useful that you should not destroy a *principle* that is to the general good of all men — namely, that in the case of all who fall into danger there should be such a thing as fair play and just dealing ... And this is a principle which affects you as much as anybody, since your own fall would be visited by the most terrible vengeance and would be an example to the world.

*Athenians:* As for us, even assuming that our empire does come to an end, we are not despondent about what would happen next. One is not so much frightened of being conquered by a power which rules over others, as Sparta does ... as of what would happen if a ruling power is attacked and defeated by its own subjects ... What we shall do now is to show you that it is for the *good of our own empire* that we are here.<sup>100</sup>

Why is it necessary for the Athenians to conquer Melos? The Athenians explain it as a question of the security of their own Empire, because if others see the Melians free, they will presume the Athenians’ ‘weakness’, while Melian ‘hatred is evidence of [Athenian] power’. In the end, it is very important to conquer ‘islanders like yourselves, who are still unsubdued, or subjects who have already become embittered by all the constraint which our Empire imposes on them. These are the people who are most likely to act in a reckless manner and to bring themselves and us, too, into the most obvious danger’.<sup>101</sup>

The lesson of the Athenian Empire should be kept in mind while reading Kagan’s adoration of the military might of the United States. As Thucydides makes clear, the *display of power* is important in order to show that no one can escape the self-appointed judge of the world.

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<sup>97</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. R. Warner, Revised ed, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972, Book 5, section 84.

<sup>98</sup> Thucydides, section 86.

<sup>99</sup> Thucydides, section 89.

<sup>100</sup> Thucydides, sections 90–1, italics added.

<sup>101</sup> Thucydides, sections 94–9.

To conclude, if we believe Thucydides, we should agree with Yasmin Alibhai-Brown when she says that ‘Bush is Right: This is not a Clash of Civilisations’.<sup>102</sup> There is much more at stake for the United States than the conquering and subduing of Islam, or the war on terrorism executed in the ‘made-in-the-USA’ style, or even the securing of Iraqi oil fields. This display of naked military power is orchestrated to show the world that what the United States wants it will get. Yet we also should listen to Ahmed Kamal Aboulmagd who says that ‘many people are talking about planet earth being no more a safe place for anyone, but I am optimistic’. In the Kantian spirit, he stresses that what we need is a ‘dialogue’, not hopelessness. ‘We should not give in to desperation, to loss of hope, to pessimism. Rather we should act actively and continue the path of dialogue and the path of understanding, simply because we cannot afford the other consequence.’<sup>103</sup> Thus, if we want to preserve world peace, the mighty power of the United States must be a part of the international order. But Plato knew a long time ago, when explaining to Thrasymachus, justice cannot be ‘the advantage of the stronger’.<sup>104</sup> Might does not make it just.

So what is my answer to Kagan’s claim that Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus? Disregarding celestial bodies, it is important to affirm, as does Kagan, that there are some differences between the way Americans and Europeans understand the world. However, these differences are not irreconcilable, nor are they explicable in psychological terms. Kagan’s reduction of these differences to the possession of military power promotes a particular vision of the world which is used to legitimize American expansionist tendencies. As I have argued, this vision goes hand in hand with the eradication of the principles of international law and with the silent eclipse of civil rights. *Inter arma, silent leges*. We hear a lot about terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and the exercise of American power but the language of rights is conspicuously absent amidst the clamour of war. We should be careful when we read Kagan’s type of ‘theoretical’ propaganda. Centuries ago, Hobbes warned that since ‘the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people’, those in power use ‘multiplying

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<sup>102</sup> Y. Alibhai-Brown, ‘Bush is Right: This is not a Clash of Civilisations’, *Independent*, 7 April 2003.

<sup>103</sup> S. Sachs, ‘Intellectual Speaks of the Arab World’s Despair’, *The New York Times*, 8 April 2003.

<sup>104</sup> See Plato, ‘Republic’, trans. G. M. A. Grube, *Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, Indianapolis, Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, Book I, 338c.

sermons' as 'the prop' to extend their 'own authority'.<sup>105</sup> To restate my argument: attempting to demonstrate, as Kagan does, one particular model as the only 'true' reflection of the present international situation, is to claim to see the world in the only possible way; that is, to disregard other possible ways. Forms of knowledge are not neutral, and the way some claims are rendered 'unspeakable' is indicative of the political investments of those in power.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hobbes continues, 'I think that neither the preaching of friars nor monks, nor of parochial priests, tended to teach men what, but whom to believe'. Hobbes, *Behemoth or The Long Parliament* (1682), ed. F. Tonnies, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, M. Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', trans. McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. R. Young, Boston, London, Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981; Foucault, 'Politics and the Study of Discourse', trans. C. Gordon, in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991; Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. J. Pearson, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2001.