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Is Globalization a Dialogue among Civilizations?

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Abstract

Following a conceptual analysis of the meaning of the three key terms in the title of this paper, namely, 'globalization', 'dialogue' and 'civilization' I shall consider a number of different ways in which the question in the title could be interpreted. The conclusion of my analysis is that, the question, 'Is Globalization a Dialogue among Civilization?' can either be answered in a rather clear, but uninteresting way. Or, alternatively, it can be answered in informative and interesting ways, though with a catch: the price to be paid is consensus and overall agreement; the answers will remain controversial and valid only for those who accept the basic assumptions behind the proposed answers.

Key Words : 1. Dialogue 2. Globalisation 3. Civilisation
4. Intentionality 5. World 3 6. Critical Rationalism

1. The Problem

Is globalization a dialogue among civilizations? This question appears to be somewhat vague. For example, if we denote 'globalization' by 'G', 'dialogue' by 'D', and 'dialogue among civilizations' by Dc, then which one of the following relations are

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meant: $G \subset Dc$, or $G \in Dc$, where the signs \subset , \in are borrowed from the set theory. The first relation indicates that the set on the left is a subset of the one on the right. Whereas the second one states that 'G' is a 'member' of the set 'Dc'. To show that the first relation holds, we have to demonstrate that each and every member of the set G is a member of the set Dc, while some of the members of the set Dc are not members of the set G. However, for the second relation to hold, we need to show that G satisfies the sufficient and necessary conditions for the membership in Dc.

In order to clarify the situation and come to a position to be able to answer the central question of the paper, we need, in the first instance, to make sense of the meaning (s) of the three main terms on which the question is based, namely 'globalization', 'dialogue', and 'civilization'.

Dialogue, from an etymological point of view, is different from communication, conversation, negotiation, and discussion (13)

Dialogue comes from the Greek word dia-logos. Dia usually means 'through' but in connection with dialogue it is the same as the Latin word 'inter'; it means 'between or among'. Logos means 'the word' which implies a very general notion of reasoning of any kind expressed through speaking or writing and retained in the form of a concept or a theory. In this sense dialogue is, therefore, an interplay of words, i.e. a flow of meaning, between or among a number of people. Out of this stream of meaning may emerge some new understanding, something new, which may have not been in the starting point. (2)

Dialogue, in modern parlance, is the end result of a number of changes in man's epistemological outlook. Socrates, the father of dialogue in the ancient world, maintained that when one realises that one knows nothing one will be better inclined to make use of dialogue. This Socratic point has obtained further clarity in modern times. Modern man, among other things, has realised that there is no such a thing as absolute and certain communicable knowledge; the thing which is called knowledge is in fact a never-ending series of conjectures and refutations for understanding reality; progress in knowledge depends on continuous criticism and critical appraisal of one's own and others' positions and view points; and more importantly, knowledge, is not the exclusive preserve of any one individual.

Dialogue is a human construct. It is not a given. It is not even a necessary feature of the social life. One can easily think of possible worlds in which dialogue plays no role in human interactions. Like all other social constructs, it does not have a fixed and immutable essence. In fact, like all other socially constructed entities, as against natural entities, it does not even have an essence to be discovered. It does however, have a set of functions to be ascribed to it by the social actors. (13)

One such function is the function of facilitating the process of creating new socially constructed facts/entities. And like a coherent light as in a beam of laser as opposed to incoherent rays in an ordinary, incoherent beam of light, in a proper dialogue, in which the flow of a shared meaning has been established, the contribution of each party to the dialogue would fortify and strengthen the positive effect of the final outcome. Dialogue can also lead to the 'discovery' of new functions for existing social facts/entities. (Ibid)

Civilization seems to be a more problematic concept. Here, apparently the etymology is not of much help. Dictionaries would indicate that the word 'civilization' is from the Latin *civilis* 'relating to citizens'. Conceptually, it is a rather controversial notion. In a recent book on this subject, Filipe Fernández-Armesto (2000) while reporting a revival in the interest in studying this topic, has pointed out that " 'Civilization' has meant so many different things to different people that it will be hard to retrieve it from abuse and restore useful meaning to it." He has produced a list of such diverse meanings.

In a loose sense, 'civilization' means 'an area, group or period distinguished, in the mind of the person using the term, by striking continuities in ways of life and thought and feelings.' However, the difficulty with this 'definition' is that the perceived continuities will vary from observer to observer, therefore no consensus can be obtained. It is of course of no help to insist that there are particular continuities which distinguish civilizations: such as a common religion or ideology or sense of belonging to a 'world order'; or a shared language or a specific technology or a combination of these features. The reason is that all such criteria are arbitrary. (Ibid)

Another 'definition' in Fernández-Armesto's list is 'a process of collective self-differentiation from a world characterised as 'barbaric' or 'savage' or 'primitive'. But this definition is

apparently value-laden and therefore cannot serve as an objective bench-mark.

A third entry in the list defines 'civilization' as a supposed stage or phase which the histories of societies commonly go through or which they achieve at their climax. However, this definition is also defective, since as Karl Popper (1961, 1994) and some other writers have argued, societies or histories do not progress towards a telos.

Fernández-Armesto's own preferred definition does not fare any better: 'I propose to define it [civilization] as type of relationship to the natural environment, recrafted, by the civilizing impulse, to meet human demands.' This 'definition' smacks of circularity. The author however, explains that what he means is to introduce 'a scale along which societies place themselves according to the degree to which they modify their natural environments.' However, the difficulty with this further qualification is that it makes 'civilization' almost tantamount to 'technological sophistication'.

Of course, 'civilization' is associated with 'the ability to change the natural environment' but it is more than that. It is also related to 'the ability to change the social environment'. Here notions such as social realities, social constructs, and social institutions gain prominence. Civilization is itself a social construct. It is a combination of those social facts, which are the outcome of human design, and those social facts, which are the outcome of the unintended consequences of human actions. We can think of the first type of social facts, following Searle (1995, 1999), as the products of collective intentionalities. This notion requires some explanation.

From an epistemic point of view, social actors can be regarded as sets of intentional states, such as belief, desire, hope, fear, and intentions. Each of these sets of intentional states form a dynamic system, which is made of a large number of constituent parts. These parts are actively and constantly influencing each other and are being influenced by 'the environment', which, in turn, consists of other intentional systems (social actors) and other entities (physical things, social institutions, ...). Social actors' interaction with 'the environment' is, in part, determined by the ways their different types of intentional states relate to the external reality.

I use the notion of 'direction of fit' (27), for defining the relation between intentional states of each social actor and the external reality. The different types of intentional states relate the propositional content of these states to the external reality with different ways of fitting. Cognitive states like beliefs, hypotheses, perceptions, and memories have mind-to-world direction of fit. Their task is to match an independently existing reality or environment. Volitive states like desires and intentions, on the other hand, have a world-to-mind direction of fit. Their aim is not to represent how things are but how the social actor would like them to be or plans to make them be. An intentional state is satisfied if there is a match between its propositional content and the reality represented or depicted by it. To know a person's intentional states, we must ask under what conditions exactly those states would be satisfied or not satisfied.

Intentional states, in essence, provide each of the social actors with a model of reality. These models are, necessarily and due to the cognitive limitations of the social actors, partial representations / reconstructions of the world. They carry with them the hallmarks typical of the subject. That is to say, his historical setting, his cultural upbringing, his political inclinations, his social class, his economic status, and the like. In other words, each of these models represents the reality as seen from the particular viewpoint of a particular subject. Since each individual is unique, his or her intentional states and therefore, his or her model of reality or environment, is not identical with the models/representations of any other individuals. And yet, since these different models are all attempts at depicting or capturing 'reality,' common or similar features might well be found amongst them.

Apart from the two general categories of cognitive and volitive states, intentional states in the mind of each individual fall into two other basic categories, namely, 'individual intentionality' or 'I-intentionality' and 'collective intentionality' or 'we-intentionality.' The latter is an irreducible class in its own right. The form that it takes in the mind of each individual is simply 'we intend,' 'we hope,' 'we are doing so-and-so,' and the like (26 & 27).¹

Collective intentionalities, as their name imply, are the products of coming together of social animals. Contrary to the individual intentionalities, they cannot be formed in isolation. Thus for

example, while Robinson Crusoe can have various individual intentionalities, he will not be able to acquire collective intentionality.

Collective intentionalities, in turn, are responsible for creating social facts, socially constructed entities, and/or institutional facts. Social facts pertain to two or more actors who have collective intentionality. Socially constructed entities or institutional facts are also (partly) the product of collective intentionality. However, contrary to the social facts, they belong only to those beings that are capable of using language and invoking symbols to create meaning. Human beings construct these social entities or institutional facts by means of collective imposition of functions on (or ascription of functions to) physical objects or already existing institutional facts. Marriage, money, government, war, university, court, rent, football match, academic conference, and the like are examples of such social entities. Socially constructed entities are ontologically subjective and epistemologically objective. In the case of money, for instance, a function is being imposed on pieces of paper or plastic cards. There is no money independent of human actors/agents, hence money is ontologically subjective. At the same time, within human communities, money plays a significant role, which is due to its epistemological objectivity (26).

Institutional facts can be divided into two main groups. Those which, as discussed above, are the products of collective intentionalities, and those which are (partly) the result of human action and not of human design. The latter category consists of unintended consequences of human beings interactions with each other and with the environment. All socially constructed entities or institutional facts are parts and parcels of what Popper calls 'world 3' (17 & 20). In Popper terminology, 'world 1' is the physical/natural world and 'world 2' is the subjective world of individuals, their experiences and thoughts in the subjective sense. 'world 3' is the outcome of interaction of the first two 'worlds'. It contains socially created entities and their physical manifestations. Thus for example, ideas, books, libraries, pieces of music, language, movies, videotapes, computers, and the like are amongst the furniture of this world. 'world 3' has causal power and can interact with the two other 'worlds' (13)

‘Civilization’ consists of both types of institutional facts and therefore, itself a member of the Popperian ‘world 3’. One can think of any civilization, in comparison to natural eco-systems, as a social eco-system. Such a system is not a fixed and rigid entity; on the contrary, like living organisms, it is constantly changing and evolving in response to the changing situations in the intellectual and physical environments surrounding it. Social ecosystems, like natural-ecosystems, are shaped by the interaction between the organisms and their environment.

A distinction also needs to be made between ‘civilization’, ‘a civilization’ and ‘civilizations’. The term civilization, without any particularity, denotes a universal concept which signifies the ability to change the natural environment and to create/change the social environment. Following Fernandez-Armesto, I call this feature ‘the civilizing ingredient’. ‘A civilization’ is one extension of such a universal concept, which contains, to varying degrees, the required ingredient. ‘Civilizations’, on the other hand, denotes the collection of all extensions of the universal concept ‘civilization’. There is disagreement amongst the experts about the exact number of such extensions. Toynbee, for example, thought there were twenty-one (Toynbee, 1946), whereas Carroll Quigley counted ‘two-dozens’ (21), and Huntington maintains that the world today is covered by ‘seven or eight’ civilizations (8).

Having defined the terms ‘dialogue’, ‘civilization’ and ‘civilizations’ we should next explain what do we mean by ‘dialogue among civilizations’. Here, let us tentatively assume that by this term we mean some sort of interaction, to be further clarified, between members of two or more civilizations whose end result is creation of shared meaning, collective intentionalities, and common understanding. There is of course no doubt that throughout the history, civilizations have had contact and relations with each other in the form of migrations, trade, pilgrimages, missions, war, transfer of ideas and technologies and so forth. However, for the main question of this paper to be answered in the affirmative, on the one hand, at least some of the above activities need to be regarded as extensions of ‘dialogue’. And on the other, they need to be identified as constituent part of ‘globalization’. To see whether this is the case, we now need to clarify the meaning of ‘globalization’.

In comparison to 'dialogue' and 'civilization', 'globalization' is a rather newly introduced theoretical construct, and hence there is even a greater degree of uncertainty concerning its definition amongst the scholars. For example, as Anthony Giddens (1999) has pointed out for some it is tantamount to 'Internalization'. In other words, here Global is another adjective to describe cross-border relations between countries. To some other it means 'Liberalization'. That is to say, removing government-imposed restrictions on movements between countries to create border-less economic relations. For others it is equivalent to 'Westernization' or more specifically, 'Americanization'. Still others define it as 'Deterritorialization'. That is, spread of supraterritoriality: social space is no longer mapped in terms of territorial places and borders. And of course, there are those who are sceptic about the status of the very phenomenon which is called 'globalization' and regard it as either nothing new or just a theoretical fiction that does not correspond to reality.

Jan Aart Scholte (2000) has produced a list (partially reproduced here) of the core theses on globalization:

(1) 'Globalization' is a transformation of social geography marked by the growth of supraterritorial spaces, but it does not mean the end of territorial geography; territoriality and supraterritoriality coexist in complex interrelations.

(2) Although globalization has made earlier appearances, the trend has unfolded with unprecedented speeds and to unprecedented extents since the 1960s. It has touched almost every person and locale in today's world; the trend has spread unevenly, being most concentrated among propertied and professional classes, in the North, in towns, and among younger generations.

(3) Globalization has had multifaceted causal dynamics, with the principal spurs having come from rationalist knowledge, capitalist production, various technological innovations and certain regulatory measures.

(4) Globalization has not displaced deeper social structures in relation to production (capitalism), governance (the state and bureaucratism more generally), community (the nation and communitarianism more generally) and knowledge (rationalism), but it has prompted important changes to certain attributes of capital, the state, the nation and modern rationality, and has

encouraged the growth of additional loci of governance besides the state, the spread of additional forms of community besides the nation, and the development of additional types of knowledge besides modern rationality.

(5) Contemporary globalization has had some important positive consequences with respect to cultural regeneration, communications, decentralization of power, economic efficiency and the range of available products, but neoliberal policies toward globalization have had many negative consequences in regard to increased ecological degradation, persistent poverty, worsened working conditions, various form of cultural violence, widened arbitrary inequalities and deepened democratic deficits.

2. The Key Question, Once More

Equipped with the above rough and ready definitions for the key terms of the main question of this paper, we should now explore whether, at last, we can tackle this question. It was said that both globalization and dialogue among civilizations involve some sort of interaction among the social actors and institutions, which belong to various civilizations. But to be able to provide a satisfactory answer for the central question of this paper further clarifications are still needed.

For example, the very notion of ‘dialogue among civilizations’ is problematic. It is not as straightforward as it may appear. There are many writers who, on various philosophical or pragmatic or empirical (historical) grounds, maintain that the different viewpoints, which should come together to form a dialogue can never be ‘coherent’. Therefore, we can never have a proper dialogue across or even within communities. Note that the position taken by these writers is different from the stand of the cynic who only casts doubt on the efficacy of dialogue. These writers, contrary to the cynic, to varying degrees, deny the very *possibility* of holding a dialogue among various cultures, traditions or civilizations. Samuel Huntington (1996), Alsdair MacIntyre (1998) and many of the post-modern writers who subscribe to Khunian-Feyerabendian ‘incommensurability thesis’ (9 &5) and/or Quineian ‘indeterminacy of translation thesis’ (22) are among a long list of writers who, either explicitly or implicitly (i.e., as a result of the basic assumptions of their viewpoints) have ended up advocating

the impossibility of holding meaningful dialogue among different cultures, etc.

Elsewhere, I have argued at some length against the validity of the so-called 'impossibility thesis' advocated by the above writers. (14) Here, suffice it to say that real instances of various forms of interactions among different nations, including what is happening in international organisations like the UN, perhaps through the mediation of simultaneous translators, give the lie to the 'impossibility thesis'. Moreover, the debilitating relativism which results from such a thesis renders it undesirable as a philosophical position.

Assuming that we have successfully overcome the hurdle of 'the Impossibility thesis' (14), we still need to explain what do we mean by 'members' of various civilizations who are supposed to be engaged in a dialogue among civilizations? Take for example, the Islamic civilization. Which members of this vast civilization are we talking about? There are many intellectual/cultural trends in the Islamic lands, each provides the individuals with a new layer of 'identity'. Thus for instance, we can talk of Shi'i Muslims and Sunni Muslims. Within each of these two general groupings we can talk of mainstream quietist believers, traditionalists, fundamentalists, early modernists, late modernist (or critical rationalists) and so on (15). Further, we can talk of Muslim technologists, jurists, philosophers, theologians, businessmen, politicians, journalists, university professors, students, and so forth. This list of partial identities can go on and on. Each individual, at any given time, may possess a large number of these various layers of identity. It is important to make it clear that when we talk about 'dialogue among civilizations' precisely, which of these groups are involved.

Another question related to the above is that interaction between how many members of two different civilizations amounts to a dialogue among those two civilizations? Here, the difficulty is that any attempt at quantifying the number of interlocutors would result in the appearance of the so-called 'heap paradox': how many grains of sand would form a heap of sand? Apparently, a dialogue between just two members of two different civilizations cannot be regarded as a dialogue between those two civilizations. Now if such a dialogue cannot be formed with the participation of two

people, it also cannot be formed with the participation of four people; and so on. There is no clear cut off point. But this seems to lead to the absurdity that however large the number of the interlocutors, it is not enough to form a dialogue among civilizations.

The paradox also works in reverse. If we imagine that two civilizations are fully engaged in a dialogue, in the sense that all their members are taking part in the process, then if just two members of these civilizations cease to take part, it would not amount to the collapse of dialogue between the two civilizations. But the same is true if four members cease to take part in dialogue; and so on. This seems to lead to the implausible position that a dialogue can be held between two civilisations even with the participation of just two members of these civilizations.

Similarly, the very word 'interaction' needs to be more clearly defined. This term means various things, including business transactions, friendship, teaching and learning, rivalry and competition, conflict and war, and so on. To be able to answer the central question of the paper we should also shed some light on this notion.

One type of interactions and a rather important one for that matter, within and without social ecosystems, is financial transactions in the wider sense of the word. Financial transactions in this sense are definitely amongst the kind of activities, which fall within the realm of 'globalization'. But could we take this sort of interaction to be a proper extension of dialogue?

Apparently the answer to this question depends on the way we 'define' financial or business transactions between members of various civilizations. A proponent of the free market such as Hayek (1976) would argue that market has a life of its own and evolves according to delicate evolutionary processes. At the same time, he maintains that individuals' imperfect knowledge is not a match for the power of the invisible hand of the market when it comes to exchange of information. It is the market which reigns supreme in regulating people's relationships with each other and not the other way round. Therefore, in financial dealings between civilizations, members of various civilizations need not enter any sort of dialogue in order to improve upon the mechanisms of the market. They should, instead, let the market to do the job for them.²

Clearly, on this reading of 'financial transaction' it cannot be regarded as an extension or a token of 'dialogue among civilizations'. However, against Hayekian, rather fatalistic approach, there are others who maintain that market is just an example of what is known as 'complex systems'. The structure or architecture of such systems are constantly undergoing changes due to dynamic interactions of various parts of the systems. Markets, like many other real complex networks, in contrast to randomly made networks, are scale-free. That is to say, contrary to the random networks in which all nodes have almost the same number of links, in scale-free networks there are many nodes with very few links and few nodes with a large number of links (1 & 3). The important point about the scale-free networks is that they are highly sensitive to interventions and fiddling by human or other intelligent actors for that matter. This new knowledge of the way complex systems work has recently helped the researchers to devise a model for 'correcting' the behaviour of the market in order to prevent it from devastating crashes (23). In the eyes of the upholders of this view of the market, financial transactions between civilizations are not purely controlled by the invisible hand of market and human interactions in this area not only do have effects but are also welcomed if conducted properly. In this sense, perhaps we can regard globalization cum financial transactions and business exchanges as a sort of interaction amongst members of various civilizations which could lead to the creation of shared meanings.

What about other types of global interactions such as travel, electronic mass media, global publications, telecommunications, global governance agencies, global civic associations and non-governmental organizations, global drug or human trafficking, and so on? Could the same be said about these types of interactions? Moreover, could we regard the creation of 'shared meanings' among members of different civilizations as proper instances of 'dialogue among civilizations'?

To go back to the meaning of the term dialogue which was adopted in this paper, namely, 'flow of meaning, between or among a number of people out of which may emerge some new understanding', it seems that at least some of the above kinds of interactions between members of different civilizations do, among

other things, involve a flow of meaning and the emergence of new understanding.

However, for these interactions to be categorised as 'dialogue' they should fulfil one minimum requirement: the minimum condition for an authentic dialogue is respect for the 'other'. Each of the participants in a dialogue should regard 'the other' as equal in humanity and should have respect and tolerance for their views. (19 & 13) To regard one's own views, culture, or tradition as superior, would diminish the possible benefits of dialogue since it would reduce the position of the other interlocutors to an insignificant and subordinate one. And to view 'the other' in this light means that one does not treat his or her interlocutor as a potential source of knowledge, as somebody who has a unique window on reality and is capable of offering views, opinions, and ideas which will be of value to one's own understanding and well-being.

Dialogue aims at what can be called reciprocal knowledge or reciprocal understanding. The principle of reciprocity, which is implicit in this process, supposes an approach, which respectively engages two subjects or cultures or civilizations in an equal process of mutual understanding (10). Here the two main guiding metaphors are Wittgenstein's 'lines of vision' and Leibniz's 'anamorphosis'.

Wittgenstein once remarked that 'the eye cannot see itself'. This remark gives rise to the notion of 'reciprocal field of vision': consider two observers facing each other on a two-dimensional plane. The eye of each observer can be regarded as the starting point of an angle whose two intersecting lines are moving away from each other and towards the other observer (In a three dimensional plane, the angle can be regarded as a cone). In this way, each eye (observer) lies within the field of the vision of the other eye (observer), while each eye, being at the starting point of the visual field, is unable to see itself.

Anamorphosis was a seventeenth century fashionable optic game popularized by Leibniz. It consisted in playing with opposite distorting mirrors to, progressively, reconstruct the right image of an object, starting from its distorted image as it was reflected by the first mirror.

Invoking these metaphors and others of that ilk, 'dialogue' establishes itself as a methodology for attaining reciprocal knowledge, without destroying, denying, or neglecting respective cultural/civilizational points of view or values. Such a respect for the 'other' amounts to a moral aspect for dialogue. A proper dialogue cannot be devoid of this aspect.

Seen in this light, it is clear that many of the activities, which are regarded as parts, and parcels of globalization do not qualify as 'a dialogue among civilizations'. But if this is the case, then we need to revise our 'reading' of the main question of this paper. This is because, under the interpretations given at the outset, we suggested that the question to be understood as either $G \subset Dc$, or $G \in Dc$. However, as the above analysis has shown, neither of these relations holds between G and Dc .

In other words, if the analysis offered here is correct, then it means that G is neither a token of a general type Dc , nor a proper subset of a set Dc . It appears that G and Dc are two different socially constructed entities or two different sets, which have partial overlap and intersection.

However, if this is the case, that is to say, if the main question of the paper reduces to the fact that of the two general types of interaction between people from different civilizations, namely, G and Dc , some tokens of the one type could also be regarded as tokens of the other, then it seems that in our philosophical pursuit, we have not gone beyond a rather trivial point.

But perhaps, as suggested earlier, we should not blame the 'question' but rather our 'reading' of it. Could there be other sense (s) to the original question which would make it interesting and informative. Let us explore this possibility.

For instance, perhaps what is meant by the question, 'is globalization a dialogue among civilization?' is to ask, albeit tacitly, 'under what circumstances globalization could be a dialogue among civilizations?' or, again to ask implicitly, 'what would happen if globalization does not become a dialogue among civilization?'

Admittedly, this way of 'reading' the question opens up new possibilities, because it changes the mode of the question from a mere demand for explanation/clarification which relies on the proper description of the actual situation, to a request for normative

prescription and presentation of ideal-case scenarios which, usually, have heuristic value and will go far beyond the factual description/analysis.

To answer the central question of the paper in the light of the new interpretation (s) of its content is not an easy task. It not only requires a detailed analysis of the existing situation, but also involves all sorts of rival value-systems and all kind of projections of the existing situation into possible cases in the future and thus enters the realm of portraying the future course of history; a rather ambitious undertaking if not an outright impossible enterprise.

What however, can be done is to make use of simplifying assumptions in order to construct models of some possible worlds which could be accessed from our own world via certain routes or paths, or make scenarios about possible courses of events in the future. This is what usually done in the field of Futures Studies. In this respect, we can, for example, regard recent World Bank special report on globalization (2002) as one such model.

According to this model by mid century, a world of nine billion people who are producing an-unevenly-distributed global GDP of \$140 trillion a year will be facing all sorts of colossal calamities, from large-scale social breakdowns to global environmental catastrophes, to lower living standards for everyone if current policies and practices remain unchanged.

In view of those who have compiled the World Bank report, to avoid such a horrible fate and achieve the stated goal of the UN for a sustainable development, it is of utmost importance that through 'global coordination and local actions' ensure that gains in social indices –such as incomes, literacy rates, or access to sanitation- of the past 20 years are not reversed by population growth pressures and unsustainable economic expansions.

Interestingly, all the suggested solutions in the World Bank report are tacitly alluding to the necessity of 'genuine dialogue among civilizations'. In fact, one of the Bank's chief economist, commenting on the content of the report says on the record that, 'A major transformation, beginning in the rich countries, will be needed to ensure that poor people have an opportunity to participate, and that the environment is not damaged in a way that undermines their opportunities for the future' (28).

However, the snag with all such models are that while they do have heuristic/explanatory value to varying extent, since they are based on simplifying assumptions which can be widely different, it might not be easy to obtain consensus over the relative merits of one model over its rivals. Here, while modern techniques such as computer simulation could be helpful, they cannot provide us with conclusive answers as to the superiority or otherwise of one model in comparison to the others.

Thus, while the World Bank report, which was released to coincide with the summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg (August 2002), emphasises that 'rich countries need to be less selfish by increasing aid, offering more generous debt relief, opening their markets to developing country exporters ...', the rich countries have not heeded the call for abandoning their protectionist policies and instead have laid emphasis on the need for the developing countries to clean up their governments (4). At the same time, some other experts, looking at the issue from a different angle and making use of other basic assumptions, criticise both the position of the rich countries and the stance of the World Bank. Thus for example, one such expert complains that, 'Today's debate on sustainable development focus overwhelmingly on politics. Rich countries attribute extreme poverty in Africa and elsewhere almost entirely to poor policies and corruption, rather than the lack of appropriate technologies for the tropical ecologies of the impoverished countries. ... These policy makers and especially key international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that strongly shape the policies of the poor countries, regard economic progress as overwhelmingly the result of market forces, downplaying the role of technological advances. Robert Solow, winner of the 1987 Noble Prize in Economics, demonstrated in 1957 that the great bulk of US economic growth in the first half of the 20th century was the result of technological progress rather than accumulation of capital' (24).

3. Conclusion

Such examples of disagreement over basic assumptions amongst the parties to the debates related to global issues can be easily multiplied. The morale of the analysis offered here seems to be that the question posed for this paper presents us with a dilemma: it

could either be answered in a way which gives us a clear-cut, but rather boring, answer. Or, it can be answered in ways, which are interesting and informative but do not provide us with definite and universally accepted solution.

However, despite the sense of unease which would probably result from facing with seemingly undesirable choices, my hope is that the above philosophical exercise has not been futile. Given the immense significance of propagating 'dialogue' in place of 'clash' and 'conflict' as the best way of interaction between the nations, cultures, and civilizations, if the above argument has shed some light on the complexity of the notion of 'dialogue among civilisations' and the intricacies of finding proper instances for such an activity, then it seems it has served some useful purpose: much more urgent work is needed to turn the idea of 'dialogue among civilizations' into an effective and functioning construct. Such a task, which is admittedly not an easy one, is something which cannot be overlooked or postponed. Because, as far as modern civilizations and modern times are concerned, we are living in such a precarious situation that, To paraphrase Rosa Luxemburg (1915), the choice facing humanity is one of 'dialogue' or barbarism: "We stand today ... before the awful proposition: either the triumph of 'modern barbarism' and the destruction of all culture, and depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery; or, the victory of 'dialogue.'"

Notes

1. Searle has rightly observed that attempts to reduce collective intentionality to individual intentionality would end up in an infinite regress of the following form for each member of a social group, "I believe that you believe that I believe that you believe that ...". It seems to posit a basic and irreducible class of collective intentionalities, is the best way of avoiding this unfortunate regress. Note also that collective intentionality is not a mysterious entity like a Hegelian World Spirit, some "we" that is mysteriously shared by all individuals who are members of a certain group. As we shall see in the text, collective intentionalities, though in the mind of each individual, evolve through interactions of the members of the social groups and hence tend to increase their overlaps and common aspects. In a sense, collective intentionalities, as explained in the text, can be represented by the entities

in what Popper denote as 'world 3' which is the objective world of the products of the interaction between 'world 1' (the physical reality) and 'world 2' (the subjective world of mental contents) (17 & 20).

2. For a rebuttal of this Hayekian view, see 14.

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