

2004

## Book Review, *Distant Proximities* by James N. Rosenau

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### Recommended Citation

Nicholas Stephanopoulos, "Book Review, *Distant Proximities* by James N. Rosenau," 29 *Yale Journal of International Law* 266 (2004).

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is aware that his proposals consist of policies without politics. He is further aware that, even if they could be realized, they would not alone suffice to achieve a benign globalization. However, his proposals indicate that environmental protection and global social equity could be improved without undemocratic, large-scale bureaucracy and government on the global level. And, in fact, some of his policies do have good prospects of success. What makes them most compelling is the prospect of gradual introduction and adoption to the distinctive features of each situation.

Despite these strengths, however, Paehlke's work also falls short of his aspirations in a number of respects. First, Paehlke's proposal of a global democracy based on the existing nation-state system is not particularly innovative. In addition, adhering to the traditional modes of international relations—concerted action by nation-states in the form of multilateral treaties—encounters the same difficulties of enforcement that Paehlke so bitterly deplores in the context of the multilateral environmental treaties already in existence. States cannot be forced to bind themselves, nor can binding treaties be absolutely enforced. From this perspective, Paehlke's strategy appears rather weak.

But perhaps the strength of the author's argument lies precisely in its modesty and realism. At least Paehlke's proposals are feasible. And there is hope for a strong democratic counter-movement against economism from the bottom, once citizens and politicians realize what is at stake. After all, as Paehlke rightly points out, consumer choice could turn out to be the most effective weapon in a world that appears more economic than ever.

*Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization.* By James N. Rosenau. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Pp. xvi, 439. Price: \$24.95 (Paperback). Reviewed by Nicholas Stephanopoulos.

In *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization*, James N. Rosenau, University Professor of International Affairs at The George Washington University, seeks to construct a theoretical framework within which globalization—that oft-used but elusive term—can be better understood. Unfortunately, critical flaws undermine his efforts.

Rosenau unwittingly highlights the three major weaknesses of his work in his self-congratulatory postscript. First, as he climbs “up the ladder of abstraction” in his observations of world politics, Rosenau writes that he cannot help but ask about any phenomenon, “‘Of what is *this* an instance?’” (p. 406). This predilection for seeking (and inventing) theories that encompass every item in the news leads Rosenau to endless proposals in *Distant Proximities*, most of them ill-considered when they are controversial, and rather obvious when they are not. Next, Rosenau admits that his academic thinking has abandoned “scientific criteria of parsimony . . . in favor of an interpretive approach . . . that lack[s] scientific discipline” (p. 407). Unfortunately, this more expansive style of inquiry leads frequently to argument by anecdote, and to sweeping assertions about the state of the world

backed up by little more than a few *New York Times* stories. Finally, Rosenau explains the book's "initial premise" as holding that "people and communities at every level are undergoing transformations that are profound, pervasive, and consequential" (p. 413). But *Distant Proximities* is too quick to argue that everything—people's skills, the exchange of information, the authority of governments—is in the midst of unprecedented transformation. Rosenau never pauses to consider that events today may reflect gradual historical processes rather than sudden upheaval.

All of these flaws are apparent in the book's first three chapters, where Rosenau lays out the crux of his theory of world affairs. One important characteristic of the "emergent epoch," according to Rosenau, is that no events are truly remote or irrelevant anymore (p. 3). Instead, even the most seemingly far-flung happenings are "distant proximities" that have consequences for people no matter what their location. Another crucial feature of the contemporary world, in Rosenau's eyes, is "framegration," a label "intended to suggest the pervasive interaction between fragmenting and integrating dynamics unfolding at every level of community" (p. 11). The final major element of Rosenau's worldview is that "macro structures" such as governments and corporations are less central to history than they once were, and that "individuals have become increasingly central to the course of events" (p. 25). To understand contemporary developments, Rosenau argues, one must look not only to the actions and motives of collectivities, but also to the micro-macro interactions between individual people and the institutions that represent them.

Two of the problems with Rosenau's analysis are suggested by the book's postscript. First, the concepts of distant proximities, "framegration," and micro-macro interactions are, when one gets past the labels, so obvious as to be unhelpful. Second, if Rosenau's theoretical constructs are to be at all interesting—that is, if he believes distant events to be dramatically *more* proximate than before, or framegration much *more* prevalent—then he fails to back these contentious claims with sufficient empirical evidence. He makes no historical comparisons to prove that the coexistence of integration with fragmentations and the emergence of individuals as global actors are as new as he claims. A third problem with Rosenau's worldview, not hinted at in the postscript, is his repeated failure to take a position regarding the importance of the dichotomies in each of his theoretical constructs. What is the relative influence of distance compared to proximity, of fragmentation vis-à-vis integration, or of micro- and macro-actors? Rosenau never offers an answer.

In contrast to the initial chapters of *Distant Proximities*, the next section of the book, in which Rosenau discusses the multiple ways in which individuals experience "framegration," is creative and insightful. According to Rosenau, people can be conceived as "populating any one of twelve worlds," with each "world" corresponding to "a predominant perspective on life . . . through which people arrange their priorities among the opportunities available to them, the threats they perceive as serious, the values they hold dear, the goals to which they aspire, and the horizons they view as salient" (p. 41). Four of these worlds are local; their occupants are oriented primarily

toward the proximate and near-at-hand. Another four worlds are global, because the people who populate them “think and act on a scale that exceeds a local context” (p. 118). Finally, there are the four private worlds of the Cynics, Illegals, Tuned-Out Passives, and Circumstantial Passives, all “so remote from the course of events anywhere that they are not occupants of any of the local or global worlds” (p. 154). Just how new a development are these twelve worlds? What is the relevant size and importance of each world? Why must people inhabit just one world at a time and not more depending on the aspect of their life in question? But these objections should not cloud Rosenau’s accomplishment. With his twelve-world model, he has constructed an innovative framework for thinking about globalization not only at the level of states and markets, but also in terms of how individual people experience it.

Rosenau next turns back to the topic of “fraggementation,” and describes four key trends underlying today’s fragmenting and integrating forces. First, he posits that a “skill revolution” is taking place in which “the pace of skill acquisition today has expanded at a faster rate than was the case in prior epochs” (p. 233). Second, Rosenau sees a concurrent “information revolution” (p. 256), thanks to the vastly more rapid exchange of information made possible by modern technological advances. Finally, the last two developments sustaining “fraggementation” are the attenuation of traditional authority structures (i.e. governments) and the emergence of new, more flexible spheres of authority that include a wide array of nongovernmental actors. As earlier in the book, Rosenau makes little effort to ground these grand claims in facts, and frequently lapses into hyperbole about the “transformation of . . . global structures” and change of “the linear into the nonlinear and the sequential into the simultaneous” (pp. 257, 262).

In the final part of *Distant Proximities*, Rosenau applies his theoretical framework to four important global issues: human rights, corruption, poverty, and quality of governance. The chapter on human rights is the most compelling of the section, as Rosenau carefully traces the impact of the four key “fraggementative” dynamics on the protection of human rights worldwide. Even here, he overlooks many of the crucial aspects of the human rights debate, such as the prioritization of political and civil versus social and economic rights, or the tension between national sovereignty and individual liberties. In the subsequent chapters, Rosenau fails to engage in the type of discussion demanded by his theoretical method. His chapter on corruption dwells almost exclusively on one particular NGO, Transparency International; the chapter on poverty mostly emphasizes the need for more international relations academic literature on the subject; and the brief chapter on governance is too busy positing new theories (e.g. “Möbius-web” governance) to explore the implications of fraggementation for modern statecraft.

*Distant Proximities* is ultimately a deeply unsatisfying book. It is rife with new terms and labels, but short on evidence to substantiate its claims. Its key points seem adorned with fancy prose in order to appear more insightful and contentious than they actually are. And its author seems so preoccupied with how his work fits into the scholarly literature on globalization—a fixation most apparent in the chapter on “Prosperity and Poverty,” where he

dwells on the perceived gaps in the literature—that the concerns of the general reader are neglected. Rosenau's new tome, then, stands as a warning against theorizing too quickly—and writing when you do not have much to say.

*The New Geography of Global Income Inequality.* By Glenn Firebaugh. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. Pp. xiii, 257. Price: \$49.95 (Hardcover). Reviewed by Hal Frampton.

Everyone knows that global income inequality is increasing. Everyone knows it so well, in fact, that all sorts of publications—from popular journals such as *The Economist* and *The New York Times*, to the scholarly works of sociologists such as Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells, to official reports of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—cite the explosion of global income inequality without any supporting evidence, assuming that readers would never doubt its veracity. But it is precisely this claim that Glenn Firebaugh sets out to disprove in his new book, *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality*.

Firebaugh, Chair of the Sociology Department at Pennsylvania State University, uses the same data sets and statistical methods as mainstream reports to arrive at the iconoclastic conclusion that global income inequality peaked in the mid- to late-twentieth century and has since started to decline. He begins by conceptualizing global income inequality as the average disproportionality between the incomes of people across the world, taking care to define inequality as a positive, not normative, measure. He then separates this disproportionality into two terms: 1) income inequality *within* nations; and 2) income inequality *among* nations. Using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) estimates for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Firebaugh makes the generally accepted argument that divergence of income levels among nations exploded with the advent of the industrial revolution. This trend, he argues, continued through the remainder of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century.

To demonstrate the decline in inequality over the past thirty to forty years, Firebaugh employs five standard statistical indices but relies almost entirely on the two that allow him to measure inequality levels among and within nations separately, and then to add them to determine total inequality. The results show a regular pattern of decline in inequality among nations from 1965 to 1989, and from 1990 to 1998, respectively.

Firebaugh's findings appear robust when checked against other studies, and when one accounts for certain variables such as the use of GNP rather than GDP as the measure of income. However, the data do have one major flaw: they are discontinuous between 1989 and 1990 because of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the addition of so many new nations. As a result, the indices measuring from 1965 to 1989 and those measuring from 1990 to 1998 are not directly comparable. It is true that both show a decline over their respective periods, but imputing a trend over discontinuous data is tenuous at