

their relation to international law (Tesón and Buchanan); how these laws may or may not be changed (Byers, Chesterman and Franck); an analysis of the Kosovo precedent (Stromseth); and, finally, sovereignty and the failed state (Keohane and Ignatieff). Earlier analysis in this vein has largely been overtaken by the ramifications of 11 September, but *Humanitarian Intervention* is saved from redundancy by the timing of its editorial process, which ran concurrently with the events of 2001.

All contributors accept the need for humanitarian intervention, their differences concern its evolution in international law and in general ethical perceptions. Farer argues that the Bush doctrine on counter-terrorism exists outside the UN charter. Bush concedes the right to act forcibly to some countries but not to others, exercises military power across international frontiers and arrogates to himself the right to decide to whom a state can, and cannot, grant asylum. Keohane suggests, without much sensitivity, that societies with a low capacity for self-governance will have to accept a limited version of sovereignty. In his defence, Ignatieff points out in the last chapter that, among rich and secure countries, the best governed tend to be those who relinquish their unilateral freedoms on defence, border security and trade to a higher regional authority. Reinforcing other themes which occur throughout the book, Ignatieff maintains that after 11 September, containment gave way to positive action. The US has taken sides and its humanitarian programmes are stiffened with the iron of its new security agenda, signalling a bleak future for the independent NGOs.

John Mackinlay

King's College, London

Being America: liberty, commerce and violence in an American world

Jedediah Purdy. New York: Knopf, 2003. \$24. 352pp.

Critics of Jedediah Purdy's first book, *For Common Things*, scorned his home-schooled condescension while communitarians praised his precocious, soul-searching eloquence and championed his effort to revive trust and commitment in a culture fraught with irony. Reading *Being America*, one is immediately struck by how Yale Law School and a fellowship at Washington's savvy New America Foundation have transformed Purdy's prose from plaintive to confident, allowing us to focus more on his ideas and less on character.

As the rest of the world is becoming like America, Purdy has become famous for wanting America to become something else. One wonders how the small-town values exalted in *For Common Things* can coexist with the features of modernity *Being America* claims are being internalised around the world: individualism; mobility; instant communications; and shattered traditions? Though he does not directly answer this question, the preface to *Being America* contains an exquisitely neat summary of the contradictory impulses felt by world's lesser traveled when confronted by the Other, which is us: 'We are onstage at the center of the world, and in others' eyes we are what they want us to be, what they fear that we are, what they want to become and what they loathe in themselves'.

For his research, Purdy spent time mingling with disenfranchised students in Egypt, socially entrepreneurial upstarts in Cambodia and religious chauvinists in India and Indonesia, all post-colonial nations where the ubiquity of America has not caused

citizens to abandon their indigenous identities. Beneath the surface, in fact there seems as little allegiance to America via American products as there is American loyalty to China for its exports. But the trappings of modernity (particularly the belief in commerce and individualism) veiled by the material symbols of the universal nation's 'soft power' rise quickly to disturb the waters. Social tensions mount when the aspirations to achieve liberal freedoms outpace the reality of getting there. Whereas yoga, curry and ayurvedic medicine have all permeated the US, they do not have the socially destabilising potential of blue jeans, MTV and McDonald's in India.

And yet even as village-bound, third world locals attain greater material choice, the decision is not easy between fundamentalist movements, which offer a retreat to the communal purity of the past and a nationalist ethos for the future, and a technologically empowered freedom which allows anyone to download a shared identity from virtual communities. For example, Purdy discovers that the 'Arab street' consists of more than the oily, polluted alleys of Cairo: the view that Osama bin Laden is a hero is also widespread among the budding, educated, Westernised elite. But meanwhile, America clings to a notion of virtuous innocence, unaware that the 'network power' it exercises through the spread of standard-bearing technology and products leads to a perception of cultural imperialism and capitalist colonisation. Building a traditional empire is costly and entails certain moral burdens, but what are the burdens of America's 'invisible' empire?

Being America's twin meditations concern how America unconsciously sells itself (but is bought with many caveats), and the application of prophetic insights from the Federalists, Burke and Tocqueville to resolve the paradox of modern liberalism: the creation of opportunities for both freedom and violence. These coexist because, as Madison wrote, mankind is permanently divided by interest, opinions and passions, but also because the American order is characterised by the principles of capitalism, democracy and nationalism, from which both freedom and violence can emerge. America is so controversial around the world – nowhere more so than at home, Purdy neglects to mention – because one's stance on any of those principles is often conflated with America itself. Admiration and resentment go hand in hand when regarding objects of status.

Purdy's geographic selection indicates a concern with the 'passionate struggles between violent nationalism and nascent liberalism' in the Oriental world. But the age of nationalism and the age of liberalism overlap up to and including the present, so is the latter truly the antidote to the former? This hints at a semantic struggle in the text: despite a terse bibliographic glossary clarifying his interpretations of liberalism and modernity, he sometimes appears to be using these central terms interchangeably in his discourse.

Towards the conclusion, Purdy asserts that 'If we can induce other nations to adopt some of *our* liberal values, that is all the tribute we should expect' (emphasis added). This fails to recognise that even though America is the first fully modern, liberal state, it does not itself define either modernity or liberalism. One of the major lessons of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* is that the developing world, particularly the Middle East, is catching up economically and modernising, but *not* Westernising. This is crucial because if the goal is to 'induce' other nations to become liberal, is this not best done by disassociating these values from a concept as controversial as America, which many believe is a terrorist nation, a rogue superpower? In getting at the question of how to prevent national identity, a condition of modern life, from being directed violently against those outside the community, Purdy's unfortunately brief interludes on migration and ethnic diaspora are superficial, considering how important these phenomena are to the transmission of liberal values such as tolerance.

The middle chapters of *Being America* are devoted to the politics of global commerce, from unions and sweatshops in Cambodia to the delicate task of economic reform in China and the role of the IMF in the Asian financial crisis. Here he adds nothing new to Thomas Freedman's *Lexus and the Olive Tree*. On global economic reform and 'Rebranding Capitalism', Purdy delivers no outspoken commentary; interested readers are better served by the controversial ethicist Peter Singer's passionate and seductively rational *One World*.

This is a dangerous time to assume that America's approach to the world is more a question of means than ends, that easing the path into modernity by whatever means appropriate is the central question. Even American modernity is incomplete, unable to meet the resurgent religious and spiritual demands of its own population with its minimalist policies. On this point alone, American-style liberalism would fall flat elsewhere in the world. In his conclusion, Purdy states that teaching 'liberalism by memory rather than amnesia' is America's still unrealised contribution to mankind, but isn't this Europe's contribution already? The American liberal model is already under attack, and justifiably so, given its shortcomings in managing the marketplace and environment.

Reading *Being America* is generally gratifying because it consciously avoids grand solutions to epochal problems. Instead, if we juxtapose Purdy's two books, we see that humility and modesty are his suggested cure for both America's social ills and the challenge of being the 'prophetic nation' in a schizophrenic world. The banal path to stability is greater freedom without exploitation, ensuring dignity and security for ordinary people. America should confront the grey world where liberty meets violence knowing its limits: 'The world cannot be made perfect; yet we should try to improve it, even though every change also brings loss and danger'. This is the simple yet pragmatic liberalism to which America itself should aspire.

Parag Khanna

The Brookings Institution