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ESSAY

Theory as time travel: Patomäki, *World Statehood* and possible futures

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World Statehood: the future of world politics, by Heikki Patomäki, Cham, Springer, 2023, 324 pp., £109.99 (Hbk), ISBN 978-3-031-32304-1

ABSTRACT
In this review essay, I set explore Heikki Patomäki's seventh sole-authored book in English, *World Statehood*. I set out the thematic structure and chapter order and then address whether the concept of 'self-transformative capacity of contexts' implies a central conflation and what is assumed if one argues that there is a tendential form of civilizational progress. I conclude with discussion of a causal process theory of time.

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Introduction

Heikki Patomäki is probably the best known critical realist currently working in the fields of global political economy, international and futures studies. He is also one of the most misunderstood critical realists for four more or less related reasons.[1] First, he is eclectic in his interests and theoretical inspirations and has, as such, wandered far from sole dependence on core tenets of critical realism. Second, he has never been content to simply absorb and apply the ideas of others and has instead continually sought to critically engage, reconstruct and innovate theory and concepts. Third, he is not much of a respecter of disciplinary boundaries. And fourth, an interest in futures studies means he is continually seeking to understand where our species is going and what its potentials are and this is a set of concerns all too easily conflated with varieties of prediction that critical realists tend to be sceptical about and sometimes hostile in regard of. *World Statehood,* Patomäki's seventh sole-authored book in English, leans into all four of these predilections and from that point of view is unlikely to change anyone's existing opinion of his work. Personally, if there are sides (maybe there aren't) I am on the one that believes his work is important. I would also remind readers that being eclectic in inspiration and interests and innovative in development of ideas and concepts are important hallmarks of originality. Insofar as frameworks are formed and justifications given, these traits do not

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preclude coherence and consistency. While Patomäki has a restless mind it is also a serious one.

In describing what *World Statehood* is about Patomäki states he is engaged in underlabouring for a processual understanding of world statehood and:

> I pose questions about world political integration, especially (1) whether and to what degree elements of world statehood exist today, (2) whether the development of further elements and functions of world statehood can be seen as a tendential direction of history, and (3) whether, and under what conditions, a world political community could be viable? (Patomäki 2023, 2)

The blunt answers are (1) partly; (2) yes (3) if we learn/choose to treat each other in appropriate ways. This, however, rather understates the scope and ambition of the book. In what follows I first set out a thematic structure synthesized from the book's content and then, taking this as background, provide a brief overview of the subject matter and issues raised in the individual chapters. I then comment on some of the arising issues with particular attention to matters that might interest a critical realist. These include whether 'self-transformative capacity of contexts' is prone to central conflation and problematic implications of strong social constructionism and whether the idea of a telos within reality can be sustained with a view to cultural and moral learning, given our current predicaments. In concluding I comment on Patomäki's innovative use of a theory of time.

Thematic structure of the argument

World Statehood is a book about world historical processes. At its core is the following structured flow of ideas and concerns (which to be clear does not mean that the chapters reduce to this order of argument in any simple linear fashion, rather they are informed by it as they range over numerous related theories, concepts and issues):

1. The universe exhibits development or evolution in the form of growing diversity, complexity and emergent forms including life, conscious life, social organization, civilization and culture etc. There is thus a telos or tendential unfolding of possibility. The Earth and humanity are just one small part of this greater anti-entropic process.
2. The development of humanity has so far proceeded through three different stages: hunter gatherer, agricultural and mechanical civilizations. As such, there is a discernible tendential direction of travel of the species that we might refer to as long term collective learning and progress (whatever else we might say about the nature of progress).
3. Progress notwithstanding, we are currently in a situation of profound problems in terms of climate emergency and ecological breakdown, territorial state relations and global market capitalism and this seems to create the need for further cultural learning and progress but also exhibits various gridlocks. A core problem is the current form of organization around the 'peace problematic' (mechanical civilization eventually brings forth industrialized technological warfare capability which demands ethico-political solutions) insofar as it presupposes the competitive relations and drivers of capitalist market society, consolidation of authority in territorial modern states, a problem of order and power-balancing and a highly limited sense of the possibility of conflict resolution and stability in terms of these (where that limited sense ultimately depends on regularities that are essentially positivist). We remain in a situation that impedes

rational collective solutions to current problems and risks the Kantian consequence of perpetual peace only in the form of the graveyard (i.e. an inhospitable world, conflict, civilizational collapse, mass extinction etc.).

4. Long term cultural learning or progress, including moral learning (how we treat each other and the world upon which we depend), has an odd sort of contingent and open inevitability to it. Each stage produces new possibilities that affect what can be done, especially in terms of emergent cultural layers, and insofar as we exhibit agency and reflexivity we open up some futures and close down others. Arguably the modern world is starting to exhibit scope for greater capacity to shape the future (ideally collectively and cooperatively) through normative discourse. Scenario building that works with causal complexes (or mechanisms) allows us to connect past, present and possible futures and adopting 'holoreflexivity', i.e. thinking in terms of wider contexts or wholes as processes in and through time, allows for more adequate perspectives on the world as it is and how we would want it to be (whoever that 'we' is and however that 'is' decided). Concomitantly, there are always narrative sense-making stories (myths that order our sense of how things are) which we apply to the world around us and these too can impede or facilitate constructive change and one can work to critique existent myths and propose alternatives. In keeping with holoreflexivity (as well as the point made in 1. above) a more cosmic sense of the human in an anti-entropic context can provide a broader sense of perspective and cultivate fellow-feeling, easing constructive change and providing a sense of hopefulness (something that seems to be currently lacking in dominant myth).
5. The current stage is thus one that includes various means to overcome its impediments and the book *World Statehood* is both an argument to establish this and an exercise in underlabouring for this (in conjunction with much of Patomäki's work and especially his later work), insofar as it explores historic ideas regarding, and current potentials for, forms of global organization suitable to meet the problems of common humanity as they now are.[2] With this in mind Patomäki notes that designs for world organization need not be limited to our current understanding of democratic decision-making and government according to the coherent territorial state and that arguments for it need to be more than merely functional in relation to existential threat. This returns him to themes of process, agency and cooperative organization to transcend existent conditions (self-actualising and self-realising changes to the way we structure our ways of living and interacting) and thus also to normative change and to the theme of moral learning and, to be clear, this is quite different as a concept than mere moralizing regarding the ills of the world.

Reducing the thematic structure of *World Statehood* in this way probably conveys the impression that the book constitutes highly contentious, if not wildly speculative, propositions. It is, however, probably more accurate to describe it as a book of grand themes structured to think through crucial questions of our time in a highly creative way. Given the state of the world there is very obviously a need for this kind of thinking, not least because so much of social science today concerns itself with what can be said in an 8000 word article whose subject and format are deemed acceptable within the disciplinary constraints of some journal of note. It is also important to keep in mind that whatever else Patomäki is, he is also a critical realist.[3] As such his work starts from the common

ground of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality. As anyone familiar with his work and innovations will also be aware, he prefers the term causal complex to causal mechanism and emphasizes the roll of temporal and historic process, and as alluded to briefly in the introduction, is more interested in exploring the shaping of future possibility than is typical among realists (at least insofar as this tends to be conflated with prediction under particular descriptions of the term). In any case, insofar as he is an open systems process-focused critical realist he emphasizes that his use of terms such as progress and direction is neither simple nor uncritical. Processes, especially within social reality (embedded in other processes), are rarely linear, and tend to be contingent and multifaceted. In terms of progress, for example, a problem of power applies whose forms require critique, disruption occurs, backsliding is possible, and, to reiterate, extinction is a present possibility. I will return to some of this in a later section of commentary. Before doing so, for the purposes of clarity I will briefly set out the chapter order of the book and relate this to the thematic structure itemized previously.

A brief chapter breakdown

The argument is made in three parts and thirteen chapters whose subjects and academic points of reference are mainly tailored to a readership familiar with international studies and global political economy (albeit the book can easily be read by anyone unfamiliar with these). Following a short introduction of main themes and a chapter overview in Chapter One, Part I (titled Cosmo-political Processes) begins with Chapter Two. Here Patomäki explores the origins and development of the idea of global organization (the need for and prospects for a world state etc.) and cosmopolitanism – the idea of our species as a community who owe each other treatment on the basis of common humanity – and distinguishes two overall framings of the concept of cosmopolitanism. 'Centric' versions which conflate the idea with the particular interests and concerns of the powerful who articulate them in some time and place and critical cosmopolitanism which is sensitive to this conflation and seeks to avoid its adverse tendencies. He notes centric versions tend to be rooted in a territorial (state) framework which shapes how duties may be owed to others (a position ripe for all manner of problems in the guise of civilizing impulses, moralizing in the name of moral duty, us/them hierarchies and so on). In keeping with his main concerns Patomäki looks to constructively engage with the more critical version of cosmopolitanism.

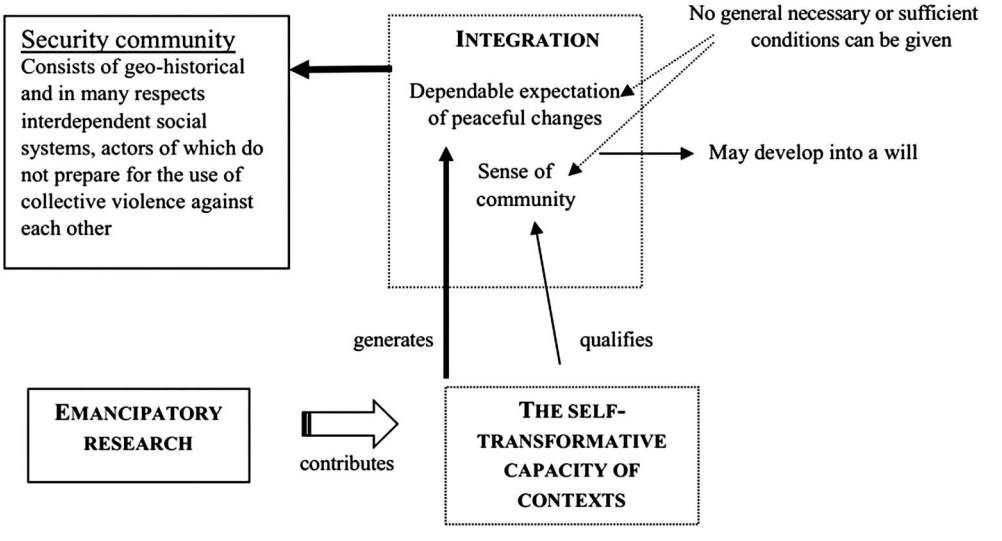
For Patomäki, critical cosmopolitanism is closely associated with a 'non-geocentric physical (NGP) cosmology' i.e. one that decentres humanity and places it in the context of a larger more complex evolving material universe. To be clear, he is not arguing that this is a necessary or sufficient condition for critical cosmopolitanism or that advocates explicitly recognize its role (though some do). Rather he is suggesting that the idea of common humanity that resists the problems of centrism acquires meaning through this broader framing (albeit he doesn't put it quite like this). In any case, our place as one species among many on one planet among many in one galaxy among many in a long history of unfolding time offers an alternative perspective on our differences and their significance. However, it is also the case that this decentred position could lend itself to the inference from science that any sense of commonality is artificial and arbitrary,

since the universe is merely the unfolding of process without purpose, and this might lead to the inference that human existence too is meaningless and thus any sense of common humanity can be undermined through nihilism. As noted in the previous section however, for Patomäki (and he is not alone in this), the universe exhibits a form of telos insofar as it develops in the direction of differentiation, greater complexity and emergent forms, including life and consciousness and so on. The universe is as such tendential.

Here Patomäki also turns to the role of mythmaking and by this he doesn't just mean stories we tell to entertain ourselves, he means the broad formation of ideas that inform the sense we make of existence – and as he notes a nihilist account of the unfolding of time is itself a story we tell ourselves (one imbricate with a 'liberal capitalist myth' that affects how science and potential are shaped) but it is not the only account available.[4] For Patomäki, myth is not to be understood as the absence of or opposite of science and reason (mythos versus logos) but rather as how we constitute and give sense to them, the narratives that connect the past to the present and future and clearly this is a key aspect of what it means to be human (or any equivalent species), insofar as it is an important aspect of our observable capacity to shape the world around us, open up some futures and close down others. Put this way and counterposed to ways of viewing the world that seem to offer little hope for the future, myth, in the appropriate sense, acquires an important role as a source of hopefulness via our ability to organize, reorganize and overcome problems.

The scope for mythmaking and the need for alternatives informs Patomäki's interest in visionary thinkers such as H.G. Wells (who in his time was not only a science fiction writer but also a public intellectual who advocated a world state) and leads him in Chapter Three to turn to Big History as a possible antidote to the nihilist strand of modernity. Big History was originated by David Christian in the early 1990s. As Patomäki notes, Big History locates our species within the long history of unfolding cosmological time but also seeks to provide constituting myth to meet the problems of humanity (weapons of mass destruction, war, climate change etc.). As he puts it, the purpose is to 'establish a sense of belonging to a wide planetary whole: the hope is that the modern [cosmic] origin story will forge global we-feeling and cooperation in our world plagued by global problems' (Patomäki 2023, 40). However, while Big History draws on concepts of emergence and complexity, for Patomäki it requires some modification and clarification based on its approach to given scientific findings and theory. Patomäki's central concern is to argue for and identify possible constituents in a more hopeful mythmaking process that identifies life, creativity, and potential that can give meaning to constructive (in both senses) approaches to the future from the present. In Chapter Four he then introduces the idea that there has been human progress in terms of cultural learning (including modes of organization and technology) and moral learning. He identifies the three stages I set out in the previous section and then does two other things.[5] He draws on counterfactual history (what didn't happen but could have) to make the argument that the main changes that became stages could have happened differently than how they did and elsewhere than where they did and thus while specific to location are also common to humanity (rather than proof of exceptionalism of some people in some places). They are thus contingent and yet in a certain sense eventually inevitable given the world as it is and a species of our kind (subject to the obvious problems of extinction etc.). The industrial revolution, for example, could have happened earlier in China, it just

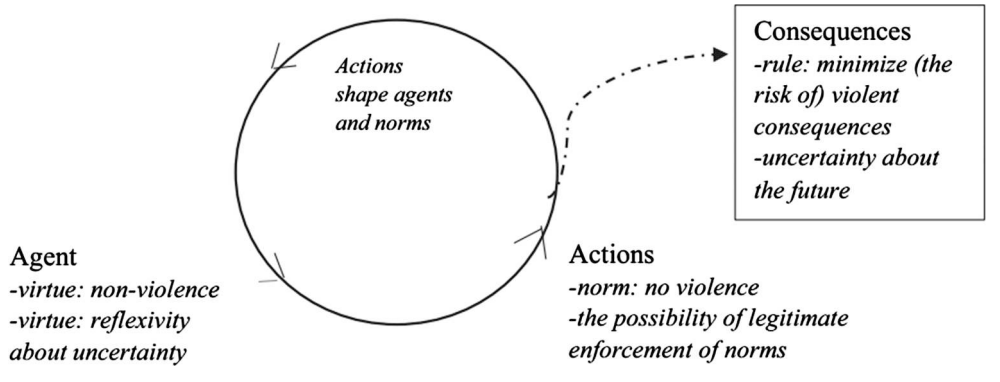
didn't. He then introduces the 'peace problematic' and discusses how this has become embedded not only in given frameworks of concepts and philosophy (Kant etc.) but also in an associated set of concerns related to power relations in the world (global capitalism) and Eurocentric history in particular. For Patomäki, underlabouring for an integrated and cooperative world system requires this to be rethought. He takes this up in Chapter Five and Part I of the book closes here with a discussion of cosmopolitan democracy and the scope for a pluralist security community which acts both as a response to the peace problematic and as an important phase transition towards some version of democratic world government. This is nicely summarized in a figure drawn from his own previous work (Patomäki 2023, 109):



Observant readers will note that emancipatory research invokes a common critical realist theme (one which Patomäki has had a great deal to say about in the form of the role of 'concrete eutopias').[6] The figure also uses the evocative phrase 'the self-transformative capacity of contexts' and in Chapter Five he begins to lay the groundwork for this idea and for transition/transformation in relation to theory of the nature of time and change which draws on Bhaskar's dialectic and its approach to time. He continues this line of reasoning into Part II (I will also return to this in the conclusion since it is an interesting issue re philosophy and realism and is important to Patomäki's concept of process).

Part II is titled Reflexive Futures and Agency and begins with Chapter Six where Patomäki argues that, depending on how conceived, the Cold War never really ended, including insofar as its meaning in processes remain undetermined and it can take on relational properties that were previously unrecognized or that it did not have. This leads him to comment on the nature of process and temporality and to also suggest that rational reflexivity in the present can revise how things are conceived and make possible, or more likely, different futures (anticipating them and initiating different structuring aspects of processes). Here he also suggests that the temporality of human existence seems to be changing. By this he means that we have at least the potential/opportunity

for better understandings of temporal processes themselves and thus are better able to grasp the scope for agency and, within this scope work on, the self-actualising potential for change implicit in the normativity of social reality (hence also self-transformative capacity of contexts). This argument leads in Chapter Seven to a discussion of the current understandings of contradictions and tensions in security (focused around a post-Deutschian discussion of plural institutions that draws on some of the discussion in Chapter Five) and of current disintegrative tendencies and impediments to progressive change in a marketized global political economy. For Patomäki, 'resolution of common problems and overcoming contradictions requires learning and the development of consciousness' and this is a social process, 'since only agents in social relations can carry out context transformations', which requires feedback and learning but also must recognize that actors do not reduce to the sum of their experiences etc. (see Patomäki 2023, 158–159). Moreover, meaningful change in the context of uncertainty requires ethico-political learning and virtues rather than merely means-end focus on actions and outcomes. For example, placing security dilemmas in a different context requires the cultivation and institutionalization of non-violence in self-other relations. Again, this is nicely summarized in a simple figure (Patomäki 2023, 169):



Chapter Eight transposes the discussion begun in Chapter Seven into the context of Polanyian double movement and comments on the issues raised by the return of the market in the later twentieth century and into the twenty-first (so not just a single and simple double movement), as well as the scope to reconceive the double movement concept dialectically and provide different explanations.[7] Following the general thematic structure of argument of *World Statehood* Patomäki highlights that the double movement in Polanyi's work seems to be semi-autonomous and functionalist in its inevitability, but in reality is not automatic and depends on agency. He notes that currently there is for many a sense of powerlessness and reactive rather than proactive action (in the context of neoliberalism), and that Polanyi generally neglects the scope for alternatives that take seriously his own otherwise prescient comments on the hazards of planetary interdependence and a planetary economy. This discussion provides a convenient means to introduce ideas in regard of institutions for 'global Keynesianism' (a rational interventionist alternative to neoliberal marketization, a subject he returns to in Part III) and also provides another way to discuss the need for and efficacy of due attention to historical process and contingency, this time phrased in terms of scope for holoreflexivity and the need for

institutional development and embedding of that holoreflexivity.[8] Chapter Nine brings Part II to a close by discussing the development of relevant transformative agency in terms of global civil society and the prospects for a world political party of some form (with some discussion and critique of the World Social Forum and of the Democracy in Europe 2025 or DiEm25 movement as possible sources of inspiration for design and development).

Part III is titled 'World Statehood and Beyond' and draws selectively on and develops a little further the themes set out in Part I and Part II. Chapter Ten turns to debates on world statehood and following some brief discussion of the work of Reinold Niebuhr focuses on Alexender Wendt's well-known article 'Why a world state is inevitable' published in 2003. According to Patomäki, the main focus of concern has been peace, war and weapons of mass destruction and while these are obviously important, if one moves beyond analytical compartmentalizations for the purposes of decomposition of ideas and arguments, then one must acknowledge the broader issues of context relevant to transformations and this includes the global political economy. Doing so brings to the fore, in the absence of effective common institutions (seen everywhere at the moment), the many disintegrative tendencies inherent to contemporary uneven growth and accumulation. This state of affairs notwithstanding, territorial states are not analogous to separate persons interacting, they are rather open systems that are intra- and inter-related in terms of processes at multiple scales. For Patomäki, this provides scope for constructive change (which can foster we-feeling and ultimately higher level identifications and purposes as normative goods – albeit this only becomes fully clear in the final chapter).

Chapter Eleven illustrates the scope for change in terms of tendencies in the global political economy. The chapter critiques the current preference for carbon trading and explores the possibility of a global carbon tax.[9] This provides two main benefits, it provides financing in the context of climate emergency and ecological breakdown and it facilitates globally oriented institution building (i.e. the shaping of processes). This returns Patomäki to his interest in global Keynesianism, following creatively in the wake of the Brandt Commission in the 1980s, and modified to recognize the need for limits to growth, given the materiality of economy and a finite planet (issues of due recognition of scale and metabolic flow and so on).[10] Chapter Twelve essentially parallels Eleven. It focuses on the scope for a world parliament and notes that the main conventional approaches have been to conceive this as a symbolic forum or as a newly sovereign legislative body, but also notes (following David Held) that it might be constituted as a framework-setting institution (for pressing global problems etc.). This offers a way forward for global organization and functionality without necessarily creating a territorial unity over and above states.[11] It could also operate according to democratic principles with a representative assembly elected according to issue-area and expertise/merit/interest rather than according to territorial states. Significantly though, the intent is to think through the concept from the point of view of institution building and processes, hence parallel to Chapter Eleven. This brings us finally to Chapter Thirteen. Here Patomäki reprises the arguments from previous chapters and explores the idea of a 'civilizing process' and draws attention to two important commitments based on previous discussion:

> What matters for peaceful conflict resolution and social cooperation is the self-transformative capacity of contexts, which in turn requires the capacity and willingness of actors to engage

> in a civilised dialogue in an ethical and pluralist way and accept the possibility of such outcomes of political processes that are at variance with their beliefs and convictions. (Patomäki 2023, 309)

> The inclination towards moral imperialism—the temptation to see oneself as the bearer and promoter of universal values in terms of 'civilisation'—must be distinguished from critical cosmopolitanism. The latter involves distance taking from any particular 'us' as a particular community, nation, or state. (Patomäki 2023, 310)

This leads on to discussion of the need for an open process of ethico-political learning in order to give sense to a world political community (WPC) that necessity and functionality alone cannot provide. Given the state of the world, however, Patomäki finds himself, as the book draws to a close, acknowledging that the myth frameworks of territorial states – the poetics of national imaginaries – are deep-rooted and remain thicker than metaphors of global wholes. Moreover, given his commitment to open systems, process, contingency and uncertainty in relation to the notion of tendential progress of the species, as a matter of consistency, he also finds himself acknowledging that any WPC cannot be deemed an end of history nor can it be assumed to be (if achieved) immune to disintegration. But all this notwithstanding, he chooses to close the book on an optimistic note in the midst of climate crisis:

> [T]he concept of the Anthropocene suggests more than just a common fate and identity in one functional area of governance; it suggests a reconfiguration of symbols on a more fundamental level implying the possibility of an ecological civilising process. It identifies the human system as a part of a much wider and more fundamental Earth system and thus resonates strongly with the life-oriented version of BH [Big History] … The life-oriented storyline cultivates the idea that the past as we know it may be a mere beginning of beginning. From this perspective, world history proper is only about to start. (Patomäki 2023, 322)

Some general points that warrant comment, further clarification and discussion

Reviews serve two main functions, summary of content and (ideally constructive) critique. As regards summary, the previous section provides just enough content to give a reader of this review a flavour of the book and some sense of what it is trying to achieve. It is, however, also necessarily partial and selective (the book is 324 pages long, involved, draws on multiple themes, discusses numerous theories and authors and is, as such, like any academic endeavour, the work of many formulated as the work of one). Moreover, like any other review, this one comes with the standard caveat, while a review may act as a signal to read or avoid, in the end this can only affect inclination, and one can only appreciate a book by reading a book, so read the book (if ultimately so inclined).

As regards critique, since this is a review in the flagship journal devoted to critical realism and Patomäki is a realist it probably makes sense to begin from matters likely to occur to any realist reading the book. For realists, perhaps the most provocative idea in *World Statehood* is that of self-transformative capacity of contexts, insofar as this relates to normative revision for the purposes of change. If Margaret Archer were alive to write this review it seems likely she would be sensitive to the possibility of central conflation one might think inherent in this idea.[12] She would likely consider this, without further specification, prone to problems of strong social constructionism

and nominalism. However, while Patomäki does not go to any great lengths in *World Statehood* to develop the social ontology of agency and structure, the book is neither his first work nor is it (in terms of ontology etc.) a standalone work. Moreover, Patomäki does not repudiate the agent-structure problematic and self-transformative capacity of contexts is about agency *and* structure *in processes*.[13] The emphasis is on processes, and in common sense terms the idea of self-transformation and the role of normativity in combination is really only the idea that reasons are causes, reflexivity provides scope to change one's mind through reasoning, and change what one does through reasoned activity. It is the idea that in a temporal dynamic the resources for doing this are interrogation of how things have been and what they are like with a view to what we want them to be like. Patomäki is quite clear that this is undertaken in structured relations and is about shaping structuring processes (institution building etc.) in which structured causation applies (whether we describe these as mechanisms or complexes). He doesn't say this is easy, he doesn't say it is foolproof. On the contrary, the entire point of the book is to address how difficult this is and to highlight that we seem to be making it even more difficult by self-limiting ourselves in terms of alienated systems of decision-making, fatalism, nihilism and so on. We are in danger of mythologizing ourselves into hopelessness, and seemingly for Patomäki this is the most fundamental impediment to constructive responses to our situation i.e. a failure to adequately grasp, *to really grasp*, that understanding and explanation in a stratified and emergent reality allows one to work on one's conditions within that reality (and so also change as a being in the world). This is what it means to focus on meaning and it is this that gives sense to statements such as:

> the future is in the process of coming to be (or at least has the potential of being) increasingly co-determined by normative discourse about its desirability, informed by adequate and plausible scenarios about possible and likely futures. (Patomäki 2023, 6; see also 119)

As such, while one can readily select passages from the book which might convey an impression of questionable strong social constructionism or nominalism, to do so would be to mislead in terms of what Patomäki is trying to achieve.[14]

In the same vein one might also point out that Patomäki is among those realists who have, over the years, valued the critical challenge that post-structuralists have offered to existing scholarship (for example, Richard Ashley's articles 'The Poverty of Neorealism' and 'Living on Borderlines' from 1984 and 1989) and this might ostensibly make it seem odd that he is prepared to make the argument for civilizational progress, and cultural and moral learning, since all of these can readily seem to evoke absolutes which set hackles rising in terms of modern sensibilities and those modern sensibilities are the product of the critical challenge driven by post-structuralists. Clearly though, Patomäki has a highly critical approach to these ideas. In terms of the past he is interested in what arises from humanity rather than what valorizes one subsection over another and in terms of the future he seeks to make progress and learning compatible with contingency, pluralism and difference and more than this he makes these (contingency, pluralism and difference) substantive aspects of progress as hallmarks of learning (their relevance is what is learned), given how things currently are (refer back to the figure from Patomäki 2023, 169).

Still, given how things are it is surely difficult to believe that humanity is liable to make progress – albeit the status of 'is liable' here needs some further consideration over the

next few paragraphs. We have a declared climate emergency, widespread awareness that multiple 'planetary boundaries' are exceeded, and it is coming up on a decade since the Paris agreement. The climate is now observably changing around us and extreme weather events are happening with increasing frequency and ferocity and yet I can still pick up a respectable newspaper and read a headline such as 'Oil and gas giants should do what they do best and drill, baby, drill' (Armitage 2024).[15] Likewise it is difficult to believe that cultural and moral learning are imminent/immanent in any progressive sense. We have fabulous technology that places us in instant communication with the world and which gives us access to the sum total of human knowledge, but somehow its use via smartphones and other devices trains us to be addicted to the baser aspects of humanity and this has fostered toxic relations, nastiness and spite. Perhaps this is froth floating on a deeper set of bonds but if so these too do not seem to have placed a halt on pathological processes – if one observes where we are then we live in a world of democratic backsliding, and where the march of authoritarianism and the rise of the far right seem to be our immediate response to hard times.[16] The future has been colonized by dread far more than hope. Even when things are 'not that bad' things still seem a little exhausted, a little shabby, as though decay had set in (which in many places subject to years of financialisaton, inequality, austerity and underinvestment, it visibly has). And this is to say nothing about the many wars now raging, most of which notably have shown disregard for what passes for the rules of war and the protection of civilians. Recognition of just these kinds of things is, of course, part of Patomäki's argument (disintegrative tendencies within constraints we must overcome). But there is a serious thematic point to make here regarding serious times.

The thematic structure of Patomäki's underlying argument begins from the idea of a developing universe of growing complexity and diversity, creating an anti-entropic tendency of open systems processes according to emergence etc. – though Patomäki is clear that all of this is dialectical rather than linear.[17] Life and conscious life are an expression of this, as ultimately are cultural and moral learning, since presumably these are inherent to organic intelligence insofar as it is social. If one strips away all of the debate and discussion of issue-areas then at root Patomäki seems to be suggesting that in a practical sense we currently need different myths to frame our imaginary in order to facilitate a step in cultural and moral learning that will enable us to organize in ways that meet the challenges we currently confront (where industrial technology of capitalism and territorial states mean we have the capacity for utterly destructive warfare and ecocidal economies). Though Patomäki doesn't put it quite like this, there is an implicit 'we will or we won't' to this, but a basic understanding that we can (succeed) if we choose to do so, since this is what holoreflexivity and self-transformative capacity of contexts means in regard of the need to treat each other and the planet in ways that overcome the problems that seem to be built into current ways things happen (the drivers of market capitalism, the dysfunction of the current peace problematic etc.). The 'we will or we won't' expresses possibility built into a universe that allows for progress as Patomäki conceives it (different technological capacities, ways of organizing and treating each other and 'the other') to continue.

However, it is possible that the actual situation is 'we can try but we can't (succeed)'. What do I mean by this? Well I don't mean 'we will or we won't' since this implies that it is in fact possible that we can progress as a species beyond where we are now. What I mean

is that it is possible that it is impossible. Speculative science and science fiction have long discussed different categories of civilization whose level of technology and sophistication exceeds ours. For example, the Kardashev scale (conceived by astrophysicist Nikolai Kardashev in 1964) ranks civilizations according to their capacity to harness energy and begins with Type I which are able to capture and control all of the radiated energy from their neighbouring star (and while the original scale ran to Type III these days it runs to Type V).[18] According to this scale human civilization is currently a Type 0. Needless to say, as things stand we have not observed a Type I or any other higher Type civilization. With that in mind it could just be that there are no such civilizations and never have been and this too has been a subject of serious discussion focussed on the prospects of the SETI project (search for extraterrestrial life) and the adequacy of the grounds of the Drake Equation and so on.[19] Clearly, this matters also to our species and to Patomäki's argument, albeit he does not discuss the themes of *World Statehood* in quite these terms.

There is a fairly standard argument in futures studies and in bleaker dystopic versions of science fiction that intelligence is an evolutionary blind alley doomed to fail. This, of course, is one possible response to the Fermi Paradox (rooted in the question: there are many stars, there are many planets, there has been billions of years for evolution to occur, if life easily arises and life evolves and continues to evolve then some species should reach a level of technological advancement such that they materially impact their environment – and this may be more than on a planetary scale – in detectable ways, communicate or become capable of interstellar travel – all this being so, where are these civilizations, why haven't they been spotted?). At the other extreme is the Dark Forest conjecture (there are many civilizations but a hallmark of advancement is the intelligence to realize that other advanced intelligent species are dangerous and so it is better to conceal one's existence) made famous by the Liu Cixin novel. The point, however, is that Patomäki's argument invokes an anti-entropic telos and civilizational progress and thus must assume a universe in which such progress is possible and that there is no limiting point. The only evidence for this is the past, as an indication of open system processes, and the observation of previous (under some description) progress, including cultural and moral learning; but this cannot make possible what may be impossible if there is in fact always a limit on technological species which causes them to self-destruct. We've never had the species capacity for planetary destruction before so the past cannot make our self-destruction not inevitable and there are no observable cases to the contrary (because we have no example who is not us).

To be clear, while impossibility may be a possibility it is not one that should rationally affect what one does because one cannot distinguish it from fatalism (nihilism etc.) which would, insofar as it is possible to overcome the current disintegrative tendencies, make it difficult to overcome those tendencies according to Patomäki's argument. In a situation of uncertainty the rational thing to do is the thing that seems to offer hope, not the one which closes it down. And, arguably, this applies to all of Patomäki's case though we do not have the space to discuss particular parts.[20]

Conclusion: time and process and realism

I don't want to leave readers with the impression that *World Statehood* is airily 'cosmic' in some derogatory sense. As I stated in the introduction, Patomäki has a restless mind, but it

is also a serious one. *World Statehood* is full of detailed discussion of debates and issues familiar in international studies and global political economy. It is not a flight of fancy, it is grounded. Even his use of sources not often found in social science is grounded. For example, his reference to Arthur C. Clarke's three laws of possibility (summarized Patomäki 2023, 52) serves an obvious role in terms of his overall argument as I have presented it:

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, she is almost certainly right. When she states that something is impossible, she is very probably wrong.
2. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

To conclude then, *World Statehood* is often brilliant. For me its most interesting aspect is the way Patomäki weaves process and causation into the theory of time in order to add credence to his account of possibility and the scope to rationally anticipate desirable futures. To do this he draws on Bhaskar's later dialectic and while other realists have taken an interest in temporality insofar as it relates to social action and distinctions between agency and structure (most notably in terms of Archer's M/M which sets out differently phased interaction) few have taken an interest in theory of time itself.

Current approaches to time divide philosophically between dynamic and static theory but struggle to make sense of the world based on reductive interpretations of the findings of physics and cosmology, which tend to spatialize time as part of a coordinate representation of spacetime. Much of the debate turns on whether the present has special status merely as a consequence of the limits of consciousness/experience or because of reality itself. Patomäki, following the later Bhaskar (albeit there is not a great deal to go on in Bhaskar regarding philosophy of time), cuts across this problematic via a focus on (depth realist) causation and process.[21] The present is not a point but rather a boundary state of becoming in which multiple causal processes manifest and since those processes work over different extents and durations the present itself becomes relative and this is in a causal sense rather than a directed moment-to-moment coordinate or event sense – and clearly not all of these processes reduce to human participation, human perception or human concerns (if we run with this way of theorizing time). Thinking in these terms gives sense to the idea that the past remains underdetermined in processual terms given that the present allows for different possibilities in regard of the past which change the context (meaning frame) of the events of the past in a broader context of ongoing unfolding temporal reality.

Similarly, the future is not some notional separate series of unconnected points in a count of T (or spacetime version of this) and hence the possibility of closing down some futures and anticipating others, despite that fundamental uncertainty still applies, gains some sense of plausibility in Patomäki's work through the temporal span of causal process. That said, relativizing the present creates numerous conceptual problems of what it means to say something is 'now' in a non-event sense, while the unreconciled tension between shaping the future and unknown futures is a subject ripe for hubris. I could go on but will just note that it might be thought curious (though not inexplicable

under some account) that a realist can be sceptical regarding foresight and futures studies and yet embrace explanatory critique and emancipation. In any case, Patomäki's book, if it isn't a contradiction given the subject matter, offers a unique perspective and deserves to be read.

Notes

1. See, for example, Patomäki (2010) and the interviews Patomäki and Morgan (2023a, 2023b).
2. See, for example, Patomäki (2008, 2011, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022).
3. For his best known early advocacy of critical realism see Patomäki and Wight (2000) and Patomäki (2002).
4. He states: 'Contemporary science is consistent with at least two different cosmic storylines. The basic themes of liberal-capitalist myth – cosmic meaninglessness if not philosophical desperation, Darwinist ideologies, and short-term comforts of life – provide underpinnings for the contemporary competitive society organized in terms of geopolitical states and world markets … This myth involves instrumentalism and can easily submit to any demands to provide means for some ends (or be simply indifferent about the uses of scientific knowledge). The prevailing narrative is in most time scales oriented towards a tragic end, thus undermining hope for long-term collective learning and progress. Empiricist science tends to feed into a sense of disorientation, division, and directionless. Attitudes can vary from indifference to reality to outright scepticism and escapism to fantasy worlds such as imagined parallel quantum worlds (or sport, soap, and nostalgia). Freedom in this myth consists of the unimpeded exercise of optimising behaviour. Consumerism results from the absence of hope for good life. The alternative storyline – revolving around the life and learning in a manner that induces cosmic hopefulness – starts from the idea that time, space, causation, emergence, and change are real. Cosmos is historical and evolving, and it is also hospitable to life. Over time, life has generated new emergent powers on Earth; it may have done so also elsewhere in the universe. A key point is that emergent cultural layers such as conscious experience, agency, will, and intentions are real and causally efficacious. This makes both scientific practices and transformative ethical political activities possible. The rational tendential direction of world history is grounded in our collective human learning, making it possible to solve problems, absent ills, and overcome contradictions through collective actions and by building better common institutions' (Patomäki 2023, 66).
5. He states: '(1) The stage of hunter-gatherers, who can handle fire and simple tools but have no other sources of energy than nutritious substances feeding their muscles and brain and the burning of wood that brings some extra warmth and protection and is useful in cooking. (2) The stage of agricultural civilisation involves a new energy system, where the sunlight is converted into food energy by the green fields of crops now inside the cultural system (Volk, 2017, 135), and where some domesticated animals provide additional muscle power and nutritious substances. Increasingly, also coal, wind, and water flows and, later, chemical explosives are utilised mechanically in production, transportation, and destruction (war). (3) The stage of mechanical civilisation is based on the work of machines operated with external sources of energy. Historically, this started with fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas). The conversion of the energy of wind or water flows into electricity started in the late nineteenth century. Since the mid-twentieth century, electricity has been produced also through the release of the binding energy of atomic nuclei in a fission reaction and by converting the energy of sunlight through the photovoltaic effect' (Patomäki 2023, 80).
6. See, for example, Patomäki and Teivainen (2004).
7. Double movement is the idea that an 'institutional pattern' termed a 'market system' emerges (it is created and depends on institutions rather than is inevitable, natural to who we are as a species or a final act of progress) and that once it exists it begins to disembed – comes to function in ways that resist interference (society becomes an 'adjunct of the market' or 'self-regulating market') – and this leads to adverse consequences (treating various entities

as 'fictitious' commodities – land (nature), labour, money etc.) which in turn results in defences measures in order that society protects itself.

8. Note, to be clear Patomäki did not invent the concept: 'Camilleri's and Falk's (2009) concept of holoreflexivity is a remarkable attempt at contributing to the making of a global transformative agency. The Greek term holo means "whole". Holoreflexity, Camilleri and Falk envisage, is the next logical step in the mutually reinforcing processes of increasing organisational complexity and personal and institutional reflexivity under planetary conditions. Reflexivity denotes the capacity to reflect upon the conditions of one's being, agency, and actions, also to shape the relevant planetary conditions. Thus, holoreflexivity involves a comprehension of the mechanisms, structures, and processes of the whole. As a form of understanding, "it is global in that it encompasses all social groupings, communities cultures and civilisations, and planetary in that it comprises the totality of relationships between the human species and the rest of the biosphere" (Camilleri & Falk, 2009, 537).' (Patomäki 2023, 196).
9. Note, this chapter draw son previous work I did with Heikki (Morgan and Patomäki 2021), and on a draft paper we jointly authored with Johan Wahlsten. For discussion of some of the general issues see Buch-Hansen and Nielsen (2023), Morgan (2021) and issues re finance see the conclusion to Morgan (2023a) and Morgan, Chu, and Haines-Doran (2023).
10. The focus of global Keynesianism is economy from the point of view of all actors and countries rather than a single macroeconomy and the chief concern is rational transformative investment and effective demand rather than price signalling coordination (Patomäki 2023: 269).
11. He notes: 'The constituencies of this body can be defined in terms of identity or functional areas rather than territorial location – or a combination of these. A part of the seats could be allocated employing lottery in various ways and for various purposes, for example: • a fraction of the seats could be reserved for non-governmental organisations interested in taking part in the functioning of this body; • alternatively, there could be a separate civil society chamber selected through a screening process and lottery, with well-defined powers and responsibilities; • lotteries could also be used to select representatives from countries that do not practice free and fair elections (similar to the selection of participants for deliberative forums)' (Patomäki 2023, 287).
12. For a sense of how Archer was attuned to this issue see the interview Archer and Morgan (2020).
13. It is worth noting that Patomäki is keen to historicise social ontology and sees this as different from say Lawson's work on social ontology. See Patomäki (2020) and Lawson and Morgan (2021a, 2021b).
14. A similar point might be made regarding his use of terms like field and code albeit the argument may be more involved and more contestable.
15. The article discusses CEO of Chevron Mike Wirth's continued commitment to fossil fuels (e.g. spending just $2bn of its $14bn capital budget for 2024 on low carbon investment because the returns are currently higher on oil and gas).
16. For example, in Europe the Chega ('Enough') party in Portugal, the Values Union in Germany and the Alternative for Germany party, and, of course, Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, Viktor Orban, Geert Wilders etc.
17. And these days is interested in concepts such as field and code, which we don't have the space to discuss here.
18. Visit: https://futurism.com/the-kardashev-scale-type-i-ii-iii-iv-v-civilization. If unfamiliar with the subject one might think serious scientists do not discuss such things. They do, see, for example, Kardashev (1985).
19. Visit: https://www.seti.org/.
20. There are, for example, many alternative concerns and foci that critical realists have pursued in terms of globalising capitalism. We might, for instance, discuss some of the issues according to Bob Jessop's take on global capitalism and the state, drawing on Poulantzas – see the interview, Jessop and Morgan (2022). As Patomäki and others note, Jessop also has a critique of Wendt. For an alternative reading of the scope of Wendt on the world state argument see

Nunn and Morgan (2016). One might also approach moral learning differently (or at least in greater depth in terms of legitimation) based on Andrew Sayer's interest in moral economy see the interview Sayer and Morgan (2022).

21. See Morgan (2023b).

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