

Camilleri, Joseph and Jim Falk, *Worlds in Transition: Evolving Governance Across a Stressed Planet*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham UK 2009. 704 pages. Paperback ISBN: 978 1 84980 034 1. 40 UK pounds.

This is not a light read. Nor is it an overview textbook for undergraduates. What we have with *Worlds in Transition* is a weighty tome that attempts to grapple with the direction of global governance, and humanity, from the modern epoch to what the author's see as the current period of transition. Camilleri and Falk have taken up the task of attempting to distill the essence of human history into a narrative that combines human proclivity for innovation and progress, with our ability to wreak havoc on the planet and each other. Part popular science, part cultural commentary, part political analysis, this book takes in the wide sweep of history to untangle the various problems facing decision makers today: from atmospheric flows that contribute to climate change, the threat of faster and more deadly pandemics, economic globalization, to broader security threats. At a whopping 704 pages, this book demands close attention.

The overarching thesis is that "the organization of human affairs is shifting in ways that markedly distinguish it from many centuries which constitute the modern epoch" (pp. 2-3). Presented as a sequel to the *End of Sovereignty* the book maps how various units of organization have evolved (from Empires to states and the decline of hegemony). This is not a conventional account of international order. While incorporating critical scholars such as Robert Cox, Ulrich Beck and Karl Polanyi, the book seeks to examine the evolutionary trajectory of human governance and its implications for humanity's adaptive capacity. In short, it takes a biological *and cultural* evolutionary perspective in assessing our capacity to reflect upon compounding problems (climate change, nuclear proliferation) and questions our capacity to respond in evolutionary leaps. We are in a period of transition because we have progressed to the point of recognizing that the planet is stressed but have yet to radically shift our political, cultural and economic structures to manage the flow of information, atmospheric gases, diseases and security threats that constitute our world.

How convincing is it? Camilleri and Falk are quite clear that they are not providing a hypothesis to be falsified (p. 3). They provide an alternative means to understand how it is that we have governance structures (with the state still central) that have not been able to “manage the shift from an inter-state to a world system” (p. 445). Their argument links the spread of markets and the capitalist system, along with cultural understandings of humanity as technologically innovative but divorced from the biosphere, have led to periods of continuous and discontinuous change. This has led states to oscillate between different modes of regulation to address the problems emerging from the disconnect between material and psychocultural needs (the most obvious being the difficulties in grappling with climate change and economic progress). The authors end on a positive note: that a holoreflexive epoch is possible such that the next stage in human evolution is open to us though it is not certain (p. 530).

The central weakness to the book is the trade-off between accurate description versus analysis. There has been great emphasis on documenting the events of the modern period across the various policy fields of global governance mentioned above. For the most part this provides us with a conventional account of events in the ‘evolution’ of say economic, health or security governance. But what we gain in detail is not the same as what we could have got in analysis. For example, in terms of global health governance, there is a great recap of events of how the past four pandemics have spread and the response from governments and the World Health Organisation. I am not convinced however, that 68 pages were needed on health (or other chapters for that matter), especially considering that if you were not ofey with global health governance some key concepts (like epidemic and pandemic) are not defined. This matters precisely because giving people an overview of events without giving them the tools to understand them undermines the contribution the volume makes to the reader’s capacity to assess the responses of the actors involved and therefore the central argument being made by the authors. Further, providing so much description tends to mean that the theoretical argument driving the narrative gets lost in the larva of information presented.

Nonetheless Camilleri and Falk have to be truly admired for asking the big questions in politics and in global governance. When I stated earlier that this was not a book to

be taken lightly, I was complimenting the authors on trying to seriously understand how we got to where we are today. When so many focus on the crisis of multilateralism, it is refreshing to read a grounded, thoughtful and engaging account of how global governance fits into the history of humankind and our species ability to save ourselves from ourselves.

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