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# REFLECTIONS ON GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL VALUES

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## IS A 'COMMON WORLD' IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION POSSIBLE? AN ISSUE FOR THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS

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*Globalization is an economic phenomenon that gives the impression that the world has reached universality. But this is just a phenomenon. Languages remain irreducible ways of conceiving the universal. The words they use are therefore not functional means of expression but symbolic systems of representation of the world (historical time and space) expressed by always specific civilizations. Furthermore, civilizations are not homogeneous. Their history shows that they declined according to mostly evolving regimes of truth, as evidenced by European West. Consequently, languages and the impossible homogeneity of civilizations force us to think, in the age of contemporary globalization, of another concept of the universal which can no longer claim to be exclusive. Neither European West nor the Far East can monopolize the universal. Hence the need emerges to replace the concept of universal with that of uni-diversity. Uni-diversity signifies that civilizations engaged in globalization are capable of a dialogue within themselves and with others. This dialogue is the way to speak of culture not as a fixed identity but as an evolutionary historical formation. This dialogue is also the condition for the formation of a common world with a view to an international community as a community of civilization.*

**Keywords:** 'common' political world, cultural identities, civilisation, dialogue, globalization, inter-culturalism, uni-diversity, universality.

### **Introduction**

The second globalization has to an unprecedented extent raised the issue of a 'common' world. This indeed is the second globalization, the first one being that of the Western imperialisms of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. We could almost trace it back to the sixteenth century which foreshadowed the following periods. However, the sixties have been the time of decolonization and emergence of a multipolar world. From then on Europe has ceased to be the universal center of the world. This multipolar world has elicited the prerequisites for a new notion of universality in view of a common world, only the prerequisites though; for economical 'globalization', universality and a common world are all very different notions. Confusing those has ob-

scured the global challenge of thinking a new universality, in actual fact a uni-diversity that corroborates a common world. Such confusion has had regrettable consequences for the dialogue between civilizations and international political life in general. Of course, I have in mind the bones of contention between Western Europe and China. This precisely is the theme of this essay which will start with the etymology of the words 'world' and 'universal'.

### **1. Languages, a Way of Thinking and Experiencing the Universality that is at Stake within the Dialogue between Civilizations in the Age of Globalization**

The French language uses the word 'mondialization', which includes 'monde', from Latin 'mundus' (see Humm 2004). This is a cause for misunderstanding. Indeed, if for the Romans the world had ultimately resembled a huge empire, that is because it was but the gradual extension of the city of Rome from which originated the 'mundus'. Universality is something entirely different: it is what converges to the one, hence the term 'uni-versum' which combines 'unum' with 'vertere', meaning 'to turn', 'to change', and thereby 'to convert'. By its imperial extension Rome converted or turned its surrounding world towards itself (*civitas universalis*). In truth, Rome has made actual what stoic philosophy had devised. The Greek language expresses it differently: the world is cosmos, which gave cosmology; universality is 'kathoulou', which gave 'catholic', that is according to the whole. In this respect the English language strayed away from Latin and even more from Greek: globalization points to what is global, as opposed to what is local. This brief etymological investigation has showed how much languages semantically influence the meaning of words which are closely linked to civilization/culture.<sup>1</sup> The fact remains that all those definitions and concepts of the world and universality are not totally satisfying. A language is not just a functional facility, it has a fundamental and symbolical importance to give meaning to and interpret both the world and what is other than oneself (see 'Faguo' in Chinese meaning France as the country of the law). This way any language has always a limited scope, which makes it impossible for it, in the context of globalization, to combine oneness with diversity. Without such a combination we shall never be able to figure out the positive impact of globalization in view of defining a universality which is to be distinguished from universalism. The method to be followed is a dialogue (in Greek *dia-logos*) between civilizations. The point of combining oneness with diversity is of course not to reform our languages, which would amount to promote a global and meaningless *Esperanto* abolishing the peculiarities of each of our civilization. Languages briefly alluded to definitions which – inadequate as they may be to figure out a new universality – point, on the contrary, to the fact that we paradoxically need them in order to elaborate and experience the universality of the twenty-first century that is neither that of the Greeks, nor that of the Romans, nor that of Christendom, nor that of the Far East. Each people, nation and civilization, which are but a mode of expressing universality, inevitably stems from its past and its linguistic experience fashions the way it conceives its relationship with what is different from itself. Hence what do the Chinese say – starting from their own language – about the world and universality? And what do European westerners say on the same subject? Sticking one last time to the linguistic issue, I would like to point out two diverging ways of conceiving time. Whereas the Chinese language has a very simple relationship

with time – since it expresses past, present and future with adverbs – western languages have numerous and very subtle ways of conjugating time. What seems decisive in this different conception of time is the use of the verb ‘to be’. It is, for example, quite significant that in daily life, whereas western languages say: ‘I am tired’ (the verb ‘to be’ expresses then a permanent state), the Chinese language would say ‘wo lei’ thus without having recourse to ‘be’, ‘I am’ (it is a moment). From this simple time-related example, it is clear that there are two different metaphysics and visions of man at work here in the way they conceive life at both an individual and collective levels.

Having developed those few linguistic thoughts, I need to go further and explore the western point of view.

## **2. What does Such a Thing as a ‘European West’ Mean, Considering the Different Ways it Conceives Universality and a Common Political World?**

As always when it comes to civilizations it would be a mistake to have an essentialist or one-sided approach; this would make civilizations timeless entities, whereas in actual fact there is nothing of that kind, any civilization resulting from a historical make up. In other words, although civilizations retain permanent features, they are also evolving. Regarding what I call the ‘European west’, there appears to be five patterns of conceiving universality and a common world: the Greek one, the Roman one, the Christian one, the rationalist ‘enlightened’ one and the socialist, Marxist one, each one of those corroborating a dominant conception of truth. The Greeks understood universality by means of *logos*, that is the philosophical reason that sheds light on the order of the world (*cosmos*). Therefore their philosophical approach was that of an astonishment granting access to eternal ideas in view of laying the foundations for an ideal political community that in Plato's eyes was metaphysical communism (universal Good). Aristotle inversely questioned this basic point and preferred a common world that makes the distinction between what is yours and what is mine, thus establishing private property. Behind those diverging approaches there are two different ways of understanding how reason functions: the one (Plato's) having politics hinge around the intelligible structure of cosmos (the universe) whereas the other (Aristotle's) connects the intelligible with the sentient in order to allow sciences to access the knowledge of *cosmos* (universality). For the Romans the question of a common world was raised in a completely different way: politics is being structured by law, and by the constitution of a common good (*bonum commune* and *res publica*), a notion which was entirely alien to the Greeks who thought in terms of polis. I will not lay too much emphasis on Christianity, since religion is not central for my purpose, yet a few words need to be said to do justice to the civilization of the European west. Christianity advocated a religious approach to universality which still had political consequences. It is the epoch making time of medieval Christianity which merged the Roman with the Greek attitude (the New Testament having been written in Greek): it integrated the philosophical reason of the Greeks, turning Christianity through this legacy into a metaphysic (though Christ as the incarnated *logos* differed from Plato's *logos*) (see the Gospel according to John, 1, 1–18). Then medieval Christianity also integrated Roman law, thinking the political common good as an interaction between the *civitas terrana* and the *civitas celesta*. Therefore Christianity allowed the European west to develop a mixed universality combining the Greek pat-

tern (*kathoulou*, according to the whole) with the Roman one up until the rationalist age of enlightenment. This way the European west has always been imbued with otherness (an important notion I will later come back on), different visions of the world and universality ultimately merging into one and making its own concept of universality tend to rally the whole world to 'its' unity (*universum*: to convert to oneself). The medieval Christian common world had thereby to become the common world of all. This has been especially clear as from the sixteenth century up until the first globalization of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the meantime, another universality emerged, that of the rationalist age of enlightenment of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, albeit the age of enlightenment was not the same in England, in France and in the Germanic countries. Yet they all laid the foundations for political liberalism through the rise of the individual who passes a contract with other individuals to form a common political body (for Hegel Napoleon is the universal Spirit on a horse). Karl Marx questioned such a universality in the nineteenth century. The new regime of universal truth (human rights, the individual) did not meet the working class aspiration to justice. Contrary to Plato and in an opposite manner – economy prevailing upon ideas – Marx advocates another regime of truth stemming from a philosophy of history endowed with a universal scope and which purports to build a new common world: communism. This brief summary of the five patterns of universality that dominated the European west over the centuries has shown many different conceptions of a common world, each of those – which results from various inputs and multiple legacies – being connected with a particular regime of truth. In actual fact there are several 'European wests' and tensions between them. Nonetheless, these multiple versions of universality that the west has spread all over the world stand in the way of a possible common world in the age of the second globalization. This unprecedented global context forces one to think of universality and a political common world in quite a different way. Once again we are not to give up on any feature of our civilizations, but we are to come to terms with one another in order to follow a path of peace. In other words, the universality aiming for a common world can no longer be a *uni-versum*, but a *pluriversum* which is not reduced to one civilization instead of a global 'totality'; should not this totality rather be elicited as a uni-diversity, that is a universality which would regulate the relationships between civilizations?

### **3. The Uni-Diversity of the Twenty-First Century Civilizations as a Deliberately Practical Way of Achieving a Common World**

In order for the Earth, our planet, not to be doomed to fall back into a state of nature in which civilizations – through self-centred (*uni-versum*) and contradictory notions of universality – would fight against one another, a uni-diversity has to be sorted out in view of building a non-uniform common world. No civilization may claim to have the monopoly of universality. Such is the meaning of a dia-logue between civilizations. However, this dia-logue should not be a purely formal one and stress how important the controversial issue of cultural identities is so as to counterbalance the exclusively economics and techniques geared globalization. As long as civilizations pretend to be static cultural entities (see Jullien 2016–2017: 53). they will inevitably be but unhistorical essences and not living historical constructions. Yet the opposite view – that sees man-

kind as a *sui generis* given irrespective of the cultures and civilizations of our planet – would only lead to a deadlock. An early nineteenth-century thinker, Joseph de Maistre, had the audacity to declare that he had never encountered any man, but only French, German or Italian people [‘In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, and so on. I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be Persian. But as for man, I declare I’ve never encountered him’]. In other words universality can only be accessed through the mediation of – always particular – cultures. Now considering the fact that the only way of fashioning universality in the age of globalization is to have each civilization regard itself with respect to the other ones as an in-between – or to stick to Latin as an ‘inter’, civilizations have to be inter-ested in one another, not because they would expect any particular profit from it, but because this way they would go beyond the living just for oneself and acknowledge that they only exist together with and through the other ones. Such an inter-est stands opposite to the current globalization which is but a fake universality that thwarts any common world either through the rivalry of identities or by standardizing the economy (see Louis Vuitton) or the techniques (see computers and social networks) (Jullien 2016–2017: Chap. 5). Technological and economic globalization is based on similarities. For European westerners, facing this challenge means to go beyond both the legacy of Greek metaphysics and an expansive individualism that only sees its self-interest. From a linguistic point of view European languages should not give up on the use of the verb ‘to be’, any more than the Chinese language should give up on a much more pragmatic use of this verb. The European west and the Far East may indeed communicate by acknowledging the distance between them instead of clinging to reified identities. Such is the trap that the legitimate yet ill sorted out ‘cultural identities’ induce us to fall into. Reified identities ice out the relationship between civilizations either by locking in our identities or by having cultures merely live next to one another, as is the purpose of multiculturalism. In order to avert this double bind, it is not enough to respect the differences between our identities, it is necessary to acknowledge the distance and tread the path of inter-culturalism, thereby allowing civilizations to remain in line with their past and use this past as a resource. This way the Chinese and European westerners would remain what they ‘are’ whilst being inter-ested both in what is not them and in what there is within them. Acknowledging the distance promotes both the dialogue with one's own civilization as well as with a civilization different from one's own. Distance thus is a fruitful resource to build up the uni-diversity of a world common to the whole planet. There is a big artistic precedent to that, when during the eighteenth century Chinese and European arts influenced each other. Both Chinese and European vases remained faithful to the aesthetics of their own civilization although their criteria evolved. In other words the inter-ested distance between both civilizations enhanced their creativity! This was neither a syncretism nor an inner locking in; on the contrary it was the fruitful and creative resource of inter-culturalism (see Arendt 1961–1983: 399). In actual fact the acknowledgement of distance is a way of ‘revealing’ civilizations to themselves: instead of remaining locked up in an iced out essence or identity, civilizations exist as they experience themselves as being still alive. This is exactly what I call a uni-diversity for a common world. Although the European west is already the result of a uni-diversity (Greece, Rome) – and

China as well – this uni-diversity has to widen its scope in order to give meaning to a globalization that has no purpose outside itself. Of course, this uni-diversity should not result in a mere economic power game within the relationships between civilizations. This challenge questions the relationship between economy, politics and culture, and the reason why the first won out over the other two. In Western Europe, this primacy is the consequence of renouncing the tradition of philosophical thought. This renunciation sheds light on three levels of understanding of the concept of self-interest, which I will briefly describe.

#### **4. Three Levels of Understanding of Inter-est in Relation to the Western European Tradition of Philosophical Thought**

For Hannah Arendt, Athenian political philosophy teaches us three modalities of human existence: that of economic of labor, that of artistic of work and that of political of activity. The first one is made for production and consummation.<sup>2</sup> Because of this limited purpose, it offers no sustainability for human existence as this modality is only of interest for what is perishable. The second one, on the contrary, invites to sustainability because of its intrinsic link with the making of the work. However, its solitary character remains in common with the economy and work. The making of the work is therefore no more inter-ested in the inter-human relationship. For the Athenians, only political activity can unite humans to give consistency to a common world, the interest resting in this perspective on the exchange of words. It is this hierarchy of ends that modernity has overthrown in favor of work, and in so doing – the sphere of economic interest. Because of this primacy of economic interest, work has developed the isolation of men from others and from the world. From this isolation comes the breakdown of the exchange of words between people, which resulted in the uniformity of a universal forgery. This false universal standardizer reduced political life to a simple sector of human existence in the service of safeguarding the interests of each and consequently of each nation. This reduction in political activity has resulted in the invasion of the private sector in the public domain. It is important to note with Arendt, that the disappearance of a real public domain implies the deprivation (or privatization) of any political notion of 'world', and consequently of relation with others. Without the presence of others, that is to say without dialogue, the alienation from the world is total, the world becomes absurd, devoid of meaning. It is not only the idea of a public domain that is disqualified, but also that of a civilization capable of dialoguing with other civilizations for the development of a common world. Two periods in European history can be identified to illustrate this reversal of the aims of European philosophical tradition. They correspond to two of the universal truth regimes that I have mentioned. In the seventeenth century, with Locke's liberal philosophy, a human was defined as a working animal. This definition continues its trajectory until the thought of Marx in the nineteenth century. For this reason economic liberalism and socialism are the two sides of Janus of the same modality of interest, that of the immanence of matter. The first globalization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then the second globalization in progress are the concrete translation of the overthrow of the hierarchy of these three levels of understanding of interest. This brief restitution of the renunciation of the European-Western philosophical tradition should not, however, lead to nostalgia for a world of hierarchy of interests which should be rehabilitated. This world corresponds

to a metaphysical age which is no longer ours. On the other hand, it is more fruitful to take advantage of experience to meet contemporary challenges, hence the question that should be asked: can an international community be thought of as a community of civilization?

### **5. Can an International Community be Thought of as a Community of Civilization? Issue for the Relationship between Economy, Politics and Culture**

If globalization is reduced to an economic phenomenon, it seems difficult to conceive of an international community which would go beyond the sole level of perishable interest relations. These relationships of interest consequently reduce relations between civilizations to the logic of economic and political power. Culture, and the civilization that encompasses it, is therefore subject to imperatives that are not its own. The fact remains that it is impossible to separate economy, politics and culture. These three levels of interest stand, although they do not have the same meaning. Any economic power is a political power which asserts the superiority of its culture, if at least one of them is reasoned exclusively in terms of power. This restriction having been made, the real question is to ask which of these levels of interest determines the sense of an international community which would allow a global 'common', what I previously called a uni-diversity. This is the major challenge of the second globalization. This challenge is all the more serious since two logics are to be distinguished, that of the dialectic of the universal and the particular, that of the singular and the plural. The first is that of economic globalization which subverts political and cultural particularities by a universal of economic and political interests (in other words, a false universal). In Arendt's line of thought, the private (*oikos*) invades the public that we identify here with the political (*polis*). Political rationality is therefore the first tributary by being at the service of an instrumental rationality (finance and economy) which is an end in itself. Hence the triumph of technique, that is to say an automatic process which knows only the means, autonomous from any teleology of the meaning of individual and collective existence. Heidegger's prophecy, *The Question of Technology* (Heidegger 1958),<sup>3</sup> finds its fulfillment, as does that of Schmitt, from another perspective, in his essay *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (see Huntington 1996). Without any purpose other than themselves, human beings lose their 'identity'. The idea of civilization is the ultimate dependent, each political community being subverted by economic globalization. Consequently, globalization generates immune defenses which are nationalisms. Thus, the individual tries to regain all his legitimate rights against the universal of economic interest. But these immune defenses in turn subvert political rationality by defending culture as an identity. Not that the dialectic of the universal and the particular is false in itself. It even carries a truth. As I have already mentioned, there is no direct universal, it is always mediated by the individual. But on the condition that one and the other are articulated and not unbalanced. Economic rationality does not of itself allow this articulation as the logic of interests ignores borders, therefore the particular. Only political rationality can honor particularities. Politics cannot exist without its own space, which does not mean that it is hermetic to an aim of the universal, as evidenced by interstate reports and the possibility of an international community. By the political way which dialecticizes the universal and the particular, a global 'common' is therefore conceivable, but not guaranteed. Sticking to the dialectic of the universal and the particular is therefore

not enough. There remains the dialectic of the singular and the plural which obeys a different logic. This is where the dialogue of civilizations comes in. This cannot be limited to the dialectic of the universal and the particular. This dialectic would mean that each culture forms a homogeneous particularity crossed by an equally homogeneous history. The history of the West, of which I have restored five regimes of universal truth, clearly shows the impossible homogeneity of a civilization. The European West, crossed by its own philosophical, religious, political experiences, is a civilizational singularity (the singular [*singularis*] means what is unique) which exists only in plural as evidenced by its plurality of expressions. This singularity obviously applies to any other civilization. It is this singularity that makes it possible to conceive a common political world, one and plural. The dialectic of the singular and the plural is therefore much more promising than that of the universal and the particular. At the age of the second globalization, it opens a path which neutralizes the alternative between a universal leveler (the economy and the technique) and the political and cultural particularities evidenced by 'identity'. If the political needs particular space to make nations exist (which by definition cannot be universal), it also needs a singular and plural cultural anchoring confronted with other political spaces resting on other cultural singularities. In other words, the singular and the plural transcend the universal and the particular. The whole issue of the dialogue of civilizations is at stake here. This dialogue transforms the two economic-technical (universalism without finality or teleology) and identity (particularism without finality or teleology) dead ends, into practice of shared interest. Through this dialogue, a condition of one diversity, inter-state relations cease to be reduced to totalities in conflict, because of their concern to perpetuate their civilization by the sole logic of power. However, it is not disputable that all civilizations want to preserve themselves. But to achieve their conservation, they paradoxically have to give up retracting or objectifying identity. Lost in purpose, civilizations at the age of the second economic globalization are threatened by this inclination. For them to be perpetuated, they need to get out of the subversive primacy of the economy and its symmetry, which are 'cultural identities', to reaffirm political life (being together) and civilization (civility). It is therefore necessary to reverse the order of priorities: culture, politics, economy and not vice versa. The very meaning of an international community as a community of civilizations is at stake here. This is the reason why globalization poses the challenge of a new definition of the universal which 'condemns' the economic and political powers of the planet to agree unless they want to reduce it to a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996) which can only drag them into a vast state of a global nature, that is to say a war of all against all.

### Conclusion

Globalization exemplifies the post metaphysical age of the European west. Yet the best as well as the worst may come out of this 'age'; the worst being the emergence of culture as an identity, an identity that is actually reified and thereby made fragile, and the best being the acknowledgement that each civilization is inadequate to make out a universality that would be valid for the whole planet. However, in order for any universality to avoid being a totalitarian one (economy, politics, cultural identities), it has to be a uni-diversity rejecting any closing up. Such a uni-diversity is the prerequisite for a common world in which each civilization would play its own partition, which implies that civilizations have a reciprocal inter-est in one another. Such an inter-est is made possible by inter-

culturalism that stems from the distance through which civilizations are apt within themselves to find resources for a dialogue that implies an empathic encounter with the other one's way of thinking. From a western European point of view it is by taking this distance into account that one can figure out a positive and rewarding exit out of metaphysics; and from both a western European and a Chinese point of view, this is how one can obviate the uniformization of the world through the metaphysics of techniques and economy. In view of building a political common world a dialogue between civilizations is just inescapable. This dialogue cannot but face the challenge of languages that can just as well lock out civilizations as they can fashion the instruments that will play the symphony of uni-diversity. There is the emergence of an international community as a community of civilizations.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that 'culture' and 'civilization' do not have the same meaning in some languages. The same goes for French, unlike German, which does not differentiate between Kultur and Zivilisation. To clarify this difficulty, I will use the word 'culture' when it comes to talking about the problem of cultural identity. It will be the same to distinguish culture in what distinguishes it from the economy and the political. On the other hand, I will use the word 'civilization' as a human phenomenon which encompasses economy, politics and culture as my problematic on the dialogue of civilizations, mentioned in the title, indicates. The distinction I propose is quite similar to that of Lévi-Strauss, which delimits culture from artistic creation, spirituality, ethics, knowledge and study.

<sup>2</sup> 'The chimera of modern big-city dwellers is filled to the last atom with technological and industrial conceptions, which are projected into cosmological or metaphysical realms. In this naïve mechanistic and mathematical mythology, the world becomes a gigantic dynamo wherein there is even no distinctions of classes' (Schmitt 1996: 13).

<sup>3</sup> Russian civilization is a good example of one of the few multicultural societies (which is not multiculturalism). It is its singularity.

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