

Review - Future States

Written by Rhys Crilley

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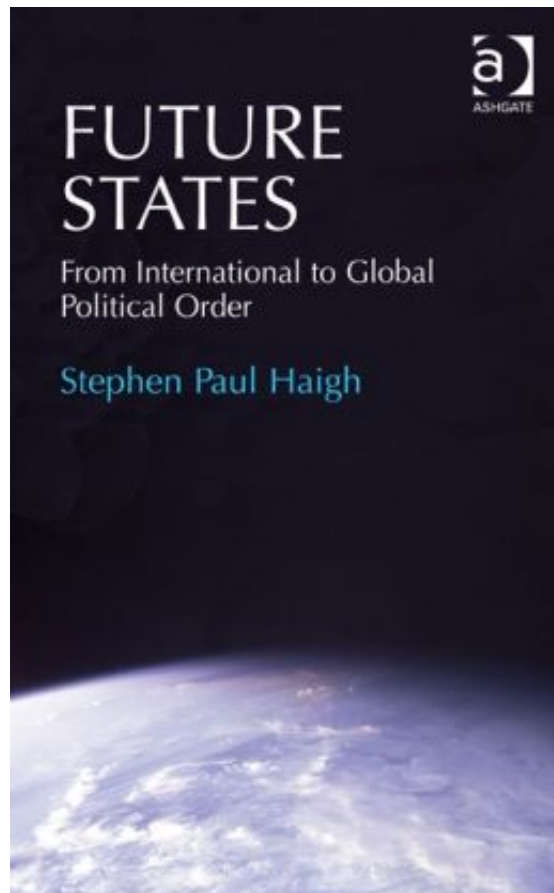
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RHYS CRILLEY, NOV 20 2013

Future States: From International to Global Political Order

By: Stephen Paul Haigh

Ashgate, 2013



In *Future States* Stephen Paul Haigh addresses the phenomena of globalization. The central argument made is for the resilience, adaptability and centrality of states in the global system, a system which is rendered neo-medieval in form by globalization. For Haigh, states transformed into embedded cosmopolitanism states are an institutional necessity in a global system that has returned to “medieval-style configurations of segmented or cross-cutting authority” (p.3). Clearly, the book deals with some extremely big questions and the author’s arguments are supported by a clear, subtle and reflexive analysis of globalization and states throughout.

Future States provides a comprehensive investigation of the development of modern states as we now know them. Haigh recognises that there is nothing natural about the concepts of sovereignty and the Westphalian state system (p.48), and he explores how they came to be. Haigh argues that with the formation of the Westphalian system “Pope

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above and Lord below lost influence; in their stead the King" (p.57). Driven by material causes (p.48) as well as ideational ones (p.50), this political order signalled a shift of identity, power and allegiance from institutions at either extreme of near and far and concentrated them in the middle (p.57).

Haigh then wonders if it is true that power and allegiance once did this, whether they can reverse and "precipitate out in something like the medieval form?" (p.57). The rest of the book is focused on this question, addressing Hedley Bull's claim that

If modern states were to come to share their authority over the citizens, and their ability to command their loyalties, on the one hand with regional and world authorities, and on the other hand with sub-state or sub-national authorities... ..then a neo-Mediaeval form of universal political order might be said to have emerged (Bull cited in Haigh, p.57).

The theoretical position of the analysis is one of pluralism. Haigh draws upon several aspects from different traditions. From realism he takes the idea of states as primary actors; from liberalism, the notion of interdependence. From Critical Theory; a sensitivity to the notion that what seems 'natural' is a reflection of dominant interests. From the English School; the idea that states form a society rather than simply a system (p.7). Overall though, the key theoretical influence for Haigh is constructivism and the core notion that ideas underpin the social world (p.7). This theoretical pluralism and pragmatism is defended by the author who recognises that although "full blown theories of IR are incompatible at some points... ..they are far from irreconcilable across all points" (p.8). This pragmatism is also adopted in regards to methods; inasmuch as the nature of different objects of research are investigated with different methods.

It may seem trivial to discuss the theory and methods of a book that deals with the big questions of globalization and makes bold claims, however this theoretical melting pot has several implications for the subsequent work. On the whole, and perhaps most importantly, it works. One may fear that a book that draws upon such a diverse pick-and-mix selection of influences may run the risk of being a 'jack of all trades and a master of none', or even worse, simply incoherent in its approach and analysis of important questions. However, *Future States* is neither of those things. It is coherent, recognises the subtleties of the issues at hand and makes a comprehensive defence of its central arguments. *Future States* takes up the calls for more theoretical pluralism and pragmatism within IR and shows that a willingness to leave the safety of one's camp and drift, as somewhat of a theoretical nomad, can actually work.

Future States goes on to rebuff the notion of globalization and the state as having a zero-sum relationship where globalization increases and state sovereignty decreases. Central to Haigh's argument here is the idea that "globalization and the state are interdependent and mutually constitutive" (p.62). Conceptualising sovereignty as fluid, flexible and varying in terms of degree, Haigh argues that states are not losing territory, authority or sovereignty through globalization. Rather, globalization is the only way for states and the international system to be strengthened (p.80).

Legitimacy is a key concept for Haigh's understanding of states, as states are "social constructions whose existence is predicated on their ability to represent society in a legitimate way" (p.97). Because of globalization, whenever states are incommensurate with society they have to increasingly justify their actions and themselves against a criteria of legitimacy that previously did not exist or was simply ignored (p.96). For Haigh, "the once formally omnipotent state is now exposed on its flanks" (p.96). This understanding of legitimacy centres around a states capacity to provide three goods; physical security, economic well-being and representation of identity (p.110).

Haigh argues that "in terms of physical security and economic well-being, societies have become functionally detached from states, with serious implications for the latter's continued good health" (p.132). In terms of identity, Haigh recognises that through globalization identities are multiple and overlapping in contemporary social and political life, they are not either/or (p.191), and they can thrive under embedded cosmopolitan states which break down the very notions of inside and outside (p.195).

The concluding chapters of *Future States* deal with the implications of Haigh's analysis which climaxes with several points. Most notably, the notion that 'universal organizational principles' of embedded cosmopolitanism, such as

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norms of democracy and human rights, markets, civil society, technology and the idea of progress, bring the universal and the particular together in a “complementary relation within the institution of the state” (p.198). In a neo-medieval system, it is these embedded cosmopolitan states that become a necessity; holding the prospects for long term success because of how they bring “us significantly together in all of our particularities as a universally human ‘we’” (p.205). Through this line of thought difference does not antagonise, alienate or exclude but performs “an essentially connective role” (p.207).

This optimistic approach and conclusion is compellingly presented and well thought out however if the theoretical diversity highlighted above is a strength of *Future States*, it must be noted that certain theoretical exclusions are perhaps one of its main weaknesses. Most prominently, *Future States* lacks an engagement with postcolonial or poststructural perspectives, alongside feminist insights. Perhaps more radical forms of constructivism (such as poststructuralism) and feminist approaches can be argued away as being ‘irrelevant’, but it seems to me that postcolonialism would have a lot to say about the subject matter that *Future States* covers. Implicit in Haigh’s work is a recognition that the development of the Westphalian system (and the system itself) was/is western-centric (p.49), yet he fails to explicitly acknowledge what the implications of this might be.

Moreover, if globalization brings global particularities together as a universal human ‘we’ (p.205), I’d argue that further attention needs to be granted to postcolonial voices in understanding this universal ‘we’. This is not to say that Haigh is unaware of the problems of universal cosmopolitanism – he appears to be (p.207) – it is to recommend that a deeper, and more explicit engagement with postcolonial literature would enhance and enrich *Future States*. A discussion of postcolonial perspectives may potentially have a large impact on the conclusions made in *Future States*, or indeed it may not, however to have no sustained engagement with them whatsoever seems like an obstacle in overcoming the critiques that are easily leveled at any discussion of cosmopolitanism and ‘universalities’.

In conclusion, *Future States* is an interesting addition to the globalization literature and to IR more broadly. Although Haigh’s central claims are bold, they are supported by a sustained engagement with history, IR theory and empirical study. Despite the sophisticated and in depth analysis of globalization, Haigh’s work is well written and, perhaps most importantly, enjoyable to read. Whether you ultimately agree or disagree with the conclusions made in *Future States*, the book is certainly thought provoking and worth the attention of anyone who wants to explore issues as big and important as globalization.

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