

8 Worldmaking Projects, the Cunning of Reason, and the Evolution of World Statehood

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8.1 Introduction: the rising planetary imaginary

The future-oriented concept of ‘project’ took shape in the context of the rise of sovereign states, global trade, colonialism, and capitalist market society in the late seventeenth century (Pincus 2008). A bit later, in the eighteenth century, the temporal-progressivist alterations of concepts (Koselleck 1997) paved the way for transformative political ideas (projects) and the American and French Revolutions. Both involved universalizing claims that were, in principle, applicable everywhere. The future became a realizable possibility.

When the subject of an ethical-political project comprises the Earth and everything on it, the globe, the question inevitably arises about the integration of this whole and its formation into a single system in one way or another. By the late nineteenth century, the conditions had evolved for world politics, world economy, world communications, world exhibitions, and also world order, where the term ‘world’ (which historically has combined ideas about temporality and humanity) is now understood mainly, or at least usually framed, in secular and planetary terms. However, the idea of a world state first appeared already in the late eighteenth century, even before the concept of ‘world’ had become common to cover large-scale phenomena.

The gradually emerging planetary imaginary (Patomäki/Steger 2010) did not come to being in a vacuum. Its contents were shaped

and mediated by pre-existing structures and processes. As Karl Marx famously put it, ‘men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past’. The first permanent international organizations coordinated global time and space, as well as communication and transportation in these spaces. They were established at the time of the second industrial revolution and the dawn of the era of new imperialism and competing imperial great powers, which resulted in World War I. These forces shaped their materialization. Although the term ‘First World War’ was coined after the war and became common in academic, historical, and public discourse only after World War II, it started discussions on and declarations of world orders, especially of *new* world orders.

In this chapter, I argue that the competing worldmaking projects of the twentieth and early twenty-first century have inadvertently co-created the conditions for further developing and empowering the existing layers of world statehood, albeit only in an ambiguous manner. First, I outline a summary of the emergence of worldmaking projects (WMPs). Next, I discuss the underpinnings of the concept, as it is not widely used by the actors or in social scientific literature, and also relate it to the concepts of the field that I have developed elsewhere (Patomäki 2022). Third, I indicate how the history of the twentieth century can be written in terms of WMPs and their intra- and interactions. Moreover, despite the end of the Cold War, there is continuity to the current situation in the 2020s characterized by the division of the world into two camps, securitization of issues, and weaponization of interdependence. In the main section, I argue that instead of the eternal struggle between idealism and political realism, or anything of that sort, we live in an evolutionary and historical world, where things become possible in phases through the intertwining of different conditions and possibilities. The cosmopolitan attempts to build elements of world statehood assume new meanings in new world-historical contexts. A short section with concluding remarks follows this discussion.

8.2 The emergence of worldmaking projects

Although the conditions for planetary world-thinking and projects could have also evolved elsewhere, for historically contingent reasons, these conditions came together in Europe in what is customarily called ‘early modernity’ (see Patomäki 2023, chapter 4). Already the first wave of Eurocentric expansion and globalization was premised on the idea that the Earth is a sphere. New global routes of trade necessitated and enabled the drawing of world maps. A new planetary imaginary emerged also through the Copernican revolution and the cultural impact of the new scientific theories and encounters with non-Europeans on social imaginaries. The revival of ancient philosophies – including Stoicism – and the Atlantic voyages widened the prevailing terrestrial horizons, preparing the ground for the new Copernican cosmology (Kuhn 1957) and planetary geography (Cosgrove 2003).

The Copernican cosmology, various scientific discoveries and innovations, and changes in the background (e.g. print capitalism, expansion of literacy, ability to read alone and silently, etc.) made it possible for an increasing number of people to imagine the Earth as a small totality and part of a much larger solar system and wider cosmos. Natural scientists like Giordano Bruno and Christiaan Huygens and Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire and Immanuel Kant went even further. They speculated about the place and origins of the solar system and envisaged intelligent life in other worlds, either similar or much more developed than that of their own society. These thinkers were opposed to particularistic framing of ethics and politics and critical of European colonialism.

From this perspective, it is unsurprising that the first programmatic visions of a world state emerged during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (by Baptiste ‘Anacharsis’ Cloots in France and Karl Krause in Germany). However, although several distinctive metaphors and framings of the planetary imaginary were available by the time of the French Revolution, the social conditions were unfavorable to their widespread distribution and adoption in any cosmopolitan form. Not only the limits of the available practical-administrative capacities

but also constant warfare – or at least the threat of war – favored the category of the nation and related framings, metaphors, and stories. The cosmopolitan planetary WMPs tentatively articulated by Cloots or Krause based on the idea of a modern state were neither widely known nor feasible. Politics was increasingly future-oriented but concerned first and foremost new institutions on a national (whatever that was taken to mean) scale, such as the central bank, parliament, taxes, or educational system.

A new round of Eurocentric expansion was facilitated by the mechanical-industrial revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, generating a truly planetary economy (Polanyi 1957: 89). The industrial-mechanical world economy's growth and dynamism – at first based on steam engines and railways – created the material and infrastructural conditions for planetary WMPs. This marked a profound shift in global connectivity and economic integration. The steam engine, railways, and telegraph fundamentally compressed time and space – goods, people, and information could move faster and farther than ever before. This created not only the material infrastructure (railroads, factories, shipping routes) but also the organizational and bureaucratic systems necessary for planetary-scale cooperative projects as well as worldwide empire-building. Before the industrial-modern period, even vast empires (e.g., Mongol, Roman, Ottoman) had limits to their global reach and ambitions. They might dominate regions but did not typically claim a universal order for the entire globe. In contrast, the nineteenth century provided the material preconditions for planetary-scale ambitions.

Planetary-scale organizational and bureaucratic systems presuppose reliable and fast communication across space. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, postal services were developed in many countries and internationally, making sending and receiving mail faster, simpler and cheaper. Also, during this time, European empires established postal systems in the colonies, connecting them to the metropolises. The Universal Postal Union (UPU) was founded in 1874. The electric telegraph started to replace the optical telegraph in the mid-nineteenth century. The Morse system was adopted as the international standard,

and the International Telegraph Union (ITU) was established in 1865. Radio was developed at the end of the nineteenth century. It was used first by seafarers, then by the military during World War I and finally, on a much larger scale, by civilians in the 1920s. In the interwar era, radio became the first medium capable of reaching millions simultaneously, transcending geographical barriers and literacy limitations and offering immediacy unmatched by newspapers.

The development of radio occurred in the context of the second industrial revolution and competing imperial great powers. The era of new imperialism may have started with the Indian Rebellion of 1857–1858. Still, even though the rebellion was suppressed violently and the authority of the East India Company was assumed directly by the British Crown, no one was openly talking about an empire. This only occurred in the 1870s and 1880s. An official turn came in 1876 when Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli – following his landmark speech in the Crystal Palace in 1872 and the Conservative election success of 1874 – declared that Queen Victoria would take the title Empress of India, indicating that ‘empire’ and imperialism should, from then on, be seen also positively. Even though the British continued to practice free trade, the French were particularly quick to follow the newly declared British model. Other great powers followed suit, resulting, for instance, in the ‘scramble for Africa’. In 40 years, the dynamics of the resulting insecurity community – involving military alliances and arms race – led to World War I. There was something in the world system that had resulted in a total catastrophe. (Patomäki 2008: chapters 3 and 4)

This phase of world history involved much violence and exploitation in different parts of the world, and it caused a massive catastrophe, mainly within Europe. However, it also constituted a qualitative change in world history. The industrial-modern period introduced truly global integration (not just connectivity but mutual dependence), ideologically ambitious projects that framed themselves in global terms, and institutional permanence, such as international organizations or governance mechanisms. In this period, ‘world’-talk became more and more commonplace, accompanied by both cooperative and imperial practices of world governance. Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points can be taken as a

prototype of a project to reorganize the world in terms of certain values and principles. Such projects involve a promise of a good or progressive outcome, usually defined in terms such as equality, prosperity, or perpetual peace (for a discussion on recent interpretations of the limits and ambiguities of Wilson's project, Kennedy 2018; for a crushing early cosmopolitan criticism, Wells 1931: 1118–1121).

In connection with his 14 points, Wilson used the expression 'new world'. The term 'new world order' emerged in the ensuing discussions and debates, especially in the context of founding the League of Nations. The 14 points consisted of a handful of general principles that can be characterized as 'liberal', while most of the 14 points concern specific territorial rearrangements. In the next phase, the new liberal international order – including not only the League of Nations but also the International Labour Organisation (ILO) founded in 1921 – provided a platform for the anti-imperialists for their struggle against racism and colonialism and for socialists to imagine the remaking of the world economy (Helleiner 2023: chapters 6–7 and 11–13). Such anti-hegemonic aspirations were often interwoven.

This is how the conditions for 'world'-talk and future-oriented world politics developed, leading to competing claims about '(new) world order' (cf. Alker 1981; Alker, Biersteker and Inoguchi 1989). Worldmaking projects (WMPs) emerged in a world shaped by the dynamics of the world economy and divided into territorial formations, first states and empires and later 'nation-states'. Also, ideologies such as patriotism and later nationalism, liberalism, and socialism preceded the emergence of WMPs. The new, globally oriented science of 'geopolitics' emerged at around the same time. The twentieth-century WMPs were forged out of the pre-existing elements but involved a desire to reorganize the world as a whole in terms of universalizable values and global institutions. This talk became increasingly widespread in the twentieth century, yet the process has resulted in a gridlock of global governance in the early 21st century (Hale et.al 2013; Hale/Held 2017; Patomäki 2023: chapter 7).

8.3 Worldmaking projects as abstract reconstructions

At this point, I should note that the term worldmaking is not often used by lay actors or in social scientific literature. The term ‘world order’ is much more common, but it carries a heavy historical ballast. ‘Order’ tends to be hierarchical and indicates the absence of action, practice, process, and change. The concept of WMP is more active, processual, and change-oriented. It focuses on ideational rather than material interests and stresses the potential worldmaking powers of actors, even though a WMP in itself, or as such, does not involve agency. The concept implies that social realities are historically and socially constructed.

To be a worldmaking project in a world-political sense, the ethical and political aspirations must be sufficiently ambitious, universalizing, and global. At any given world-historical moment, these aspirations – embedded in a taken-for-granted background – may be largely realized, realized to some extent, or not at all. Claims of novelty tend to be exaggerated, and often, continuities dominate. Moreover, attempts to realize planetary worldmaking aspirations tend to have unintended consequences and effects of power (meaning existential and socially constitutive effects). To the extent that aspirations are realized, the primary understandings co-generate – in a context of power relations and previous geohistorical layers – constitutive and causal processes through which the forms and parts of the whole are determined. Also, when largely and successfully realized, the understandings and explanations underlying a WMP are prone to involve a partial and one-sided picture of the world. A corollary is that because WMP-related understandings and explanations can serve particular ideational and material interests, they can be subjected to ideology critique. For such purposes, the mode of existence of WMPs is that of political theories and ideologies and their philosophical underpinnings (ontology, epistemology, and axiology).

However, WMPs are not only concepts and ideas, but to the extent that they manage to constitute and generate agency and shape practices, institutions, and forces of production and destruction, they form vast entities that have the ability and power to shape the contexts in which they operate across the world. A possible way of thinking about

the causal impact and effects of WMPs is in terms of fields (Patomäki 2022). To the extent that WMPs succeed in shaping the world through re-organizing dispositions and relational positions of practices and institutions, involving a particular distribution of resources, they generate various causal outcomes that we can observe. Whereas the field theory of global political economy focuses on the liberal world economy and interstate practices as well as on the constitutive and causal consequences of geohistorical fields involving learning, WMPs are primarily identified through their ideational (ideological) contents and are presented as active makers. There may be tensions between the two concepts, yet they are best seen as complementary.

8.4 A brief history of the twentieth century in terms of WMPs

To reiterate, the 1918 declared Wilsonian ‘new world order’ can be taken as a prototype of a WMP. In terms of classification criteria, it existed as a declaration of ethical-political aspirations to organize some aspects of the world system as a whole in a particular way, and it was in significant part expressed in terms of principles. To the extent that such aspirations are realized, they may result in new institutions (sedimented practices with legal underpinnings) and organizations, such as the League or ILO. The post-WWI liberal international project was not the same as the nineteenth-century Eurocentric civilization that included liberal principles such as free trade and the gold standard. The emerging twentieth-century ‘new world order’ was a more explicit and self-conscious world-ordering project than the nineteenth-century system. Although it continued, in some ways, the Kantian-Cobdenian free trade-based peace project, it was in significant part defined against the power-political and imperial practices of the nineteenth century, while also trying to manage relational processes inherited from the past.

Table 1: *Worldmaking projects that emerged 1918–1945*

Name	Period	Aspirations	Institutions
Classical liberal (semi-Kantian)	1918–44	Wilson's 14 points: freedom of seas, free trade, public diplomacy, disarmament, adjustment of colonial claims, territorial adjustments, association of nations	League of Nations, International Labour Organisation (ILO)
Soviet socialism	1918–1945–1991	A world order contender, but at first 'socialism in one country'; later a mixture of great power status in international society and revolutionary state-level practices.	Post-WWII, supported UN & decolonization through the UN (+ Comecon, Warsaw Pact...)
Japanese 'New Order in East Asia'; the Italian 'Nuovo Ordine' and Nazi 'Neuordnung'	Early 1930s–1945 ('Ordine Nuovo' a terrorist organization in the 1970s)	Anti-globalist, turning nationalism and racialist-imperialist geopolitics into a WMP. A plurality of imperial great powers divides the world into their spheres of interest. Includes, however, the key pillar of the liberal order, namely political economy based on nations-capital in world economy.	The aim was an external, imperial, reorganization of the world, but explicit institutions mostly lacking. Mutual recognition of 'Monroe doctrines' for each imperial sphere and clearing unions for trade.
Embedded liberalism (Bretton Woods & UN)	1945–1973	Combined classical liberal order with 'embedded' elements (e.g. capital controls), facilitating the building of a democratic welfare state at home. During the Cold War, this WMP involved 'capitalist power-balancing'.	The United Nations, IMF, World Bank, and over time, hundreds of others, including GATT, NATO & Trilateral Commission

Table 1 summarizes the four WMPs that arose during the inter-war era and before the decolonization process. In the 1930s-40s, the Wilsonian liberal 'new world order' was contested not only by the anti-imperialists and socialists but also by the fascists and Nazis, who started to talk about their own 'new order' (the Japanese 'New Order in East Asia', the Italian 'Nuovo Ordine', and the Nazi 'Neuordnung'). This nationalist, geopolitical, and racist-imperialist WMP was opposed to the universalist, liberal order imposed through international law and emerging institutions. The idea seems to have been to create a concert of imperialist great powers, dividing the world into their spheres of interest, each with its own leader and laws. And yet, this WMP includes the key pillar of the liberal order, namely the capitalist world economy based on the interplay between nations and capital (as argued by Hofmann 2017). While the scope of the ambition was planetary, universalizing values and explicit world institutions were largely lacking, though it can be argued that for example Carl Schmitt's framework involved universalizing certain meta-values or principles such as plurality of *nomoi* and friend-enemy distinction. Arrangements would probably have consisted of just some sort of unstable mutual recognition of 'Monroe doctrines' for each imperial sphere and possibly bilateral clearing unions for their trade, following the German 1930s model and 1940 proposal (Patalano 2023: 304–305; Gross 2017). The defeat of this WMP in World War II discredited racism and imperialism and sped up decolonization (see Table 2).

World War I not only triggered but in an important sense also caused the Russian Revolution (e.g. Read 2013). After a period of external military interventions, civil war, experimentation, and hesitation, the characteristic features of the Soviet socialist WMP began to take hold, including centralized planning, state control ('dictatorship of the proletariat'), industrialization and technological advancement (to achieve economic self-sufficiency and military strength), internationalism and proletarian solidarity, and some social welfare at home. The Soviet Union was a world-order contender but had to settle for socialism in one country instead of a worldwide revolution, soon mixing a great power status in international society and support for revolutionary state practices and

expansion of the sphere of Soviet socialism. This led to power-balancing practices against the capitalist West. (Patomäki 1992: 212–214) In the post-1945 era, the Soviet Union supported the UN and decolonization through the UN and established organizations such as Comecon and the Warsaw Pact.

World War II set the stage for the reorganization of the liberal world order. The new version combined classical liberal order with ‘embedded’ elements (e.g. capital controls), facilitating the building of a social democratic welfare state at home (Ruggie 1982; cf. Helleiner 2014). New regional and global institutions were established: the UN, IMF, World Bank, and over time, hundreds of others, including GATT, NATO, G77, G7, UNDP, UNEP, WIPO, and the Trilateral Commission. During the Cold War, this WMP involved ‘capitalist’ power-balancing against the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China. The post-1945 era that has been characterized by terms such as ‘embedded liberalism’ and ‘American hegemony’ was simultaneously also the era of the Cold War (as conventionally understood).

The opponents of Western imperialism and advocates of collective self-reliance became a visible political force immediately after World War I. In the decades after World War II, both American liberals and Soviet socialists opposed European colonialism and imperialism, facilitating the struggles of those professing racial equality, national-territorial self-determination, and radical redistribution of rights, obligations, and resources in the world economy (for an interpretation employing the concept of WMP, see Getachew 2019; for discussions, Bartelson and Jackson 2020). Following the decolonization process, the so-called third world dominated the General Assembly of the UN. The demands for the New International Economic Order reflected most closely the principles and ideas of collective self-reliance of the Gandhi-Mao-Nyerere era. Since the early 1980s, however, there has been a trend away from the local orientation of collectivist self-reliance and import-substitution strategies and toward world-market-oriented growth (Alker 1981: 75–76, 85–87; Fischer 2016).

Table 2: The main worldmaking projects that emerged in 1955–2025

Name	Period	Aspirations	Institutions
Collective self-reliance (anti-imperial)	1921–1989 (heyday 1955–1979)	Racial equality, 'Africa to be ruled by Africans' (soon to be generalized to 'national' [territorial] self-determination), radical redistribution of rights & obligations and resources in the world economy	The United Nations (after decolonization, third world dominated GA), The New International Economic Order (NIEO), which was defeated at the UN by the industrialized West and then by rising neoliberalism
Neoliberal	(Started to prevail gradually after 1973–	To extend and neo-constitutionally lock in the sphere of private property rights and competitive 'free' markets across the world. Rule-based international order involves norms of human rights and democracy imposed by the hegemon (the US), unilaterally if necessary.	Neo-constitutional institutional arrangements ensuring free trade, strengthening private property rights and imposing orthodox economic policies: BW-institutions advocating structural adjustments, WTO, the EU etc.
Post-colonial development-talism critical of Western neo-imperialism	1989– (BRICS 2009–)	Continuation of some of the aspirations of collective self-reliance, but active participation in globalization & competitive capitalist market economy. Aim: equal rights & obligations with the Western powers, including the US.	The UN, Non-Aligned Movement, BRICS (alternative institutions of governance of the world economy)
Nationalist populist authoritarianism (neo-'Neuordnung')	2008/9–	Anti-globalist, though involving political economy based on nations-capital in world economy (possibly libertarianism at home); aiming at pluralism led by great powers; this kind of 'order' consists of essentially different and in part incompatible national cultures and civilizations.	Apart from some anti-hegemonic countries such as Russia, the US under Trump is also verging on advocating such neo-'Neuordnung', albeit antagonistically vis-à-vis those challenging the US hegemony.

As an ideology, many elements of neoliberalism were articulated already in the interwar era (Slobodian 2018), but neoliberalism did not become a visible WMP before the 1970s and 1980s. Aided by globalization and the increasing discrepancy between territorial states and the liberal and financialized world economy, the rise of neoliberalism coincided with the era of jet passenger planes, transnational phone calls, satellites, and live TV news across the world. Neoliberals aspire to establish institutional arrangements that ensure free trade and liberal-orthodox economic policies, extending the sphere of private property rights and competitive 'free' markets across the world. Neoliberalism succeeded in transforming the Bretton Woods institutions, establishing the WTO and the EU, etc. (for a more detailed discussion, Patomäki 2021: 114–123). At the end of the Cold War, another new world order was proclaimed, apparently establishing a 'rule-based' international order based on the norms of human rights and democracy imposed by the US, unilaterally if necessary.

The (neo)liberal international order is contradictory and forms only part of the reality in the 2020s and 2030s (reflecting also the deep contradiction of international law, see Koskeniemi 2005; Patomäki 2023: chapter 12). Moreover, the liberal aspects of this 'order' ignore long-term continuities regarding sovereign states, power-balancing, state-reasoning, nationalism, and the UN Charter system (it continues to include a capitalist power-balancing system as the world in the 2000s has been increasingly divided into suspicious and hostile camps). In this context, the rising inequalities, especially within states and looming global problems have, among other things, eroded belief in the possibility of progress (more on this in the concluding section). There are many continuities from the Cold War era, such as militaristic political economy and tendencies toward limitation or end of democracy.

Meanwhile, a WMP of post-colonial developmentalism critical of Western neo-imperialism has risen, involving the BRICS movement. There is a continuation of some of the aspirations of collective self-reliance, but also a commitment to actively participate in globalization and competitive capitalist market economy. A key demand is equal rights and obligations with the Western powers, including the US, and –

instead of double standards and hegemonic unilateralism – equal and consistent applicability of rules and principles. Moreover, the goal is to eliminate unilateral post-imperial privileges (for example, the position of the US dollar in the world economy) and to create real and fair conditions for economic development also among middle-income and poor countries.

What is remarkable about the situation in the early 21st century is that the three prevailing WMPs (neoliberal, postcolonial developmentalism, and neo-‘Neuordnung’) are all iterations of previous ideologies and WMPs, though including also novel combinations. They have grown in a context often characterized as ‘hyper-globalisation’ (referring to an extreme level of interconnectedness and integration among countries and economies on a global scale) or as its immediate aftermath (Rodrik 2011, 2022; Subramanian/Kessler 2013; Beattie 2023; Grynspan 2023). Securitization of world-economic issues and weaponization of interdependence have replaced pure economic liberalism, and these developments constitute generic tendencies toward neo-‘Neuordnung’ direction. Although this situation involves something analogical to the insecurity community of competing imperialisms and related security dynamics that led to World War I (in the highly integrated world economy of the very early twentieth century); in terms of ideologies and WMPs, the current situation looks like a rehash of the developments that led to World War II and were related to the struggles about how to organize the world economy, associated with a conflict between haves vs. have-nots.

8.5 WMPs during the early 21st-century regressive era

It is not possible to understand the dynamics of the whole without an account of the causal consequences of organizing parts of the world economy in a particular way (see Patomäki 2022, 2023). In other words, we cannot understand or explain world history only in terms of WMPs. For example, the enormous economic growth of the last hundred years (including the quadrupling of the world’s population and a similar

increase in per capita production) and its consequences have made the world increasingly interconnected. The development of technology and emergent infrastructures have enabled such forms of interaction and organization that very few could even have imagined in the interwar period, while it has also pushed the Earth to a new geological era, the Anthropocene. At the same time (here meaning ‘already since the industrial-mechanical revolution of the nineteenth century’), the capitalist market economy has generated increasing inequality both within countries and globally. The only period of temporary exception to this general rule occurred in 1940–1980 when inequalities decreased within most countries. In the neoliberal era since 1980, inequalities within countries have increased again (in some places to record highs), while global inequality has declined only slightly, mainly due to the economic growth of China and some other Asian countries (e.g. Piketty 2014; Milanovic 2016; Boushey et.al. 2017).

The 1940–1980 era associated with the era of embedded liberalism and Soviet socialism included world-historically exceptionally high rates of growth. Growth and its limitations and contradictions can be analyzed in terms of the fields that (de-)generate it. Processes of uneven growth in the world economy involve not only vicious but virtuous circles of cumulative causation (e.g. Kaldor 1996). For example, high levels of inequality can contribute to lowering rates of growth (e.g. Akyüz 2018), including through the ‘downward’ race to the lowest possible wage and cost level, thereby generating protectionist tendencies in the declining and deindustrializing part of the world economy (Podkaminer 2024; cf. discussions on convergence in Piketty 2016; Milanovic 2016). Fields function in the open and historically evolving global political economy, and together the fields, as well as the mechanisms and complexes that generate them constitute the world-historical movement of global political economy as a whole, resulting in real-world trends and oscillations in economic growth and distribution of incomes and wealth. The whole consists of the interacting fields and their inner ‘codes’, including those of the interstate field, involving WMPs and various forms of learning (including regressive and pathological), and conflicts. This dynamic generates not only cooperation but also conflicts. The latter can escalate to

wars, including world wars. Both the whole and its parts are in a constant movement – and in a process of becoming something different, while partial regress and various pathologies are common.

It is in such a context that the three dominant twenty-first-century WMPs (neoliberal, postcolonial developmental, and neo-*Neuordnung*) have been (i) forged as responses to perceived societal problems, resulting in reiterations and contextual modifications of the early-to-mid twentieth-century ideologies, while they have also (ii) contributed to the movement of global political economy by shaping agency, policies, and institutions. For example, neoliberalism has succeeded in transforming social contexts through agency, practices and institutions, with far-reaching effects. Despite its reliance on the ideal of self-regulating competitive markets, somewhat paradoxically it has also established a project of large-scale transformation by means of deliberate social engineering (Patomäki 2021: 108–109). Putting (irrealist) theories into practice tends to produce negative unintended effects that can also be cumulative and self-reinforcing. Redefining and repositioning actors as (particular kinds of) entrepreneurs or customers change their rights and obligations and their self-perception. Constructing a risk-taking resilient subject – a subject that is presumed to be capable of adapting to changing circumstances, especially to unexpected hardship – is a possible response to the downsizing and erosion of public responsibilities and the continuing turmoil of capitalist market society, but can undermine trust in other people and common institutions and thereby make cooperation more difficult (e.g. Bowles 2008; Chandler/Reid 2016). The prevailing economic and social policies have also had various causal effects such as rising inequalities, progressively more insecure terms of employment, and recurring economic crises. These have led to discontent with globalization and various political responses, including those of nationalist and authoritarian populisms. (For an analysis, Patomäki 2021)

WMPs are not static but changing and they intra- and interact. For example, following negative experiences such as those of the shock therapy in the 1990s and various conflicts, actors may initially reject only some aspects of neoliberalism, but as developments diverge and

conflicts escalate, actors may take more distance from the (neo)liberal world order and its universalizing values and rules and principles. When regressive learnings start to dominate through policies and institutional rearrangements, including through de-democratization, the myopic and contradictory state perspectives on political-economic and security problems make state-actors increasingly inclined to the fallacy of composition and other contradictions. Moreover, protectionist tendencies may degenerate into a full-scale trade war affecting not only the world economy and its prospects but also states' security anxieties, threat perceptions, and enemy constructions. Preparations for war or actions of war make the security dilemma increasingly acute, prompting tit-for-tat responses and escalation. Through such processes – multiple combinations of action and reactions are possible – neo-Neuordnung may rise to become an increasingly dominant WMP, as it did in the 1930s and early 1940s. At a deeper level, the potential repetition of history indicates unlearning, regressive learning and/or pathological learning.

8.6 The cunning of world-historical reason and world statehood

To paraphrase Marx's famous remark to Hegel, when the tragedy of history repeats itself, the second time easily appears more like a farce than a tragedy. However, the enormous growth of the powers of production and destruction of the last hundred years, the related development of technology and infrastructure, and the further shrinking of the Earth have made the possibility of the tragedies of the twentieth century being repeated absurd (which does not mean that it cannot happen, but it would be utterly irrational).

The condensed account of the overall dynamics outlined above is also only partial. Several different WMPs have contributed to the huge growth of population, output, and human-technological causal powers and their societal and ecological consequences. Awareness of these powers and their consequences has prompted the spread of holoreflexivity (based on a planetary perspective) and the gradual development of

global governance powers and functions until the end of the twentieth century. However, the development of global governance has largely been gridlocked in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

My quasi-Hegelian point is that the WMPs of the twentieth and early twenty first century, and their intra- and interactions in the context of rapidly changing material context, have inadvertently created the conditions for further development of the world-layer of governance and government. So far, the development of these conditions – in part based on new interconnected, planetary-scale infrastructures of communication and movement – has occurred within a system of multi-spatial (meta)governance (Jessop 2012), while new kinds of functions and powers can emerge. One essential aspect is that modern ideologies and the process of decolonization have brought into being a world where people are equal. Although regressive, racist, and imperialist developments remain possible in some restrained and ambiguous sense, slavery, racism, and imperialism in all their explicit forms have been delegitimized. Moreover, although there are disputed territories and borders, the room for traditional imperial-territorial expansion is limited as recognized sovereign states cover all the space on Earth (though a shift toward neo-Neuordnung can involve neo-imperial territorial claims). Similarly, by and large, only tacit and nostalgic forms of racism remain conceivable. Morally and legally, the equality of all humans is a universally recognized principle in nearly all moral and legal systems at all scales. This can be and often is violated, but the norms and principles remain valid, and regression can only occur to some degree.

Even more important is the emergence and development of the notion that negative global dynamics can be not only mitigated but also steered toward cooperation and the common good at the level of the whole. This idea arose with the ‘world’ talk at the very beginning of the twentieth century, before World War I, and it became more common at the time and in the aftermath of Wilson’s fourteen points. For example, in his *Imperialism: A Study*, Hobson (1988 [originally 1902, this edition 1938]) discussed comprehensively different aspects of imperialism and wars. Although Hobson’s basic argument was in some regards in line with cosmopolitan liberalism, he also argued from a critical political

economy perspective that the new imperialism of the late nineteenth century and related tendencies for war were (co-)generated by the inner mechanisms of industrial-capitalist market society, especially inequality-related overproduction/underconsumption. Hobson advocated socialist-democratic reforms within states to strengthen domestic demand for goods and services. He also advocated global reforms: fair global regulation of trade combined with building elements of European and global federalism (for a summary and discussion, see Patomäki 2008: 44–58).

In the interwar era, there were related and parallel calls for ‘organized trade’ under the control of the League of Nations, as well as a ‘Collective International Economic Council’ that would ‘regulate consumption, international production, currency and transport relations, [and] raw material distribution’. For one, Rudolf Hilferding, an Austrian Marxist thinker, saw free trade as a force for peace in the era before monopoly capitalism and imperialism, envisioning a future world where trade would be guided by cooperation and mutual benefit rather than by the competitive logic of capital accumulation. He wrote: ‘Economic competition between nations for conquest of markets must be replaced by cooperation’. In 1931, he reiterated this point, calling for both ‘the removal of unhealthy protectionism’ and ‘international cooperation under the leadership of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization ... to replace the chaos wrought by economic nationalism with a well-planned order of world-wide exchange’ (quotations from Helleiner 2023: 105–106)

A related set of ideas concerns the world’s monetary system. Proposals for multilateral clearing systems date back to the 1890s (suggesting a compensation mechanism on the model already implemented by the Universal Postal Union) and were widely discussed in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, during the early 1940s as war raged, there were several clearing union proposals on the table, including by Nazi Germany (for the original proposal, Funk 1940; for discussions, see Skidelsky 2001: 194–196; Patalano 2023: 307). John Maynard Keynes’s particular conception is the best known because it constituted the British position in the Bretton Woods negotiations. For him, an ICU involved an impartial

system for managing currencies and a world central bank governing a common currency, the *bancor*. Financial positions would be defined against the rest of the world, and obligations made systemic and equitable between debtors and creditors. The resultant plan was intended to achieve several aims. In principle, it would avoid problems associated with a dominant international currency belonging to one state, it would reduce and mitigate conflicts between states in trade and monetary matters, and insofar as it functioned effectively, it would enable the pursuit of rational economic policies for the mutual benefit of all states. The plan, of course, was not without its problems, several of which were quickly identified by E.F. Schumacher and then Michał Kalecki and Schumacher (for a detailed discussion of their contribution and the context, see Faudot 2021). New versions of the plan have been developed and several proposals made since then, also in the twenty-first century (Morgan and Patomäki, 2026).

Table 3 summarizes the basic idea of the cosmopolitan social/democratic WMP. This WMP is based on holoreflexivity and the possibility that better control – especially democratic control – of the whole may not only prevent conflicts between different parts but also promote co-operation and the common good. The same idea has been shared by those thinkers and movements that have advocated world statehood as such, from H.G. Wells's early works (Wells 1902) and 'open conspiracy' (Wells 1933) to the world federalist movement of the 1940s, via the World Order Models Project of the 1970s and 1980s, and to the rise (and subsequent partial decline) of global civil society and alter-globalization movement in the 1990s and 2000s. This WMP, with multiple variations, has aimed at transforming the existing global institutions and building new ones. Many of the proposals concern establishing state-like tasks, functions, and powers on the planetary scales under rubrics such as multispatial (meta)governance. It involves executing functional tasks in various areas through planetary-scale regulations, taxes, policies, and institution-building, and in terms of legitimate processes (not only output legitimacy but also participation, representation, etc.).

Table 3: *The cosmopolitan social democratic, or democratic-socialist, WMP*

Name	Period	Aspirations	Institutions
Democratic socialist and/or global-Keynesian cosmopolitanism	1918– (re-emerged in the 1980s)	Planning on a world scale and/or Keynesian policies and institutions applied globally. Global democracy and redistribution (justice). Combines developmentalism and responses to global problems (war, ecology, etc.).	International Clearing Union, global taxes, world economic policy, world parliament, planetary control of nuclear weapons, etc.

To reiterate, there is something at the heart of the world-historical process that is analogous to Hegel's cunning of reason (a term Hegel 1975: 89, mentions only once in the introduction to lectures on the philosophy of world history). Hegel's cunning of reason means that while actors may be pursuing their own limited material and ideational interests or goals, they can unknowingly contribute to the advancement of a broader rational purpose of spirit (reflexive consciousness) and freedom. Each stage of development can only be fully understood retrospectively. The process involves the dialectic of *Aufhebung* (overcoming) whereby the existing contradictions come to be unified in a higher principle or organization. Hegel's basic idea can be interpreted in a future-oriented way. There are developments and tendencies in world history that involve not only unintended consequences but also learning and the overcoming of contradictions that together lead history towards a direction that can be normatively assessed as rational. In other words, we can talk about the tendential rational direction of world history. Any claim about the tendential rational direction of world history is based on a dialectical argument within the meaningful human sphere (at a general and abstract level, Bhaskar 2008: 91, argues that dialectical rationality, truth, theory/practice consistency and dialectical universalizability impose a tendential directionality to the absencing of constraints on wellbeing and possibili-

ties – such a process is dialogical). Moreover, no endpoint is more than temporary; world history remains open. To the extent that a rational direction constitutes an explicit goal of action (itself never more than a part of processes that determine world history), it must be realized, at least in a significant part, through transformative praxis. Reason is not independent of actors and agency, nor does it operate only behind the backs of actors, as Hegel seems to have assumed.

Now, in the context of the dynamics of the whole in the early twenty first century, the tendential rational direction coincides approximately with the goals of the cosmopolitan social/democratic WMP (which can be specified in various ways). The idea of post-WWI socialists that an integrated global economy could be actively regulated, managed, and planned to serve cooperative and democratic goals has become more feasible by the 2020s than it was in the 1920s-1940s, not least due to technological and infrastructural developments. While in the 2020s, the prevailing negative dynamics seem to be taking the world towards a global military catastrophe, the multiple human-made global problems that have emerged in the twentieth and twenty first centuries have become more acute than ever – this is widely recognized for example in the context of climate change. On the positive (even if also ambiguous) side, the emergent possibilities include global civil society, the internet, and related infrastructures, paving the way for new forms of agency such as world parties.

Collective learning materializes in collective actions and common institutions. There is a further problem, however. While common institutions are part of the solution, they may sometimes also aggravate the problem of conflicts. This depends to a large degree on how they are built and what kinds of universalizing values they express (Patomäki 2023: chapter 13). Integration processes must be compatible with a security community in which there is trust and a mutual expectation that conflicts can be resolved through peaceful change. They also require institutional arrangements compatible with such processes. The era of states or WMPs will not come to an end with changed or new common global institutions. States and competing WMPs will continue to exist and evolve also in a world where the layer of world statehood has become more func-

tional and more capable of directing the dynamics of the whole toward a more cooperative direction.

8.7 The role of changing forms of temporality in WMPs

The dynamics of the whole also include changing forms of temporality. Therefore, it is necessary to say a few words about what the prevailing forms of temporality are in the 2020s and 2030s. Transformations of concepts in terms of time and temporality did not stop at the 18th-century secularization of Christian time and the emergence of the idea and expectation of progress (as discussed by Koselleck 1997). Already World War I problematized belief in inevitable, linear or dialectical progress. Following manifold twentieth-century twists and turns in the dominant conception of time, a techno-commercial version of the linear progressive time remains part of the common sense in many parts of the world, especially in the industrialized and subsequently deindustrialized West. This rather shallow belief in progress can be summarized as a sentiment like ‘new models of cars or computers are technically more advanced than the previous ones and thus better – as seen on TV’ (Patomäki 2009: 435).

Meanwhile, especially since 1980, Whiggish neoliberalism has succeeded in claiming the direction of such ‘progress’, as also witnessed by attempts to ‘modernize’ social democratic parties in the 1980s and 1990s. Although neoliberalism includes many and sometimes conflicting elements, in its mainstream form, its core content is based on neoclassical economics (Patomäki 2021: 104–109). When people are told that neoliberal globalization is the best possible world and the inevitable result of historical development, and when they are simultaneously informed that due to the prevailing situation and laws of economics, they must accept cuts, the threat of unemployment, worsening working conditions, increasing inequality, and reduced forms of democracy, it is not surprising that they turn against such globalization (Piketty 2020: 652). The emergent global problems and the cosmopolitan social/democratic WMP play a role in this new constellation. Global problems reinforce

the feeling of uncertainty or even danger about the future. Neoliberal elites have tended to be opposed to supranational regulation (cf. Harmes 2012). Gradually, a convergence occurs between those occupying privileged positions within the world, potentially threatened by trans- or supranational regulation and taxation and by new institutions, and those dominated groups who find that their conditions have changed, making life more insecure, and who anticipate that globalization requires them to make further sacrifices.

The rise of nationalist-populist movements and parties contributes to shaping the prevailing perception of time and temporality. Through a critique of the prevailing Whiggism and, as a generalization but selectively, of modernity, they turn to the glorification of a 'Golden Age' when the community – at this point understood conventionally as the nation – was strong, unified, and culturally or ethnically 'pure'. From this perspective, it seems that instead of progressing, society has been on a downward trajectory due to external forces such as global elites, immigrants, and international institutions – and also due to those domestic forces that have been undermining traditional institutions such as family, sexual division of labor, and private property. Reflection on the temporal form of such a situation leads to the old idea of the cyclical nature of history. Thus emerges the possibility of invoking a cyclical view of history, to instill hope, and to mobilize people around the idea of a national revival. The story of a 'golden age' and a return to a better past is often represented as compatible with neoliberal economic policies. The story encourages one to deny planetary-scale problems, such as climate change, which indicates the need for novel global responses. Such problems must thus be an invention of globalists; focusing on them is an obstacle to national revival (this understanding resonates with libertarian denial and neoliberal downplaying of the problem). In a more moderate form, one could as well argue, following the logic of neoclassical economics, that even if the problem is real, 'we' should let others take the main responsibility for handling it. 'Our' contribution is only a small part of the whole, and we can free-ride without worrying too much.

This is the context in which arguments about the cunning of reason and the tendential rational direction of world history can now be

presented. Such arguments are neither Whiggish nor anti-Whiggish. Rather, they are based on the idea that time, causation, emergence, and change are real. While agency and their reflective consciousness, will and intentions (what Hegel called the ‘spirit’) are made possible by – and can be seen as effects of – complex and evolving society, they are causally efficacious and capable of achieving changes (this is what Hegel meant by ‘freedom’ and he expected its area and scope to expand). World history is open-ended and involves contingency. The past should not be understood in terms of the present, or as inevitably leading to the present, and the present is in no way the best of possible worlds. The deeper constitutive meanings and principles of the global political economy emerge and evolve historically. This process is co-generated by collective human learning. However, this includes the possibility of regressive and pathological learning and various illusions and mystifications, as discussed above (e.g. stories about returning to the golden age). The future depends also on agency: our anticipations are reflexive, and self-altering predictions can move the world in a direction that may or may not be desirable.

8.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that following the industrial-mechanical revolution of the early nineteenth century, the world economy’s growth and dynamism created the material and infrastructural conditions for planetary-scale WMPs. The nineteenth century developments marked a profound shift in global connectivity and economic integration. The steam engine, railways, and telegraph fundamentally compressed time and space; goods, people, and information could move faster and farther than ever before. In other words, this period laid down the material preconditions for the ‘world’ talk that emerged and spread in the second half of the century and planetary-scale ambitions that involved not only colonial empires and capitalist markets but also various international organizations and systems of global governance. Proper WMPs claim to represent a new vision for organizing the world as a whole, and indeed,

many of the WMPs have proclaimed a 'new world order' or 'new order' of some sort.

Categorizing worldmaking projects depends to a significant degree on one's theoretical perspective and concerns. I have identified eight different WMPs as they have evolved in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. These WMPs are not separate but interact and evolve; they are also part of the same dynamics of the global political economy and world history. In addition to the development of infrastructures and the struggles surrounding them, the overall dynamics have also concerned productive forces and relations as well as economic growth, which in turn has had massive impact on the planet's biosphere. In this era of the emergence and development of WMPs, nationalism can be seen as a metaproject or, perhaps more metaphorically and accurately, as the operating system beneath many other worldmaking projects. Many of the WMPs of this era have been associated with particular (multi)national states. In this and other ways, the universalizing aspirations tied with these WMPs have often been contradictory. The eight WMPs I have discussed include three liberal, two socialist, and two fascist ones. The WMP of post-colonial developmentalism critical of Western neo-imperialism is not easily categorizable in these terms. It is a mixture of elements of contemporary neoliberalism, embedded liberalism, and collective self-reliance of the era of 1955–1989. I have left aside 'religious-universalist projects' (their engagement with global issues tends to be reactive, moralistic, or strategically selective rather than systematic or integrative) and 'planetary-ecological projects' (I have subsumed such concerns under the category of the cosmopolitan social democratic, or democratic-socialist, WMP).

My basic point in this chapter has been that the twentieth century WMPs, together with economic and technological developments, have created conditions where learning, political struggles, crises and risks generate the possibility of new collective actions and institutions on a planetary scale. Instead of ending, world history proper is only about to begin. Nonetheless, to achieve any major changes in the rational and desired direction, the cosmopolitan social/democratic WMP would have to be able to redefine the prevailing notions of time and temporality.

Progress is not something that just happens or something that requires just adaptation. Progress is also not something we should resist (there is no golden era, and we cannot return to the past). Defining the direction of progress involves agency. Participation in the realization of rational and desirable developments indicates freedom as self-determination. However, the processes of determination are diverse and can involve explicit pluralism; all actions, policies, and institutions have unintended consequences, often negative, and progress in an open world history requires learning from past mistakes and tragedies. Despite these provisos, the rational tendential direction is toward the strengthening and qualitative development of the layer of world statehood.