

IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN

— 1930—

Immanuel Wallerstein was born on September 28, 1930 in New York City, married Beatrice Friedman on May 25, 1964, and with her had one daughter. He took all three degrees at Columbia University (1951, 1954, 1959), and also studied at Oxford in 1955–56. He served in the U.S. Army between 1951 and 1953, and has also held leadership positions in a number of professional associations for social scientists, including President of the International Sociological Association (1994–98). Wallerstein began his career at his alma mater, rising from instructor to associate professor of sociology between 1958 and 1971, at which point he taught at McGill University in Montreal for 5 years. In 1976 he was made director of the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations at the State University of New York at Binghamton, a position he held until recently when he moved to Yale, even while taking visiting appointments elsewhere.

The world of anglophone scholarship was stunned in 1972 when the great French historian of the Annales School, Fernand Braudel, published his two-volume masterpiece, *The Mediterranean*. To that point the Annales School had been best represented by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, whose *Feudal Society* (1940/61) had set a new standard for sociologically informed historiography, as it remains to this day. Bloch was murdered by the Gestapo near the end of WWII, and his successors were prolific but not as gifted as he, until Braudel's work burst upon the scene during the 70s and 80s. His three-volume work, *Civilization and Capitalism* (1981) inspired many historically-minded sociologists to pursue this new avenue of research.

The connection with Braudel and Wallerstein is an intimate one. Wallerstein was offered the unique opportunity in recent U.S. academic history to head a new program using a new paradigm, with the publishing support of a new journal (*Review*) at a time when risks were being taken institutionally and intellectually, largely owing to the tumult of the 60s. When the Braudel Center opened at Binghamton in 1976, it was amidst great publicity, and Braudel's visit at the inaugural ceremonies was covered in major news magazines. Wallerstein, who to that point had been an Africa specialist, suddenly rose to the challenge of bringing to life an American version of Braudelian history, and published his major work, *The Modern World-System* (3 vols., 1974, 1980, 1989). The first volume was received with tremendous attention from the international scholarly press, and "world-system analysis" became for a time the latest methodological innovation to grace the human sciences. Wallerstein surrounded himself with an extraordinary group of foreign-born experts in the socio-economy of the global system, and a steady stream of books, conferences, and journal articles issued from Binghamton, as new graduate students were trained for the first time in this mode of research. Wallerstein's other impor-

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tant works include *The Capitalist World-Economy* (1979), *Unthinking Social Science* (1991), and a number of volumes co-authored with Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, and André Gunder Frank. Heavily leftist in orientation and qualitative/historical by inclination, the Binghamton program ran in vigorous opposition to the mainstream world of U.S. sociology. Whether the Braudel Center and its program shall outlast its founder remains to be seen, but the amount and breadth of work that the Center sponsored during its first 20 years of existence, and the refreshing attention it drew to global dynamics rather than the traditional parochialism of research aimed only at the U.S. went a long way toward invigorating sociology and its sister disciplines, especially history and political-economy.

UNTHINKING SOCIAL SCIENCE: THE LIMITS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARADIGMS, 1991

World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase

World-systems analysis has existed under that name, more or less, for about 15 years. Some of its arguments, of course, have longer histories, even very long histories. Yet, as a perspective, it emerged only in the 1970s. It presented itself as a critique of existing dominant views in the various social sciences, and primarily of developmentalism and modernization theory which seemed to dominate social science worldwide during the 1960s.

The worldwide revolution of 1968 did not spare the world of social science, and world-systems analysis shared in, was part of, a wider reaction to the ideologized positivism and false apoliticism that had been the counterpart within world social science of the US hegemonic world view. Although world-systems analysis was only one variant of this critique, it stood out in retrospect by the fact that it broke more deeply with nineteenth-century social science than did other critiques, albeit probably not deeply enough.

It is hard to know how to assess "what we have learned." What I shall do is spell out what I think are the major premises or arguments that I

believe have been reasonably explicated. I choose carefully the verb "explicated." It does not mean these premises or arguments have been widely adopted or that they have not been contested, in detail at least, even among those who think they share in the world-systems perspective. What it means is that there has been enough elaboration of the arguments such that they are familiar beyond the bounds of the initiates (and thus, for example, they might appear in textbooks as reflecting a "viewpoint"), and such that these premises and arguments might be seen as part of the defining characteristics of a world-systems perspective.

I see three such defining characteristics. The first and most obvious is that the appropriate "unit of analysis" for the study of social or societal behavior is a "world-system." No doubt this assertion has led to enormous discussion around the so-called macro-micro problem, which in this case translates into how much of local and/or national behavior is explained/determined by structural evolution at the level of the world-system. I believe this is a totally false problem, but I shall not argue that here. I merely point out that, formally, the macro-micro issue is no different if one decides that the boundaries of a "society" are those of a "world-system" or that these boundaries correlate more or less with those of "nation-states." There still can be said to be the macro-micro issue. The real novelty, therefore, is that the world-systems perspective denies that the "nation-state" represents in any sense a relatively autonomous "society" that "develops" over time.

"Unthinking Social Science," by Immanuel Wallerstein. As seen in *World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase*, *Review*, XII, 2, © 1990. Used by permission.

The second defining characteristic has been that of the *longue durée*. This of course put us in the *Annales* tradition, as well as in that of the burgeoning field of "historical sociology." But I believe the world-systems perspective was more specific than either, and spelled out some elements that are blurry in the other two traditions. Long duration is the temporal correlate of the spatial quality of "world-system." It reflects the insistence that "world-systems" are "historical systems," that is, that they have beginnings, lives, and ends. This stance makes clear that structures are not "immobile." It insists, in addition, that there are "transitions" from one historical system to its successor or successors. It is this pair, the space of a "world" and the time of a "long duration," that combine to form any particular historical world-system.

The third element of world-systems analysis has been a certain view of one particular world-system, the one in which we live, the capitalist world-economy. Let me list the various elements that have been explicated. Some of these were borrowed, directly or in modified form, from other earlier perspectives. Some others were relatively new. But it has been the combination of these arguments that has come to be associated with world-systems analysis. I merely list now the characteristics presumed to be the description of a capitalist world-economy:

1. the ceaseless accumulation of capital as its driving force;
2. an axial division of labor in which there is a core-periphery tension, such that there is some form of unequal exchange (not necessarily as defined originally by Arghiri Emmanuel) that is spatial;
3. the structural existence of a semiperipheral zone;
4. the large and continuing role of non-wage labor alongside of wage labor;
5. the correspondence of the boundaries of the capitalist world-economy to that of an interstate system comprised of sovereign states;
6. the location of the origins of this capitalist world-economy earlier than in the nineteenth century, probably in the sixteenth century;
7. the view that this capitalist world-economy began in one part of the globe (largely Europe) and later expanded to the entire globe via a process of successive "incorporations;"

8. the existence in this world-system of hegemonic states, each of whose periods of full or uncontested hegemony has, however, been relatively brief;
9. the non-primordial character of states, ethnic groups, and households, all of which are constantly created and re-created;
10. the fundamental importance of racism and sexism as organizing principles of the system;
11. the emergence of antisystemic movements that simultaneously undermine and reinforce the system;
12. a pattern of both cyclical rhythms and secular trends that incarnates the inherent contradictions of the system and which accounts for the systemic crisis in which we are presently living.

To be sure, this list is merely a set of premises and arguments that have been articulated, and that have become relatively familiar to many. It is not a list of truths, much less a list of creeds to which we all pay allegiance. No doubt much empirical work needs to be done on each of these items, and there may be in the future much theoretical reformulation of them. But, as a relatively coherent and articulated view of historical capitalism, they exist.

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT: SOCIAL SCIENCE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, 1999

Ecology and Capitalist Costs of Production: No Exit

Today, virtually everyone agrees that there has been a serious degradation of the natural environment in which we live, by comparison with thirty years ago, a fortiori by comparison with one hundred years ago, not to speak of five hundred years ago. And this is the case despite the fact that there have been continuous significant technological inventions and an expansion of scientific knowledge.

From "The End of the World as We Know it," by Immanuel Wallerstein. As seen in *Ecology and the World System*, by W. Goldfrank. Published by Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. Copyright © 1999. By permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport.

that one, might have expected would have led to the opposite consequence. As a result, today, unlike thirty or one hundred or five hundred years ago, ecology has become a serious political issue in many parts of the world. There are even reasonably significant political movements organized centrally around the theme of defending the environment against further degradation and reversing the situation to the extent possible.

Of course, the appreciation of the degree of seriousness of the contemporary problem ranges from those who consider doomsday as imminent to those who consider that the problem is one well within the possibility of an early technical solution. I believe the majority of persons hold a position somewhere in-between. I am in no position to argue the issue from a scientific viewpoint. I will take this in-between appreciation as plausible and will engage in an analysis of the relevance of this issue to the political economy of the world-system.

The entire process of the universe is of course one of unceasing change, so the mere fact that things are not what they were previously is so banal that it merits no notice whatsoever. Furthermore, within this constant turbulence, there are patterns of structural renewal we call life. Living, or organic, phenomena have a beginning and an end to their individual existence, but in the process procreate, so that the species tends to continue. But this cyclical renewal is never perfect, and the overall ecology is therefore never static. In addition, all living phenomena ingest in some way products external to them, including most of the time other living phenomena, and predator/prey ratios are never perfect, so that the biological milieu is constantly evolving.

Furthermore, poisons are natural phenomena as well and were playing a role in the ecological balance sheets long before human beings got into the picture. To be sure, today we know so much more chemistry and biology than our ancestors did that we are perhaps more conscious of the toxins in our environment, although perhaps not, since we are also learning these days how sophisticated the preliterate peoples were about poisons and antipoisons. We learn all these things in our primary and secondary school education and from the simple observation of everyday living. Often we tend to neglect these obvious con-

straints when we discuss the politics of ecological issues.

The only reason it is worth discussing these issues at all is if we believe that something special or additional has been happening in recent years, a level of increased danger, and if at the same time we believe that it is possible to do something about this increased danger. The case that is generally made by the green and other ecology movements precisely comprises both these arguments: increased level of danger (for example, holes in the ozone layer, or greenhouse effects, or atomic meltdowns); and potential solutions.

As I said, I am willing to start on the assumption that there is a reasonable case for increased danger, one that requires some urgent reaction. However, in order to be intelligent about how to react to danger, we need to ask two questions: For whom does the danger exist? And what explains the increased danger? The "danger for whom" question has in turn two components: whom, among human beings; and whom, among living beings. The first question raises the comparison of North-South attitudes on ecological questions; the second is the issue of deep ecology. Both in fact involve issues about the nature of capitalist civilization and the functioning of the capitalist world-economy, which means that before we can address the issue of "for whom," we had better analyze the source of the increased danger.

The story begins with two elementary features of historical capitalism. One is well known: capitalism is a system that has an imperative need to expand—expand in terms of total production, expand geographically—in order to sustain its prime objective, the endless accumulation of capital. The second feature is less often discussed. An essential element in the accumulation of capital is for capitalists, especially large capitalists, not to pay their bills. This is what I call the "dirty secret" of capitalism. . . .

From the point of view of capitalists, as we know, the point of increasing production is to make profits. In a distinction that does not seem to me in the least outmoded, it involves production for exchange and not production for use. Profits on a single operation are the margin between the sales price and the total cost of production, that is, the cost of everything it takes to bring

that product to the point of sale. Of course, the actual profits on the totality of a capitalist's operations are calculated by multiplying this margin by the amount of total sales. That is to say, the "market" constrains the sales price, in that, at a certain point, the price becomes so high that the total sales profits is less than if the sales price were lower.

But what constrains total costs? The price of labor plays a very large role in this, and this of course includes the price of the labor that went into all of the inputs. The market price of labor is not merely, however, the result of the relationship of supply and demand of labor but also of the bargaining power of labor. This is a complicated subject, with many factors entering into the strength of this bargaining power: What can be said is that, over the history of the capitalist world-economy, this bargaining power has been increasing as a secular trend, whatever the ups and downs of its cyclical rhythms. Today, this strength is at the verge of a singular ratchet upward as we move into the twenty-first century because of the deruralization of the world.

Deruralization is crucial to the price of labor. Reserve armies of labor are of different kinds in terms of their bargaining power. The weakest group has always been those persons resident in rural areas who come to urban areas for the first time to engage in wage employment. Generally speaking, for such persons the urban wage, even if extremely low by world, or even local, standards, represents an economic advantage over remaining in the rural area. It probably takes twenty to thirty years before such persons shift their economic frame of reference and become fully aware of their potential power in the urban workplace, such that they begin to engage in syndical action of some kind to seek higher wages. Persons long resident in urban areas, even if they are unemployed in the formal economy and living in terrible slum conditions, generally demand higher wage levels before accepting wage employment. This is because they have learned how to obtain from alternative sources in the urban center a minimum level of income higher than that which is being offered to newly arrived rural migrants.

Thus, even though there is still an enormous army of reserve labor throughout the world-system, the fact that the system is being rapidly deru-

ralization means that the average price of labor worldwide is going up steadily. This means in turn that the average rate of profits must necessarily go down over time. This squeeze on the profits ratio makes all the more important the reduction of costs other than labor costs. But, of course, all inputs into production are suffering the same problem of rising labor costs. While technical innovations may continue to reduce the costs of some inputs, and governments may continue to institute and defend monopolistic positions of enterprises permitting higher sales prices, it is nonetheless absolutely crucial for capitalists to continue to have some important part of their costs paid by someone else. . . .

The environmental dilemmas we face today are directly the result of the fact that we live in a capitalist world-economy. While all prior historical systems transformed the ecology, and some prior historical systems even destroyed the possibility of maintaining a viable balance in given areas that would have assured the survival of the locally existing historical system, only historical capitalism, by the fact that it has been the first such system to englobe the earth and by the fact that it has expanded production (and population) at a previously unimaginable rate, has threatened the possibility of a viable future existence for mankind. It has done this essentially because capitalists in this system succeeded in rendering ineffective the ability of all other forces to impose constraints on their activity in the name of values other than that of the endless accumulation of capital. It is precisely Prometheus unbound that has been the problem. . . .

I draw from this analysis several conclusions. The first is that reformist legislation has built-in limits. If the measure of success is the degree to which such legislation is likely to diminish considerably the rate of global environmental degradation in say the next ten to twenty years, I would predict that this type of legislation will have very little success. This is because the political opposition can be expected to be ferocious, given the impact of such legislation on capital accumulation. It doesn't follow, however, that it is therefore pointless to pursue such efforts. Quite the contrary, probably. Political pressure in favor of such legislation can add to the dilemmas of the capitalist system. It can crystallize the real political

that are at stake, provided, however, that these issues are posed correctly.

The entrepreneurs have argued essentially that the issue is one of jobs versus romanticism, or humans versus nature. To a large degree, many of those concerned with ecological issues have fallen into the trap by responding in two different ways, both of which are, in my view, incorrect. The first is to argue that "a stitch in time saves nine." That is to say, some persons have suggested that, within the framework of the present system, it is formally rational for governments to expend x -amounts now in order not to spend greater amounts later. This is a line of argument that does make sense within the framework of a given system. But I have just argued that, from the point of view of capitalist strata, such "stitches in time," if they are sufficient to stem the damage, are not at all rational, in that they threaten in a fundamental way the possibility of continuing capital accumulation.

There is a second, quite different, argument that is made, one that I find equally politically impractical. It is the argument on the virtues of nature and the evils of science. This translates in practice into the defense of some obscure fauna of whom most people have never heard, and about which most people are indifferent, and thereby puts the onus of job destruction on flaky middle-class urban intellectuals. The issue becomes entirely displaced from the underlying ones, which are, and must remain, two. The first is that capitalists are not paying their bills. And the second is that the endless accumulation of capital is a substantively irrational objective, and that there does exist a basic alternative, which is to weigh various benefits (including those of production) against each other in terms of collective substantive rationality.

There has been an unfortunate tendency to make science the enemy and technology the enemy, whereas it is in fact capitalism that is the generic root of the problem. To be sure, capitalism has utilized the splendors of unending technological advance as one of its justifications. And it has endorsed a version of science—Newtonian, determinist science—as a cultural shroud, which permitted the political argument that humans could indeed "conquer" nature, should indeed do so, and that thereupon all negative effects of economic expansion would eventually be countered by inevitable scientific progress.

We know today that this vision of science and this version of science are of limited universal applicability. This version of science is today under fundamental challenge from within the community of natural scientists themselves, from the now very large groups who pursue what they call "complexity studies." The sciences of complexity are very different from Newtonian science in various important ways: the rejection of the intrinsic possibility of predictability; the normality of systems moving far from equilibrium, with their inevitable bifurcations; the centrality of the arrow of time. . . .

The concept of substantive rationality presumes that in all social decisions there are conflicts between different values as well as between different groups, often speaking in the name of opposing values. It presumes that there is never any system that can realize fully all these sets of values simultaneously, even if we were to feel that each set of values is meritorious. To be substantively rational is to make choices that will provide an optimal mix. But what does optimal mean? In part, we could define it by using the old slogan of Jeremy Bentham, the greatest good for the greatest number. The problem is that this slogan, while it puts us on the right track (the outcome), has many loose strings. . . .

No exit? No exit within the framework of the existing historical system? But we are in the process of exit from this system. The real question before us is where we shall be going as a result. It is here and now that we must raise the banner of substantive rationality, around which we must rally. We need to be aware that once we accept the importance of going down the road of substantive rationality, this is a long and arduous road. It involves not only a new social system, but new structures of knowledge, in which philosophy and sciences will no longer be divorced, and we shall return to the singular epistemology within which knowledge was pursued everywhere prior to the creation of the capitalist world-economy. If we start down this road, in terms of both the social system in which we live and the structures of knowledge we use to interpret it, we need to be very aware that we are at a beginning, and not at all at an end. Beginnings are uncertain and adventurous and difficult, but they offer promise, which is the most we can ever expect.