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**Psychoanalysis and the  
Future of Global Politics**  
Overcoming Climate  
Change, Pandemics, War,  
and Poverty

**Robert Samuels**

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and Poverty

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ISBN 978-3-031-41165-6      ISBN 978-3-031-41166-3 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41166-3>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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*Dedicated to my daughter and the future*

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# Introduction: Psychoanalysis and Future of Global Progress

**Abstract** This book offers a unique approach by using Freudian psychoanalytic theory to explain how we can resolve the most important issues facing the world today and in the future. One of my main arguments is that we need to move beyond national politics in order to provide global solutions to global problems. However, there is a misplaced fear concerning global governance, and much of this phobia is derived from a misunderstanding of history and human psychology. Not only do we have to learn to give up our idealized investment in nations and nationalism, but we also have to move beyond seeing the world from the perspective of a victim fantasy. Since we often repress real signs of global progress, we experience the global present and the future in negative ways. To reverse this perspective, we should first understand the incredible progress humans have made in the last two hundred years, but we also should not ignore the real threats we face.

**Keywords** Nationalism • Global progress • Global politics • Freud • Psychoanalysis • Victim fantasy • Climate change • Universal human rights

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world today and in the future. One of my main arguments is that we need to move beyond national politics in order to provide global solutions to global problems. However, there is a misplaced fear concerning global governance, and much of this phobia is derived from a misunderstanding of history and human psychology. Not only do we have to learn to give up our idealized investment in nations and nationalism, but we also have to move beyond seeing the world from the perspective of a victim fantasy. Since we often repress real signs of global progress, we experience the global present and the future in negative ways. To reverse this perspective, we should first understand the incredible progress humans have made in the last two hundred years, but we also should not ignore the real threats we face.<sup>1</sup>

To clarify why we are not acting on climate change and other pressing problems, I discuss our misunderstandings and the psychoanalytic process of denial.<sup>2</sup> Linked to this defense mechanism is the Freudian concept of the death drive and the relation between repression and the unconscious. I also describe how our lack of understanding is supplemented by conspiracy theories derived from the primary processes.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, we should embrace Freud's theories of the reality principle and neutrality in order to fully understand how to pursue global progress in the future through the extension of universal human rights and unbiased science.<sup>4</sup>

## BOOK OUTLINE

Drawing from Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, I begin with a brief description of the evidence and causes of global progress. After establishing what has and has not worked in the past to extend human lifespans, I examine current and future threats to our shared world. I also focus on what psychological processes block us from comprehending the past and the future on both an individual and a collective level. Through the Freudian concept of victim fantasy, I describe how we often repress the truth of our global progress.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 2 provides a close reading of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* in order to comprehend the premodern conservative ideology that still limits global progress today.<sup>6</sup> Freud's often neglected text provides a psychoanalytic understanding of the foundations of all social orders and the way that social hierarchies are established to protect the powerful and exploit the disempowered. As one of the leading sources for resistances to globalization, conservative ideology needs to be exposed and countered



by the affirmation of scientific reason, universal human rights, and economic modernization. Moreover, we shall see that this move away from premodern institutions and beliefs is already being accomplished, but we need to understand how to peacefully continue the development of global Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> At the heart of this chapter is how we need to change the way we think about nature and climate change.

In Chapter 3, I turn my focus to a Left-wing criticism of globalization and psychoanalysis. By examining Gary Walls “Toward A Critical Global Psychoanalysis,” I discuss many of the reasons for the Leftist rejection of both global capitalism and psychoanalysis.<sup>8</sup> We shall see that one of the central aspects of the rejection of global progress and Freud’s model of treatment is a misunderstanding of neutrality in psychoanalysis, science, and democratic law. Instead of seeing neutrality as a necessary but impossible ideal, the Left tends to dismiss this foundation of modernity because of its failure to be fully achieved.<sup>9</sup> By not only focusing on inequality, this chapter examines the role that globalization plays in countering poverty on an international level.

While Chap. 2 focuses on the conservative reaction to modern globalization, and Chap. 3 looks at the Left-wing critique of global progress, Chapter 4 examines the psychological and political roots of the Right-wing rejection of global solutions to global problems. Through a critical analysis of Glenn Beck’s *The Great Reset*, I articulate the underlining borderline personality psychopathology underlying Right-wing conspiracy theories.<sup>10</sup> At its most fundamental level, the libertarian Right simply denies the need to act on climate change, pandemics, poverty, and the spread of dangerous weapons.

Although some of the critiques coming from the Left and the Right concerning globalization are based on actual facts, these reactions often suffer from misunderstanding both the negative and positive aspects of modern capitalism, democracy, science, and psychoanalysis. One reason for this distorted view of modernity is that centrist global elites have often presented a fake version of liberalism.<sup>11</sup> To help reveal the problematic psychopathology shaping these centrists, I interpret Joseph Stiglitz’s *Globalization and Its Discontents* as a psychoanalytic mode of critical introspection.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Stiglitz exposes the internal conflicts of “centrist” global elites by attacking his own role in building a new global system.

The final chapter focuses on how we can help promote global solutions to global problems through a better understanding of psychoanalysis and universal subjectivity. Through a critique of Michael Shermer’s *The Moral*

*Arc*, I discuss the danger on basing our understanding of global progress on evolutionary psychology and other pseud-sciences.<sup>13</sup> Instead of turning to the new brain sciences to discover what type of psychology best fits universal human rights and modern science, I argue that psychoanalysis represents the most effective science and philosophy for our global future. While I do not center each chapter on a particular global threat, I do show how the only way to address effectively climate change, pandemics, poverty, and war is to take on a universal form of subjectivity, which aligns with the role of neutrality in Freudian psychoanalysis.

### DOCUMENTING GLOBAL PROGRESS

The first step in understanding global progress is to address the clearest evidence of advancement. As Steven Pinker highlights in *Enlightenment Now*, perhaps the most indisputable fact is that over the last 150 years (1873–2023), the average global life expectancy has gone from 35 years to 70 years.<sup>14</sup> Before, we get to the causes for this increase in life expectancy, I want to first discuss many of the other top signs of global progress presented by Pinker.

Although many people believe that global poverty is increasing, the reality is that in the last two hundred years (1820–2020), the level of dire poverty as measured by the UN has moved from 90% of the world population to 10% (87).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, half of this improvement has occurred since 1980, and one of the greatest surprises is that as the global population has continued to increase, the level of extreme poverty has decreased.

During this time of international poverty reduction, we have also witnessed a major increase in the number of people living under democratic rule. Pinker documents how in 2015, a majority of world's population benefited from the rights and protections afforded by modern liberal democracies, and another third of the world's population was in countries governed by a mixture of democratic and autocratic states (203). If we look back in time, we find that in 1900, only a fifth of the world's population were in democracies, and in 1850, the number was seven percent. Even though we may be currently witnessing a backlash against modern liberal democracies, the global trend is heading towards international democratization. In fact, the vast majority of the people living outside of democracy reside in China (203).

As another symbol of global progress, Pinker highlights how we are currently seeing a major decrease in capital punishment, and as more and

more countries outlaw the death penalty, the number of nations that execute people has been lowered to less than one fifth of the world's nations (209). During this same period, a real reduction in state-sanctioned racism and ethnic prejudice has been achieved. Pinker documents how in 1950, half of the countries in the world had laws discriminating against ethnic or racial minorities, but by 2003, that number had dropped to less than one fifth. Of course, there is still a long way to go on this front, but it is important to recognize the progress we have made as we strive for further improvement. If we do not document the real achievements, then we will not believe that we can improve things in the future.

One of the greatest improvements during the last two hundred years has been the increase in rights and opportunities for females. Few people realize that in 1900, only one nation allowed women to vote, and now, women can vote in every country except for the Vatican City (222). Pinker also points out that women now make up over 40% of the global workforce and a fifth of the members of national parliaments (222). Surprisingly, global polls have found that more than 85 percent of respondents claim that they support full equality for women.

In terms of global literacy, the rate has now moved from 10% in 1800 to 83% today. Most of the increase has occurred in the last fifty years, and a big factor is the education of females and people outside of Western Europe (236). For Pinker, literacy plays a role in a wide-range of social and personal areas:

Studies of the effects of education confirm that educated people really are more enlightened. They are less racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, and authoritarian. They place a higher value on imagination, independence, and free speech. They are more likely to vote, volunteer, express political views, and belong to civic associations such as unions, political parties, and religious and community organizations. They are also likelier to trust their fellow citizens—a prime ingredient of the precious elixir called social capital. (235)

Although it is hard to untangle correlation from causation, there is ample evidence that literacy and education are key drivers for global progress.<sup>16</sup>

As countries around the world dedicate more funding to education, they have also increased their spending on social welfare programs. Pinker reveals that a hundred years ago, developed nations on average dedicated 1% of their wealth to supporting children, the poor, and the aged, and this