



GLOBALISATION, HUMANISM, MODERNITY

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Our time has proved to be amazingly effective in gropingly building up a civilization which it has proved amazingly inept at putting in order.

(André Maliaux)

After so many crises which have followed each other in as many areas, we ought to admit that industrial and technological civilization is creating as many problems as it is capable of resolving. The myth of progress, one of the founding myths of our civilization, also appears to have collapsed as a myth. The development of modern society, spectacular as it is from an economist's angle of vision, has not been able to society; stop a slide into human and moral underdevelopment. A deterioration of quality in relation to quantity makes only those things that can be actually measured appear to be real; unfortunately, things like poetry, suffering, or love are hardly quantifiable.

Towards the end of his eventful life, Jean Monnet, a remarkable figure of the twentieth century, reasoned that, had he been able to start all over again, he would have begun with culture. A founding father of what was later to become the European Union, he expressed that belated belief in the pre-eminent role of culture as a part of greater civilization after he had tried for several decades to build a prosperous Europe in economic terms in the aftermath of a devastating war.

Indeed, culture in its conventional meaning had begun to be perceived as a tradable commodity by reference to the huge market of the United States that had successfully accomplished a homogeneous culture out of a multitude of ingredients.

Close to the end of the twentieth century, a prevailing sentiment among the people of Eastern Europe was that of anxiety followed by serenity as they witnessed the twilight of militant ideologies. Moving from the illusion of authoritarian planning as

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a way to salvation to the model of market economy as a medicine against all ills brought about a profound crisis. A loss of identity and sense of purpose has demoralized millions of people by making the evil look somewhat commonplace and by postulating a new horizon of expectations well tempered by single-minded thinking.

Brazilian philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, in his courageous and sarcastic book prophetically tided *The collective imbecile*, described the phenomenon that we are all observing today, that of the triumphant globalization of ignorance which demolished established values and ushered in an age of indifferent non-culture. That was, he claimed, an age relying on world-wide techno structure, a time when economic performance and social concerns had already celebrated their divorce, and the universal notion of public good and its political expression were no longer a matter of predominant interest. Malfunctions made slow but inexorable progress and laid the ground for impending damage of scale, from the spectacular rise of extreme nationalist parties to the continued efflorescence of fundamentalist religious fury, be it Islamic or Christian.

The instances of collective emotion caused by a pacifying and responsible message or by causes that do not promise immediate profit – a course tenaciously pursued by a host of politically unengaged groups – seem to herald a way out of the worship of fashionable models that rely on the fascination of money-making as the quintessential source of individual prosperity and fulfillment. Such models come and go in cycles. But the hope is always there that spiritual resistance can alternately liberate the individual from the bonds of time, from any kind of possession that may hurt human nature, impoverish the spirit and foil the type of transcendence that is conducive to knowledge.

By defeating the paradigm of uniform thinking and the submission to an infallible single model or to a single ideology, a person endowed with free critical judgment would never fail to rediscover his/her fundamental spiritual vocation, even though a sub cultural environment may be demoralizing. The human being will continue to aspire towards major ideals, such as discovering the values that are worth the risk of rebirth, an adventure that may eventually bring personal fulfillment and a renewed sense of being in harmony with the world, beyond the aggressive temptations of consumerism, beyond violence.

The human being finds it, indeed, difficult to overcome in an environment saturated with the banality of evil, in an unfair competition against those with whom it is impossible to compete, in a position of paradigmatic loser or predestined powerless Victim.

A large amount of recent writings tends to reinforce the notion of perennial globalization with all its components advancing in a single direction. This invites further reflection on the humanistic tradition and, equally, on the idea of *post-humanist society*. It also brings to mind the notion of *end of history* and the rather ideological approach inherent to Fukuyama's theory.

The interaction between advanced information technology and the breakthrough

in biotechnology alters the confined localist character of traditional culture. Likewise, the open character of modem science provides the instruments for shaping a new history, building on the worship of inequality, which opens up disturbing opportunities reminiscent of the old models of the superhuman or the subhuman.

The growth and consolidation of large monopolistic multinational concerns seem to vindicate Fernand Braudel's suggestion that the interests of capitalism may one day come into collision with those of the marketplace. This takes us back to the Marxian reflections on the savage nature of capitalism and, paradoxically, prompts a multibillionaire Eke George Soros to devote a recently published book to the current crisis of capitalism. The experience of the great information revolution and the agonizing moral dilemmas left behind by the outgoing century now reveal - in a context of confrontation opposing globalization to the individual - certain points of disturbing fragility. Progress toward global society does not appear to coincide with a much hoped for advance toward a higher human ideal. The uncertainties about the environment also bring to fight the counterproductive aspects of development. Those unsetting trends can be associated with a sort of anthropological enfeeblement that points to a growing insulation of the individual from social links and to his lonely position in his dealings with the machinery of State, a relationship that ignores the essential elements of human condition: the emotional and spiritual components. The interrelations between the individual and the community in the context of globalization, the tensions between conventional wisdom and the search for deeper meanings, between the progress of science and its potentially destructive other side of the coin will have to be systematically monitored in order to face the challenges of post-humanistic development. At a time of revolutionary change caused by the advent of information and biological technologies, a new conceptual framework and new intellectual instruments will have to be devised in order to overcome the most radical of all abdications from the ideas of humanism: the notion of having built a human environment that is not worth living in.

Standardisation on colossal scale produces devastating effects, but it may also trigger off a sort of counter – fundamentalism that would eventually liberate human creativeness from the burden of everyday toil. The ethical problems arising from biological experiments, which may seem to run-counter to the course of nature, induce a reappraisal of the revolutionary tenets enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by propounding the idea that people are not biological equals and that their freedom is inescapably limited. In this new confrontational context anthropology assumes a new, highly symbolical task: that of rediscovering the difference.

Everything lying between the forging of a New Man, whose identity dissolved in the social standards of authoritarian regimes, and worship of a single God appears to abhor and deny the existence of difference. Making a choice in favor of humanity amounts to embarking upon a project where difference and the ability to be out of the ordinary gives modern man a chance to overcome the psychic disorder which slowly

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pushes him toward renouncing responsibility for the sake of an illusory freedom without boundaries (and, of course, without responsibilities).

Is it possible to claim, therefore, that a global economic system founded on the free movement of capital and free markets pursuing the fundamental aim of fast growth is the ultimate truth? In some interpretations globalization appears rather as a return to the old model of *open society*, an admittedly less than perfect community with an in-built ability to improve itself endlessly. During the sharp moments of crisis in the 1990s, the misfortunes of the *periphery* hardly brought any benefit to the *center* seen as a sophisticated mechanism of interdependence designed to marginalize certain groups of countries or even entire continents. Once it becomes difficult to maintain the capitalist system as a single viable unit, the menacing advance of the *periphery* against the *center* becomes real the moment when the discipline of the free market itself may cause – as George Soros aptly observed – an instability that can only be managed up to a certain point.

The way globalization, cultural identity and humanism relate to each other is also indicative of the widening gap between the operation of the world economy and, the political and social organization inherent to the nation state structures, since the glaring inequality between the center and the periphery tends to replace human values by monetary ones. The very concept of an open globalization society is thus seriously distorted.

The looming cultural identity crisis is also caused by the fact that the progress of world economy toward globalization was not accompanied by social transformation moving ahead at a similar pace. Market forces do not seem capable of self-regulation any longer; they actually generate social inequity. global village has become a testing ground for a sort of marketplace fundamentalism that hardly manages to make a clear distinction between good and evil. George Soros even argues that the market may pose an even greater threat to the open society than totalitarian ideologies have ever done.

In his criticism of the capitalist system, Soros emphasizes that the major gaps in the functioning of the existing system are also due to the fact that market mechanisms and the drive for profit have penetrated areas where they would have no calling to operate. In a Republic: of the Citizens the values of peace, justice and liberty are embedded in the notion of collective interest as opposed to a society formed of individuals. Making rules and, abiding by them requires, however, a mutually supportive relationship between the community and the individual. Personal interest alone, when served in the guise of single moral principle, can easily undermine any political establishment.

Market fundamentalism-the: way several analysts with a concern for the avatars of globalization describe it can hardly be expected to bring about a much needed balance between politics and the marketplace. It may be conducive to the abolition of collective decisions and the supremacy of market values over the political and social ones. Although the ideological pre-eminence of single-mindedness is still at the zenith

of its power and its crises are likely to be resolved at the level of financial markets, it may not be able to prevent the self-destruction of the system itself but may rather hasten the prospect of an explosion. Could it be that the new society with an ability to sustain the new type economy is simply not there yet? Could the interests transcending borders prevail over the sovereignty of states and the wisdom of international institutions? Even the United States, a nation born out of the enlightened ideas of the French Revolution, is not exempt from an identity crises even now, when it has emerged as the sole superpower with a responsibility for world leadership.

Some of the more strident paeans to globalization and the attending reflections on the obsolescence of the kinds of culture and civilization that have been built over many generations are actually apt to remind us of the simple fact that any theoretical or practical construct-in fact, any creationist myth-encapsulates the seeds of its own destruction.

By relating the triad globalization, humanism and culture to a world theoretically divided by Samuel Huntington into 8 or 9 major civilizations reflecting cultural differences that have been there for centuries some analytical studies on the role of culture in the global village attempt to weave together the various strands of a school of thought which emphasizes the fact that the cultural traits of modern societies have an essential impact on the economic and political performance of those entities. That approach to modernity simply notes that traditional values are gradually eroded in step with the pace of change.

For more than two centuries modernization has been going in or out of fashion in relation to system changes in the areas of mentality, behavior or values. The over dependence of those changes on economic development has created an impression that there is a single path leading to a more secular and more rational world outlook. A number of entities that are well positioned within the dynamics of globalization try to, bring into evidence the emergence of generalized cultural changes, although the enduring differences are still the same ones that have characterized the Christian, Islamic, Confucian and other civilizations for centuries.

We are only a century away from the time when, the obliteration of religion was predicted and actively promoted. And yet, at the beginning of the year 2000, it is no secret that the heritage of religious and historical traditions seems to come alive with a vengeance, stressing once again the differences among cultural zones.

While industrialization brought in its wake profound institutional and cultural changes, it is a fact that the values and beliefs systems of the prosperous and the impoverished societies, respectively, differ in a very substantive way. The well-to-do nations and communities tend to take a more secular approach and to be more concerned about individual fulfillment. Over the past two centuries, the predominant trend was that of economic growth associated with modernization and, more recently, Post-modernization. Social change, however, could not be reduced to an automatic dependence on the hard facts of economics. Obviously, economic growth is not the only element that may have an impact on cultural change.

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In the context of globalization, if we consider the existing cultural models, it makes sense to assume that, in relation to a set of variables, long term developments display an easily discernible coherence.

Ronald Inglehard identified two fundamental axes which are relevant in this context: on the one hand the axis of *traditional authority* and its opposite *secular and rational authority*, and on the other hand the axis comprising the two opposites – *survival values* and the values of *well being*. Traditional societies have a preference for social conformism; they place religion and family values in a privileged position, while the communities that give preference to rational values develop opposite tastes. The communities that have to give precedence to survival values do so, naturally, because of their low standards of well being; they attach more importance to materialistic values and pin their best hopes on science and technology. In his analysis of the theory of modernization, Inglehard discovered and explained the tendency of various cultural elements to become associated in coherent models by pairing together. Likewise, the cultural models related to economic and technological development tend to move away from an ethnocentric stance and to come closer to predictable cultural models in probabilistic: terms.

The relationship between economic development and secularization is not a simple one, as the example of the oil – rich Islamic countries which are also intent on preserving highly ritualized religious practices clearly confirms.

Modernization is not, therefore, a linear phenomenon, and it is certainly not likely to mark the final stage of history, even though some post-modernistic values may temporarily triumph and alter the political agenda. In fact, the goal of economic growth at any cost appears to be challenged by an emerging concern about environmental safety. In the same vein class confrontations seem to be increasingly superseded by those originating in cultural identity or those related to the quality of life.

Religion and complex historical heritage determine the shape of cultural zones in a significant way. An example to that effect is the manner in which communism left its mark on the value systems in the societies it once dominated. Similarly, colonial ties affected the Latin American cultural zones in the former Spanish or Portuguese Possessions, while the non-European English or French speaking nations also have their distinctive cultural physiognomies.

Cultural influence seems to be closely linked to economic development as expressed by GDP and the specific values of affluence. As if to confirm the thesis of American exceptionality, the abundance of wealth in the United States goes hand in hand with the Preservation of a traditional value system – a type of development that is not to be found in Europe. As a rule, the individual perception of security is associated to the GDP per capita. As they rise to higher levels of well being, the rich post-modern societies are gradually moving away from tradition. Major religions also leave their imprint on the value systems of modern societies through the mediation of religious institutions. Absorbing all those impacts, culture pursues its Own trajectory; it may suffer changes along the way, but its consequences are enduring. True culture

reflects the historical of experience of an entire people even though the values it upholds; at a given moment in time may vary. The nation state has been most instrumental in concentrating virtually all the basic values of a society, and it is likely to preserve that role even at the height of globalization. Traditional values together with the *rational* ones – to use Inglehard's description – display a close interdependence during the transition to an industrial society. Modernization thus appears to play a major part in effecting those economic changes that can set culture itself on a new course, The differences between the wealthy societies and the impoverished ones generate, in a cause and effect procedure, perceptible differences also at the level of value systems. From a Marxian perspective the economy is seen as the engine of change in the realm of culture, while in a Weberian version it is precisely the impact of culture that makes economic transformation possible. The two approaches have a point of convergence, namely that economic, political and cultural changes are intertwined in a coherent and Predictable manner for the simple reason that in they are linked in a causal relationship.

In Inglehard's view economic development produces two types of changes at the level of values: long term ones resulting in different sets of values from one generation to the next, and short term ones which are mostly perceived as attitudinal variations. The complex configuration of societal maps is conducive to, the conclusion that they are gradually embracing modern or post-modern values, which would indicate that changes in world outlook have a substantive impact on the development of political institutions.

Democratic institutions have increasingly demonstrated their staying power, but in order to advance on the path of democracy passing good legislation is not enough; the new laws should have the chance to operate in a propitious social and cultural environment. In the long term, the process of modernization would eventually lead to a generalized spreading of democratic: institutions.

Spiritual pursuits and soul searching about the meaning and purpose of life will always be a part of human development even in the most standardized globally integrated community. Traditional societies will continue to cultivate their specific values in an enduring system of cultural zones. The past will always have a bearing on current developments, and so will the abiding power of beliefs and the effects of economic development on the shaping of culture. All this tends to confirm the wisdom of the great Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa when he described Latinity as the future of a past.

When dreaming of a better world we may need a point of equilibrium between the marketplace, the state and the community by combining the work of the invisible hand of the market with that of the visible hand of the state to place culture in a preeminent position. There is no better password for the eternity of this world.

