

identifiable interests in play, these tend to be far less direct and far more diffuse than they are in North America, and the objectives we have in mind in most cases cannot possibly be attained by ourselves alone. All this allows us to claim that what's in the enlightened interest of the international community at large is in the Canadian interest, too. Happy is the country whose geopolitical circumstances are so benign as to allow it to proffer such assertions with a straight face. Our only desire, we insist, is to lift up the fallen, rescue the oppressed, and relieve the miseries of the miserable, arguing that our doing so will make the world a happier, safer and more prosperous place not only for them, but for ourselves and others, too. We thus act here, not as Presbyterians, but as Methodists; we think less like economists and more like social workers.

Now I want to emphasize that I have no fundamental objection – in principle, at least – to this general attitude, and I reserve the right to feel a trifle injured if I am told later this evening that I am addicted to a heartlessly brutish brand of realism. Canada is an unbelievably fortunate country. It is blessed with a relatively benign internal history (although our First Nations can certainly be forgiven for thinking otherwise), along with enormous wealth, as secure a geographical location as it is possible on this technologized earth to imagine, and, notwithstanding what we often say and hear in daily political debate, an enviable system of governmental institutions, norms and practices that together deliver public services of high calibre in decently responsive style. Unencumbered – except in relation to the United States – by foreign policy requirements that are persistent, urgent and vital, we are almost uniquely well-positioned to indulge our perfectly human desire to do some good in the world, and to take satisfaction from the effort. Given our extraordinary advantages, moreover, if WE don't try, it is hard to imagine (outside Scandinavia and Australasia, perhaps) what society would. And to what faint hope could we then cling in attempting to sustain our abiding belief in progress, and in the possibility of improving our world through collective action co-operatively orchestrated by public policy means? At our core, after all, we *are* 'westerners'. We may accept (as Margaret Atwood claims our literature does) that Fate perennially lays upon us an influential and sometimes heavy hand. In this we may be a little more like Europeans and a little less like Americans. But we are convinced, too, that among the working forces of history there is at least a little room for humanly-contrived architecture, and being true to ourselves requires that we seek to make constructive use