

# SOME THOUGHTS ON GLOBALIZATION AND WORLD PHILOSOPHY

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## I. Cultural Violence vs. A Culture of Peace

In recent years, as I, like everyone else, have grown older, I have become increasingly pessimistic about the future of this planet of ours. There are some who have suggested that one possible reason why we have yet to detect any signs of rational life elsewhere in the universe is that, while there may have been some such things at various times in the intergalactic past, whatever such entities may have existed eventually reached such a high stage of technological proficiency that they were able to destroy themselves in so devastating a way that they all perished in a nuclear holocaust or something similar. I do not consider such an outcome to be inconceivable on this planet; I think it unlikely in the next, say, ten years, but after that, as we say in English, “all bets are off.”

The root cause of such an outcome would, of course, be cultural violence. Nations dominated by two frequently antagonistic cultures on the Indian sub-continent possess nuclear weapons – probably not enough to destroy the rest of the world, but enough largely to destroy each other. And suppose the United States, with its enormous nuclear stockpile, were to come under the domination of a madman – what then?

It was not so very long ago that a book by a Harvard professor named Samuel Huntington alerting readers to an alleged clash of civilizations was, to use another colloquialism, the cat’s meow, both in academic and, I was told, diplomatic circles. Huntington followed with one more literary triumph, before passing from the scene, in which he deplored the gradual relinquishment of dominance over American society by the old White Anglo-Saxon Protestant aristocracy of which he was a member. Were he still alive, he would no doubt have taken pleasure in the temporary refutation of this latter claim by the elegant Anglo-Saxon President that we in the United States has for four years in the person of Donald Trump. (A little sarcasm.)

What I never managed to forget when Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* was all the rage was the fact that in a brief earlier version of his story, which appeared in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington had drawn some geographical lines between his clashing civilizations that were different from those drawn in the book. In other words, this supposedly powerful thesis was articulated by its proponent in different configurations at different times. As some lawyers like to say, *res ipsa*

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*loquitur*: the dubiousness of the fundamental assertion, built on half-truths, is, or should be, self-evident. And, *nota bene*, the assertion in question is essentially an assertion about putatively inevitable cultural violence.

What is almost inevitable when one speaks of cultural violence at a time still not very far removed from the twentieth century is the memory of Germany under National Socialism. It is hard to imagine a more forthright, monstrous preacher of cultural violence than Adolf Hitler. Germany's image, if not its reality, had been that of a very cultured nation, going back to a time, as late as the mid-nineteenth century, when it was actually a collection of sovereign states rather than a single nation. And yet Hitler managed, within a relatively short period of time, to seduce large masses of Germans into an attitude of overt worship of him and of his violent prejudices. Ah, it may be said, but the really cultured Germans were not a part of those masses – they were in exile, or in hiding. Really? To be sure, there were many Germans who opposed Naziism, but there were plenty of “cultured” Germans who discovered new aspects of their inner selves and supported it. Let us not delude ourselves.

My point is that the culture of peace that served as part of the title of this session is something that requires cultivation. And, what must never be forgotten, it can easily be lost, go to seed, like an unweeded garden. If being human is something that, as the theme of this World Congress suggests, has to be learned, it can easily and quickly be unlearned, as well.

## II. Social and Political Philosophy in the Global World

To what extent has social philosophy been globalized? To a very large extent, it seems to me. On the final day of the 2018 Beijing World Congress of Philosophy, just before the closing session, I tried to make the case that Karl Marx remains the pre-eminent philosopher of our time, even though we were then commemorating – and that was the principal purpose of my talk – the two hundredth anniversary of his birth. This obviously means that, in my view, he is the pre-eminent social and political philosopher of our time. The brief essay that I offer here was part of a special symposium on globalization that was organized by a specialist on that topic, Professor Alexander Chumakov of the Russian Philosophical Society.

The question of globalization itself has been a major topic of philosophical conversation and writing over the past several decades. That conversation and writing have been dominated far too much, in my opinion, by Western and Western-oriented philosophers, taking “Western” in a broad sense. Among the major contributors, in addition to our own Alexander Chumakov, have been Jürgen Habermas, the late Jacques Derrida, Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and the late Peter Kemp. These last three can all be called “cosmopolitans;” Derrida, with his title reference to “the new International” (a reference to his *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new International*), likewise, though with some reservations; Habermas somewhat less so, given his later focus on the constitutional state.

The prominent social philosopher who threw cold water on the cosmopolitan ideal, more than anyone else, was the late John Rawls. I have written about him elsewhere; here, I simply want to emphasize how disappointing his book entitled *The Law of Peoples* was to many of his followers, some of whom have attempted to salvage him by applying his so-called principles of justice to the global scene in a way in which he himself refused to do in that book. But what we find in *The Law of Peoples* seems to me to be a clearer revelation than in any of Rawls' earlier work of a certain atmosphere of upper middle-class bourgeois American self-satisfaction that would have characterized the Baltimore atmosphere of his childhood, that was interrupted, in his case, by military service in wartime, but that prevailed to some degree up until the time of his death and for a few years thereafter, through the period of the American attack on Iraq. It was still the era of American hegemony. I described this in very clear terms in several papers, particularly one that I gave in Moscow, at the Institute of Philosophy, and that was published in translation in *Voprosy filosofii* ("Globalizatsiia i mezhekulturnii dialog" (Globalization and Intercultural Dialogue), tr. D. Lakhuti, *Voprosy Filosofii* (Moscow) 2002, pp. 80-87).

That world of twenty years ago no longer exists; the American exodus from Afghanistan was a symbolic expression of its end. But I am not sure just how to describe the world of the present. There are various global forces that bear some resemblances to state actors of the past, even though they are not all the same forces as in the past -- China obviously occupies a very important role now that it did not occupy fifty years ago, for example -- and there are ever-new ways in which global interconnections have increased, and continue to increase, in importance; but what stands out today as the biggest puzzle, it seems to me, and that makes a description of the current world scene so difficult is precisely the status of my country, the United States, and especially the stance of its ruler for four years, its chief executive from January 2017 to January 2021, who continues to command a large following. We are beginning to see, among social and political philosophers, laments about the end of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism -- even, among some American colleagues, comparisons between the United States in 2018 and Germany in the mid-1930s.

For several reasons I do not take such comparisons too seriously -- for one thing, Hitler, as warped as his thinking was, was far more intelligent than Trump is -- but the challenge to try to understand the real world rather than having recourse to some heavenly ideal, the challenge that I believe social philosophers face, or should face, is real and urgent. It has its roots in part in the fact that large masses of people in my country and in many other countries throughout the world feel that globalization has harmed them much more than it has helped.

As long as the spirit of capitalism, giving priority to the maximization of profits by a few over meeting the needs of all, continues to dominate in so many parts of the globe, our planet's resources will continue to be squandered rather than shepherded, with advanced technology simply intensifying this process.

Once again, my own country is a very interesting, and a very sad, case study. Those who were in power in 2018 were trying as hard as possible to cut back on

previous administrative restraints on the exploitation of resources – mining, lumber, etc. – by the major corporations in order to increase their profits while at the same time doing virtually nothing to increase the incomes of ordinary people, millions of whom live from week to week without any savings. Some of the Trump administration's efforts have been reversed, at least for the present, but some have not, and in any case the effects will be long-lasting. Globalization as such is a welcome phenomenon; globalization with capitalism is a disaster.