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Thinking about civilizations

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The word 'civilization'—in the singular but also in the plural—has become common of late in the mouths of politicians and in the writings of international relations academics. Samuel Huntington stirred up a storm in political studies by his vision of the future world as a 'clash' of civilizations (in the plural);[1] and the war in Yugoslavia generated an increased frequency in political rhetoric of the word 'civilization' (in the singular). Indeed, as I shall argue later, conflict in the Balkans revealed more clearly than before the meaning of civilizations and of civilization (in both plural and singular) for our time.

Most people do not think of themselves in the course of a normal day's activities as belonging to a civilization. Civilization is for most people pretty far down on the scale of self-conscious identities. And when politicians evoke civilization, it is usually when they want to arouse their constituents against some demonized enemy. The everyday manifestation of civilization is not in a feeling of belonging. It is in the almost unconscious, taken for granted, *common sense* that expresses a people's shared idea of reality. This idea of reality also includes the sense of what is right and proper in ordinary behaviour. Common sense includes a normative guide to action as well as a perception of 'objectivity' (or what is really out there). I would argue that this common sense, which is different for people in different times and places, is shaped by a people's collective practical responses to their material conditions of existence.

Context and meaning

Words have meaning only in their historical context. The word *civilisation* emerged in French in the eighteenth century, as a process generating the *civilité* associated initially with the status norms of the *noblesse de robe* in the court of the monarchy; and later that particular development in French society was expanded into a

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[1] Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3, 1993; the article was expanded into a book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

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universalistic concept by the Revolution. In eighteenth century Germany, the corresponding term was *Kultur*, a word associated with the middle class and the universities rather than the courts, and which soon, with the Romantics like Herder, came to be identified with specific peoples, each with its own particular cultural spirit.[2]

During the nineteenth century, as European dominance embraced the world, 'civilization' became, in European thinking, joined to 'imperialism'. The civilizing process had emerged through a European history conceived as Progress, whether in the Hegelian or the Marxian form, which Europe was spreading to the rest of the world. *La mission civilisatrice* was the more sophisticated and universalistic way of expressing this movement; 'the white man's burden', was the more openly racist.

The imperial movement, however, encountered *Others*, human communities constituted very differently from the European by their respective histories. These other communities, during the nineteenth century, were overlaid by and subordinated to European norms and institutions. Their own norms and institutions were not obliterated. They were occulted, obscured from view, awaiting some stimulus that would arouse once again the native energy that remained with them.[3] The encounter obliged Europeans to recognize the existence of other civilizations while maintaining the conviction that these others would ultimately become included within the embrace of the one civilization—their own—which had a universal vocation.

The imperial rivalries among the European powers of the late nineteenth century and the European civil war of 1914–18 displaced the optimism of European expansionism, of what Charles Morazé called the age of *les bourgeois conquérants*.[4] Pessimism gave more credence to the German concept of *Kultur*, an emphasis on the particularity of peoples, detracting from the universality of *civilisation*.

Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, a work composed during World War I, is open to much criticism. In some respects it resembles a gigantic poem more than an academic treatise. Perhaps for that reason it marks an ontological shift in the European conception of the world, what Spengler called his Copernican discovery: The Faustian West was not the centre of the universe; it was one among a number of Culture/Civilisations and was approaching the end of its historical trajectory.[5] No longer could the triumph of 'the West' remain

[2] On the origins of the concept of civilization in the European tradition, see Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, trans. Richard Mayne (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 3–8; also Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; originally published 1939). On Herder, see Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980).

[3] Kinhide Mushakoji, 'Multilateralism in a multicultural world: notes for a theory of occultation', in Robert W. Cox (ed.), *The New Realism: Perspectives on Multilateralism and World Order* (London: Macmillan for the United Nations University, 1996).

[4] Charles Morazé, *Les bourgeois conquérants* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1957).

[5] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* one volume edn. (New York: Knopf, 1939). 'The system that is put forward in this work … I regard as the *Copernican discovery* in the historical sphere in that it admits no sort of privileged position to the Classical or the Western Culture as against the Cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs, Mexico—separate worlds of dynamic being which in point of mass count for just as much in the general picture of history as the Classical, while frequently surpassing it in point of spiritual greatness and soaring power.' (Introduction, p. 18.)

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unchallenged in world history. The only universal truth in history, for Spengler, was the process of rise, maturity and decline of all civilizations.[6]

Following World War II, decolonization gave an initial stimulus to a revolt against the West within the hitherto subordinated civilizations,[7] but the Cold War came to dominate politics and economic and social organization. In the Cold War, two universalisms, both rooted in European history, fought for global dominance. The end of the Cold War left one of these contestants dominant in military power, and the source of a globalizing economy and a spreading popular culture. At the same time, the apparent victory of this Western form of universalism with its core in America became a challenge to subordinated cultures and civilizations to affirm their individuality in the face of one hegemonic form of political, economic, and cultural power. The challengers had far fewer resources but Western universalism had its own weaknesses. The issue for the future structure of world order had become universal globalization versus alternative paths of economic, social and cultural development; or one all-absorbing civilization versus a coexistence of several civilizations.

Conceiving 'civilization'

Pointing to the issue of one versus several civilizations does not answer the question of what exactly these entities called civilizations are. How do we know one? What are its boundaries? Are there some common dimensions of civilization which enable us to distinguish one from another and to discern change in particular civilizations?

Archeologists identified early civilizations in material terms—civilizations in Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, and the environs of Mohenjo Daro to the east.[8] These civilizations had in common a bronze age technology, a form of economic organization that involved some central control and a class structure, and hierarchical systems of political authority. Other civilizations with such characteristics have existed in China, Central and South America and parts of Africa. Each of these materially defined civilizations was united intersubjectively by myth, religion, and language through which their members could communicate with each other, interpret and act upon their different worlds. Myth, religion and language were one and the same until the rationalization of language split them apart. Together they constituted the realm of intersubjective meanings which were the *common sense* of these distinct worlds, their distinctive perceptions of reality.

[6] The American historian William H. McNeill, during the renewed Western euphoria following the defeat of Nazism in World War II, wrote *The Rise of the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), subtitled *A History of the Human Community*, in self-conscious opposition to Spengler's thesis. Some twenty-five years after this book's publication, McNeill reflected that 'its scope and conception is a form of intellectual imperialism'; and that 'my review of the whole of human history and the temporary world role played by the United States therefore operated, if it operated at all, entirely at a subconscious level for all concerned': '*The Rise of the West* After Twenty-Five Years', *Journal of World History* I (1990). The article is reproduced in the 1991 edition of *The Rise of the West*.

[7] Geoffrey Baraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964) captures this moment well in ch. VI, 'The Revolt against the West. The Reaction of Asia and Africa to European Hegemony'.

[8] For example, Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957).

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From this, I am inclined to propose as an initial definition of 'civilization': a fit between material conditions of existence (in which I include human organization of an economic and political character) and intersubjective meanings. I do not advance this in a 'vulgar Marxist' sense in which the material base would determine the intersubjective superstructure. Rather I am suggesting something more like Max Weber's notion of elective affinity—different sets of intersubjective meanings might fit with similar material circumstances. The important thing is that the relationship conveys a sense of reality to the people concerned. Of course, there is nothing fixed or immutable in this fit. Material conditions change. So do the meanings that people share intersubjectively. Civilizations are thus in slow but continuing development. Change is of their essence.

Change comes about both from internal contradictions and from encounters with other civilizations. Geography has been at the foundation of civilizations—the ground upon which the material structure of civilization was erected and the site of the myth and poetry that gave it meaning. But historical development loosens the determining influence of geography. As civilizations encounter one another and as peoples migrate, meanings mingle and are discordant. Different peoples in the same geographical site come to perceive reality differently. First nations people in Canada do not see the same reality as middle class urban Canadians. The same goes in France for Islamic North African inhabitants of the urban *banlieux* and graduates of the *Grandes Ecoles*. Civilization is something we carry in our heads which guides our understanding of the world; and for different peoples this understanding is different. The common sense of one people is different from that of another and their notions of reality differ. It may even be that a single individual has to reconcile within him or herself the perspectives and the claims of two different civilizations—the Indian or the Japanese executive of a multinational corporation, for example, or the Central American immigrant in Los Angeles. This is what has made the drawing of geographical boundaries around civilizations in our own times an exercise in futility.[9] We need to know more about the modes of thought characteristic of different civilizations, how these modes of thought came about, and how they may be changing.

I can suggest three dimensions of thought that can help distinguish among civilizations: first, the notions they have of time and space and the relative emphasis on the one or the other; second, the tension between individual and community; and thirdly, what one can loosely call spirituality or cosmology, the common notion of the relationship of humanity to nature and the cosmos.

A focus on time imagines a common past and projects a common future—myths of origin that shape a people's character and vocation, and an eschatology of destiny. A time orientation is protected by the continuity of institutions like churches and states. It is nourished by literary traditions and intellectual dialogue. It is expressed in a concern for planning and development, activities that take place in time and require time for fulfilment.

Space privileges the synchronic over the diachronic. The emphasis is on the relationship among components of a system or the links and interactions in a

[9] Huntington, in *Clash of Civilizations*, writes of 'fault lines' separating civilizations and he uses the geological metaphor of 'tectonic plates' colliding. For him, civilizations occupy a geographical sphere and they have a 'core state' as their centre. In fact, he represents civilizations as states writ large; and their relationships are conceived very much in line with neorealist international relations theory.

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network. The market is a synchronic concept. Administration, military logic, and geopolitics are pre-eminently spatial in their thought forms. The spatial orientation leads to a concern for homeostasis or the restoration of equilibrium among the interconnected components or else for the establishment of a new equilibrium.[10]

Shifts in emphasis between time and space can mark transformations within civilizations. European civilization began with a strong time orientation centred in the Church and its sense of historical progression from the Old Testament rule of God's law to the moment of revelation in time through Christ and an eschatological anticipation of the Kingdom of Heaven; eighteenth century Enlightenment modernity marked a transition point which gave more emphasis to space through a science based upon universal laws; and contemporary postmodernism undervalues both time and space in a sense of the immediacy of events and their proximity in a world in which everyone is involved with everyone else.[11] This is, of course, a very broad generalization, but it suggests that a shift in time and space orientations can be a clue to civilizational change.

Individualism is a product of European civilization, reaching its most extreme development in America. The civilizations of the East are perceived as stressing solidarity and the obligations of individuals to a range of communities, from the family to the clan and the nation as a whole. Furthermore, individualism is not confined to human behaviour. It also arises in forms of thought. Methodological individualism recognizes only discrete entities and ignores collective wholes. It obscures those phenomena that bind societies together, and which merge the individual into the whole. In the extreme form it denies the existence of society. Only individuals exist.

Individual and community are not, however, mutually exclusive categories. The nature of a civilization depends upon the mix; and the mix can change. Individualistic behaviour may increase among people who still maintain a belief in communal norms; and the disintegration of a society beset by excessive individualism may stimulate a reaction to rekindle a sense of common welfare. This shifting mix is another indicator of civilizational change.

[10] There is, of course, an enormous bibliography on time and space. I refer here only to a few works that explicitly link concepts of time and space to the nature of civilizations. This was a central concern for Harold A. Innis in *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) and *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: Press Porcépic, 1986). David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), also takes this approach. On the related matter of the diachronic and synchronic in perspectives on society, Jean Piaget, *Etudes sociologiques* (1965) translated into English as *Sociological Studies* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995); and Fernand Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences: The *longue durée*', in Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Braudel's use of the term *durée* recalls Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (translated into English as *Time and Free Will*).

[11] Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, writes: 'Spatial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs. They always express some kind of class or other social content, and are more often than not the focus of intense social struggle … During phases of maximal change, the spatial and temporal bases for reproduction of the social order are subject to the severest disruption.' (p. 239). He adds: 'As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and ecological interdependencies—to use just two familiar and everyday images—and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to cope with an overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds'. (p. 240.)

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The spirituality dimension touches people's sense of the fundamental nature of the world and of humanity's place in it. Monotheism, polytheism and pantheism are three distinctive modes of perception. I am not considering these as forms of religious belief, although the words are theological. I am considering the implications for thought in general of these cosmological postulates. Monotheism posits absolute truths; and it separates humanity from nature. Nature exists to satisfy humanity's needs. Polytheism knows a multiplicity of truths and is non-exclusive when it comes to deities and values. Pantheism perceives humanity as one with nature.

Much human conflict is overtly justified as defence of absolute truth, even when covertly less lofty motivations are at work. The absolutist residue of monotheism remains resilient despite the decline of formal religion. No one preaches polytheism as such to the world today but an openness to a plurality of values and to recognition of difference challenges absolutism in public discourse.[12] Pantheism is an emerging force in public concern for maintenance of the biosphere in which humanity shares the fate of other forms of life. In pantheism the cosmologies of aboriginal peoples meet with a new cosmology derived from deep ecology.[13]

These different and conflicting forms of spirituality are also shaping changes in civilizations. They find expression in conflicts concerning material life—in the connection of race, gender, ethnicity and religion with economic oppression, and in the common fate of humanity in a fragile biosphere.

Beyond these internal dimensions of civilizations is the sense of relationship to other civilizations. Awareness of the Other may be the catalyst for arousing a self consciousness of one's own civilizational identity. For the European Middle Ages, Islam was the significant Other. At that time, Islam was the higher of the two in terms of philosophy, medicine, trade and urban development; and it aroused in Christendom a fanaticism manifested in the Crusades. In twentieth century Europe, Islam reappears as Europe's Other but now, as a consequence of the imperial expansion of Europe during the nineteenth century and the technological and economic supremacy of Europe and America, in a relationship of subordination and resentment which is perceived as a latent threat to a dominant Euro-American civilization.

The material foundations of this dominance and subordination have been echoed in modes of thought among both dominant and subordinate civilizations. Euro-

[12] See, for example, David L. Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), who writes: '… monotheistic thinking … fails a people in a time when experience becomes self-consciously pluralistic …'(p. 7); and '… polytheism is not a matter of some new theology, sociology, or psychology. It is rather a matter of many potencies, many structures of meaning and being, all given to us in the reality of our everyday lives.' (p. 65.)

[13] Fritjof Kapra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), writes: 'Shallow ecology is anthropocentric, or human-centered. It views humans as above or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental, or "use", value to nature. Deep ecology does not separate humans—or anything else—from the natural environment. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life.

'…the emerging new vision of reality based on deep ecological awareness is consistent with the so-called perennial philosophy of spiritual traditions, whether we talk about the spirituality of Christian mystics, that of Buddhists, or the philosophy and cosmology underlying the Native American traditions.' (p.7.)

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American dominance in scholarship and media have defined the identity of subordinate civilizations in what Edward Said called 'orientalism'.[14] The elites of subordinate civilizations confront the choice of imitating the dominant civilization while trying to preserve something of their own or of reviving their myths of origin in order to reject the dominant civilization and to claim the intellectual space to create something different.

Culture and identity

Two terms that are very current in contemporary discourse appear to have a link to the concept of civilization. These are culture and identity. I do not want to propose any dogmatic definitions of these words but just to say how I would distinguish them from my use of 'civilization'.

'Culture' is sometimes used as an equivalent to 'civilization' but more usually refers to norms and behaviour patterns of a more limited group. 'Multicultural' refers to a society composed of a number of such groups of different ethnic or religious backgrounds, all of which may belong to the same civilization. Culture and civilization are not isomorphic concepts. Culture is an anthropologist's word, and civilization is an historian's. In the anthropological connotation, a culture is a composite of practices and norms that are mutually coherent. It evokes the notion of homeostasis as a natural restorer of equilibrium. The idea of equilibrium is alien to the notion of 'civilization'. Thinking about civilizations leads rather to considerations of development and change through encounters and transformations.

Another sense of 'culture' derives from the German, and this is closer to the meaning of 'civilization'. In this particular meaning, 'culture' is the creative force of civilization. Spengler, for example, uses 'culture' to refer to the early stages of the civilizing process, and 'civilization' he uses to refer to the stages of maturity and decline.[15] However, because of the common usages of 'culture' in English it is probably best to avoid confusing it with 'civilization'.

Postmodernism has given wide currency to the notion of 'identity' as the self-consciousness of collective subjects of history, especially those whose existence has hitherto been obscured in the dominant discourses. Feminism and post-colonial literature have given particular emphasis to such identities. One might think of a civilization as a very large realm of identity, and often it seems to be so in the rhetoric of appeals to defend the principles of Western civilization, or some other definition of civilization. I prefer to leave the notion of identity to refer to self-consciousness. Insofar as it may relate to civilization it refers only to a conscious affirmation of belonging to a civilization. It does not refer to the 'common sense' or perceptions of 'reality' that characterize particular civilizations and which are to be

[14] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

[15] Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Introduction, esp. p. 31: '… every Culture has *its own* Civilization. In this work, for the first time, the two words, hitherto used to express an indefinite, more or less ethical, distinction, are used in a *periodic* sense, to express a strict and necessary *organic succession*. The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture … Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are the conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming … They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again.'

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found at a deeper level of consciousness—a level at which something that has been shaped by the historical development of a people comes to be understood by them as universal and natural. It is only through deep critical reflection that the formation of such 'common sense' through time and the perception of 'reality' that corresponds to it can be revealed.

Present day issues in the development of civilizations

Development and change in civilizations today has to be approached from two aspects: first, the contradictions within civilizations that pose choices among visions of the future; and second, the external influences coming from coexisting civilizations that have an impact on those choices. This puts the emphasis upon the dynamics of civilizational development. It differs from attempts to draw the boundaries of civilizations which is the more usual approach. To attempt to define the essence of a civilization reifies it in a non-historical way and reinforces exclusionary defensive tendencies. I would aim rather for a global perspective on the processes of change in a full range of contemporary civilizations, avoiding so far as possible a perspective rooted in any one of them.

Taking as a guideline the definition of a civilization as a fit between material conditions of existence and intersubjective meanings, political economy or *social economy* is, I suggest, the most promising field in which to seek the potential for change and development. Social economy is precisely the area in which different forms of human organization, including the language and the concepts that make human organization intelligible, mesh with technologies and material resources to create viable human communities.[16]

One form of civilization, which Susan Strange called the 'business civilization',[17] is clearly pre-eminent in discourse about world affairs. It is the vehicle for economic globalization. Its ideology is nourished in business schools around the world and in economic journalism and political rhetoric in the economically powerful countries. The business civilization has no formal organization. It is informally ordered by a *nébuleuse* of interrelated bodies which generate policy—international agencies like the World Trade Organization, the IMF, the Bank for International Settlements, the World Bank and the OECD and unofficial bodies like the annual World Economic Forum at Davos.[18] This civilization cuts across pre-existing historical civilizations in different parts of the world, although it is an offshoot and transformation of Euro-American civilization rooted mainly in the United States. Members of the business civilization who are drawn from other civilizations—Indian, Japanese, Islamic, African, for example—must confront the personal dilemma of dual civilizationship.

[16] Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) argues compellingly for a non-reductionist theory of communication and civilizational change, developing the work of Harold Innis (see n. 10).

[17] Susan Strange, 'The Name of the Game', in Nicholas X. Rizopoulos (ed.), *Sea-Changes: American Foreign Policy in a World Transformed* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1990), pp. 260–73.

[18] Robert W. Cox, 'A Perspective on Globalization', in James H. Mittelman (ed.), *Globalization: Critical Reflections* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 27.

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The transformation of the Euro-American tradition into the business civilization privileges space over time. The 'end of history' idea[19] springs from it: the notion that with globalization the ultimate in human society has been achieved and nothing further is possible except more of the same. The spatial orientation is implicit in the synchronic concept of the market. The absolutism of monotheism is rendered into a universalistic economic theory with its social correlates—what in French is called *la pensée unique*. Individualism and competitiveness are its basic assumptions regarding human conduct; and society, the real existence of which is moot, is just their by-product, an illusion created by the invisible hand.

The business civilization is, however, something of an abstraction or ideal type—a projection into the future of some powerful tendencies in the present. There are other forces at work which are rooted in the gradual transformation of the social organization and practices of coexisting civilizations. The interaction of these forces shape social economies which are the different ways in which people are organized to satisfy their material needs. Karl Polanyi called these 'substantive economies' by contrast to the formal economics of theory.[20] There is a growing literature on comparative capitalism which demonstrates the substantive variety of forms of social economy that constitute the different realities of peoples who all experience in some measure the impact of globalization.[21]

These different social economies are all beset by issues, contradictions, and open or potential conflicts the resolution of which will orient their future course. Globalization says: There is no alternative. In the thinking of globalization, societies will inevitably be shaped to conform to the requirements of economic competition which means they will become more and more alike. Those who contest globalization affirm the possibility of alternatives that embody values both derived from their past and imagined as more desirable futures.

In America, which is the model for globalization, a thriving economy has in recent years generated both a high level of employment, much of it in low-paid and precarious jobs, and a growing polarization of incomes. There are signs that rampant individualism may have passed the point at which it serves as a dynamic of economic competition to become a threat to social cohesion.[22] The vitality of civil

[19] Most notably expounded in Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

[20] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957).

[21] E.g. Suzanne Berger and Ronald Dore (eds.), *National Diversity and Global Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); John Zysman, 'The Myth of a 'Global Economy': Enduring National Foundations and Emerging Regional Realities', *New Political Economy*, 1:2 (July 1996), pp. 157–84; Mitchell Bernard, 'East Asia's Tumbling Dominoes: Financial Crisis and the Truth About the Regional Miracle', in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds.), *The Socialist Register, 1999: Globalization and Democracy* (London: Merlin Press).

[22] The American sociologist Robert D. Putnam has suggested that civil society in the United States has lost much of the spirit of association once noted by de Tocqueville as its salient characteristic. He sees this as being replaced by a privatizing and individualizing of leisure time with non-participation in group activities. He calls this a decline of 'social capital' which refers to networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. See Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6:1 (January 1995). The same author has made a study in collaboration with others about social capital in Italy: Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). The Italian study contrasted with the American in finding stability in a northern Italy with a higher propensity for cooperative social interaction and a south where this was lacking—characteristics both of which had a long historical legacy. It may be

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society—those voluntary associations which de Tocqueville once saw as the strength of the American polity—is reportedly in decline. But so anchored in public consciousness is the 'American way' that there, in America, it becomes hard to imagine an alternative future.

In Europe, the emulators of America hold the preponderance of economic power and political influence; but popular opinion, reflected in recent elections which have returned social democratic parties, is more sceptical regarding the social consequences of economic globalization.[23] This critical response has become divided as some social democratic leaders, won over by neoliberal arguments of the need to strive for global market competitiveness, now propose to moderate its social consequences by policies to enhance the competitive opportunity of individuals, and to strengthen a form of 'competitive corporatism' that would offer more security to established workers.[24] At the same time, those who remain suspicious of this social liberalism have so far failed to present a compelling alternative. European societies show signs of following the American course—with growing income gaps, and culturally and ethnically distinct pockets of urban squalor and violence. The difference from America is the residual survival of a stronger social base for an imagined alternative.

The conflict in Europe, which is social and economic at bottom, opposes two modes of thought, two sets of intersubjective meanings—one is spatially oriented towards competition in the world market, individualist in its ontology, absolutist in certainty as to the principles on which it is founded, and dominant in its relationship with 'backward' and less efficient societies; the other is time-oriented towards building a future which embodies social as well as economic goals, with more emphasis on community as a basis for human security, and open to the acceptance of difference without domination among peoples.

Asia has been the site of a variety of forms of capitalism, much influenced by that in Japan. Japanese capitalism grew within the framework of a continuous social tradition which gave loyalty to institutions—state and corporation—precedence over

recalled that Giambattista Vico in the early eighteenth century envisaged as a possible end stage in the cyclical evolution of civilizations a 'barbarism of reflection' more inhuman than the primitive 'barbarism of sense' among peoples who 'have fallen into the custom of each man thinking only of his own private interests'. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* translated from the third edition (1744) by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), paras. 1102–6. Robert Putnam, Susan Pharr and Russell Dalton in a forthcoming book, *What is Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), use opinion surveys to show a general decline in people's confidence in their political institutions, most marked in the United States but noticeable in all of the rich countries (except for Iceland and Denmark). *The Economist* in its issue of 17 July 1999 began a series 'Is there a crisis?' enquiring why citizens of the mature democracies are losing confidence in their institutions.

[23] Michel Albert, *Capitalisme contre capitalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1991) presented the case for a 'Rhineland model' of capitalism confronting the Anglo-Saxon model, the former characterized by consensus, corporatism, long-term planning and a stabilizing relationship between banks and industry, the latter by a focus on short-term profits, shareholder dividends and stock markets facilitating predatory behaviour such as hostile take-overs.

[24] Hans-Jürgen Bieling, 'European Integration and Industrial Relations—A Critique of the Concept and Strategy of "Competitive Corporatism", (unpublished draft); also M. Rhodes, 'Globalization, labour markets and welfare states: a future of "competitive corporatism"?', in M. Rhodes and Y. Mény (eds.), *The Future of European Welfare: A New Social Contract?* (London, 1998); also Ignacio Ramonet, 'Social-conformisme', *Le Monde diplomatique*, avril 1999, and José Vidal-Beneyto, 'La social-démocratie privatisée', *Le Monde diplomatique*, juillet 1999.

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individualism.[25] However, many of the features considered characteristic of Japanese society have been strained in the decades since World War II by the nature and rapidity of economic growth and the impact of American-inspired popular culture. The identity of state and corporation, symbolized by the notion of Japan Incorporated, has weakened as corporations have gained more operational autonomy; and the formerly strong cohesion of family and community may be dissolving, leading to more emphasis on consumerism and individualism and to a lesser commitment to work and organizational loyalties.[26] A by-product of these disruptive tendencies has been an outbreak of radical forms of alienation.[27] Contending social forces in Japan which might foreshadow a transformation of the 'common sense' of Japanese people, and which are rooted in the economic and social changes of recent decades, are reflected in the choice Japan faces between remaining within the American security blanket and asserting its independence as a geopolitical entity; and the option of independence opposes those who would revive an imagined imperial past to those who would pursue the postwar hopes for a new form of non-aggressive democratic and internationalist future. The factors of individualism versus community and of dominance versus sharing are inherent in this predicament.

Other societies in southeast Asia, so recently devastated by global finance, must either succumb to external direction in their economic development or else devise means of regulating international financial flows so as to gain room for pursuit of internally determined social and economic goals. Recovery could take the form of state-directed capitalism evoking traditions of community and authority; but a more radical alternative could emerge from the development of a civil society able to mobilize people in a common social project and to gain acceptance of sacrifice with equity in its pursuit.[28]

Russia and China are both old civilizations that have in different degrees been subordinated to concepts of civilization derived from Europe—in the form both of socialism and capitalism. Russia has experienced three successive waves of Westernization: under Peter the Great, the Bolsheviks, and the attempt through 'shock therapy' to introduce Western capitalism. The last has produced a predatory, corrupt, mafia dominated, version of capitalism. The weakness of civil society has

[25] See Shigeto Tsuru, *Japan's Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982); James Fallows, *Looking at the Sun: The Rise of the New East Asian Economic and Political System* (New York: Pantheon, 1994); and Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973).

[26] Professor Tamotsu Aoki, a cultural anthropologist, Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology, University of Tokyo, at a symposium convened jointly by the International House of Japan and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Tokyo, 26 September 1996.

[27] Yumiko Iida, 'Virtual Kingdom and Dreams of Apocalypse: Contemporary Japan Mirrored in *Aum Shinrikyo*', paper presented at the 10th annual conference, Japan Studies Association of Canada, Toronto, 3–4 October 1997. Aum Shinryiko, a doomsday cult, attracted a large number of highly educated Japanese.

[28] Mitchell Bernard, 'East Asia's Tumbling Dominoes', analyses the 'Asian crisis' in terms of the different forms of social class relations of production evolving in different Asian countries interacting with global finance. He argues that an alternative to foreign capital acquiring control of Asian economies, such as is likely to continue under IMF 'structural adjustment', could be popular support for an alternative conception of locally-controlled and socially and ecologically-oriented development based on a coalition of worker and peasant social forces, and with some middle-class support for something like a Tobin tax to curb speculative financial movements.

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left people passively vulnerable to the kleptocracy, and has left government without a secure base in the people. It has also, together with the preponderance of foreign financial and political influences, obstructed the emergence of an alternative social and political project.[29] Yet a sense of the uniqueness of Russian history remains latent as rejection of the West and as an alternative vision of society. The 'Russian idea' appeals to an imagined past of communal values and the hope of a future good society guided by belief in the absolute truth inherent in the Russian soul.[30]

In China, elements of the old Confucian tradition survived into the Communist era and remain a stabilizing force in society. The Confucian inheritance combines sentiments of social responsibility with an open attitude towards truth. Capitalist processes have been introduced under Party-state control with less sense of cleavage than in Russia. The regime's effort to retain socialism within capitalism has combined economic decentralization and high growth with movement towards integration into the global economy. Chinese capitalism, like neoliberalism elsewhere, has produced a polarization of rich and poor, massive unemployment, and the decline of public services for health and welfare, moderated only slightly by socialist ethics. The Party has monopolized the functions of civil society and remains suspicious of any autonomous grouping of people which inhibits the articulation of any alternative social project.[31]

Up to now, international studies have been concerned primarily with states, the inter-state system, and markets. The tendencies I have been discussing suggest that civilizations and civil societies be brought into the picture in order to explain the historical transformations of the late twentieth century. Civilizations explain the potential of societies to espouse new directions of development. Civil societies shape common sense and collective purposes. A strong civil society can be the inner strength of a civilization and the creative force for its development; its absence, the explanation of subordination to an expansive Other.

[29] There is much recent reporting on the criminalization of Russian capitalism. See *Le Monde*, 21 August 1999; and *The Economist*, 28 August–3 September 1999. Grigory Yavlinski, an advocate of economic liberalism, excoriated 'Russia's phony capitalism' in *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 1998, citing George Soros as saying that in the process of privatization, first 'the assets of the state were stolen, and then when the state itself became valuable as a source of legitimacy, it too was stolen' (p. 69). The problem has been evident also in other countries of the former Soviet bloc which have too readily accepted the notion that state control of the economy was the evil. Sabina Neumann and Michelle Egan in 'Between German and Anglo-Saxon Capitalism: The Czech Financial Markets in Transition', *New Political Economy*, 4:2 (July 1999), argue that 'the deliberate failure to establish a system of rules and enforcement over financial markets was the result of the belief that overregulation would cramp the natural growth of capitalism' (p. 190.)

[30] Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), is the classic statement. Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) traces its history and its influence from Tsarist times, through the Soviet period, to Yeltsin's 'reforms'. McDaniel argues that the vision of the West held by Russian reformers was a mythical West defined as the opposite of the Soviet system, so that the idea of capitalism conceived by the reformers was both unlike real Western capitalism and totally divorced from traditional Russian morality and culture. It is notable that the evocation of the 'Russian idea' has parallels with a nationalist current in Japanese politics that appeals to an imagined past. See Yumiko Iida, 'Fleeing the West, making Asia home: transpositions of otherness in Japanese pan-Asianism', *Alternatives*, 22 (1997).

[31] George T. Crane, 'Imagining the Economic Nation: Globalization in China', *New Political Economy*, 4:2 (July 1999); Lily Ling, 'Hegemony and the Internationalizing State: A Post-Colonial Analysis of China's Integration into Asian Corporatism', *Review of International Political Economy*, 3:1 (1996); and Gregory T. Chin, 'Beneath the "Miracle": Explaining China's Economic Growth', paper prepared for the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Sherbrooke, Québec, June 1999 (unpublished).

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If the challenge to established ways of understanding the world is everywhere rather weak compared to the form of 'common sense' propagated by global media, it is nevertheless true that popular movements stimulated by material inequities and grievances have articulated alternative projects of society. These latent new directions are very diverse: some appeal to alternative absolute values while others are more open to recognition of a diversity of truths; some are grounded in a sense of time and continuity in contrast to the space orientation of modernism; most emphasize community over individualism; and the pantheist notion of humanity in union with nature is now more prominent in reactions to the hegemony of globalization. The 'battle in Seattle' gave some evidence of this diversity of protest.[32]

Civilizations and world order

Civilizations, I have argued, are to be thought of as processes or tendencies rather than as fixed and bounded essences. The historical dialectic moves ever onward. Each apparent culmination engenders the contradictions that lead to a further movement. The problem for political analysis is to spot these contradictions and to assess the possible directions of change.

The bias implicit in enquiring into the development of civilizations is an acknowledgment that there *is* collective choice about the future of societies. By 'collective choice' I mean the gradual emergence through civil society of a common understanding of the nature of the world and a vision of the future of society. It is conceivable but unlikely that one single vision could emerge common to all people. More likely there will be several collective visions.

The war in Yugoslavia has been a catalyst of issues in the contemporary development of civilizations. The war solved nothing, but it did illustrate options and potential directions of change. Broadly, for the world as a whole and not just the NATO countries, it underlined the choice between a single concept of civilization and recognition of a plurality of civilizations. NATO military force, which was primarily a projection of American air power, represented and was perceived both by its proponents and by its opponents to be an expression of the one-civilization option. NATO power became a potentially global force foreshadowing possible similar interventions in other conflicts. It demonstrated a mode of warfare that is lethal for enemy populations and economies while minimizing loss to its perpetrators. As such, it was a warning to forces resisting the one-civilization vision of the future. American and NATO military-political power are a support for economic globalization, which is the material basis for the one-civilization perspective; and a doctrine of human rights derived from Euro-American historical experience and grounded in individualism has been universalized as the one-civilization's core value.

The apparent dominance achieved by NATO force and the one-civilization implications that can be drawn from it could, however, prove to be ephemeral. Public opinion in the United States and in the Congress was almost evenly divided on the

[32] The 'battle in Seattle' refers to the anti-globalization, anti-multinational corporation demonstrations from a variety of groups that paralyzed the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle, 30 November–3 December 1999.

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war, suggesting that a future United States government would be reluctant to engage in other such interventions unless American geopolitical interests were directly involved. Public opinion and elite opinion in the European allies was also divided and there was open opposition within some EU governments. The increasing fragility in the alliance, together with differences within the military over the conduct of the war, hastened the conclusion of an accommodation with the Serbian forces. NATO's apparent success could mask its inner weakness.

The air campaign against Serbia also mobilized public opposition as well as government opposition to NATO in Russia and China, while opinion in other countries of Asia and in Africa was apprehensive about Euro-American global dominance. A prospect of global hegemony that had hitherto moved with stealth in economic globalization and cultural penetration now appeared as an overt military-political challenge. Non-European civilizations were challenged by the attack on Serbia to affirmations of self-conscious difference and rejection of the universal claims of NATO-backed Euro-American power.

A major factor in the apparent dominance of globalization ideology and the one-civilization perspective has been the weakness of civil society in both West and non-West. Indicators are a weakening of public support for political institutions as shown by low voting turnouts at elections and a sense of the futility of party politics; the erosion of public services held hostage to budgetary constraints imposed by global finance; the progression of organized crime and its corrupting influence on politics and economy; and the atrophy of social solidarity with the progress of individualistic consumerism. The weakness of civil society is the greatest factor of uncertainty in the development of social forces that could sustain the development of civilizations.

There are, however, signs of a renaissance of civil society out of people's alienation from formal politics and economic power. The component elements of a multi-civilization world are perceptible in the negative reactions to globalization among states and within civil societies; but these reactions are fragmented and lack a coherent doctrine and institutional support such as NATO and the *nébuleuse* of economic governance provide for the one-civilization project.

The United Nations might be thought of as the obvious institutional framework for a multi-civilizational world were it not for the fact that the United Nations has become a hostage to American power—either used as an instrument of American policy where this is possible or, where this seems impractical, substantially set aside as in the case of the war against Yugoslavia.[33]

In a multi-civilizational world order, the role of a world organization would be to seek out principles acceptable in the 'common sense' or intersubjectivity of each of the different civilizations—to distill a kind of supra-intersubjectivity from the distinct intersubjectivities of its component parts. This could only come about through a lengthy learning process from experience in reconciling conflicts. Two conditions would be indispensable:

[33] Brian Urquhart, a former Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, described in his article 'The Making of a Scapegoat', in *The New York Review of Books* (12 August 1999) how the United States manipulated the appointment process to the Secretary-Generalship of the United Nations in December 1996 so as to eliminate the reappointment of Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which had the support of all members of the Security Council except for the United States, and to secure the appointment of Kofi Annan. This article was a review of Boutros Boutros-Ghali's book *Unvanquished: A US–UN Saga* (New York: Random House, 1999).

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- First, the emergence of a core body of people who would cultivate an empathetic understanding of forms of common sense other than their own—who could bridge intersubjectivities; and
- Second, the development of civil societies capable of articulating the basic sentiments and goals of the people who compose them.

Civil society is the force that develops the intersubjective content of civilizations; and the core group which assumes the task of reconciliation of differences would have to keep abreast of these developments in the dynamics of civilizations.

This concept of a structure for world order is far from being an institutionalized form of global governance. It envisages a weak centre embodying certain accepted common principles in a world fragmented among peoples guided by different sets of social practices and goals. Such a pluralistic framework of weak centre in a fragmented whole has precedence in world history—in the European medieval Papacy, and in periods of Chinese history, for example. Such a structure would not displace the nation-state system or the international economy. It would provide the framework of principles within which the state system and economic relations could be regulated.

Struggle among social forces is the principal dynamic of change in societies. In the European tradition, this was understood by Giambattista Vico at the beginning of the eighteenth century[34] and by Karl Marx in the nineteenth. This perception remains just as valid at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The nature of class conflict is, however, changing, no longer tied so closely to property in the means of production as Marx saw it, but expanding to include other forms of dominance and subordination and of particular interests versus the general welfare. The arena of social struggle lies in civil society which is why developments in civil society are the key to understanding civilizational changes.

Certain common principles can be affirmed as starting points for thinking about an inter-civilizational world:

- Mutual recognition of difference;
- Maintenance of the biosphere upon which all forms of life depend;
- Avoidance of violence in dealing with conflict and especially in the use of weapons of mass destruction;
- Mutual support in promoting social equity, reversing the current trend towards social polarization;
- Suppression of organized criminal activity that becomes an occult political and economic power; and
- Consensual understanding of basic human rights.

Human rights is a particularly problematic case in the search for common understanding among coexisting civilizations. The conflict over Kosovo brought it to the fore and underlined the difficulties. Despite political rhetoric, there are no pure cases free of ambiguity and inconsistencies. Why is human rights a justification for intervention in one instance while similar instances are ignored—for example, the

[34] *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* translated from the third edition (1744) by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Frisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970).

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war in Chechnya, the oppression of Kurds, the genocide in Rwanda, or the dispossession of Palestinians? How can we justify intervention that results in dramatically increasing the intensity of the oppression it was intended to stop? Max Weber alerted us to the distinction between an absolute ethic which brooks no exception and an ethic of responsibility which contemplates the consequences of an action before undertaking it.[35] The ambiguities and inconsistencies of external intervention also lend substance to suspicions that other motives, geopolitical and economic, are at work under the cover of human rights.

In the European Enlightenment tradition rights are represented as innate in the human being and universal to a common human nature. This is the basis for much Western political rhetoric. In an historical mode of thinking, rights are not innate, they are the product of people's historical struggles which become enshrined in their common sense; and human nature is not uniform and universal but is formed differently by different histories. This historical mode of thinking is more attuned to understanding a multi-civilizational world.[36] From it we may derive the proposition that somewhat different concepts of human rights will be formed by the histories of different civilizations, arising in each case out of the conflicts that have shaped those civilizations, and that they will reflect the cosmologies, the relationship of humanity to nature, and the balance between individual and community characteristic of those civilizations.

The challenge in a multi-civilizational order is to find means of encouraging popular forces struggling for an entrenchment of human rights in *their* society without appearing to impose one civilization's norms upon another. An externally imposed order would remain fragile, vulnerable to the charge of imperialism.

To evoke the idea of a multi-civilizational world order is to affirm that an alternative, even more than one alternative, to the one and final civilization of globalization is possible. This can be a rallying force—a myth if you like, and myth is a powerful social force—for those who resist the claims of a one civilization world and of the *pensée unique*. Greens, cultural nationalists, anti-imperialists, those who are disadvantaged and marginalized by economic globalization and other forms of domination including feminists and native peoples, all can find reason to support this view of the world which allows for the expression of diversity and the exploration of alternative possibilities for social and economic development.

[35] Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), pp. 120–28.

[36] This view of history is, I think, consistent with that of R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946). In *The New Leviathan* (Oxford: Cumberlege, 1942), Collingwood wrote: 'Civilization is a thing of the mind …; an enquiry into its nature, therefore, belongs to the sciences of the mind, and must be pursued by the method proper to those sciences'. (p. 280.) I believe Collingwood rejected the term 'idealism' applied to his own work. My own thinking about historical materialism includes relating 'things of the mind' to the material context of thought, which I think is not inconsistent with Collingwood although not explicit in his work. Collingwood regards civilization as a process leading towards civility and away from barbarism. Writing during World War II, Collingwood was addressing 'German barbarism' which he saw as a recent growth, specifically Nazism; but the more general conception of tendencies towards civility or barbarity stands apart from the German question. He is quite clear as an historian that this process does not imply a 'one civilization' outcome because 'the civilizing process … leads in different places and at different times to different results'. And: '… as men who create a particular society aim at creating a universal society but, owing to facts over which they have no control, find it turning under their hands into a particular society'. (p. 288.)

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At this moment in world history it is not sufficient either to celebrate or to deplore the dominant tendencies as they may be perceived by a dispassionate external observer. This would leave an impression of inevitability. A critical approach will seek out the contradictions in those tendencies which would open the possibility of action towards alternative futures. It would also try to think through what desirable alternatives might look like and anticipate reconciliation among differing visions of the future rooted in the aspirations of particular groups and peoples.

Existing institutions can play a role in this process—states, international institutions, universities, churches, non-governmental organizations, and diplomacy—but in and of themselves these are not the forces to build a world climate for coexistence among civilizations. They can be agencies used to this end but a broader force must be present to activate and orient them. Behind these institutions is the climate of human purposes and attitudes that would be necessary to make these institutions work to that end. In the past, critical moments like the end of a great war have generated surges of collective motivation that pushed institutions in new directions. At present, one may well ask where such a movement could come from. Possibly the motive force could arise from deeper awareness across civilizations of their common fragility in the face of threats to the biosphere, from the dangers to all from increasing social polarization, and from the existence of uncontrolled weapons of mass destruction; and at the same time from awareness of the possibility of transcending these impending disasters through consensual action taken in mutual recognition of and respect for differences.

The two critical factors in arousing this awareness—the strengthening of civil societies as the substrata of civilizations and the existence of a core body of people capable of linking civilizations in mutual understanding—cannot be reduced to institutional formulas. They can come about only through a conscious shaping of minds towards those ends. The European medieval monastic movement or the formation of the mandarin class in China are suggestive historical precedents but differ from the present world situation insofar as each of those past movements led to a single civilizational perspective. The present challenge is to encourage the formation of *organic intellectuals* (to use Gramsci's term) who can *both* articulate the visions of possible future societies drawing upon the experience of different existing social formations *and* become links among these different visions and movements.

In today's world more and more people have acquired experience that lends itself to this task and many of them may be prepared to assume the responsibility of participating in a collective endeavour. Among teachers, aid workers, journalists, peace activists, environmentalists, diplomats and international civil servants, as examples, some individuals see the world not only through the perceptual lens they grew up with but can also, by reflecting upon their own uniqueness, imagine how other people of whom they have experience perceive the world. Such individuals are capable of thinking and acting in terms of a coexistence of different forms of common sense. The network linking them together in a global movement might arise quite informally out of the contacts inherent in their daily work. Institutionalization might follow.

Academic educators may be inspired to study comparatively the different forms of 'common sense' that coexist and to trace their origins and developmental patterns. Activists may use this knowledge to show how diversity need not mean conflict.

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Journalists may in their reporting analyse the different senses of 'reality' that constitute situations of conflict while avoiding lending themselves to making propaganda for one 'true' position. Diplomats may focus on genuine reconciliation which takes account of differing perspectives rather than scoring a win for the institution they work for.

Such a movement could both work through existing institutions and generate new institutional forms. Will the impetus for it come from aversion to the dogmas and effects of globalization? Perhaps in part. Or would some more dramatic catalyst, some global catastrophe, be ultimately required to bring together the forces that could activate the movement?

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