INTRODUCTION

The World We Have Lost

The essays in this book were written over a span of twelve years, between 1994 and 2006. They cover quite a broad swath of subject matter—from French Marxists to American foreign policy, from the economics of globalization to the memory of evil—and they range in geography from Belgium to Israel. But they have two dominant concerns. The first is the role of ideas and the responsibility of intellectuals: The earliest essay reproduced here discusses Albert Camus, the most recent is devoted to Leszek Kołakowski. My second concern is with the place of recent history in an age of forgetting: the difficulty we seem to experience in making sense of the turbulent century that has just ended and in learning from it.

These themes are of course closely interconnected. And they are intimately bound up with the moment of their writing. In decades to come we shall, I think, look back upon the half generation separating the fall of Communism in 1989–91 from the catastrophic American occupation of Iraq as the years the locust ate: a decade and a half of wasted opportunity and political incompetence on both sides of the Atlantic. With too much confidence and too little reflection we put the twentieth century behind us and strode boldly into its successor swaddled in self-serving half-truths: the triumph of the West, the end of History, the unipolar

American moment, the ineluctable march of globalization and the free market.

In our Manichaean enthusiasms we in the West made haste to dispense whenever possible with the economic, intellectual, and institutional baggage of the twentieth century and encouraged others to do likewise. The belief that *that* was then and *this* is now, that all we had to learn from the past was not to repeat it, embraced much more than just the defunct institutions of Cold War–era Communism and its Marxist ideological membrane. Not only did we fail to learn very much from the past—this would hardly have been remarkable. But we have become stridently insistent—in our economic calculations, our political practices, our international strategies, even our educational priorities—that *the past has nothing of interest to teach us.* Ours, we insist, is a new world; its risks and opportunities are without precedent.

Writing in the nineties, and again in the wake of September 11, 2001, I was struck more than once by this perverse contemporary insistence on *not* understanding the context of our present dilemmas, at home and abroad; on *not* listening with greater care to some of the wiser heads of earlier decades; on seeking actively to *forget* rather than to remember, to deny continuity and proclaim novelty on every possible occasion. This always seemed a trifle solipsistic. And as the international events of the early twenty-first century have begun to suggest, it might also be rather imprudent. The recent past may yet be with us for a few years longer. This book is an attempt to bring it into sharper focus.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY is hardly behind us, but already its quarrels and its dogmas, its ideals and its fears are slipping into the obscurity of mis-memory. Incessantly invoked as "lessons," they are in reality ignored and untaught. This is not altogether surprising. The recent past is the hardest to know and understand. Moreover, the world has undergone a remarkable transformation since 1989, and such transformations always bring a sense of distance and displacement for those who remember how things were before. In the decades following the French Revolution the *douceur de vivre* of the vanished *ancien régime* was much regretted by older commentators. One hundred years later, evocations and memoirs

of pre–World War I Europe typically depicted (and still depict) a lost civilization, a world whose illusions had quite literally been blown apart: "Never such innocence again."[1]

But there is a difference. Contemporaries might have regretted the world before the French Revolution, or the lost cultural and political landscape of Europe before August 1914. But they had not *forgotten* them. Far from it: For much of the nineteenth century Europeans were obsessed with the causes and meaning of the French revolutionary transformations. The political and philosophical debates of the Enlightenment were not consumed in the fires of revolution. On the contrary, the French Revolution and its consequences were widely attributed to that same Enlightenment, which thus emerged—for friend and foe alike—as the acknowledged source of the political dogmas and social programs of the century that followed.

In a similar vein, while everyone after 1918 agreed that things would never be the same again, the particular shape that a postwar world should take was everywhere conceived and contested in the long shadow of nineteenth-century experience and thought. Neoclassical economics, liberalism, Marxism (and its Communist stepchild) "revolution," the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, imperialism and "industrialism"—in short, the building blocks of the twentieth-century political world—were all nineteenth-century artifacts. Even those who, along with Virginia Woolf, believed that "in or about December 1910, human character changed"—that the cultural upheaval of Europe's fin de siècle had radically shifted the terms of intellectual exchange—nonetheless devoted a surprising amount of energy to shadowboxing with their predecessors.[2] The past hung heavy across the present.

Today, in contrast, we wear the last century rather lightly. To be sure, we have memorialized it everywhere: museums, shrines, inscriptions, "heritage sites," even historical theme parks are all public reminders of "the Past." But there is a strikingly selective quality to the twentieth century that we have chosen to commemorate. The overwhelming majority of places of official twentieth-century memory are either avowedly nostalgio-triumphalist—praising famous men and celebrating famous victories—or else, and increasingly, opportunities for the acknowledgment and recollection of selective suffering. In the latter

case they are typically the occasion for the teaching of a certain sort of political lesson: about things that were done and should never be forgotten, about mistakes that were made and should not be made again.

The twentieth century is thus on the path to becoming a moral memory palace: a pedagogically serviceable Chamber of Historical Horrors whose way stations are labeled "Munich" or "Pearl Harbor," "Auschwitz" or "Gulag," "Armenia" or "Bosnia" or "Rwanda," with "9-11" as a sort of supererogatory coda, a bloody postscript for those who would forget the lessons of the century or who never properly learned them. The problem with this lapidary representation of the last century as a uniquely horrible time from which we have now, thankfully, emerged is not the description—the twentieth century *was* in many ways a truly awful era, an age of brutality and mass suffering perhaps unequaled in the historical record. The problem is the message: that all of *that* is now behind us, that its meaning is clear, and that we may now advance—unencumbered by past errors—into a different and better era.

But such official commemoration, however benign its motives, does not enhance our appreciation and awareness of the past. It serves as a substitute, a surrogate. Instead of teaching children recent history, we walk them through museums and memorials. Worse still, we encourage citizens and students to see the past—and its lessons—through the particular vector of their own suffering (or that of their ancestors). Today, the "common" interpretation of the recent past is thus composed of the manifold fragments of separate pasts, each of them (Jewish, Polish, Serb, Armenian, German, Asian-American, Palestinian, Irish, homosexual . . .) marked by its own distinctive and assertive victimhood.

The resulting mosaic does not bind us to a shared past, it separates us from it. Whatever the shortcomings of the older national narratives once taught in school, however selective their focus and ruthlessly instrumental their message, they had at least the advantage of providing a nation with past references for present experience. Traditional history, as taught to generations of schoolchildren and college students, gave the present a meaning by reference to the past: Today's names, places, inscriptions, ideas, and allusions could be slotted into a memorized narrative of yesterday. In our time, however, this process has gone into reverse. The past now has no agreed narrative shape of its own. It ac-

quires meaning only by reference to our many and often contrasting present concerns.

This disconcertingly alien character of the past—such that it has to be domesticated with some contemporary significance or lesson before we can approach it—is doubtless in part the result of the sheer speed of contemporary change. "Globalization," shorthand for everything from the Internet to the unprecedented scale of transnational economic exchange, has churned up people's lives in ways that their parents or grandparents would be hard put to imagine. Much of what had for decades, even centuries, seemed familiar and permanent is now passing rapidly into oblivion.

The expansion of communication, together with the fragmentation of information, offers a striking contrast with communities of even the quite recent past. Until the last decades of the twentieth century, most people in the world had limited access to information; but within any one state or nation or community they were all likely to know many of the same things, thanks to national education, state-controlled radio and television, and a common print culture. Today, the opposite applies. Most people in the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa have access to a near infinity of data. But in the absence of any common culture beyond a small elite, and not always even there, the particular information and ideas that people select or encounter are determined by a multiplicity of tastes, affinities, and interests. As the years pass, each one of us has less in common with the fast-multiplying worlds of our contemporaries, not to speak of the world of our forebears.

All of this is surely true—and it has disturbing implications for the future of democratic governance. Nevertheless, disruptive change, even global transformation, is not in itself unprecedented. The economic "globalization" of the late nineteenth century was no less disruptive, except that its implications were initially felt and understood by far fewer people. What is significant about the *present* age of transformations is the unique insouciance with which we have abandoned not just the practices of the past—this is normal enough and not so very alarming—but their very memory. A world just recently lost is already half forgotten.

What, then, is it that have we misplaced in our haste to put the twentieth century behind us? Curious as it may seem, we (or at least we

Americans) have forgotten the meaning of war. In part this is, perhaps, because the impact of war in the twentieth century, though global in reach, was not everywhere the same. For most of continental Europe and much of Asia, the twentieth century, at least until the 1970s, was a time of virtually unbroken war: continental war, colonial war, civil war. War in the last century signified occupation, displacement, deprivation, destruction, and mass murder. Countries that lost wars often lost population, territory, security, and independence. But even those countries that emerged formally victorious had similar experiences and usually remembered war much as the losers did. Italy after World War I, China after World War II, and France after both wars might be cases in point. And then there are the surprisingly frequent instances of countries that won a war but "lost the peace": gratuitously wasting the opportunities afforded them by their victory. Israel in the decades following its victory in June 1967 remains the most telling example.

Moreover, war in the twentieth century frequently meant civil war: often under the cover of occupation or "liberation." Civil war played a significant role in the widespread "ethnic cleansing" and forced population transfers of the twentieth century, from India and Turkey to Spain and Yugoslavia. Like foreign occupation, civil war is one of the great "shared" memories of the past hundred years. In many countries "putting the past behind us"—i.e., agreeing to overcome or forget (or deny) a recent memory of internecine conflict and intercommunal violence—has been a primary goal of postwar governments: sometimes achieved, sometimes overachieved.

The United States avoided all that. Americans experienced the twentieth century in a far more positive light. The U.S. was never occupied. It did not lose vast numbers of citizens, or huge swaths of national territory, as a result of occupation or dismemberment. Although humiliated in neocolonial wars (in Vietnam and now in Iraq), it has never suffered the consequences of defeat. Despite the ambivalence of its most recent undertakings, most Americans still feel that the wars their country has fought were "good wars." The USA was enriched rather than impoverished by its role in the two world wars and by their outcome, in which respect it has nothing in common with Britain, the only other major country to emerge unambiguously victorious from those struggles but at

the cost of near-bankruptcy and the loss of empire. And compared with the other major twentieth-century combatants, the U.S. lost relatively few soldiers in battle and suffered hardly any civilian casualties.

As a consequence, the United States today is the only advanced country that still glorifies and exalts the military, a sentiment familiar in Europe before 1945 but quite unknown today. America's politicians and statesmen surround themselves with the symbols and trappings of armed prowess; its commentators mock and scorn countries that hesitate to engage themselves in armed conflict. It is this differential recollection of war and its impact, rather than any structural difference between the U.S. and otherwise comparable countries, which accounts for their contrasting responses to international affairs today.

It also, perhaps, accounts for the distinctive quality of much American writing—scholarly and popular—on the cold war and its outcome. In European accounts of the fall of Communism and the Iron Curtain, the dominant sentiment is one of relief at the final closing of a long, unhappy chapter. Here in the U.S., however, the same story is typically recorded in a triumphalist key.[3] For many American commentators and policymakers the message of the last century is that war *works*. The implications of this reading of history have already been felt in the decision to attack Iraq in 2003. For Washington, war remains an option—in this case the first option. For the rest of the developed world it has become a last resort.

After war, the second characteristic of the twentieth century was the rise and subsequent fall of the state. This applies in two distinct but related senses. The first describes the emergence of autonomous nation-states during the early decades of the century, and the recent diminution of their powers at the hands of multinational corporations, transnational institutions, and the accelerated movement of people, money, and goods outside their control. Concerning this process there is little dispute, though it seems likely that those who regard the outcome—a "flat world"—as both desirable and inevitable may be in for a surprise, as populations in search of economic and physical security turn back to the political symbols, legal resources, and physical barriers that only a territorial state can provide.

But the state in my second sense has a more directly political significance.

In part as a result of war—the organization and resources required to fight it, the authority and collective effort involved in making good its consequences—the twentieth-century state acquired unprecedented capacities and resources. In their benevolent form these became what we now call the "welfare state" and what the French, more precisely, term "l'état providence": the providential state, underwriting needs and minimizing risks. Malevolently, these same centralized resources formed the basis of authoritarian and totalitarian states in Germany, Russia, and beyond—sometimes providential, always repressive.

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, it was widely accepted that the modern state could—and therefore should—perform the providential role; ideally, without intruding excessively upon the liberties of its subjects, but where intrusion was unavoidable, then in exchange for social benefits that could not otherwise be made universally available. In the course of the last third of the century, however, it became increasingly commonplace to treat the state not as the natural benefactor of first resort but as a source of economic inefficiency and social intrusion best excluded from citizens' affairs wherever possible. When combined with the fall of Communism, and the accompanying discrediting of the socialist project in all its forms, this discounting of the state has become the default condition of public discourse in much of the developed world.

As a consequence, when now we speak of economic "reform" or the need to render social services more "efficient," we mean that the state's part in the affair should be reduced. The privatization of public services or publicly owned businesses is now regarded as self-evidently a good thing. The state, it is conventionally assumed on all sides, is an impediment to the smooth running of human affairs: In Britain both Tory and Labour governments, under Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, have talked down the public sector as dowdy, unexciting, and inefficient. In Western societies taxation—the extraction of resources from subjects and citizens for the pursuit of state business and the provision of public services—had risen steadily for some two hundred years, from the late eighteenth century through the 1970s, accelerating in the course of the years 1910–1960 thanks to the imposition of progressive income tax, inheritance tax, and the taxation of land and capital. Since that time,

however, taxes have typically fallen, or else become indirect and regressive (taxing purchases rather than wealth), and the state's reach has been proportionately reduced.

Whether this is good or bad—and for whom—is a matter for discussion. What is indisputable is that this public policy reversal has come upon the developed world quite suddenly (and not only the developed world, for it is now enforced by the International Monetary Fund and other agencies upon less developed countries as well). It was not always self-evident that the state is bad for you; until very recently there were many people in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, and not a few in the U.S., who believed the contrary. Were this not the case, neither the New Deal, nor Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, nor many of the institutions and practices that now characterize Western Europe would have come about.

The fact that Fascists and Communists *also* explicitly sought a dominant role for the state does not in itself disqualify the public sector from a prominent place in free societies; nor did the fall of Communism resolve in favor of the unregulated market the question as to the optimum balance of freedom and efficiency. This is something any visitor to the social-democratic countries of northern Europe can confirm. The state, as the history of the last century copiously illustrates, does some things rather well and other things quite badly. There are some things the private sector, or the market, can do better and many things they cannot do at all. We need to learn once again to "think the state," free of the prejudices we have acquired against it in the triumphalist wake of the West's cold war victory. We need to learn how to acknowledge the shortcomings of the state *and* to present the case for the state without apology. As I conclude in Chapter XIV, we all know, at the end of the twentieth century, that you can have too much state. But . . . you can also have too little.

The twentieth-century welfare state is conventionally dismissed today as European and "socialist"—usually in formulations like this: "I believe history will record that it was Chinese capitalism that put an end to European socialism."[4] European it may be (if we allow that Canada, New Zealand, and—in respect of social security and national health for the aged—the USA are all for this purpose "European"); but "socialist"? The

epithet reveals once again a curious unfamiliarity with the recent past. Outside of Scandinavia—in Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Holland, and elsewhere—it was not socialists but *Christian Democrats* who played the greatest part in installing and administering the core institutions of the activist welfare state. Even in Britain, where the post–World War II Labour government of Clement Attlee indeed inaugurated the welfare state as we knew it, it was the wartime government of Winston Churchill that commissioned and approved the Report by William Beveridge (himself a Liberal) that established the principles of public welfare provision: principles—and practices—that were reaffirmed and underwritten by every Conservative government that followed until 1979.

The welfare state, in short, was born of a cross-party twentieth-century consensus. It was implemented, in most cases, by liberals or conservatives who had entered public life well before 1914 and for whom the public provision of universal medical services, old age pensions, unemployment and sickness insurance, free education, subsidized public transport, and the other prerequisites of a stable civil order represented not the first stage of twentieth-century socialism but the culmination of late-nineteenth-century reformist liberalism. A similar perspective informed the thinking of many New Dealers in the United States.

Moreover, and here the memory of war played once again an important role, the twentieth-century "socialist" welfare states were constructed not as an advance guard of egalitarian revolution but to provide a barrier against the return of the past: against economic depression and its polarizing, violent political outcome in the desperate politics of Fascism and Communism alike. The welfare states were thus *prophylactic* states. They were designed quite consciously to meet the widespread yearning for security and stability that John Maynard Keynes and others foresaw long before the end of World War II, and they succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. Thanks to half a century of prosperity and safety, we in the West have forgotten the political and social traumas of mass insecurity. And thus we have forgotten why we have inherited those welfare states and what brought them about.

The paradox, of course, is that the very success of the mixed-economy welfare states, in providing the social stability and ideological demobilization which made possible the prosperity of the past half century, has led a

younger political generation to take that same stability and ideological quiescence for granted and demand the elimination of the "impediment" of the taxing, regulating, and generally interfering state. Whether the economic case for this is as secure as it now appears—whether regulation and social provision were truly an impediment to "growth" and "efficiency" and not perhaps their facilitating condition—is debatable. But what is striking is how far we have lost the capacity even to conceive of public policy beyond a narrowly construed economism. We have forgotten how to think politically.

This, too, is one of the paradoxical legacies of the twentieth century. The exhaustion of political energies in the orgy of violence and repression from 1914 through 1945 and beyond has deprived us of much of the political inheritance of the past two hundred years. "Left" and "Right"—terminology inherited from the French Revolution—are not quite without meaning today, but they no longer describe (as they still did within recent memory) the political allegiances of most citizens in democratic societies. We are skeptical, if not actively suspicious, of all-embracing political goals: The grand narratives of Nation and History and Progress that characterized the political families of the twentieth century seem discredited beyond recall. And so we describe our collective purposes in exclusively economic terms—prosperity, growth, GDP, efficiency, output, interest rates, and stock market performances—as though these were not just means to some collectively sought social or political ends but were necessary and sufficient ends in themselves.

In an unpolitical age, there is much to be said for politicians thinking and talking economically: This is, after all, how most people today conceive of their own life chances and interests, and any project of public policy that ignored this truth would not get very far. But that is only how things are *now*. They have not always looked this way, and we have no good reason for supposing that they will look this way in the future. It is not only nature that abhors a vacuum: Democracies in which there are no significant political choices to be made, where economic policy is all that really matters—and where economic policy is now largely determined by nonpolitical actors (central banks, international agencies, or transnational corporations)—must either cease to be functioning democracies or accommodate once again the politics of frustration, of populist

resentment. Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe offers one illustration of how this can happen; the political trajectory of comparably fragile democracies elsewhere, from South Asia to Latin America, provides another. Outside of North America and Western Europe, it would seem, the twentieth century is with us still.

Of all the transformations of the past three decades, the disappearance of "intellectuals" is perhaps the most symptomatic. The twentieth century was the century of the intellectual: The very term first came into use (pejoratively) at the turn of the century and from the outset it described men and women in the world of learning, literature, and the arts who applied themselves to debating and influencing public opinion and policy. The intellectual was by definition committed—"engaged": usually to an ideal, a dogma, a project. The first "intellectuals" were the writers who defended Captain Alfred Dreyfus against the accusation of treason, invoking on his behalf the primacy of universal abstractions: "truth," "justice," and "rights." Their counterparts, the "anti-Dreyfusards" (also intellectuals, though they abhorred the term), invoked abstractions of their own, though less universal in nature: "honor," "nation," "*patrie*," "France."

So long as public policy debate was framed in such all-embracing generalities, whether ethical or political, intellectuals shaped—and in some countries dominated—public discourse. In states where public opposition and criticism was (is) repressed, individual intellectuals assumed de facto the role of spokesmen for the public interest and for the people, against authority and the state. But even in open societies the twentieth-century intellectual acquired a certain public status, benefiting not only from the right of free expression but also from the near-universal literacy of the advanced societies, which assured him or her an audience.

It is easy in retrospect to dismiss the engaged intellectuals of the last century. The propensity for self-aggrandizement, preening contentedly in the admiring mirror of an audience of like-minded fellow thinkers, was easy to indulge. Because intellectuals were in so many cases politically "engaged" at a time when political engagement took one to extremes, and because their engagement typically took the form of the written word,

many have left a record of pronouncements and affiliations that have not worn well. Some served as spokesmen for power or for a constituency, trimming their beliefs and pronouncements to circumstance and interest: what Edward Said once called "the fawning elasticity with regard to one's own side" has indeed "disfigured the history of intellectuals."

Moreover, as Raymond Aron once remarked apropos his French contemporaries, intellectuals seemed all too often to make a point of *not* knowing what they were talking about, especially in technical fields such as economics or military affairs. And for all their talk of "responsibility," a disconcerting number of prominent intellectuals on Right and Left alike proved strikingly irresponsible in their insouciant propensity for encouraging violence to others at a safe distance from themselves. "Mistaken ideas always end in bloodshed," Camus wrote, "but in every case it is someone else's blood. That is why some of our thinkers feel free to say just about anything."

All true. And yet: The intellectual—free-thinking or politically committed, detached or engaged—was also a defining glory of the twentieth century. A mere listing of the most interesting political writers, social commentators, or public moralists of the age, from Émile Zola to Václav Havel, from Karl Kraus to Margarete Buber-Neumann, from Alva Myrdal to Sidney Hook, would fill this introduction and more. We have all but forgotten not only *who* these people were but just how large was their audience and how widespread their influence. And to the extent that we do have a shared recollection of intellectuals, it is all too often reduced to the stereotype of a rather narrow band of left-leaning Western "progressives" who dominated their own stage from the 1950s through the 1980s: Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Günter Grass, Susan Sontag.

The real intellectual action, however, was elsewhere. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, opposition to Communist repression was for many years confined to a handful of courageous individuals "writing for the desk drawer." In interwar Europe both Fascism and "anti-Fascism" could draw on a talented pool of literary advocates and spokespersons: We may not be altogether comfortable acknowledging the number and quality of nationalist and Fascist intellectuals in those years, but at least until 1941 the influence of writers like Ernst Jünger in Germany, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Louis-Ferdinand Céline in France, Mircea Eliade

in Romania, or Henri de Man in Belgium was probably greater than that of their left-leaning contemporaries whom we more readily celebrate today: André Malraux, John Dewey, or even George Orwell.

But above all, the twentieth century saw the emergence of a new intellectual type: the rootless "voyager in the century." Typically such persons had passed from political or ideological commitment in the wake of the Russian Revolution into a world-weary skepticism: compatible with a sort of disabused, pessimistic liberalism but at a tangent to national or ideological allegiances. Many of these representative twentieth-century intellectuals were Jewish (though few remained practicing Jews and fewer still became active Zionists), overwhelmingly from the Jewish communities of Eastern and Central Europe: "chance survivors of a deluge" in Hannah Arendt's words. Many, too, came from cities and provinces that for all their cultural cosmopolitanism, were geographically peripheral: Königsberg, Cernovitz, Vilna, Sarajevo, Alexandria, Calcutta, or Algiers. Most were exiled in one way or another and would have shared, on their own terms, Edward Said's bewilderment at the appeal of patriotism: "I still have not been able to understand what it means to love a country."

Taken all in all, these men and women constituted a twentieth-century "Republic of Letters": a virtual community of conversation and argument whose influence reflected and illuminated the tragic choices of the age. Some of them are represented in the essays in this book. Of these, Arendt and Albert Camus may be the only names still familiar to a broad audience. Primo Levi is of course widely read today, but not, perhaps, in ways he might have wished. Manès Sperber is sadly forgotten, though his distinctively Jewish trajectory is perhaps the most emblematic of them all. Arthur Koestler, whose life, allegiances, and writings established him for many decades as the intellectual archetype of the age, is no longer a household name. There was a time when every college student had read—or wanted to read—*Darkness at Noon.* Today, Koestler's best-selling novel of the Moscow show trials is an acquired, minority taste.

If young readers find Koestler's themes alien and his concerns exotic, this is because we have lost touch not only with the great intellectuals of the past century but also with the ideas and ideals that moved them.

Outside North Korea, no one under the age of forty today has an adult memory of life in a Communist society.[5] It is now so long since a self-confident "Marxism" was the conventional ideological reference point of the intellectual Left that it is quite difficult to convey to a younger generation what it stood for and why it aroused such passionate sentiments for and against. There is much to be said for consigning defunct dogmas to the dustbin of history, particularly when they have been responsible for so much suffering. But we pay a price: The allegiances of the past—and thus the past itself—become utterly incomprehensible.

If we are to understand the world whence we have just emerged, we need to remind ourselves of the power of ideas. And we need to recall the remarkable grip exercised by the Marxist idea in particular upon the imagination of the twentieth century. Many of the most interesting minds of the age were drawn to it, if only for a while: on its own account or because the collapse of liberalism and the challenge of Fascism offered no apparent alternative. Many others, some of whom were never in the least tempted by the mirage of Revolution, nevertheless devoted much of their lives to engaging and combating Marxism. They took its challenge very seriously indeed and often understood it better than its acolytes.

The Jewish intellectuals of interwar and postwar Central Europe were especially drawn to Marxism: in part by the Promethean ambition of the project, but also thanks to the complete collapse of their world, the impossibility of returning to the past or continuing in the old ways, the seeming inevitability of building an utterly different, new world. "Żydokommuna" ("Judeo-Communism") may be an anti-Semitic term of abuse in Polish nationalist circles, but for a few crucial years it also described a reality. The remarkable Jewish contribution to the history of modern Eastern Europe cannot be disentangled from the unique attraction to Central European Jewish intellectuals of the Marxist project. In retrospect, of course, the intellectual and personal enthusiasms and engagements of the age seem tragically out of proportion to the gray, grim outcome. But that is not how things seemed at the time.

Because all this passion now appears spent, and the counter-passions it aroused accordingly redundant, commentators today are inclined to dismiss the ideological "culture wars" of the twentieth century, the doctrinal

challenges and counter-challenges, as a closed book. Communism confronted capitalism (or liberalism): It lost, both in the terrain of ideas and on the ground, and is thus behind us. But in dismissing the failed promises and false prophets of the past, we are also a little too quick to underestimate—or simply to forget—their appeal. Why, after all, were so many talented minds (not to speak of many millions of voters and activists) attracted to these promises and those prophets? Because of the horrors and fears of the age? Perhaps. But were the circumstances of the twentieth century really so unusual, so unique and unrepeatable that we can be sure that whatever propelled men and women toward the grand narratives of revolution and renewal will not come again? Are the sunlit uplands of "peace, democracy, and the free market" truly here to stay?[6]

We are predisposed today to look back upon the twentieth century as an age of political extremes, of tragic mistakes and wrongheaded choices; an age of delusion from which we have now, thankfully, emerged. But are we not just as deluded? In our newfound worship of the private sector and the market have we not simply inverted the faith of an earlier generation in "public ownership" and "the state," or in "planning"? Nothing is more ideological, after all, than the proposition that all affairs and policies, private and public, must turn upon the globalizing economy, its unavoidable laws, and its insatiable demands. Indeed, this worship of economic necessity and its iron laws was also a core premise of Marxism. In transiting from the twentieth century to the twenty-first, have we not just abandoned one nineteenth-century belief system and substituted another in its place?

We are no less confused, it seems, in the moral lessons we claim to have drawn from the past century. Modern secular society has long been uncomfortable with the idea of "evil." Liberals are embarrassed by its uncompromising ethical absolutism and religious overtones. The great political religions of the twentieth century preferred more rationalistic, instrumental accounts of good and bad, right and wrong. But in the wake of World War II, the Nazi destruction of the Jews, and a growing international awareness of the scale of Communist crimes, "evil" crept slowly back into moral and even political discourse. Hannah Arendt was per-

haps the first to recognize this, when she wrote in 1945 that "the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe"; but it is Leszek Kołakowski, a very different sort of philosopher working in an avowedly religious tradition, who has put the matter best: "The Devil is part of our experience. Our generation has seen enough of it for the message to be taken extremely seriously. Evil, I contend, is not contingent, it is not the absence, or deformation, or the subversion of virtue (or whatever else we may think of as its opposite), but a stubborn and unredeemable fact."

But now that the concept of "evil" has reentered discursive usage, we don't know what to do with it. In Western usage today the word is deployed primarily to denote the "unique" evil of Hitler and the Nazis. But here we become confused. Sometimes the genocide of the Jews—the "Holocaust"—is presented as a singular crime, the twentieth-century incarnation of an evil never matched before or since, an example and a warning: "Never again." But at other times we are all too ready to invoke that same evil for comparative purposes, finding genocidal intentions, "axes of evil" and "Hitlers" everywhere from Iraq to North Korea, and warning of an impending repeat of the unique and unrepeatable every time someone smears anti-Semitic graffiti on a synagogue wall or expresses nostalgia for Stalin. In all this we have lost sight of what it was about twentieth-century radical ideologies that proved so seductive and thus truly *diabolical.* Sixty years ago Arendt feared that we would not know how to speak of evil and would thus never grasp its significance. Today we speak of it all the time—with the same result.

Much the same confusion attends our contemporary obsession with "terror," "terrorism," and "terrorists." To state what should be obvious, there is nothing new about terrorism and it is hard to know what to make of a historian who can claim that terrorism is a "post–Cold War phenomenon" (see Chapter XXI). Even if we exclude assassinations or attempted assassinations of presidents and monarchs and confine ourselves to those who kill unarmed civilians in pursuit of a political objective, terrorists have been with us for well over a hundred years. There have been Russian terrorists, Indian terrorists, Arab terrorists, Basque terrorists, Malay terrorists, and dozens of others besides. There have been and still are Christian terrorists, Jewish terrorists, and Muslim terrorists. There were

Yugoslav ("partisan") terrorists settling scores in World War II; Zionist terrorists blowing up Arab marketplaces in Palestine before 1948; American-financed Irish terrorists in Margaret Thatcher's London; U.S.-armed *mujahaddin* terrorists in 1980s Afghanistan, and so on.

No one who has lived in Spain, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Japan, the UK, or France, not to speak of more habitually violent lands, could have failed to notice the omnipresence of terrorists—using guns, knives, bombs, chemicals, cars, trains, planes, and much else—over the course of the twentieth century right up to and beyond the year 2000. The only—*only*—thing that has changed is the September 2001 unleashing of homicidal terrorism within the United States. Even that is not wholly unprecedented: The means are new and the carnage horrifying, but terrorism on U.S. soil was not unknown in the early years of the twentieth century.

But whereas in our reiterated invocation and abuse of the idea of "evil" we have imprudently trivialized the concept, with terrorism we have made the opposite mistake. We have raised an otherwise mundane act of politically motivated murder into a moral category, an ideological abstraction, and a global foe. We should not be surprised to find that this has once again been achieved by the ill-informed invocation of inappropriate twentieth-century analogies. "We" are not merely at war with terrorists; we are engaged in a worldwide civilizational struggle—"a global enterprise of uncertain duration," according to the Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy—with "Islamo-Fascism."

There is a double confusion here. The first, of course, consists of simplifying the motives of the anti-Fascist movements of the 1930s, while lumping together the widely varying Fascisms of early-twentieth-century Europe with the very different resentments, demands, and strategies of the (equally varied) Muslim movements and insurgencies of our own time. Familiarity with recent history might help correct these errors. But the more serious mistake consists of taking the form for the content: defining all the various terrorists and terrorisms, with their contrasting and often conflicting objectives, by their actions alone. It would be rather as though one were to lump together Italian Red Brigades, the German Baader-Meinhof gang, the Provisional IRA, the Basque ETA, Switzerland's Jura Separatists, and the National Front for the Liberation of Corsica, call

the resulting amalgam "European Extremism" . . . and then declare war against the phenomenon of political violence in Europe.

The danger of abstracting "terrorism" from its different contexts, setting it upon a pedestal as the greatest threat to Western civilization, or democracy, or "our way of life," and targeting it for an indefinite war is that we shall neglect the many other challenges of the age. On this, too, the illusions and errors of the cold war years might have something to teach us about ideological tunnel vision. Hannah Arendt, once again: "The greatest danger of recognizing totalitarianism as the curse of the century would be an obsession with it to the extent of becoming blind to the numerous small and not so small evils with which the road to hell is paved."[7]

But of all our contemporary illusions, the most dangerous is the one that underpins and accounts for all the others. And that is the idea that we live in a time without precedent: that what is happening to us is new and irreversible and that the past has nothing to teach us . . . except when it comes to ransacking it for serviceable precedents. To take but one example: Only a quite astonishing indifference to the past could lead an American secretary of state to discourage outside efforts to end Israel's calamitous 2006 war in Lebanon (itself an ill-fated replay of an equally calamitous invasion twenty-five years before) by describing the unfolding disaster as "the birth-pangs of a new Middle East." The modern history of the Middle East is drenched in the blood of serial political miscarriages. The last thing the region needs is yet another incompetent foreign midwife.[8]

Such foolhardiness is perhaps easier to sell in a country like the United States—which venerates its own past but pays the history of the rest of humankind insufficient attention—than in Europe, where the cost of past mistakes and the visible evidence of their consequences were until recently quite hard to miss. But even in Europe a younger generation of citizens and politicians is increasingly oblivious to history: Ironically, this is especially the case in the former Communist lands of Central Europe, where "building capitalism" and "getting rich" are the new collective goals, while democracy is taken for granted and even regarded in some quarters as an impediment.[9]

But even "capitalism" has a history. The last time the capitalist world

passed through a period of unprecedented expansion and great private wealth creation, during the "globalization" *avant le mot* of the world economy in the decades preceding World War I, there was a widespread assumption in imperial Britain—much as there is in the U.S. and Western Europe today—that this was the threshold of a truly unprecedented age of indefinite peace and prosperity. Anyone seeking an account of this confidence—and what became of it—can do no better than read the magisterial opening paragraphs of John Maynard Keynes's *Economic Consequences of the Peace*: a summary of the hubristic illusions of a world on the edge of catastrophe, written in the aftermath of the war that was to put an end to all such irenic fancies for the next fifty years.[10]

It was Keynes, too, who anticipated and helped prepare for the "craving for security" that Europeans would feel after three decades of war and economic collapse. As I have suggested above, it was in large measure thanks to the precautionary services and safety nets incorporated into their postwar systems of governance that the citizens of the advanced countries lost the gnawing sentiment of insecurity and fear which had dominated political life between 1914 and 1945.

Until now. For there are reasons to believe that this may be about to change. Fear is reemerging as an active ingredient of political life in Western democracies. Fear of terrorism, of course; but also, and perhaps more insidiously, fear of the uncontrollable speed of change, fear of the loss of employment, fear of losing ground to others in an increasingly unequal distribution of resources, fear of losing control of the circumstances and routines of one's daily life. And, perhaps above all, fear that it is not just we who can no longer shape our lives but that those in authority have lost control as well, to forces beyond their reach.

Few democratic governments can resist the temptation to turn this sentiment of fear to political advantage. Some have already done so. In which case we should not be surprised to see the revival of pressure groups, political parties, and political programs based upon fear: fear of foreigners; fear of change; fear of open frontiers and open communications; fear of the free exchange of unwelcome opinions. In recent years such people and parties have done well in a number of impeccably democratic countries—Belgium, Switzerland, and Israel, as well as more vulnerable republics like Russia, Poland, and Venezuela—and the challenge

they present has tempted mainstream parties in the U.S., Denmark, Holland, France, and the United Kingdom to take a harsher line with visitors, "aliens," illegal immigrants, and cultural or religious minorities. We can expect more along these lines in years to come, probably aimed at restricting the flow of "threatening" goods and ideas as well as people. The politics of insecurity are contagious.

In that case we might do well to take a second glance at the way our twentieth-century predecessors responded to what were, in many respects, comparable dilemmas. We may discover, as they did, that the collective provision of social services and some restriction upon inequalities of income and wealth are important economic variables in themselves, furnishing the necessary public cohesion and political confidence for a sustained prosperity—and that only the state has the resources and the authority actively to underwrite those services and provisions and limitations in our collective name.

We may find that a healthy democracy, far from being threatened by the regulatory state, actually depends upon it: that in a world increasingly polarized between isolated, insecure individuals and unregulated global forces, the legitimate authority of the democratic state may be the best kind of intermediate institution we can devise. What, after all, is the alternative? Our contemporary cult of economic freedom, combined with a heightened sense of fear and insecurity, could lead to reduced social provision and minimal economic regulation, but accompanied by extensive governmental oversight of communication, movement, and opinion. "Chinese" capitalism, as it were, Western-style.

What, then, are the limits of the democratic state? What is the proper balance of private initiative and public interest, of liberty and equality? What are the manageable objectives of social policy, and what constitutes interference and overreach? Where exactly should we situate the inevitable compromise between maximized private wealth and minimized social friction? What are the appropriate boundaries of political and religious communities, and how best should we minimize frictions across them? How should we police those conflicts (both within states and between them) that cannot be negotiated? And so forth.

These are the challenges of the coming century. They were also the challenges that faced the last century, which is why they will sound at

least a little familiar to some. They are a reminder that the simple nostrums of today's ideologues of "freedom" are no more help to us in a complex world than were those of their predecessors on the other side of the twentieth-century ideological chasm; a reminder, too, that yesterday's Left and today's Right share among other things an overconfident propensity to deny the relevance of past experience to present problems. We think we have learned enough from the past to know that many of the old answers don't work, and that may be true. But what the past can truly help us understand is the perennial complexity of the questions.

NOTES

[1] "Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word—the men
Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again."
Philip Larkin, *MCMXIV*

[2] See, classically, Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians,* first published in 1918.

[3] See, e.g., my discussion of the writings of John Gaddis in Chapter XXI.

[4] Thomas Friedman, "Living Hand to Mouth," *New York Times,* October 26, 2005.

[5] In substance this point applies even to China, for all the formal "Communist" attributes of the governing apparatus.

[6] For this view of the matter see, e.g., Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-first Century* (NY, Public Affairs, 2003)

[7] Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 271–272.

[8] Condoleezza Rice, in a briefing at the State Department, July 21, 2006. *http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/69331.htm*

[9] I am grateful to Ivan Krastev of the Central European University for allowing me to read his unpublished paper on "The Strange Death of Liberal Central Europe," which contains a stimulating discussion of this topic.

[10] John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1920) Chapter II: "Europe Before The War."