

**Book Review: Frank Füreidi, *First World War: Still No End in Sight*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. ISBN: 978-1441125101 (Hardcover). 288 Pages. \$29.99.**

**Reviewed by Peter Harrison<sup>1</sup>**

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Frank Füreidi, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent—Canterbury, has written a survey of the decline in direction and leadership as it has been felt by Western ruling and intellectual elites starting with the backdrop of 1914's Great War. Although not the initial cause, he views the First World War, whose centennial is currently upon us, as the watershed moment for what Füreidi contends is a real and perceived loss of authority. Füreidi suggests that the ideal of democracy has only just managed to survive the century, and that 'intellectual attention' needs to focus on this political principle in order to begin to solve the problems that have beset the planet since WWI (Füreidi, p. viii). However, rather than trying to re-invigorate the values of humanism, universalism, progress, and democracy, as Füreidi suggests, maybe it is timely to begin a thoroughgoing historical, economic, and sociological re-contextualization of Enlightenment principles, which, crucially, resists a postmodernist methodology.

In its historical context, the ideal of democracy emerged in the Enlightenment, with an early radical advocate being Baruch Spinoza, who referred to the establishment of state power based on genuine and participatory consent as that 'perfectly absolute dominion, which we call democracy' (Spinoza, p. 385). It is important to remember that Spinoza was writing in the Netherlands at the time of its so-called *Golden Age* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a period of world economic superiority based on the

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<sup>1</sup> **Peter Harrison** is the co-author of *Nihilist Communism – A Critique of Optimism in the Far Left*, first circulated in print form in 2003, but properly published in 2009 by Ardent Press of San Francisco (available from Littleblackcart books). His next project titled *Knowledge and Violence: The Ascent of the Human Commodity* will be published by TSI Press in 2017.