

# Making of the Modern World 15

Lecture #17: The Triumph of  
Liberalism and the End of History?

# Videos on Globalization

- “Commanding Heights”
- “Life and Debt”
- “The Power of Nightmares”
- Good documentaries if you want to know more.

# International Liberalism

- We return now to the beginning of our course, our discussion of liberalism and liberal values.
  - Reactions against globalism are often reactions against “liberal values” that place individual self-interest and the rights of individual self-expression above others threatening to erode traditional values.
  - But also fears of an atomizing, materialistic, “selfish” culture.
    - Loss of community, loss of control, illusion of freedom, triumph of base desires.
- We return to a theme of our course. How do we secure prosperity and find meaning in the modern world?
  - Liberalism has been accused of eroding meaning and fulfilling community for the sake of prosperity
    - How do you react to the question, what are you going to do after college?

# Environmental Impact

- Biodiversity under threat: 4500 animal species threatened
- Global warming
  - Greenhouse gases
  - Kyoto accords, 1997
- Human mortality rate declines steadily, several regions work on birth control measures
- “Tragedy of the Commons”

# Why Global Warming will be so difficult to stop

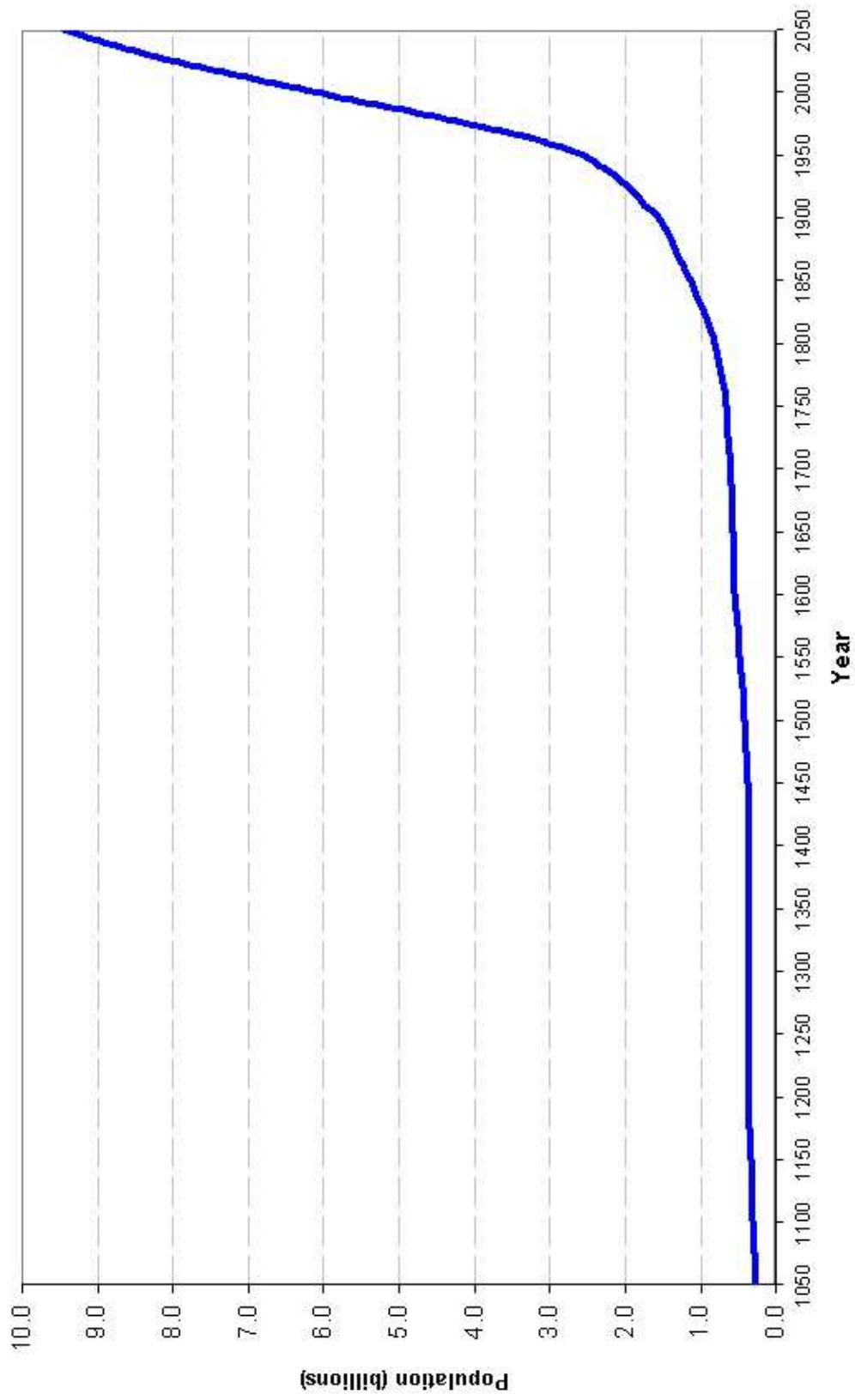
- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions linked to prosperity
- Costs are borne now, benefits come later
- Problem is worldwide w/ no one culprit and no one victim
  - Tragedy of the commons
  - Prisoner's dilemma
    - Rational self-interest leading to suboptimal outcomes
      - Externalities
      - population

# Population for Areas of the World, 1900 – 2050

Major Area	1900	1950	1975	2005	2050
Africa	133	224	416	906	1937
Asia	947	1396	2395	3905	5217
Europe	408	547	676	728	653
Latin America	74	167	322	561	783
North America	82	172	243	331	438
Oceania	6	13	21	33	48
World (total)	1650	2519	4074	6465	9076

source: World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision, Highlights, New York: United Nations,

World Population and Growth Rate



# Economic Inequities

- Regional poverty a persistent problem
- Unequal distribution of resources
  - Impact of colonialism
- Slavery abolished in Saudi Arabia, Angola in 1960s, forced indenture remains in place in developing world
  - International Labor Organization of the UN: 250 million children, ages 5-14, work, esp. southeast Asia
  - Global trafficking of human slaves

# Global Diseases

- Disease has always played an important role in the development of human communities
- 1978 UN called for end to all infectious diseases by 2000 – unrealistic goal
- Ancient diseases TB and malaria on the rise
- New diseases Ebola and AIDS
- Threat throughout the world but has struck the developing world the hardest

# End of the Cold War

- President Ronald Reagan (in office 1981-1989) deeply opposes USSR
  - The “evil empire”
- Promotes massive military spending, beyond Soviet economy to keep up
  - Strategic Defense Initiative (“star wars”)
- Forces Soviet Mikhail S. Gorbachev (1931- ) to implement reforms, ultimately brings down the USSR

# Revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe

- Polish trade union Solidarity movement opposes Polish Communist Party rule, forces multiparty elections, 1989
- Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania follow
- The “Velvet Revolution”
  - Bloodless revolutions
- East Germany decides to open the Berlin Wall
  - East and West Germany reunite (1990)

# The collapse of the Soviet Union and European communist regimes



# Collapse of the Soviet Union

- Reforms under Gorbachev
  - Economic
  - Social
- *Perestroika*: “restructuring”
- *Glasnost*: “openness”
- Nationalist sentiments, long suppressed, come to the surface
- Several non-Russian republics secede, August 1991
- Attempted hardliner takeover in Moscow fails, Soviet Union collapses by end of the year

# End of History?

- Francis Fukuyama and the triumph of liberalism
  - What is history?
    - A spirit or force of progress
    - A recording of human struggle
      - Struggle over ideas
  - According to Fukuyama, politics has largely been decided and there is no viable alternative to liberal democracy
    - Perhaps now, politics is about management; reduced to economic competence.
- The End of History and the Last Man
  - Politics and being human; asserting one's self through a struggle for mastery

# Purpose of the Course

- To understand some important aspects of the modern world.
- So we studied some:
  - History
  - Economics
  - Political Philosophy
  - Art
  - Music

# Remember—you (and I) are weird

- We are at one of the finest public universities in the world (not to mention we can read!)
- We spend a small portion of our income on food, which comes from all over the world.
- We have credit cards
- We have culture available, nonstop, for free
- We are some of the richest people in the history of mankind.
  - (I agree that it doesn't always feel like it)

# Markets and States

- No Man is an Island
  - We live together
  - We depend on each other
  - How shall we coordinate our efforts?
- Two ways we coordinate:
  - Markets
  - States
- A gigantic amount of your life is determined by these two entities.
  - And they are often out of our control

# Political Animals

- Aristotle said that humans are *zoon politikon*.
  - We are political animals, social animals
- Politics is the defining trait of humanity.
  - We reason
  - We discuss
  - We plan
  - We make community
- Politics is part of the way that we build a community capable of providing meaning and community.

# Liberalism

- The dominant mode of political and economic organization in the world today is liberal democracy.
  - Individual rights
  - Liberty
  - Equality
  - Universalism
- But this is not the only mode.
- And life has not always been like this, and it might not always be.

# We are our History

“History does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do”

-James Baldwin

Our modern world does not simply exist but was made, and it has a lineage.

# Things I wanted you to be able to speak intelligently about by mid-June

- Why is the First World War so important?
- Why is modern art so weird?
- How did Nazi Propaganda influence *Star Wars*?
- Why are some so rich and some so poor?
- Why is a street scene in Cuba so recognizable?
- What are the growth prospects for China going forward?
- Why has Botswana been so successful over the last 50 years?
- Why will it be so difficult to curb global greenhouse gas emissions?
- Why are we all so anxious?

# “The Best of All Possible Worlds”

- How do we understand our world?
- How will we deal with the world’s challenges?
- How do we understand suffering in our world?
- Philosopher Gottfried Leibniz argued that “all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.”

# The Lisbon Earthquake



- 1755
- Massive destruction
- Up to 100,000 people killed
- Virtuous and sinful harmed together
- In what sense can this be “all for the best in the best of all possible worlds”

# Enlightenment

- What is to be done:
  - Marquis of Pombal: “What now? We bury the dead and heal the living.”
- Much of our lives is out of our control, but we are capable of enlightened action.
- Kant: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity.... Have courage to use your own understanding!”

# Enlightened Progress



# The End



- The world is what we make it.
- Get to work!