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Charles S. Maier. *The Project-State and Its Rivals: A New History of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Harvard University Press, 2023. ISBN 9780674290143.

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Introduction by Heidi Tworek, The University of British Columbia

It is a pleasure and honor to write the introduction to this H-Diplo roundtable on Charles S. Maier's insightful and important new book, *The Project-State and Its Rivals: A New History of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Maier offers a fascinating re-reading of the last 125 years through the interaction of four collective agents: the project-state, resource empire, realm of governance, and web of capital.

The project-state lies at the heart of this book, as its inclusion in the title implies. Maier defines the project-state as "a political unit that consciously aspired to inflect the course of history" with "a transformative agenda" (5). The project-state sought to inspire citizens ideologically, which differentiates it, Maier writes, "from other regimes that political scientists have often evoked such as the developmental-state and earlier the administrative-state" (5): the former with its concentration on economic modernization, and the latter with its focus on bureaucracy. The projects for this type of state varied but their ambitious remit could incorporate welfare, national education, or other collective undertakings like large infrastructure. The "intensity" of project-states' interventions and ambitions, in turn, distinguished them from states more generally (9). This proposed new category represents an attempt to explain the history of the last century or so without resorting to conventional political divides like left/right or democratic/authoritarian.

At the same time, the book traces how the project-state has jostled and interwoven with the other three agents. The "resource empire" is a structure "of extraction" whose deleterious economic consequences continued long past the conclusion of formal empires in the 1960s (10). The realm of governance, meanwhile, is Maier's designation for nonstate actors, international organizations, and think tanks. He argues that though the Great Depression of the 1930s stymied the first efforts of governance, the realm reemerged post-World War II and became increasingly prominent, even as it generally "endorsed the objectives of capital" (79). Finally, the "web of capital" comprises "individuals and organizations—firms, banks, trade associations—that participated in markets" (12). Though the state and capital often intertwined, Maier maintains that "they can be distinguished analytically like threads in a tapestry" (4).

Filled with Maier's characteristic pithy analogies, the book explores the heyday of the project-state, arguably up to the 1970s and often in concert with resource empires, before the realm of governance and web of capital increasingly took hold. The work proposes a "framework" to "explain the longer-term stresses inherent in earlier institutional arrangements, like the structural flaws in a bridge or building that suddenly collapses after we were convinced it was totally robust" (5). This "shifting balance of institutional power" warrants greater historical consideration (377) and also suggests how to capture causality without reducing complexity. Maier ends his wide-ranging and thought-provoking book with a plea for better balance between the four categories. At present, that would mean more project-state to push back against populism, corporations, and governance.

The three reviews show how Maier's book offers much food for thought to historians and political scientists alike.

First, international historian Lorenz Lüthi points out that the book "refreshingly sidesteps the usual topics that readers might expect" like revolutions, wars, or genocide. But far from skipping lightly over the deeper nature of the past, "the book reads like the product of a career-spanning reflection about the essence and underlying mechanics of the twentieth-century state system." After noting that the book focuses on Europe and the United States, Lüthi considers how Maier's concept of the project-state may apply to non-liberal and repressive states. He offers reflections on how the concept might spark new ways of thinking about the creation of states like Vietnam or India after 1945, asking if they operated as project-states and new nation-states simultaneously. Finally, he ends with some considerations of Maier's diagnosis of the present, wondering if politicians like Donald Trump in the US, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, and Christoph Blocher in Switzerland represent a new post-1989 form of right-wing populism, where "personal interest supersedes the project-state, leading the very idea of the project-state ad absurdum."

Meanwhile, political scientist Eric Helleiner praises Maier for this "well-written and engaging narrative of a vast range of historical developments over the past one hundred years." Helleiner's questions focus mostly on Maier's categories. He wonders about the boundaries of Maier's four collective agents and the interaction between them. Is the project-state the main protagonist in competition with the other three or is interaction between the four more crucial, with balance the ultimate goal? Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Helleiner's own interests in green finance, he asks if factors like the environment or technology deserve greater attention.[1]

The third review by international studies professor Anna Grzymala-Busse explores three questions raised by Maier's "magisterial and sweeping political history." She first interrogates the definition of the project-state as a transformational aspiration, wondering whether it works to try to separate the goal of controlling society versus transforming it. Second, she finds the explanation for the origins of the project-state convincing, but less so the exploration of its myriad forms thereafter. Finally, Grzymala-Busse suggests that "the failure of mainstream political parties" on both left and right might offer another reason for the (re-)emergence of illiberal and populist movements rather than interactions between Maier's four historical agents.

Maier's reply to the three stimulating reviews reflects on what the book does and does not consider. He notes that the international political system could have played a larger role in understanding the impulse towards a project-state, for example in comprehending if it can be spurred by competition between states as Helleiner suggests. Maier also finds his own ruminations reflected in some of the reviewers' comments, such as whether the project-state really enables scholars to "side-step the issue of liberal and repressive politics" or whether governance is best designated a "realm."

Finally, Maier uses the three reviews to contemplate "perhaps the underlying query: what are the boundaries of the project-state?" After considering the neoliberal agendas of the late UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and late US President Ronald Reagan, as well as the cases of contemporary Hungary

[1] Eric Helleiner, "Introduction: The Greening of Global Financial Markets?" *Global Environmental Politics* 11:2 (2011): 51-53.

and post-1989 Eastern Europe, all of which are raised by the reviewers and covered in the book, Maier suggests that such questions about "definition and boundaries" come with the territory of "proposing any large categories for sociopolitical management." Abstraction, Maier notes, "is hard to apply to historical narratives." But this erudite and illuminating work takes on that task with aplomb. In so doing, it bridges the worlds of political science and history in crucial ways. It offers no easy answers to the problems of the present, though it shows convincingly that there are no answers at all without a better understanding of history.

Contributors:

Charles S. Maier is the Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History, Emeritus at Harvard University. He has written numerous essays and books on European politics and international relations between the world wars and after World War II, including *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton University Press, 1975), *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton University Press, 1997); *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Harvard University Press, 2006); *The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in Perspective* (Harvard University Press, 2010) and *Once within Borders; Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

Heidi Tworek is a Canada Research Chair and Professor of International History and Public Policy at the University of British Columbia, where she directs the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions. Her work examines history and policy around communications, particularly the effects of new media technologies on democracy. She is the author of the prize-winning *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900–1945* (Harvard University Press, 2019). A senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation as well as a non-resident fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, she co-edits the *Journal of Global History*.

Anna Grzymala-Busse is Michelle and Kevin Douglas Professor of International Studies, Director of the Europe Center, and Senior Fellow of the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford University. Her research focuses on the historical development of the state and its transformation, political parties, religion and politics, and post-communist politics. She is the author of *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy* (Princeton University Press, 2015), and most recently, *Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State* (Princeton University Press, 2023).

Eric Helleiner is Professor and University Research Chair in the Department of Political Science at the University of Waterloo. His most recent books include *The Contested World Economy: The Deep and Global Roots of International Political Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), *The Neomercantilists: A Global Intellectual History* (Cornell University Press, 2021), *The Status Quo Crisis: Global Financial Governance after the 2008 Meltdown* (Oxford University Press, 2014), and *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International*

Development and the Making of the Postwar World (Cornell University Press, 2014). He is currently researching the political economy of green finance.

Lorenz Lüthi is a Professor in History of International Relations at McGill University, where he has taught since his graduation from the PhD program at Yale in 2003. He is the author of two prize-winning books, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton University Press, 2008) and *Cold Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). He is currently working on a pair of books on Cold War Berlin.

Review by Anna Grzymala-Busse, Stanford University

In this magisterial and sweeping political history, Charles S. Maier focuses on four collective actors: project-states, resource empires, capital, and organizations devoted to governance. By weaving together their stories, he aims to account for "both the successes of liberal democracy some three decades ago and the 'dark, regressive, and dangerous' developments" since then (2). This complex and nuanced story, a "rethinking of the long twentieth century," begins with the rise of the project-state, aided and abetted by various foundations and think tanks that were set on improving governance, as it first subordinated capital in the interwar era and then stood aside as capital increasingly exerted power over policymaking and societal relations starting in the 1970s.

Project-states are characterized by their "self-aware ambitions": their transformative agendas and reformist coalitions. They seek not just to control societies, but to reshape them. Their projects range from the New Deal of United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to the murderous efforts of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, to the vision for an independent Ghana of political leader Kwame Nkrumah, to the National Health Service of British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, to the Nazi horrors of Auschwitz. Here, Maier acknowledges the difference between the gross inhumanity of genocidal projects and liberal democratic ones, but seeks to look beyond the distinctions of democracy and authoritarianism, and find the common thread of ambition and radical transformation.

The origins of the project-state lie in elite ambitions after World War I and the competition among states to industrialize. Subsequently, in the interwar period, states sought to contain the power of capital and harness existing networks of governance: the international organizations, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and networks of experts who sought to intervene in society. The project-state thus continually interacted with governance and capital, weaving webs of interdependence to the point that Maier argues these actors came to require each other.

The project-state's efforts to control the economy and the autonomous power of capital took various forms. In the 1930s, democratic governments in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France flirted with economic planning and the nationalization of industry. The Soviets implemented the most brutal version. After World War II, the emphasis on productivity and rate of economic growth over the employment rate or steel tonnage as indicators of prosperity (188) was the first signal of both the ascendance of capital and the eventual rise of neoliberal attempts to reject the state.

In the realm of governance, non-state actors shaped the state, for example through the economic paradigms of economist John Maynard Keynes or his neoliberal successors. From 1914 to 1939, state, non-state organizations, and networked capital all expanded and intensified their activity. In the international arena, states supplanted philanthropy. After World War II, the project-states created a plethora of new international institutions and solutions, ranging from the International Monetary Fund to the World Bank to a newly revitalized United Nations, "only to have this vigor abate by the late 1960s" (119). By the 1980s, Maier argues, sites of governance were aligned with neoliberalism, citing the World Bank, International

Monetary Fund, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and the Economic Commission for Europe (239).

In the arc traced in this book, the project-state was initially successful in subordinating capital and governance in its heyday (roughly from the 1930s to the 1960s), only to fail to develop convincing public agendas after the 1960s. The states then turned to serving their own ruling classes. By the 1990s, "the state was back—so long as it was in the service of entrepreneurial capitalism, faith, or party. These events of the late 1970s opened a decade of worldwide epochal reversals of policies" (280).

This stimulating and nuanced analysis raises several questions. First, what are the boundaries of the "project-state"? For Maier, the relevant distinction is that these states do not merely try to govern society, maintain order, or invest strategically in the economy: they try to *transform* societies: "the project-state strives to reshape society and not just to control it" (26). Yet transformation and control are not so easily distinguished. Thus, with regulations as seemingly innocuous and universal as mortgage policies, redlining, voting registrations, or sentencing guidelines, the American state established a racial order.[1] Not all transformative projects are overt and broadcast as such. Nor should we mistake their public justifications with their inner logic. Maier writes that what distinguishes Viktor Orbán from Jair Bolsonaro is the former's "idea of the state and a vision of history" (367). But insofar as Orbán is aspiring to a project-state, this aspiration is indistinguishable from providing window dressing for an autocratic grab of power and resources.

The democratic project state was generally a center-Left one in Maier's telling of the story. In contrast, neoliberalism sought to *dismantle* core aspects of the state, roll back redistribution, and privatize the state. This major effort, which spanned the decades from the 1980s to the financial crisis of 2008, "implied a political project to remove state intervention whose effect, if not intention, might be to limit the accumulation of private property" (326). We are even introduced to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as a "fundamentalist leader" on par with Iran's leader Ayatollah Khomeini (279).

But could the neoliberal projects of Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan not count as "project-states"? A state leading a project claiming to destroy the state still self-consciously seeks to reshape society (even if Thatcher famously derided it as non-existent). After all, the elimination of the state was supposedly the initial goal of the Communists, authors of the project-state *par excellence*. The privatization of utilities and services, the targeting of labor and the privileging of capital all transformed social relations as much as the New Deal or the National Health Service did.

[1] Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare* (Oxford University Press, 1994); Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton University Press, 2012); LaDale C. Winling and Todd M. Michney, "The Roots of Redlining: Academic, Governmental, and Professional Networks in the Making of the New Deal Lending Regime," *Journal of American History* 108:1 (2021): 42-69; on redlining see Robert K. Nelson, LaDale C. Whitney, et. al,, "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America," ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, *American Panorama: An Atlas of United States History*, 2023. https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining.

The discussion of the states that arose out of the rubble of communism in Europe after 1989 underlines the "fuzzy" boundaries of the project-state (26). These states defy easy labels, as Maier points out. Yet his framework leads us to think of them as project-states, even as he argues that they advanced and advocated for neo-liberalism. The new democratic leaders liberated the economy from its hidebound and inefficient allocation of resources that inevitably ignored consumers and the environment alike; freed society from the self-avowed monopoly of Communist rule; and tried to transform the state from a tool of the party to an instrument of the rule of law.[2] This triple transition the post-Communist states undertook is precisely the transformative project that characterizes project-states.

In examining the post-Communist adoption of neoliberal ideas, Maier suggest that this could be seen as a failure of the West European socialist thought: "it was not the collapse of Communism in the East that undermined the West European Left but rather the reverse" (282). Further, "the fact that the new post-Communist regimes in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic would take up neo-liberal policies revealed the systemic strains that assailed the socialist vision" (282). Yet the collapse of Communism had little to do with the developments in the West European Left. The West European Left may have aided and abetted Communist rule in the East, but it had little to do or say about its collapse. Agency still mattered, and it lay with the hundreds of thousands of protestors, the elites negotiating their way out of Communism, and the decisions of democratically elected governments.

Nor is it the case that these states were simply "neoliberal." Yes, they privatized industries and unleashed the market. This is hardly a surprise, given the enormity of the four decades of the failures of the "real existing socialism," with its inefficient planning and allocation of resources, self-serving corruption, and its failure to meet societal needs. Yet for all the rhetoric of Václav Klaus and Leszek Balcerowicz, the finance ministers who initiated neoliberal reforms, an extensive post-Communist welfare state continued to prop up employment, subsidize industries, and provide wide ranging health, educational, and welfare services. The populist governments continued these policies, expanding them to targeted welfare payments, whether to families with children or those who promised to have them. In the United Kingdom and in the United States, programs that served the mobilized elderly constituencies of the conservatives (such as American Social Security or Medicare) were left untouched.[3] Given Maier's definitions, the project-state can be neoliberal; yet they rely on the redistributive and regulatory apparatus they supposedly reject. That

[2] Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Facts* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein, *From Triumph to Crisis: Neoliberal Economic Reform in Postcommunist Countries* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Rebuilding Leviathan: Party Competition and State Exploitation in Post-Communist Democracies* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Kim Lane Scheppele, "Constitutional Negotiations: Political Contexts of Judicial Activism in Post-Soviet Europe," *International Sociology* 18:1 (2003): 219-238.

[3] Paul Pierson, *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Retrenchment* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Julie Lynch, *Regimes of Inequality: The Political Economy of Health and Wealth* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Isabela Mares and Lauren Young, *Conditionality and Coercion: Electoral Clientelism in Eastern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

may suggest that the definition of the project-state is too capacious, or that it provides an analytical lens through which we can examine very different kinds of state projects.

Second, the book beautifully explains how the project-state arose, but it is less clear why it took the form that it did, and why it would ally with governance. Why did the project-state take such different forms? It is at times jarring to read of "the Tennessee Valley Authority on one hand and Auschwitz on the other hand" (6). If what binds these projects is ambition, then that is a very thin notion of the identifying characteristic of "transformation." Even if Maier is at pains to avoid the usual dichotomies of democracy and autocracy, they remain essential to understanding why the project-state could be constrained in some cases, and brutally vicious in others.

One hint here may be that the rise of the project-state was coterminous with the rise of political parties as critical actors in domestic politics. In both autocracies and democracies in the early twentieth century, political parties became the dominant way of organizing political society in an era of expanded suffrage and greater political demands. The broader the constituencies to which they were accountable (and that accountability is critical to democracy), the lower their likelihood of implementing a narrow, resource-extensive, rent-seeking project.[4]

This critical role of political parties brings up a third and final point. To what extent can the trifecta of state, capital, and governance explain the recent rise of illiberal and populist movements within democracies? Maier argues that the project-states' failure to address considerations of inequality and community opened the gates to populism: populism springs from both socioeconomic and cultural alienation, and a revolt against the perceived "arrogance of knowledge and expertise" (372).

Yet viewed from another perspective, a major enabling condition for the rise of populism is the failure of mainstream political parties. Here, Maier argues that the Left drifted in the late 1960s, and then grew fascinated with capitalist growth and technology, culminating in the Third Way politics of the 1990s (206). He faults the center-Left both for its "conversion to the market" and its complacency: "having instituted welfare state reforms, the social-democratic center-left believed it had completed its economic program and now had to tend to noneconomic issues—gender, race, sexual expressiveness, and the fight against terrorism" (358).

But the Right is equally responsible, both in its failure to contain its extremes, and to articulate a conservative defense of liberal democracy. Instead, all too often, the center-Right ceded to the far-Right, whether within parties as in the American Republican Party, or across parties when the center-Right tries to outcompete the far-Right on immigration or xenophobia (only to fail to convince the voters who prefer the original and undiluted version). In the past, conservative commitments to democracy were critical to its

[4] Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Gary Cox, *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

success, as Daniel Ziblatt's work has demonstrated.[5] Political parties are the critical tether and funnel between the citizenry, the state, and capital.

Maier ends the book with a plea for "more of a project-state—as against the lobbying of corporate interests, the inflammation of populist impulses or even the earnest recommendations by the advocates of governance" (387). One could also add a plea for more *politics*: greater accountability and responsiveness, broader and deeper representation, a credible contest between rival policy programs, and a full-throated defense of the rule of law. No state, whether project-minded or not, can fulfill these desiderata alone.

[5] Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Political Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Review by Eric Helleiner, University of Waterloo

I enjoyed reading Charles Maier's new book. It sets out to tell a "new history of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries" as part of "an effort to make sense of the political and economic transformations of our time" (ix). Maier is frustrated with the "moral narratives" (3) of some historical works that focus on the ideological battle throughout this period between supporters of liberal democracy and their authoritarian (or totalitarian) opponents. He also seeks to go beyond those left-wing historians who downplay the role of states as agents in the post-1989 era and who focus on "the power of capital, the advance of globalization (at least until the past decade) and the success of neoliberalism" (3). Instead, he proposes a framework that analyzes the interactions and changing balance of influence among four "collective protagonists" (x) over this time period: "the project-state, resource empire, realm of governance, and web of capital" (14).

The core analytical innovation in Maier's work is the first of these protagonists, the "project-state," which he notes "strives to reshape society and not just to control it" (26). He argues that it was very influential across much of this period but then lost its momentum in the 1970s in places such as Europe and America. Resource empires also play an important role in Maier's narrative up until the 1960s (while leaving enduring legacies of economic and racial inequality). Gaining greater significance since that time was the "realm of governance" which includes "the nonstate or interstate organizations that proposed to intervene in society by invoking ethical, normative, or 'expert' considerations" (11). Even more influential since the 1980s has been the "web of capital" which Maier describes as "consisting of individuals and firms working to secure and increase economic returns" (4).

After outlining this framework, in the rest of the book Maier provides a well-written and engaging narrative of a vast range of historical developments over the past one hundred years. In so doing, he draws on his own past work and synthesizes an enormous amount of other literature in ways that generate many interesting insights. In the preface, Maier modestly claims that the analysis "does not aspire to be an encompassing narrative of global developments since 1900" (xi) because he has focused on developments in the two places that have been the subject of his own long-term research: Europe and the United States. It is certainly true that some of his central themes are focused on those places, notably his thesis that the 'project-state" lost its energy in the 1970s (a thesis that does not translate well to a place such as China where a newly ambitious "project-state" emerged after 1978).[1] But the book's analysis often has a global orientation, covering important developments beyond the Euro-American world.

Although the idea of the "project-state" is at the core of the book, Maier notes that "the borders of the concept may be fuzzy" (26). This fuzziness is most evident in the discussion of the post-1980 neoliberal era. Maier notes that some see this as a historical period when project-states "failed to generate convincing public agendas", while others see it as the time of the emergence of an "alternative state project in its own right" (16). Maier himself seems to lean to the first interpretation, but he acknowledges that leaders such as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were "determined to infuse the state … with a transformative project" (279) that was designed "to extricate the state from policies that might limit the aspirations of

[1] Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Belknap Press, 2013).

capital" (326). After recounting various financial crises of the neoliberal era, he sums up his view of the neoliberal project: "looking back over these crises, it could be argued that the great project of the neoliberals … was not really one of reducing the role of the state in the economy or enlarging the scope of markets. It was rather one of redistributing income to those who had been able to gather financial claims on the future from those who had to accept lower earnings in the present" (357).

Maier also notes that the boundaries around some of the other collective protagonists are similarly a little fuzzy. As he puts it, the precise classification of "many important institutions" within his schema "remains an open question" (15). He gives the example of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which has a "governance mission" but is also "charged with maintaining the robustness of international capital as a whole" (399). He might have added that IMF is also seen by some analysts to be heavily influenced by its dominant shareholder, the US.[2] Another example comes from Maier's discussion of "state capital" in the "socialist world" (194). Maier includes this within his "web of capital", but might other analysts see Chinese state-owned enterprises as a key part of the post-1978 Chinese "project-state," including in the international arena?[3]

Maier's discussion of the growing "realm of governance" in the neoliberal era also encourages some questions. Maier argues that the purveyors of this realm generally "accepted the institutional status quo and worked within it" (378). Indeed, he suggests that "the realm of capital and the realm of governance were tightly aligned" (316) by the late twentieth century. But he also acknowledges the mass protests in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization (and could have added the related transnational protests of the time against the IMF, World Bank, and proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment).[4] He might also have accounted for bodies such as the World Social Forum or Bank of the South that rejected the institutional status quo and worked against it.[5] This line of argument thus raises the issue of which transnational organizations and international institutions count in the "realm of governance" and which do not.

Readers might also ask whether a "realm" can be an historical "actor" or "agent" in the same way that states, empires, or capital are. Maier notes that his four protagonists are all "collective actors" who are "embodied in an institutional arrangement" (18). Although he states that "I am not trying to personify these abstractions" (16), these protagonists are said to "seek to maximize their historical roles" (4) and have "collective aspirations" (17). Does that hold for the "realm of governance"? To be sure, Maier sometimes refers to "the governance community" (379) and to the "agencies that spoke for governance" (233), but how

[2] For example, Strom Thacker, "The High Politics of IMF Lending," *World Politics* 51:1 (1999): 38-75, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100020025.

[3] For example, see Randall Stone, Yu Wang, and Shu Yu, "Chinese Power and the State-Owned Enterprise," *International Organization* 76:1 (2022): 229-250, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818321000308.

[4] See, for example, Robert O'Brien, Anne Marie Goetz, Jan Aarte Scholte, and Marc Williams, *Contesting Global Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[5] For the World Social Forum, see, for example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond* (Zed Books, 2006); for Bank of the South, see Pablo Nemiña and Diana Tussie, "Post-Hegemonic Policies in South America: The Case of Financial Cooperation," *Sul Global* 2:2 (2021): 18-37.

coherent was this "community" in any given era and did its "agencies" have common preferences that could be "spoken for"?

Maier also raises the question of whether there may be other key historical forces that are missing from the story. He addresses the role of geopolitics, religion, and labor, but some other potential forces may also be relevant to an effort to "help sort out the developments of the last hundred years" (15). For example, although Maier notes environmental degradation and climate change briefly in a few places, should more attention be devoted to the role of the environment and biosphere as an active agent in shaping human history, particularly in the context of the Great Acceleration after the mid-twentieth century?[6] Indeed, Maier's final paragraph in the book notes that "the requirements posed by environmental degradation" may encourage the emergence of an "international confederation" (392). Similarly, should more attention be given to technological change as an important driver of historical change in this period?

One further issue concerns the book's title. It suggests a focus on the rivalries between the project-state and the other three collective protagonists. The book's analysis itself, however, often emphasizes their "mutual need or codependence" (114). Maier's narrative also sometimes suggests that interactions and balance of influence within each of the four collective protagonists—as opposed to between them—was an equally, if not more, important driver of history. For example, he highlights the historical importance of the rivalry between the two project-states of the US and USSR after World War Two (118). In the 1960s and 1970s, he also emphasizes the centrality of "distributional struggles" between "states used to controlling the oil reserves of the Middle East and Latin America against the countries that sat on those oil reserves" (224). Other analysts might also call attention to the ways in which competitive rivalries between leading capitalist firms—and even sectors of capital—helped to drive economic change through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[7]

What lessons should we draw from Maier's analysis for interpreting the current era? He concludes the book with an analysis of rising populism and the return of authoritarianism, arguing that they are a legacy of the neoliberal era. Although his concerns about authoritarianism resurrect the preoccupations of the historians promoting "moral narratives," Maier's core lesson is distinct: "It is that an active project-state, an innovative economy, and disinterested governance need to remain in some balance: without alternate sources of political agency, the project-state alone can become abusive; excessive rewards to capital will corrupt; and the prescriptions of rationale governance alone remain feeble and often unaware of the self-interest that may have motived their prescriptions" (x).

Maier suggests that there was a sort of "equilibrium among states, capital, and the realm of governance" in early postwar years (193), but that this equilibrium became unmoored after the 1960s in Western Europe and the United States. In the current context, he calls for "more state" but not of the kind offered by

[6] Jennifer Clapp and Eric Helleiner, "International Political Economy and the Environment: Back to the Basics?," *International Affairs* 88:3 (2012): 485-501, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01085.x.
[7] See, for example, Jeffry A. Frieden, "Invested Interests," *International Organization* 45:4 (1991): 425-451, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033178.

would-be authoritarians who, he argues, "have made little effort to construct a transformative state … their 'project' goes little further than perpetuating their own power" (367). Instead, he advances the following goal:

> This author…would wish for more of a project-state—as against the lobbying of corporate interests, the inflammation of populist impulses or even the earnest recommendations by the advocates of governance. A state will require political argument and recruitment of like-minded partners, thus parties, but parties committed to public projects for expanding membership, fairness, and life chances, even as activists recall that much of life must remain nonpolitical (387).

Maier's criticism of how capital became "the dominant transnational force" (17) since the 1980s also echoes some of the analyses of many left historians of the neoliberal era. He notes that their downplaying of the role of states "helps make sense for the years since 1989 and, as I argued twenty years ago, since the changes of the 1970s" (3). But he insists that "the state is not disappearing" (4) and rejects the "treatment of capitalism as an all-encompassing causal framework," arguing that "the political system, based on the resources of power, whether accumulated by force or consent, remains conceptually independent" (13).

Whether Maier's preferred "project-state" is reviving in the current era is something that he argues "is yet to be determined" (9). In the conclusion, however, he notes that the competitive nature of international politics often feeds back on domestic politics and might encourage a rebalancing of the relationship between states and the web of capital. Maier highlights the role of war in this respect, but America's and Europe's growing economic competition with an increasingly assertive Chinese "project-state" in the current era seems like another important dynamic. Might the consequences of this competition be a catalyst for the revival of the kind of American and European project-state that Maier hopes to see? Maier himself notes that "this book has not covered international politics as such" (388), but this question is one that might be productively pursued in a sequel.

Review by Lorenz M. Lüthi, McGill University

Charles S. Maier's new book provokes readers to think more systematically about the role of the state in society, the economy, and international affairs from World War I to the present. At the heart of his argument stand the changing interactions of four collective agents that shaped large-scale developments in the past century: project-states with ambitious transformative agendas, resource empires with their legacies of racial and economic equality, non-political institutions (like labor unions or non-governmental organizations) that are dedicated to issues of governance, and the transnational system of capital (5-18). While formal empires declined over the course of the century, project-states and governance reached a double peak in the interwar period and again in the two decades after World War II. But over the course of the century, the system of capital, that is, the system of production and exchange based on monetary equivalents, rose to dominance.

The Project-State and its Rivals refreshingly sidesteps the usual topics that readers might expect in a history of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Revolutions, wars, and genocide – as transformative and staggering as they were throughout the last century – do not appear centrally in the book. The author is mainly interested in the nature of collective agents, which are tangible as in governments and abstract as in markets, and how they transformed each other through mutual interaction. The book reads like the product of a career-spanning reflection about the essence and underlying mechanics of the twentieth-century state system. Rich in themes and details, the book propelled me to the Rockefeller Foundation and the Republic of China of the 1920s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New-Deal America and Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Europe's nascent social welfare states and economists who discussed the virtues of capitalism in the 1950s, and neo-liberal thinkers and international bankers in the 1970s.

I enjoyed reading this book, which weaves politics and economics together. Yet, I frequently felt that I was reading more than just one book. One was about large-scale developments in the Western world, and the other mainly about the project-state, a particular kind of state that has transformative ambitions in politics, economics, and culture. To be fair, Maier candidly concedes that his life-long scholarly focus on the history of Western Europe and the United States influenced his overall approach (xi). And he similarly asserts that the recent rise of dark, dangerous, and regressive developments that seem to question the past success of liberal democratic regimes deeply worries him (2). Consequently, the book has a strong Western gaze; much of the rest of world appears intermittently but does not contribute deeply to the overall argument. *The Project-State* deals mostly with the liberal democratic project-state in the wider North Atlantic World (parts one and two) and the challenges with which it had to deal in the past fifty years (part three), be they in the form of the rise of neo-liberalism, the increase of debt levels, the collapse of the traditional left (democratic and revolutionary) after the end of the Cold War, and eventually the emergence of right-wing populism in past quarter of a century. In many respects, the book becomes a truly global history only in part three, when the transnational system of capital comes into its own. I completely share Maier's concern about the rise of aggressive and authoritarian populists in the European Union and the United States. But was the rise of these challenges and rivals merely the result of both the decline of the liberal project-state and the end of the resource empires? Did the waning of the Western liberal project-state predicate the current problems that have been caused by neo-liberalism, high debt levels, the global collapse of the

traditional left, and the rise of populism across the world? Are we speaking of one narrative, or of multiple, intersecting narratives?

Conversely, the book's title promises a history of the project-state in the twentieth century and the twenty-first century. Yet, the clear definition of the book's focus, which is the interaction of project-state with three other collective agents, excludes a detailed discussion of the many non-liberal project-states of the twentieth century. Again, in fairness, Maier acknowledges that there were repressive project-states (Bolshevik Russia, Hitler's Germany, Mao Zedong's China, or Ruhollah Khomeini's Iran) that tried to mobilize citizens and change mentalities in the process (xii). Yet, they do not appear prominently in the discussion, although they have been, and in some cases still are, rivals to the liberal democratic project-states. Just think about Xi Jinping's China or Vladimir Putin's Russia. Both are project-states, one neo-Marxist and the other neo-imperial. Accordingly, to what degree are we here even speaking of rivalries between two different forms of project-states?

Despite my conceptual criticism of the dual focus of the book, *The Project-State and Its Rivals* provides an excellent starting point for further discussions about the nature of modern states, and in extension, of the international system. Readers with a passion for the oft-neglected field of economic history will find much food for further thought about large-scale developments in the last century. But where would any discussion about the role of the project-state, liberal or repressive, possibly lead us? Project-states that guide modernization, mobilize the citizenry, and transform mentalities (5-6) emerged in the nineteenth century in the form of powerful national states in Europe. Even though Maier cautions us not to confuse project-states with state projects (or state-building projects; 26), project-states did not just emerge from the comprehensive mobilization efforts among World War I participants. Take, for example, the development of the German lands in the 50 years after 1866, from right before the war against Austria to 1914, at the beginning of World War I. The modern German state and the modern nation that was built around a German identity was as much a state-building project as it was a project-state.[1] While the first global war certainly was a rupture in European politics, it did not necessarily see the rise of a powerful project-state; the foundations had already been laid before. Similarly, project-states popped up across the globe in the twentieth century. In 1947, India entered into independence with a weak central government, undefined borders, and a patchwork of jurisdictions, including semi-independent statelets. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders almost singlehandedly created both a national state project and a secular and socialist project-state from scratch, and they succeeded against all odds.[2] Likewise, Vietnam did not exist in 1945; Indochinese intellectuals did not even agree on the boundaries and name of the post-independent state, or even numerous states. The kernel of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam emerged in the early 1950s as the Indochinese Communist Party fashioned a Stalinist and highly militarist state out of nothing as a vehicle to create a modern, socialist Vietnamese nation.[3] Israel falls also into this category of

[1] Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866–1945* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

[2] Ramachanrda Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (Picador, 2008).

[3] Christopher Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina, 1885–1945* (University of Hawai'i Press/Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2012); Goscha *The Road to Dien Bien Phu: A History of the First War for Vietnam* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

project-states, transforming Jewish settlers and refugees from various parts of Europe into citizens of a new nation-state.[4] The view beyond the wider Atlantic world allows us to see other project-states that followed economic modernization, used mass mobilization of its citizenry, and tried to shape the mentality of their nationals.

At the same time, Maier's book calls on us to think more systematically about the nature of the repressive project-states, which were rivals in the Cold War past and seem to be a part of the unsavory developments in more recent decades. Putin's neo-imperial Russia not only is an external challenger to Western project-states, but is also a supporter of their internal enemies. Of course, repressive project-states bypass both economic modernization within global capitalism and a commitment to liberal forms of governance. Yet, Bolshevik Russia (later the Soviet Union), Communist China, and Islamic Iran are all quintessential project-states that emerged in rejection to the liberal democratic narrative. All three were wedded to projects of economic modernization and pursued cultural revolutions that were designed to shape the mentality of their citizens, often using horrendous amounts of violence in the process. And all of them had a global mission that rivalled the dominant project-states of the wider Atlantic world, the quest to impose either a Communist or a theocratic paradise on a global scale.[5]

And finally, how much is the recent rise of dark, dangerous, and regressive developments in the wider Atlantic world, about which Maier and I are equally worried, a reaction to the decline of the liberal democratic project-states of the past? Or to what degree do Jörg Haider's Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs; FPÖ) in Austria and Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary link to older forms of national essentialisms that we had hoped the catastrophe of World War II had discredited? Certainly, they benefitted from the political and ideological vacuum of the parallel decline of the project-state in the Atlantic world and of the Cold War. But they also took advantage of existing, deep-seated discourses about the nation that had been suppressed when the Cold War created a different set of ideological clarities. The Hindutva of Narenda Modi's India's People's Party (Bharatiya Janata Party; BJP) similarly promotes a national essentialism that contradicts the secular nature of the nation project-state which Nehru and Congress had pursued after 1947. At the same time, I fear, there is also a new type of right-wing populism that emerged after the end of the Cold War. While Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini were right-wing politicians, their rise to power depended on the wealth of sympathetic business circles. But the rise of Christoph Blocher in my native Switzerland in the 1990s, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy at almost the same time, and recently Donald Trump is a new form of dark right-wing populism. Here we deal with wealthy people who seek political power to protect and even increase their ill-gotten wealth. Their personal interest supersedes the project-state, leading the very idea of the project-state ad absurdum.

[4] Michael Brenner, *In Search of Israel: The History of an Idea* (Princeton University Press, 2018).
[5] Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Harvard University Press, 1993); Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945–1957* (Bloomsbury, 2013); K. Ramazani, "Khumayni's Islam and Iran's Foreign Policy," in *Islam in Foreign Policy* ed. Adeed Dawisha (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 16-18. Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2018), 156-158.

Response by Charles S. Maier, Harvard University

I am only sorry that I could not have had my three reviewers available for a manuscript review before publication of *The Project-State and its Rivals*. Let me thank them now, along with the chair of this roundtable, Heidi Tworek, for their grappling with so demanding a book. I find their comments intelligent and sympathetic but, alas, of course impossible to integrate into the final product. Heidi Tworek had the dual mandate of presenting the original reviews while keeping in mind the book itself, and I am grateful to her for taking on this sensitive task. Anna Grzymala-Busse poses perhaps the underlying query: what are the boundaries of the project-state? She is right to ask, citing my discussion of the objectives of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, how a strong leader's idea of a project-state can be differentiated from a personalist project for power. She also asks whether the neoliberal projects of the late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan could not count as project states. Here, I think, I did anticipate the question and suggested that the neoliberal agenda entailed a project-state in its own right. I do see the force of her suggestion that the post-1989 governments in Eastern Europe should count as project-states; however, I interpreted them as revolts on the part of civil society, thus aspects of the realm of governance that along with the web of capital has been one of the great alternative impetuses for regulating societies. To be sure, the difficulty with proposing any large categories for sociopolitical management will entail a struggle over definition and boundaries; that is the price for abstraction, which admittedly, is hard to apply to historical narratives. I certainly agree with Gzrymala-Busse's plea for more politics as well as more state, that is, continued debate over public policies and their consequences.

Lorenz Lüthi notes that the book has a strong Western gaze: "much of the rest of the world appears intermittently but does not contribute deeply to the overall argument." That may be so, but I agree with historian James Sheehan's recent comment that the Western template of the state has had tremendous global influence.[1] Eric Helleiner's review also recognizes that the book "often has a global orientation" and covers non-Western experiences. I would also counter that even from a very limited knowledge of the history of China (and no linguistic access), I did try to include its modern history into my categories. But it is true the Chinese historical experience may not fit my categories neatly. More precisely, the concept of a Chinese state, whether Qing, Guomindang, or Communist, retains the Confucianist stamp of a civilizational authority that claims to fit within an encompassing order ranging from the transcendental to the household.

Lüthi argues that the collective agents I discern *ipso facto* exclude "a detailed discussion of the many non-liberal project states of the twentieth century." On one level that is true, but it also precludes detailed discussion of many liberal project-states as well. Indeed many "conservatives"—a category I do not explore—would argue that the project-state must stifle liberty by its nature. I do not agree. I tried to argue that it is the balance between the project-state and its "rival" forces of capital and governance (i.e. those

[1] James J. Sheehan, *Making a Modern Political Order: The Problem of the Nation State* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 5.

non-governmental organizations speaking for scientific norms or at least non-partisan discussion) which keeps the project-state within limits. I did not choose to analyze the cases where that balance failed.

Nonetheless, there are many approaches even to the "totalitarian" state, which, like my discussion of the project-state, also decompose its structure into contending currents for power and supremacy: recall such early analyses as *Behemoth* by the German political scientist Franz Neumann or *How Russia Is Ruled* (about the Soviet regime) by the American political scientist Merle Fainsod.[2] I also tried to distinguish explicitly between state-building projects, as in Bismarckian Germany, and states that ruled with a project. Still, I welcome Lüthi's citation of the bold political constructions that attempted both to create states and use them to transform societies. He appropriately names India, Israel, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Others might be added such as Ghana and Tanzania. I would also respond that I was trying to find categories for political and social action that side-stepped the dichotomy between liberal and non-liberal states.

I think Lüthi's review raises the implicit question, which I have worried about as well: can we historians and political scientists really side-step the issue of liberal and repressive politics with the scheme I provided? As we seem to slide back into an era of repressive politics (though much will depend upon the American electorate and its representatives), does the project-state as a construction that seeks to avoid the liberal/non-liberal dichotomy retain the utility that I thought it did as I began this project?

Eric Helleiner's review implicitly raises these questions and I find that his discussion hits on my own frequent self-interrogations. Helleiner asks whether a "realm" can be a historical agent in the same way as states or even capital. The term may not have been the best to choose, but what I was trying to get at was the collection of foundations, think-tanks, journalists, academics, etc., who sought to mobilize considerations of supposedly non-political forces. In early modern Europe, the clergy might have played the analogous role; nineteenth-century Russians might have called them the intelligentsia. What has united them in the twentieth century is the claim that they spoke for science and supposedly had no desire to organize ordinary political-party competition. Both the web of capital and the realm of governances appeal to different sources of authority and legitimacy and do not wield coercive power on their own. They lack what the sociologist Max Weber termed the "monopoly" of legitimate force, which the state embodies. Nonetheless, they have become a persistent voice in the modern political regime, sometimes as a counterweight to state power and to financial institutions, but sometimes as an ally. It is their distinctive objectives that led me to call them rivals, not their explicit ambitions. The history is a braided or interwoven one, sometimes cooperative, sometimes in tension.

I am grateful to all three readers for their sympathetic grappling with a long and complex book. When I brought it to a close, I realized, as Helleiner points out, that I had given short shrift to international politics—after all, key to defining states of any sort must be the recognition that there are many of them and not just one. I also knew that the collective agents I sought to focus on had not and perhaps would never

[2] Franz L. Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944* (Oxford University Press, 1944); and Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Harvard University Press, 1953).

settle into a settled equilibrium. It may be appropriate to recall that what impelled this work originally was the challenge of writing a history that could account for what seemed to be the successes of emancipatory politics in 1989–1990 in Eastern Europe and 1994 in South Africa and the blows to liberal democracy after 2001, including the serious international financial crisis of 2008–2009 and the ugly political movements that have gained strength since then. How might one derive a framework that allowed both these moments to appear as plausible if not final historical outcomes? *The Project-State and its Rivals* thus represents more an ongoing progress report on the politics of our lifetime than a finished history. But, of course, all written histories must count as provisional.