

# **Dialogue of Civilizations**

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**An Introduction to  
Civilizational Analysis**

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**VICTOR SEGESVARY**

**Mikes International**

**The Hague, Holland**

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## **PUBLISHER'S PREFACE**

The author was one of the guest speakers of the 44<sup>th</sup> Study Week of the Hollandiai Mikes Kelemen Kör (Association for Hungarian Art, Literature and Science in the Netherlands), held 11-14 September 2003 in Elspeet, the Netherlands. The theme of the conference was: NEW ATLANTIS - Our Present and Future in the Perspective of Our Cultures -. The paper presented by Mr Segesvary can be read in the October-December 2003 issue of the Mikes International periodical (in Hungarian, [http://www.federatio.org/mikes\\_per.html](http://www.federatio.org/mikes_per.html)).

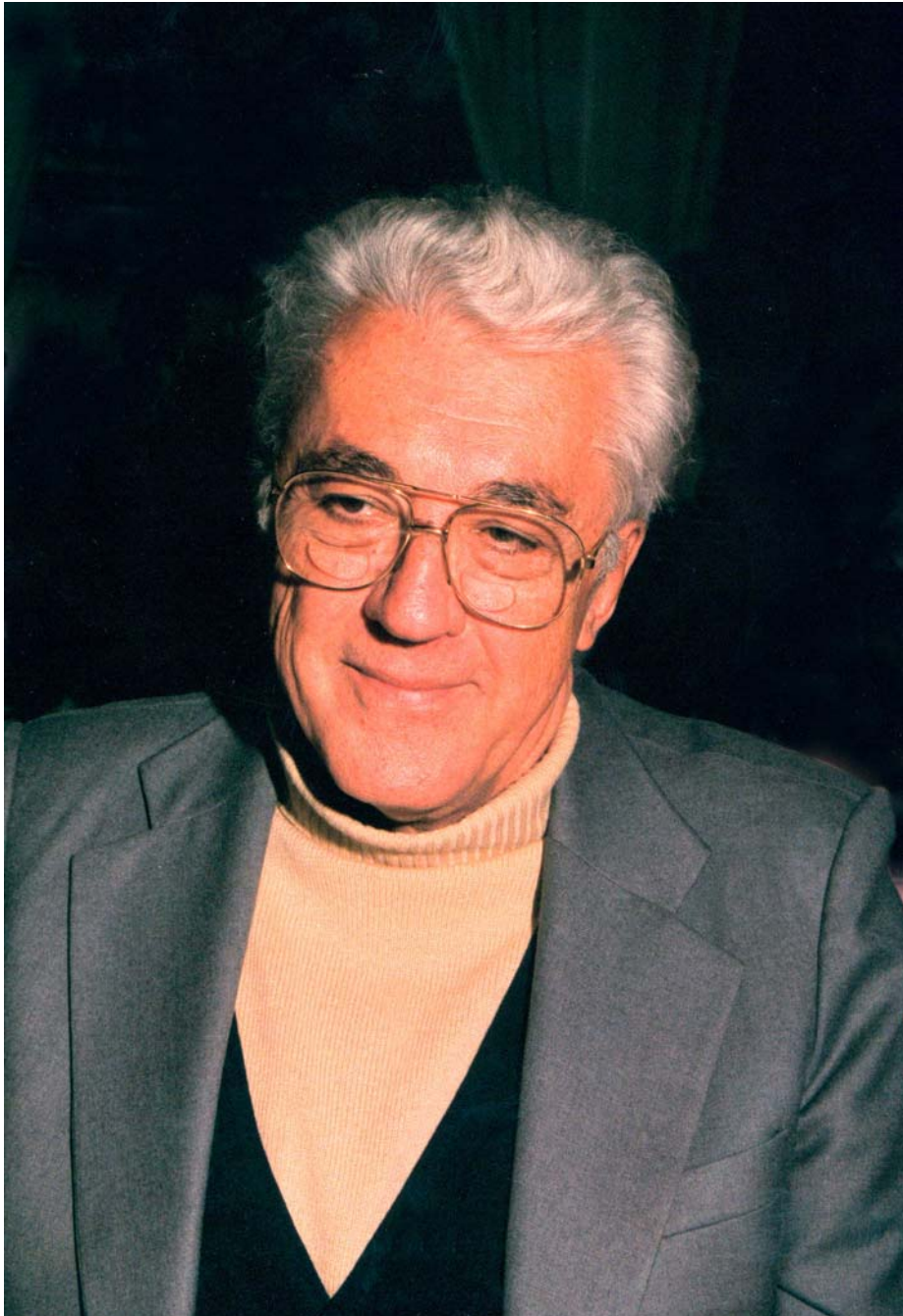
At the conference an agreement was reached between Mr Segesvary and MIKES INTERNATIONAL to publish his reach oeuvre within Bibliotheca Mikes International. Present volume is the first result of this agreement.

The "Dialogue of Civilizations" was first published in 2000 by the University Press of America. We publish electronically this volume with their permission.

In the same time we also publish the Hungarian translation of the entire volume. The author himself performed the translation.

The Hague (Holland), January 27, 2004

MIKES INTERNATIONAL



Victor Segesvary

*To my friends around the globe  
belonging to  
different civilizational worlds*

**APPEAL**

**OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
ORGANIZATIONS IN FAVOR OF  
A DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS**

*Resolution adopted by the General Assembly at  
its fifty-third session on the 4th of November 1998*

**53/22. United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations**

*The General Assembly,*

*Reaffirming* the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, which, *inter alia*, call for collective effort to strengthen friendly relations among nations, remove threats to peace and foster international cooperation in resolving international issues of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all,

*Recognizing* the diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity,

*Aware* that positive and mutually beneficial interaction among civilizations has continued throughout human history despite impediments arising from intolerance, disputes and wars,

*Emphasizing* the importance of tolerance in international relations and the significant role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among civilizations,

*Noting* the designation of 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance, and recognizing that tolerance and respect for diversity facilitate universal promotion and protection of human rights and constitute sound foundations for civil society, social harmony and peace,

*Reaffirming* that civilizational achievements constitute the collective heritage of mankind, providing a source of inspiration and progress for humanity at large,

*Welcoming* the collective endeavour of the international community to enhance understanding through constructive dialogue among civilizations on the threshold of the third millennium,

1. *Expresses its firm determination* to facilitate and promote dialogue among civilizations;

2. *Decides* to proclaim the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations;

3. *Invites* Governments, the United Nations system, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations, to plan and implement appropriate cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations, including through organizing conferences and seminars and disseminating information and scholarly material on the subject, and to inform the Secretary-General of their activities;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to present a provisional report on activities in this regard to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, and a final report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

[See the Tehran Declaration on Dialogue Among Civilizations in Annex]

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## PREFACE

This short book is an introduction to a new way of thinking about our contemporary world. It represents an entirely different approach to relations between human groups from the one which prevails even today. It signals, in the sense indicated by the resolution of the United Nations, a perspective coinciding with the dawn of a new millennium.

To illustrate how much the analysis of civilizations and of their mutual relationship is different from our customary ways of looking at human and societal interaction, it is sufficient to refer here to our expressions describing the space of such interactions. Either we speak of international relations, the international community or inter-statal relations, or, simply, of humankind. All these expressions describe the world of nation-states which dominate interaction patterns between various human groups. They all reflect, as well, a universalistic perspective dating back to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, as if "humankind" would stand for a homogeneous, Western-style ensemble of human beings at planetary level. For this reason, I avoid in this study such customary, descriptive designations as international or inter-statal relations, replacing them with terms such as "relations between different human groups" or, whenever possible, with the new term "inter-civilizational relations".

I also would like to put in here a word of caution concerning the differences between civilizations and ideologies. Communism, socialism, materialism, idealism, and the doctrine on the advantages of the free market are ideologies because they represent explanatory frameworks with a view to solving some problems of human societies. They are, one could say, worldviews limited to a unique perspective of social life. They are, in most cases, motivational in their intent because their aim is to induce people to act in order to reach some definite, pre-determined goals like a classless society or an unrestrained freedom in economic activities. Ideologies, like those mentioned above, may or may not be present in one or another of the civilizations co-existing in our world; this depends on a number of other factors which determine a specific civilization's basic characteristics. Thus, in Hinduism the philosophical tenets of idealism and materialism are both present, whereas none of them can be discovered in Buddhism or in classical Confucianism, though they are present in all neo-Confucian trends of thinking.<sup>1</sup> Ideologies, then, are not constituted at the same level as civilizations, which represent the highest existential framework for human individuals and societies, whereas ideologies may be emerging or disappearing phenomena at the surface of great civilizational entities.

I have written extensively on problems emerging in inter-civilizational relations -- under which fall even such popular, contemporary concepts as globalization -- based on a lifelong experience of civilizational encounters. In fact, these encounters induced me to create a new approach in the humanities and social sciences, which I termed "civilizational analysis." After having written on inter-civilizational relations and their globalizing aspects, I felt it necessary to plainly explain the need for, and the substance of, this new approach. Hence the present introduction to civilizational analysis, which serves as preparation for a civilizational dialogue.

I shall deal with the subject under three main headings. First, I shall explain why, in my view, it is imperative today to achieve a civilizational dialogue in dealing with relations between different human groups. Second, in the substantive part, I shall discuss what civilizations and cultures are, what their different aspects are, and how they encompass the lives of all human beings and communities. Third, I shall briefly summarize the methodological principles which must be respected in the course of such a complex undertaking as a civilizational analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> When I was on assignment for the United Nations in Cambodia at the beginning of 1994, I had to lecture, at the request of the Minister of Commerce, to the directors and office chiefs of the international and domestic trade departments of the ministry. The problem I had to deal with at the time was not civilizational but ideological. All these civil servants were trained to work in a socialist, centrally planned economy, along the lines of Vietnamese economic policies and practices -- a Western civilizational product. I endeavored to explain to them the differences between these socialist-oriented policies and practices, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, policies and practices relevant to a market economy -- part of the presently dominant Western ideology.

Because this is an introductory text intended for those as yet unversed in the study of civilizational diversity, I make relatively little use of footnotes only to give practical examples or to quote outstanding authors or important documents whenever I feel that such references are necessary to sustain or to illustrate my argument. However, I do not cite in the text itself other authors, because the nature of my endeavor requires that I summarize my own thoughts, gleaned from personal experience as well as from the writings of eminent thinkers and specialists philosophers, humanists, social scientists. This, I hope, will facilitate the reading of the text and will make it easier for the reader to comprehend the conceptual and practical intricacies of this completely new field of study.

The use of the masculine personal pronoun is a matter of convenience and should be understood as gender-neutral terms. All ideas expressed, all conclusions made in the reflections hereafter are my own, and I alone am responsible for them.

## **FIRST PART**

### **Why Is a Dialogue of Civilizations Needed in Our Age?**

In order to demonstrate the need to proceed with civilizational analysis when considering worldwide problems in various fields of human life, I shall discuss, first, the nature of a pluralistic world; second, the causes underlying the empirical fact that the world became pluralistic; and, third, why the existence of a pluralistic world necessitates the pursuit of a dialogue, at the civilizational level, of all aspects of human and societal interaction.

## ***The Nature of a Pluralistic World***

### **The Definition of Pluralism**

When using the expression "pluralistic world" it is first necessary to determine what kind of pluralism we mean by that designation. What we mean here is civilizational pluralism, or the phenomenon of co-existing civilizations on our planet. It is neither a pluralism defined by biological characteristics--among them race, gender, or any other physical differences--nor a pluralism determined by an individual's or a community's geographical location on the globe. Civilizational pluralism is defined by civilizational differences--whether we call them "forms of life" or "language games"--which justify speaking about corresponding civilizational worlds. There is only one world if the entity designated by the concept "world" is the totality of things, objects, phenomena; but there is a plurality of worlds if "world" stands for a perspective of human totality. Civilizational pluralism is quite distinct from all other kinds of pluralism, like those existing within civilizational worlds themselves. The presence of pluralism since the dawn of history constitutes what some call an "ordered heterogeneity"; homogeneity, in its modern forms especially, representing authoritarian or media-imposed cultural monisms, is fatal for a pluralistic world. Civilizational pluralism is a celebration of difference.

The definition of civilizational pluralism given above is important as it distinguishes it from multiculturalism. The latter concerns one society in one country in which several distinct cultural groups live together--in a continuous and irreversible interaction. We can therefore say that, as opposed to multiculturalism, civilizational dialogue is concerned with pluri-culturalism or, rather, with the existence of different civilizational and cultural worlds.<sup>2</sup> This, of course, does not mean that the importance of multiculturalism is denied. Multiculturalism many times reflects real, practical circumstances, or shapes a specific world in a particular way. From our point of view, it is important simply to delimit the two concepts from each other because multiculturalism will not be dealt with here.

Civilizational pluralism in fact corresponds to what some anthropologists and biologists called multilinear evolution in the life of human beings. Multilinear evolution means that cultural patterns and "environmentally-causal" interrelations a parallel way and in terms of interaction, in different parts of the world. "Environmentally-causal" means that there is a constant and unstoppable interaction between culture, man's environment, physical as well as human, and historical forces determined by past events. In consequence, multilinear evolution is an additive and cumulative process in contrast to the organic or biological evolutions, which are substitutive. As a result civilizational entities are extremely complex, with constantly emerging new realities and levels of interaction. In the space of this interaction there is, in most cases, considerable latitude for potential variation of a civilization's features. The successive stages of a civilization's evolution show, of course, qualitatively distinctive patterns.

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<sup>2</sup> Multiculturalism, which was called "cultural pluralism" in America between the 1950s and 1980s, was extremely well defined in a landmark text of the National Coalition for Cultural Pluralism: "[Cultural pluralism is] a state of equal co-existence in a mutually supportive relationship within the boundaries or framework of one nation or people of diverse cultures with significantly different patterns of belief, behavior, color, and in many cases with different languages. To achieve cultural pluralism, there must be unity with diversity. Each person must be aware of and secure in his own identity, and be willing to extend to others the same respect and right that he expects to enjoy himself." (R.D. Grillo, R. D. *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference: State, Culture, and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998], 192).

An example from anthropology illustrates the characteristics of multilinear evolution and the environmental causation mentioned above. The Chuchee, a reindeerherding tribe of Siberia, did not take over from the Eskimos the technique of building snow huts; the latter did not take over from the former the breeding and rearing of reindeers to harness them to their sleds--both obeyed separately the rules governing certain social practices in their respective cultures.

Culture patterns and environmentally or historically conditioned relationships may as well constitute cross-cultural regularities present in human existence, either simultaneously--contemporaneity--or on a temporal continuum--history--without implying either a diffusionist linkage, in the first case, or a developmental sequence, in the second case. History demonstrates that a basic regularity in cross-cultural evolution is that pluralism first appeared in the form of religious pluralism. In regard to political institutions, empires have been constituted regularly during the whole of human history, while city-states and nation-states are located on a historical continuum. A cross-cultural regularity present in all civilizational worlds is the human drive to express an individual's and a community's ideas, beliefs, or emotions in an artistic way. Multilinear civilizational evolution performs, therefore, the function of sociocultural integration at successive levels of emergence. Thus, the Japanese culture, based on the ancient Shinto and Confucian value systems, represented an integrative force in Japanese society at the Tokugawa age as much as it has since the beginning of the modernization period during the Meiji revival.

Thus, civilizational pluralism does not fit into categories such as states, nations, or other current definitions of the frame of life of different human groups, but it encompasses them. Civilizational pluralism means that there are several great civilizations co-existing in the same space and in the same temporal dimension, co-existing in a continuous and irreversible interaction. Alternative civilizational perspectives cannot be compared with alternative geometries or other, similar mathematical theorems. Alternative geometries, or any other alternative scientific theories, are irreconcilable because they have contradictory axiomatic structures, and were designed as such. No respectable scientific theories can be developed if their authors admit, from the beginning, the existence of serious alternatives, because such an attitude would mean that the theorems and axioms underlying their views are not unconditionally true. Civilizations are irreconcilable and incommensurable because they are more than cognitive constructs, artistic creation, or forms of life. They are rooted in existence, and are made up of personal and collective identities.

There cannot be trans-civilizational or *meta*-civilizational spheres corresponding to some sort of imagined spaces in which the common denominator of all civilizational differences are located. There are none, because not only our cognitive but our other faculties as well, like imagination, are shaped and influenced by civilizational circumstances. There are no universal standards above these civilizational givens. It is the civilizational context--religion, culture, tradition, social practices--which endows with meaning cognitive or artistic activities or existential realities. Civilizational pluralism, therefore, also means that civilizations co-existing in spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be arranged in a sort of evolutionary time sequence, neither on a continuum of qualitative evaluation, as one being inferior or superior to the other, nor classified on a scale of moral values as right or wrong--simply because there is no Archimedean point from which they can be arranged, evaluated, or classified. For example, one of the greatest errors in modern thought concerning an evolutionary sequencing of civilizational givens was Max Weber's effort to present world religions and civilizations as phases of a rationalization process. Hinduism, Confucianism, Judaism, medieval Christendom, and Protestantism all represented further steps, upward, on the continuum of rationalization from other-worldly mysticism to inner-worldly asceticism, from irrepressive impulses to rational conduct, and from magic to science--finally reaching the materialistic, greed-motivated civilization of Western modernity (the "iron cage" as Max Weber himself called it).

Civilizational pluralism poses, therefore, the problem of how to ensure communication and how to achieve mutual understanding between people belonging to different civilizations. Inter-civilizational encounters presuppose a civilizational dialogue.

## **Relativism As a Corollary to Pluralism**

It is an inevitable corollary to civilizational pluralism that civilizations other than one's own have the same value for those beings brought up in their orbit, and shape decisively their existence as much as Western civilization shapes ours. Consequently, pluralism means relativism. It means a just and nondeniable relativity

of civilizational contexts--including beliefs; values; symbolic expressions; societal practices or ways of life; a relativism of visions, values, and traditions, but not facts. It is a relativism concerning co-existing civilizations and their relations to each other, not relativism inside those civilizational worlds, not in their own overarching framework. Again, civilizational relativism indicates the equal standing in their respective spheres of each civilization, and relativism in one given civilization, say the Chinese or the Islamic--an entirely other matter--could be designated, for the sake of clarity, as cultural relativism. In other words, relativism is the explanation for human diversity (which equals civilizational diversity), since there is no universally accepted authority to measure the incommensurables.

The relativism characterizing the co-existence of civilizations does not rule out objectivity but calls attention to the fact that this objective world is looked at differently by different human beings and their groups.<sup>3</sup> Objectivity is a notion which has its validity within every civilizational orbit but is meaningless when civilizational conditioned worldviews are compared. Otherwise expressed, objectivity is embedded in civilizational contexts. This, of course, does not mean that there are no objective realities like, for example, the existence of the natural world. It does mean, however, that human groups look at objective realities in their own specific way, in harmony with the existential and cosmic framework prevailing in their civilization.

A good example of civilizational relativism is how people imagined, since time immemorial, the mythic story of man. It is a good example because it shows a basic difference between Western modernity and other civilizations in the world. The Western conception, formulated some three centuries ago by Thomas Hobbes, sees today's man as a civilized successor--civilization taken in the sense of a polished, educated being--of the "natural," "savage" man, granting therefore to modern man a superior status above all other creatures in the universe. Other civilizations, not based on a monotheistic creed, consider that man descended, in one form or another, from the gods, from those supernatural beings. It is evident that these views of man's origin are incommensurable. Each myth is equivalent to the other, and it would be impossible to say that one is superior to the other.

An example of a completely different order of relativism between civilizational approaches is a comparison between the Western and Chinese intellectual dispositions or orientations. The Greek heritage of fundamental interest in abstract theorizing for theory's sake and in inquiries related to the ultimate foundations of human thought and existence, still characterizes the West at the end of the present millennium. In this respect, Western culture is basically a rationalist one, that is, abstract theorizing and foundationalist inquiries are based on the faculty of human reasoning and the criteria it imposes on our intellectual discourse. On the contrary, Chinese thinking is a pragmatic one, which proceeds in a dialectical way and not through the application of the rules of formal logic. This practicality of the Chinese approach manifests itself in its utilitarianism (very much different from what we know as the utilitarian trend in ethics and sociology), looking always for solutions of the problems encountered in everyday life. Even if Chinese thinkers had recourse to sophisticated reasoning, as happened many times, they never tried to solve ultimate questions of existence. This orientation was certainly linked to their all-encompassing and well-integrated cosmic worldview, which ruled out all sorts of existential uncertainties or all sentiments of "ontological insecurity." This worldview was expressed by the concept of *li*, the central concept shared by both Confucians and Taoists, denoting harmony and interrelatedness of all phenomena, mankind included, in the universe.

The pragmatism of the Chinese can also be illustrated by their totally different conception of "law" from the Roman legal approach, inherited by the West. For the Chinese--living in geographical isolation and a less differentiated society than the Romans--the universe represented a pattern of not imposed but a "ceaseless regularity" due to the spontaneous interaction of all things, whereas the Romans worked out an abstract system of legal concepts and procedures to achieve an as equitable as possible adjudication of discrepant

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<sup>3</sup> Considering whether we can have an objective opinion about happiness and distress of others, Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, writes: "It seems certain that we do not feel comfortable in our present-day civilization, but it is very difficult to form an opinion whether and in what degree men of an earlier age felt happier and what part their cultural conditions played in that matter. We shall always tend to consider people's distress objectively-- that is, to place ourselves, with our wants and sensibilities, in *their* condition, and then to examine what occasions we should find in them for experiencing happiness or unhappiness. This method of looking at things, *which seems objective because it ignores the variations in subjective sensibility, is, of course, the most subjective possible, since it puts one's own mental states in the place of any others*, unknown though they may be. Happiness, however, is something essentially subjective" (Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Standard Edition, trans. J. Strachey [New York: W.W. Norton, 1961], 36). [Second emphasis added]

and contradictory interests among groups of Roman society and subjected peoples living inside the frontiers of the empire.

## ***The Causes of Civilizational Pluralism***

What does it mean that we live in a pluralistic world? Was the world not always pluralistic in the course of history? Were there not always different human groups with different cultures and civilizations?

The answer to these questions can, of course, only be that although the world was always pluralistic, this phenomenon did not take on the importance which it has in our age. Civilizational pluralism existed but was not consciously acknowledged as a reality. It was an empirical fact and, taken as such, reported by travelers, mentioned in history books, but not experienced by most people living in their own world. What change in our world picture made us realize the existence of a pluralistic world? The answer is twofold: first, the de-colonization movement which took place after World War II, and, second, the phenomenon of globalization, the complex meaning of which is not always rightly understood.

## **The De-Colonization Process**

World War II meant the end of the great empires of the United Kingdom and France and of the colonial possessions of other European countries like Italy and Portugal. This epoch-making event took place as a result of the overwhelming influence of liberal ideology, sustained by the military power of the United States, while Europe was incapacitated by the destruction and devastation of the war and as a result of the revolutionary appeal of communist and socialist ideologies in Asia, Africa, and South America, sustained as well by military power, the huge army of the Soviet Union.

De-colonization was, of course, promoted in the framework of the United Nations organization which rubber-stamped the independence obtained by former colonies through acknowledging their status as sovereign states. Most colonies reached independence through a political process, but there were also several--like Algeria--who led a deadly fight against the colonial power in order to be liberated from its domination.

Why did the process of de-colonization contribute to the birth of an acknowledgedly pluralistic world and why did it make necessary to initiate a civilizational dialogue? Simply because Western countries and their populations became aware of the existence of civilizational differences through the creation of independent states in the orbit of various, co-existing civilizations. Different identities, different cultures, different ways of life were discovered, which, through the accelerated improvement of electronic communications and, consequently, the unimaginable extension of the influence of the media, became known to the great public.

It must be said, in addition, that since the seventeenth-century scientific and technological advances in Europe and the nineteenth-century colonial extension of the domination of Western powers over other areas of the world, it has appeared that only one civilization will govern life on planetary level--the civilization that is superior in every aspect to other civilizations and destined to replace all others which will be relegated to the rank of folklore and magic.

Taking one example only, Islamic civilization with its glorious past seems to have been steeped in this past without any motion, without adapting itself to the ever-changing circumstances, without having the force to resist not only the military but the spiritual and intellectual invaders as well. Nevertheless, this was a civilization which reached exceptional heights in civilizational refinement and richness in the times of the caliphs such as the Omayyad and the Abbassid. According to reports of travelers, the court of Charlemagne, the first emperor of a genuinely European empire, was incomparably less brilliant than the court of Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad. Islamic civilization also produced outstanding philosophers and men of science, who transmitted the Greek cultural heritage to the Europe of the Middle Ages and whose political order reached the climax of its power when the Ottoman sultans occupied part of Europe and menaced even the court of



the Hapsburgs in Vienna. However, something must have happened within this civilization, leading it to fall into a centuries-long sleep, into an inexplicable torpor even in the face of an outside enemy. The internal civilizational factor which led Islamic culture into a spiritual and intellectual immobility was, most probably, the "closing of the gates" of free and inventive reasoning (*ijtihad*), which stopped the search for ever-new solutions to emerging problems in cultural and everyday life in accordance with the faith and inherited traditions of Muslims all over the world.

The terrible "earthquake" which has shaken the Muslim world in the course of the last two hundred years brought with it a painful awakening. This "earthquake" was, first, the political domination by foreign powers, the colonization under all its forms (colonies, everyday life in accordance with the faith and inherited traditions of Muslims all over the world, protectorates, or straightforward incorporation into an alien, "infidel" state); or, and this was a much more fundamental shock for the Islamic community around the world than the colonial rule, the cultural onslaught of a globalizing "world" culture on Muslim people's souls and minds. What we call today Islamic fundamentalism is an instinctive reaction to this onslaught of a secular culture which menaces Muslim faith, customs, traditions, and social institutions.

## Global Culture or Cultural Globalization?

Civilizational pluralism is the only correct, empirically proven sense of globalization as contemporary phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> It really means the opening up of people's minds in all parts of the world to the existence of differences between human beings and between civilizational worlds because this continuous process operates through

- (a) Technological developments which make it possible to know, by each inhabitant of the planet, the differences between civilizations and the different ways of life of people who live in their respective orbits. This technological evolution includes not only the information revolution, a historically very recent phenomenon, but also the fabulous development of techniques of communication, from the invention of printing to the telephone and copying at a distance, and of transportation, from steamboats to airplanes;
- (b) Increased contacts, exchanges, and interaction between various civilizational worlds made possible by the above indicated technological developments. I mean by these increased contacts, exchanges, and interaction not only trade or the dissemination of ideas, of artistic forms, and of social habits and everyday practices--cultural diffusion in the language of anthropology--but an institutionalization of such contacts and interaction through which a compact and intricately interwoven tissue of civilizational encounters was born.

This pluralistic vision encompassing the world is, however, taken as the manifestation of a global culture. The world culture, which supposedly characterizes the phenomenon of globalization, consists of several elements, such as

- (1) A uniform "scientific" discourse of meaning
- (2) A cornucopia of standardized commodities of denationalized ethnic and folk motives
- (3) A series of generalized "human values and interests"
- (4) An interdependent system of communications and information which disseminates, in accordance with the interests of whatever powers that be, the elements enumerated above.

In this perspective, world culture or global culture appears as a new form of universalism, that is, the global spread of Western modernity and instrumental rationality in its institutionalized forms of scientism, free market ideology, the centralized bureaucratic state, and popular representation of commensurate value systems encapsulated in images and imageries of Western mass culture. It is, however, more and more

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<sup>4</sup> In our days, globalization is mainly understood as economic globalization. This means worldwide exchange of goods and services; the immediacy of worldwide financial transactions--also called (wrongly) worldwide financial integration--which take place through a constantly improved technological infrastructure; tourism and travel, leading to the planetary extension of some superficial social customs and practices.

realized that the context-specific "Westernness" of the so-called world culture, presented as a timeless, definite cultural content (best known under the "end of history" label), is inevitably undermining its capacity to create a global collective identity rooted in a globally accepted and internalized culture. In addition, although the universalization of the nation-state as the political organization of contemporary societies contributed to the global spread of the interstate system--a characteristic feature of the globalization drive--the cultural homogenization within nation-states, their essential feature, reinforced the cultural diversity of that system.

There is undeniably a global interconnectedness within which individuals and societies situate themselves in the context of a complex world community; they conceptualize themselves as part of a global cosmos. Particularistic identities are thus constructed in full awareness of the rest of the world. These particular identities do not aim at insulation from the world, but allow individuals and communities, embedded in local contexts, to potentially interact with them. This is the sense of the excellent formula that tries to capture the essence of globalization in saying that globalism is the interpenetration of universalistic and particularistic tendencies.

*It is thus evident that globalization did not result in a civilizational homogeneity but, rather, in the awareness of the planetary human diversity, and in the discovery of an extensive range of local, spatially bound, cultures being part of overall civilizational ensembles.* In this sense, civilizational pluralism is the proof of the failure of the so-called modernization drive, at worldwide level, toward technological and material progress as well as civilizational homogeneity. Therefore, *civilizational pluralism stands for a constant interplay of the local and the global*; those belonging to one or the other of the multiple, co-existing worlds are not only living in their local cultural world but also are aware, concomitantly, of the existence and characteristics of the other worlds, too. It is precisely this constant interplay which distinguishes the pair "local versus global" from the pair "particular and universal."

The particular and universal are exclusive of each other. Therefore, to characterize the dialectics of the local and the global as an interplay of the particular and the universal is fallacious. In the first place, the local/global dialectics represents an interpenetration of these two aspects, which is possible only if the above definition of globalization as the awareness of civilizational differences is adopted. In the second place, both the concept of the local (referring to a place) and the concept of the global (referring to the planetary space) are relational; that is, their meaning is determined by their mutual relations. For the local it is the relation between places or between a place and the planetary space; for the global, the relation between local and global phenomena, or, in other words, between places and the encompassing space of multiple worlds. Relational determination also means that entities which are relationally defined are, at the same time, autonomous and interdependent. In inter-civilizational relations this autonomy stands for the safeguarding of each civilization's genuineness, spontaneity, and expressiveness, whereas interdependence means the continuing dialogue in the framework of civilizational encounters.

## ***Why Does Civilizational Dialogue Necessitate Civilizational Analysis?***

*Civilizational analysis means that whenever we tackle contemporary problems we have to look at them through a multiple prism refracting the views of all civilizations concerned.* There is a hierarchy of local, sociocultural, civilizational and inter-civilizational levels of analysis and dialogue, but the latter two are thoroughly linked. We cannot proceed with inter-civilizational analysis if we did not proceed before with an analysis of our own civilization. Thus, if we discuss the problem of the modern nation-state it is indispensable to take into consideration institutional approaches of other civilizations in organizing public space and, especially, the experience of people belonging to these other civilizational orbits that have had modern statehood imposed on them by the contemporary interstate system. Since our civilizational differences with other human groups became evident, it is also clear that the nation-state form of organization of the political sphere of a society does not correspond to everyday realities--including inherited habits, societal structure, or customary behavior--and, therefore, will have to be replaced by the organizational form of a political institution congruent with those realities. In this vein, it is even possible to say that civilizational analysis and dialogue is a search for congruence between ideas, customs, and behavior in particular contexts and institutional forms, on the one hand, and the civilizational tissue underlying these public and private practices, on the other hand.

In the private sphere, to take another example, it is necessary to adapt oneself to certain moral attitudes required in other civilizations; in a world where pluralistic social practices prevail one cannot expect to impose one's own moral or behavioral rules and ignore the traditional comportment of others. The phenomenon of worldwide travel and tourism illustrates well how necessary it is to beware of differing customs and practices. Frequently, serious problems are created by tourists from Western countries who totally ignore local attitudes and requirements. The scandal caused by women wearing shorts and trousers in Islamic and other countries is already wellknown, as is the Western craze of photographing everything everywhere without even asking the permission of those who themselves or whose surroundings are being photographed. Such ignorant attitudes can lead to very serious consequences. In the region of Algeria, called the M'Zab, five oasis towns are grouped together around the main center, Ghardaia. However, for the local population another small town, Beni Izguen, represents, in terms of traditional beliefs, a sacred place where foreigners, although admitted, are forbidden to take photographs. Bypassing such rules can be dangerous; tourists ignoring this interdiction have been attacked and beaten.

There is, then, a need to carry out civilizational analysis for the obvious reason that in our global world we are aware, we must be aware, of culturally based pragmatic differences which distinguish human groups from each other. Another aspect of the contemporary world evidenced by globalization necessitates an in-depth examination. This is the mentality of many of our contemporaries in the Western world, which in an entirely unrealistic and doctrinaire way heralds the superiority of our civilization above all others. According to this point of view, whatever civilizational characteristics of our culture are being considered--science, market economy, democracy, social equality--represent the best that humankind can hope for, the highest achievement in our species' history. It is, therefore, logical to believe that all people living in the orbits of other civilizations must adopt our ways of thinking, acting, and living, even if these ways are not in congruence with their own traditional beliefs, customs, and social practices. In this sense, globalization reflects an extremely pernicious trend because it means nothing else but "globalizing" the Western ways of life on the whole planet. This second (ethnocentric) sense of globalization is frequently viewed as the appearance of a nascent "world culture" which will erase civilizational differences--and with them all wonderful human diversity, creativity, and inventiveness. To avoid the pernicious effects of this type of globalization, we need to learn about civilizational characteristics enabling us, if coupled with sincerity and the firm resolution to understand others' ways of life, to initiate a true dialogue between different human groups.

The ethnocentric, selfish, and imperialistic tendency in a great civilization is not new in history. In China, for example, it was a dominant view until the mid-nineteenth century that China represented the "Middle Kingdom" between heaven and earth; there was, it was believed, no civilization beyond its boundaries, and all inhabitants of the planet were subjects of the emperor of the Celestial Empire. However, what gives particular significance to the Western idea of civilizational globalization in the form of a "world culture" is that the West represents a tremendous material and military power in our age. The media-born Western secular, democratic, capitalistic civilization already invaded the world's other continents, and its homogenizing force is almost irresistible. And homogenization is the death of cultural or civilizational pluralism. It is, nevertheless, also evident that the other civilizations are engaged in an intense battle for their survival. The only way to re-establish a pluralistic world, then, is to initiate an inter-civilizational dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and goodwill.

A positive attitude toward civilizational dialogue is made easier if we accept, in accordance with the multilinear concept of cultural evolution, that various civilizations represent the result of adaptive processes in particular environments. These civilizations are constantly modifying historically derived cultural and social realities. In fact, the second meaning of globalization is a clear negation of the anthropological vision of multilinear evolution, which acknowledges differences as well as similarities in human history. Concerning differences, we have in our age sufficient proofs of their existence. As for similarities, suffice it to refer to the great irrigation civilizations of the past, in the Middle East, Asia, and America, which attested to remarkable similarities in inventiveness and organizational capabilities. This astonishing parallelism led in all cases to population increase, to the growth of permanent settlements and urban centers, to the appearance of unprecedented technological skills and managerial and bureaucratic classes, as well as to the rise of city-states and empires.

An inter-civilizational dialogue has to be based on mutual understanding (for this reason, the German expression *Verstehen* is frequently used to describe such a methodological approach). Giambattista Vico used, some three hundred years ago, the Latin term *entrare* ("enter into another world") to describe the effort required in encounters between cultures. The question of whether mutual understanding and dialogue is

possible between human beings belonging to different civilizations was, of course, many times asked without getting satisfactory answers. Mutual understanding requires a firm commitment to one's own civilizational values and worldview in order to appreciate differences with others. We cannot understand the fundamental order of being and the meaningful order of things in the universe without understanding our place in them. To understand these orders we have to be attuned to our own civilizational context as a whole and not to only one aspect of this context.

The scientific imperative presupposing and affirming a conceptual and value neutrality is a serious handicap, and from the perspective of civilizational dialogue it is unwittingly ethnocentric. The supposedly neutral terms used in judging other civilizations (terms which are not always so neutral in the name of the West's scientific supremacy) reflect the emphasis on instrumental reason, which has been a rule in our civilization since the seventeenth century. Man became a "rational animal," and rationality became the exclusive means to grasp the order of being, that is, identities shaped by civilizational foundations. This was the belief, originated by the European Enlightenment, in the sameness, Western-style, of all men--a universalism which preceded the homogenizing globalism of our own age. The imposition of scientific points of view distorts the effort to understand others' beliefs, values, institutions, and practices to the point of rendering them totally incomprehensible.<sup>5</sup> Did not the development of Western science push aside most symbolic formulations and expressive attitudes which are the essence of all other civilizational ensembles? It is, therefore, true that efforts aiming to understand other civilizations unavoidably lead us to challenge our own self-definitions, our explanatory concepts and methods as well as the meaning we give to the cosmos we live in.

*Thus, the initiation of an inter-civilizational dialogue basically is an endeavor to surmount the civilizational disjunction which exists between our Western, scientific civilization and all other civilizations of the planet.* Interdependence is a fact, but homogenizing globalization is a trend imposed by the West on humankind. This disjunction is much more than a dialectical relationship, it represents incoherence in our position toward the existence of other human groups. It is the outcome of the trend of homogenizing globalization which brings with itself not only the disappearance of pluralism but also the loss of human freedom through the loss of particular identities and ways of life. Inter-civilizational dialogue necessitates a fundamental shift in our look at the world, in our way of understanding the "lifeworld" of other human groups--across cultures.

A good example of a basic shift in comprehension of other cultures is Chad Hansen's interpretation of the Chinese concept of the mind, which illustrates what we said above about the pragmatist inclination of Chinese thinking as against the theoretical approach of Greek and Western thought<sup>6</sup>, Hansen shows that our Aristotelian heritage to distinguish between a sentence and a string of words does not exist in the Chinese language. Our difficulties in understanding this language, in Hansen's view, are not due to its inherently being obscure and convoluted, as many Westerners think, but are, due to our approach, which distorts the reasoning patterns of the Chinese, rendering them obscure and convoluted in our own terms. Hansen, thus, translates the ancient Chinese pictographic symbol for heart (used today in an abstract form), for which no mental string of words and sentences correspond, with a composite expression "heart-mind" in order to obtain the meaning intended by the Chinese. Contrary to our conception, which emphasizes the meaning of mind and neglecting the connotation of heart, the Chinese always refer to the two together. In consequence, Hansen's interpretation of a Chinese mental construct, bridging linguistic and cultural barriers, represents an

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<sup>5</sup> René Dubos, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist, described the disjunction between scientific knowledge and direct human experience in the following terms: "Despite our pathetic attempt at objectivity, we as scientists are in fact highly subjective in the selection of our activities, and we have goals in mind when we plan our work. We make *a priori* decisions concerning the kind of facts worth looking for; we arrange these facts according to certain patterns of thought which we find congenial; and we develop them in such a manner as to promote social purposes which we deem important. The most sweeping assumption in our communities at the present time is that the good life will automatically emerge if we focus our scientific efforts on the production of things and on the manipulation of the body machine, even though a large percentage of scientists probably believe that such an attitude is responsible for incoherence in technological civilization" (René Dubos, "Science and Man's Nature," in Gerald Holton, ed., *Science and Culture: A Study of Cohesive and Disjunctive Forces*, [Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1965], 259-260). One of the great physicists of our century, Werner Heisenberg, considered that "confidence in the scientific method and in rational thinking replaced all other safeguards of the human mind" (Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, [New York: Harper & Row, 1958], 198).

<sup>6</sup> Chad Hansen, "Language in the Heart-Mind", in Robert E. Allinson, ed., *Understanding the Chinese Mind: The Philosophical Roots*, [London: Oxford University Press, 1989], 75-124.

excellent example of how civilizational dialogue based on a thorough analysis which supposes a thorough knowledge of another cultural world, can contribute to the initiation of an inter-civilizational dialogue.

The above example shows that interpretation and understanding are inextricably intertwined. An expansive interpretation, like that of Hansen, may even alter what we endeavor to understand, and it certainly modifies our own ways of understanding. It also demonstrates that we can understand that various civilizational worldviews are not conflicting but complementary if we start a dialogue with an open mind to all other cultures and their particularities. In this case, we shall understand the holistic bent of the Chinese people, and we shall appreciate the fact that they considered the various components of the surrounding cosmos to be in harmony with each other. Therefore, man's place in this cosmos was firmly established and excluded alienation and an exclusive interest in the search for knowledge. This made possible an entirely pragmatic approach to the existential problems of the world.

## **SECOND PART**

### **What Is Civilization?**

In this substantive part of the essay, I shall, first deal with major aspects of the cultural foundations of civilizations; meaning and ethos; religion; symbolism, myth, and ritual; individual and community. I shall then discuss problems related to social practices and ways of life, such as society, political order, and economic activities.

## ***The Concepts of Culture and Civilization***

### **The Evolutionary Background**

Considering culture and civilization as creations of the human species, we have to start with the insights of some great biologists, who related man's cultural capabilities to biological evolution. They recognize that human existence is either teleological--having an aim--or teleonomical--showing lawlike regularities. This means that the evolution of the human species was an ordered growth, with flexible adaptation to evolutionary requirements, but not a programmed growth. This view does not exclude the important role of chance in human evolution, because ordered growth and evolutionary forces hitting by chance at successful solutions are not contradictory. They represent a dialectical relationship along the work of natural selection. There is a chance factor even in the manifestation of an individual human being's genetic background (the genotype) in the course of the concrete realization of this individual (the phenotype) as a result of environmental influences, including culturally created environments.

Mankind's uniqueness is revealed by the species' capability to surpass the material level of existence, for example, its transcendence of natural and human environments. This is expressed most clearly by the fact that man alone of all creatures in nature has an awareness of death, of the negation of all meaning of existence, of the passage of time. This transcendence is an aspect of culture because most humans live in man-made environments brought into being by their cultural world. The existence of cultures and civilizations is certainly interdependent with the genetic background of the human species, and these creations of the human mind, in addition to their other achievements, greatly facilitate man's adaptation to environmental variations. For example, the capacity differentiation or non-differentiation, so important from the point of view of actual changes (differentiation), or possession of future potentialities (non-differentiation), is a consequence of genetic endowment. In the same vein, differential fertility rates or variable capacities to achieve excellence in any field of activity are also based on genetic variations. Thus, genetic foundations condition and make possible, though do not impose, the origination of cultures, and specific, recurrent genetic mutations are sources of certain individuals' or groups' detrimental characteristics. Whether genetic, natural, or cultural factors played a role in the disappearance of cultures and civilizations is a problem that is probably impossible to solve. Who could say today what the exact reason was for the sudden collapse of the Khmer civilization after 500 years of existence?

Cultural evolution, in a way, completes biological evolution, but in many respects it bypasses the latter, whose rhythm is extremely slow. Adaptation becomes more a matter of cultural change than of genetic mutation. Both trends tend toward increasing complexity of forms and expressions, and through mutual feedback they enrich each other. Although cultural achievements meet various biological needs, characteristics of culture patterns and complexities cannot be derived from biological foundations, notwithstanding the fact that, for example, learning capabilities are genetically dependent. The two types of evolution are different in the sense that in biological evolution the differences are consequences of genetic mutations in populations, whereas different culture patterns, based on different genetic endowments, emerge in the course of cultural evolution as a result of interaction with environmental conditions. For this reason, civilizational differences have to be explained in terms of the specific culture which underlies them, and not in universal or global terms.

As an illustration of this important consideration, one can refer to the modernization drive, based on a dangerous fallacy, taking place in the non-Western world for more than a half a century. The concepts and methods of modernization, including economic and social development, elaborated in the course of several centuries in the West, cannot be transplanted to non-Western countries because they do not correspond at

all to the underlying culture patterns of its civilizational world. Modernization efforts, if any, should be based, therefore, on cultural processes of adaptation of imported concepts and methodologies to the local context, that is, mediated by an internal evolution of the civilization concerned.

From the biological point of view, ethical differences between human cultural worlds are not based on evolutionary determination; each person acquires his own particular mixture of good and evil tendencies through interaction with his natural and civilizational environment. Group ethics evolves in accordance with the life experiences of the community, transmitted through traditions from time immemorial. Such ethics always coincides with the needs of adaptation to the environment and with those of natural selection. Human free will exists, importantly from the ethical point of view, despite the vast, genetically and environmentally determined background. This really means that our actions, as conscious beings, are not pre-determined but practically free, or in other words, humans are much less stimulus-bound than any other species. That also means that human action is less controlled by relevant and afferent genetic and environmental inputs; therefore, comportment of humans is less predictable, and depends in any particular situation on learning and knowledge. In contrast, animals need not find out in detail environmental conditions before they accomplish a certain performance; birds need not build wind tunnels to test aerodynamic principles before learning to fly, they already "know" them instinctively. What we called above human transcendence makes humans capable of proceeding on a selective basis between afferent inputs; their mental capability dominates their choice and their active behavior.

The ethics of free will represents an epoch-making shift from an instinctive altruism within groups and populations, which appeared in the course of biological evolution, to an ethics based on individual decisions of choosing between alternatives without any constraints. The character of such decisions depends, simultaneously, on the cultural/civilizational context and personal inclination.

## Conceptual Varieties<sup>7</sup>

Culture is no longer a concept used only by anthropologists, as it was until the mid- nineteenth century. It has acquired a fundamental connotation in the comprehension of our society and lifeworld (Francis Bacon, in the seventeenth century, compared culture to the "manurance of minds"). It is a concept referred to by philosophers, sociologists, historians, literary critics, economists, and political scientists, and it became an integral part of many social scientific theories as well as contemporary philosophical systems.<sup>8</sup> However, culture became the dominant factor in thinking about the human lifeworld only with the appearance of the new approach we call civilizational analysis, which does not require quantitative measurement of culture's role in society, but aims at understanding, in each different case, the influence of cultural conditioning.

One of the simplest and profoundest definitions of culture is due to a sociologist (Talcott Parsons) who considered culture as, simultaneously, product and determinant of human interactions, determinant in the sense that without the "patterned order" of cultural elements no interaction within human groups, or between such groups, could take place. Culture is, then, a real "thing," something which exists without doubt (in philosophical language, it is an ontological entity). It is not only real but, as a system of beliefs, values,

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<sup>7</sup> Kroeber and Kluckhohn, in their work published in 1952, registered more than 152 definitions of the concept employed in the anthropological and philosophical literature.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, who intended to show how mobile the term "culture" is, distinguished four clusters of its meaning:

- (i) Culture as "a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development" of individuals
- (ii) Culture as "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general," in the anthropological sense
- (iii) Culture as "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity"
- (iv) Culture as "the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored."

(Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1983], 90).



attitudes, feelings, and artistic expressions shared by communities and societies, it is also transmitted in time, from generation to generation. As a result of its total involvement with social interactions (of which it is inevitably an ingredient) it assumes a most important integrative role in the life of human beings. This is only possible because aspects of a culture--beliefs, values, norms, behavioral rules, or expectations--are always in co-variance with each other, that is, they "hang together." Modification in the content or form of one induces changes in all others. Such a holistic conception of culture, therefore, excludes reductive formulations such as

- (1) Those put forward by some anthropologists who understood only material features of a society's life--artifacts, technical processes, etc.--under the designation of culture
- (2) Those advanced by some sociologists who tried to present culture as consisting only of a symbolic system ("symbolic orders," "modes of discourse," "behavior mediated by symbols") generated internally by a community.

It is for this reason that culture is not like a dinner menu from the items of which one can choose what one wants, what one integrates in one's individual biography. Such an attitude would unwittingly lead to a state of confusion in the life of individuals and groups, what Emile Durkheim, the great French sociologist, called *anemie*, or Karl Marx designated as alienation. The holistic nature of culture does not exclude, however, variations in the form of different components if its fundamental aspects, for example, a reasoning style or reasoning patterns, remain unchanged. Here one can refer to an example well known in the recent philosophy of the social sciences, namely, the dissociation between reasoning patterns of the sixteenth century, or some magical practices in other periods of history (shamanism) or regions of the world (Africa), and scientific reasoning in our culture.

Cultures are, in the perspective traced above, particular entities, timebound in the long term, and expressing, simultaneously, individual and group identities encompassed by specific human worlds. These identities, besides various cultural elements referred to before, consist of

- (a) Shared memories of mythic events and personages marking turning points in the group's history
- (b) A sense of continuity with the experiences made by succeeding generations
- (c) A sense of common destiny with expectations in terms of the culture's patterns.

On the contrary, a supposedly global culture could only be one widely diffused in space and cut off from any past, that is, without any history, and entirely laid out in the artificial and calculated terms of a scientific-technological discourse.

Culture is an individual's guide as far as the intentions and comportment of other people are concerned who live in his own or in other human worlds; culture makes possible understanding and dialogue between persons and communities. Good examples of a culture's dialectical nature as, simultaneously, product and determinant of human interaction, are different conceptions of hereditary transmission, crystallized, for example, in kinship systems which represent effective structures of the society's construction. In regard to the evolutionary perspective of natural selection--reproductive success--concerning groups and populations, the real objects of selective forces, their role is justified. Kinship as a cultural product is a unique characteristic of the human species, as much as culture itself; all the more so that relationships traced on genealogical lines, like matrilineal or patrilineal descent, respond to requirements of sociocultural identities and desires of belonging based, inseparably, on the biological nexus. Not only human beings as such are reproduced, but the also whole sociocultural world in which they live, together with the groups and categories contained in it and the relationships they entertain between themselves.

The all-embracing wholes which are thus reproduced are civilizations. The two concepts of culture and civilization are frequently collapsed into one. In contrast, some social scientists have given solely a spiritual, ideological, or moral content to culture, whereas others consider civilization as a territorial compact imposing the reign of one, particular culture on other human groups through geographical proximity. It is better to distinguish, however, the two concepts. In this study, *culture designates the spiritual, cognitive, affective, normative, and expressive core of a civilization, and civilization, including, of course, its core culture, comprises as well social practices; economic, political, and social organization; life-styles; and every other aspect of existence incorporated in the way of life of those human groups that are the bearers of the culture.* Components of a culture are like Max Weber's "world orders" which, though they sometimes manifest specific patterns of meaning, are kept together by the traditional meaning-structure of the cultural community.

Interdependence of all aspects of a civilizational ensemble is assured by the interwoven patterns of the core culture's components.

The above conceptual analysis makes it evident that there are several cultures and several civilizations of which the bearers are specific human groups and societies. Cultures and civilizations may disappear or go through a more or less slow process of transformation, like the road from medieval Christendom to the modern age taken by Western culture. In consequence, different visions of reality and different ways of life always existed side by side on our planet in the course of history, as the two great thinkers of the eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder, already affirmed against the universalist tide of the dominant Enlightenment thought.

## ***Meaning and Ethos***

### **Creation of Meaning: Explanation of Life and Cosmos**

The very first, basic function of culture is to give meaning to human existence and to the cosmos we live in.<sup>9</sup> The fact that human beings cannot live without giving explanatory meaning to their natural surroundings and to their human world does not need an explanation as it is a universally experienced reality. Meaning is more than a logical structure; it is the formulation of a meaningfully constituted reality, involving powerful emotions not reducible to rational thinking, a purposiveness not reducible to binary oppositions. Meaning-creation is one of the principal manifestations of human transcendence, referring to something beyond human experience and, simultaneously, integrating our existence with our lifeworld. Therefore, meaning-attribution is an existential condition for living in our world--the same natural world for all of us but different human worlds created by us.<sup>10</sup> Without the human faculty of meaning-creation it would be impossible to understand these natural and human worlds, because meaning-constitution is based on configurational awareness and pattern recognition. What seems to be absurd, what can be absurd, is only something without meaning or meaninglessness.

Meaning-ensembles even contain what is called the "coincidence of opposites," which are more than paradoxes, and represent evidently logical impossibilities. Reality itself is culturally constructed because it is built out of culturally entailed meaning elements. No social interaction can take place without a symbolic dimension which links it to the comprehensive whole of meanings dominant in the given culture. In this sense, all cultural activity is innovative because it re-shapes the image we have of reality in order to embody in it new mental and cultural vistas. All human communities possess such meaning-ensembles designed to overcome the uncertainties and anxieties of our existence or, in other words, to eliminate the feeling of "ontological insecurity." *The requirement to give meaning to the world is an exclusive feature of the human*

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<sup>9</sup> I use the word "cosmos" as defined by Louis Dupré, who gave a detailed description of this classical Greek term which exceeded in its meaning the physical universe we now call cosmos: "Nature teleologically directs organic processes to their destined perfection. It establishes the norms that things developing in time must follow if they are to attain their projected end. The more comprehensive term *kosmos* constitutes the ordered totality of being that coordinates those processes as well as the laws that rule them. *Kosmos* includes, next to the *physics* of organic beings, the *ethos* of personal conduct and social structures, the *nomos* of normative custom and law, and the *logos*, the rational foundation that normatively rules all aspects of the cosmic development" (Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993], 17) (italics in original).

<sup>10</sup> The great American pragmatist, John Dewey, wrote in this sense: "Universals, relations, meanings, are of and about existences, not their exhaustive ingredients. The same existential events are capable of an infinite number of meanings... Since possibilities of conjunction are endless, and since the consequences of any of them may at some time be significant, its potential meanings are endless... Ghosts, centaurs, tribal gods, Helen of Troy and Ophelia of Denmark are as much the meanings of events as are flesh and blood, horses, Florence Nightingale and Madame Curie... they all are the same kind of meanings with respect to validity of reference" (John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* [New York: Dover, 1958], 236 and 319).

*species, due to our having consciousness, free will, and intentionality.* A meaningless life leads humans to alienation and makes of their existence an exercise in survival, nothing more.

Endowing the world with meaning is an intersubjective, therefore cultural, phenomenon. A lonely individual living in a world where there are no other individuals, that is--living in a universe without past (traditions) and without future (expectations)--could hardly give a meaningful explanation of his environment. As meaning-creation is an intersubjective affair, it can only take place in a community, in the co-presence of contemporaries, shared memories with past generations and acknowledgment of their contribution to the present ensemble of meanings, and the expectation that coming generations will further enrich and carry over the innovated ensemble to their successors. In this sense, every new generation proceeds with its creative reinterpretation of meanings, that is, the re-evaluation, from its own standpoint, of traditional meaning-stratifications and other interconnected complexes of meaning inherited from the past. Meaning is not a piece of information but a selective relation with the world, which opens up the perspective of hitherto unknown possibilities.

*The meaning-ensemble of a culture constitutes a worldview which is always a view of life--a view of the cosmos surrounding us and a view of the multiple human worlds human beings brought forth through their innovative, meaning-creative activities.* For this reason, a worldview is always contextual. The role of a worldview in all our mental activities can be elucidated through the analysis of the relationship of what we call the concept and the word describing it. The concept is bound to the word, but is at the same time more than a word; the word becomes a concept when the plenitude of a cultural context, built on meanings and experiences of a human group by which a word is used, can be condensed into one word. The contextual nature of a worldview which is the expression of a meaningful world also explains why, through the enrichment of the meaning-ensemble by inherited traditions, a non-contemporaneous vision-- past events or future expectations--can become part of contemporaneous reality.

A worldview incorporates a style or pattern of reasoning which is congruent with the meaning-structure determined by the culture concerned. The contextual nature of reasoning patterns negates, of course, the German philosopher Hegel's dictum that "the rational is the real and the real is the rational," even if we think in terms of one civilizational world and not in terms of relations between civilizations. Rational thinking is evidently a matter of a community's culturally elaborated meaning-structures which define certain criteria applicable in evaluative judgments and thought processes. Reasoning styles are deeply embedded in the context of a human group's world and are intertwined with all aspects of a civilization.<sup>11</sup> Thus, criteria of rationality are culturally determined--or context dependent--which means that there are no universal rules specifying what counts as a reason for believing a certain proposition applicable everywhere in the world, without taking into account the differences in reasoning and argumentation. If a reasoning pattern is not contextual, it consequently is not relevant in the given situation. This does not mean that there cannot be typical sequences and relations between arguments in changing contexts. Problems related to rationality represent the great watershed between the sciences of man, like civilizational analysis and dialogue, and the sciences of nature, in which rationality is determined by the most up-to-date methodology employed, aiming to establish fundamental assumptions about the natural world.

In contrast to meaning-creation and the explanatory and integrative powers of meaning-ensembles expressed in worldviews and *ethos*, ideology is a simple, prefabricated but articulated set of ideals, ends, and purposes which endeavor to interpret the past, explain the present, and offer a particular vision of the future. Ideology formulates a determinate type of cultural construction of reality intended to achieve social integration and cohesion, and spells out structural processes of cultural and social change in conformity with the thinking of those who are the protagonists of the ideology concerned. Ideologies are targeted to specific human groups as they express those groups' interests (like Marxism), or express the emotional and ideational basis of the action of such groups (like various types of nationalisms). Ideologies are never holistic

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<sup>11</sup> The philosopher of science Ian Hacking clearly states the particular nature of given styles of reasoning, even in the field of scientific activity: "The rationality of a style of reasoning as a way of bearing on the truth of a class of propositions does not seem open for independent criticism, because the very sense of what can be established by that style depends upon the style itself... The inability is not a difficulty of seeing what the other counts as true, but of grasping what possibilities are in question. We learn about that only through coming to share a style of reasoning... We cannot reason as to whether alternative systems of reasoning are better or worse than ours, because the propositions to which we reason get their sense only from the method of reasoning employed. The propositions have no existence independent of the ways of reasoning towards them," (Ian Hacking, "Styles of Scientific Reasoning," in John Rajchman and Cornel West eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], 155, 159, 162).

as they are unable to give a coherent, all-embracing picture of the world. They exist in concrete historical forms and in specific relations to other ideologies (socialism versus capitalism). As instruments of manipulation, ideologies represent worldviews designed to arouse the energies of people in order to inspire actions related to the achievement of the envisaged objectives. An ideology serves, in reality, the interests of power-holding or power-seeking groups under the veil of a self-delusive propaganda presented as an autonomous meaning-creating worldview and a genuine *ethos*.

## Ethos

A culture's *ethos* is constituted by its ethical principles and moral rules. Meaning-ensembles as comprehensive worldviews determine a culture's ethical values, which represent a whole congruent with the meaning-ensemble itself.<sup>12</sup> Values thus have intrinsic qualities; they concern man's existence, for which reason they cannot be disputed or questioned. The value-system derived from the meaning-ensemble of a culture constitutes a major characteristic of a community in addition to its reasoning patterns. Ethical norms and moral rules guide human action and interaction in a way congruent with the value-system of the culture. In every meaning-ensemble, ethical norms and moral rules have certain reasons, but that does not mean that they are rational in our sense.

Action and interaction are based on man's intentionality; therefore human activity is self-generating and self-inventing through a creative re-interpretation of culturally inherited principles. Individual and social action are meaningful activities precisely because they are governed by norms constituted of cultural patterns and templates which are always subject, even if they are collective in their nature, to individual innovations. Such norms cluster and form structures; specific clusters of normative elements designate culturally determined entities we call institutions. As several civilizations always co-exist in time, we have a plurality of institutions corresponding to the various norms and templates existing in the core cultures of those civilizations. There is an institutional pluralism within civilizations allowing space for specific arrangements to accommodate particular, normative clusters.

Freedom is a major characteristic of different cultural *ethos*, but its meaning varies in accordance with the prevailing, overall meaning-structure. Freedom, in our modern culture, means free will, the self-determination of the individual being in terms of his own inner laws ("the normative inner order"), his own intentions and desires. To be free consists of having a freedom of choice and decision without any interference by any external power, sacred or profane; freedom, thus, serves to secure for individual beings the possibility to act and live in harmony with their potentialities. The "ethics of right" is a version of this ethical conception, an ethics which only emphasizes the rights of individuals, especially in social matters, without spelling out corresponding duties and obligations.

Another variant of the conception of freedom is the one which involves freedom to choose between good and evil, an *ethos* which, of course, presupposes the existence of evil. This view denies the premise defended by the individualistic *ethos* that all men are good and it is outside circumstances--society or nature--that determine whether a man does what is morally good, that is, whether he chooses the morally good. In the second variant of *ethos*, it is the community, through its cultural traditions, which determines what is morally relevant.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For the Greek Stoic Chrysippus, *ethos* is entirely congruent with nature's laws: "Living in accordance with virtue is equivalent to living in accordance with experience of what happens in nature--for our natures are parts of the whole," (quoted in A. A. Long, "Greek Ethics After MacIntyre and the Stoic Community of Reason," *Ancient Philosophy* 3. [1983], 192).

<sup>13</sup> If "human individuals are essentially *social* individuals, if, in their very individuality, they are constituted and, as it were, permeated by the culture, traditions, and institutions of the society to which they belong, then their freedom as well must have a social character. Even as *individual* freedom this freedom must have a *communal* character, or at least an essentially communal aspect, expressing and manifesting itself in the way in which the individual participates in and contributes to the communal practices of his society. The original locus of freedom, then, would not be the isolated individual, but a society that is the medium of individuation through socialization: freedom would have to be thought of as ultimately residing in the structures, institutions, practices, and traditions of a larger whole. But since this larger social whole is what it is only through being kept alive, 'reproduced,' and interpreted by the individuals who are part of it,

Ethical norms and moral rules are relativized as much as cultures are relative to each other, but they cannot be relativized within a civilizational orbit. However, as in the domain of meanings, one can discover similar pronouncements between all value-systems because they are relevant in all human situations. To cite a concrete case of such a cultural invariance, I refer to the Kantian principle, which became in modern ethical thought "the principle of universalizability," according to which one should act in a way one would like to have others act in respect of oneself. This principle figures, since time immemorial, in the core teachings of various religions as, for example, in Christianity : "Do to other men all that you would have them to do to you; that is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12); in Brahmanism : "Knowing how painful it is to himself, a person should never do that to others which he dislikes when done to him by others" (Mahabharata. Trans. Santi Parva, 259, 20); in Buddhism : "Do not harm others with what would harm you" (Udana-Varga 5:18); or, finally, in Confucianism : "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire" (Analects 15:23). The same precepts can also be found Judaism or Islam, or in the Taoist or Zoroastrian writings.

Contrary to conceptions of freedom which consider that ethical norms and moral rules are rooted in individual persons or in society, the *ethos* of non-Western cultures postulates a transcendent source of these norms and rules. In most cases, ethics and morals are derived from the existence of God and from divine commandments like those in the monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) or, as in India, from man's inner identity with Brahman (a sort of pantheism), or from the commandments corresponding to a specific view of the immanent world which is illusion, *maya*. In other cases ethical action and moral attitude are consequences of transcendent (metaphysical) considerations as the belief in *nirvana* in Buddhism, or as the obedience to the transcendental influence of ancestors in Confucianism.

## ***Religion: The Foundation of Cultures***

Every culture, core of a civilization, possesses a religious tradition which gives it an internal unity through a shared view of life and a common scale of values. The internal unity of a culture, ensured by its religious foundations, means that religious faith and values create a harmony between the inner world of spiritual aspirations and the outer, empirical world of physical and societal realities, making the latter meaningful in a transcendental sense. The most obvious example of the linkage between spiritual tradition and civilization is the Muslim civilization, where there is no difference between the two--the Islamic worldview and ethical values penetrate the entire civilization. The ultimate barriers between civilizations are not the racial or geographical ones, not the material and social conditions of life, but the spiritually based cultural traditions which underlie the civilizational whole. It is more and more recognized in our contemporary world, too, that it is the religious impulse which supplies the cohesive force unifying a culture and society. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense, religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations themselves rest.

While material conditions of life of a civilization can be discontinuous, the existence of great religious traditions is like an unbroken arc representing an infinite continuity, which includes periods of decline as well as ages of spiritual, material, or social achievements. In the European culture, the centuries of the Renaissance and Reformation were epochs of spiritual renewal, whereas the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were those of material and social developments. The same periodical fluctuations can also be observed in the history of all other civilizations. In the ages of upheaval of each civilization a breaking point may be eventually reached in which new forces burst some of the barriers of tradition, and there ensues a period of intellectual excitement, irreverence for the past, heightened individual activity and collective expectations, and a sense of new beginnings and a new life. The spiritual anarchy then gives way to a new, mature civilizational synthesis which may often be attained only on the eve of the material decline of the civilization. Historically, it has happened frequently that cultural and civilizational renewal has followed an irruption of peoples, possessing a less complex cultural and civilizational framework, who overwhelmed the spiritual and cultural traditions of the conquered and reached a modified synthesis of the mature culture, thus

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individual and 'public' freedom now become inextricably intertwined" (Albrecht Wellmer, "Models of Freedom in the Modern World," *Philosophical Forum* 21 [1989], 228-229) (*italics in original*).

initiating a new epoch. Exceptions to this historical evolution are Egypt and China, where the same people either have passed through successive civilizations without any important infusion of new blood, creeds, and traditions, or have lived in the same civilizational framework for millennia. In the Nile valley, especially, successive waves of civilizations are more clearly traceable than in other regions of the world; following the rise and decline of three successive civilizations, only the fourth one, the Arab conquest, wrought fundamental civilizational changes in the lives of the people living in the valley.

The fundamental divide between late modern and other civilizations in respect of questions of ultimate concern represents the most difficult aspect of trying to initiate a civilizational dialogue. "Ultimate concerns" designate problems related to the meaning of life:

- (1) death--the inevitable end of every individual human existence
- (2) human destiny--the aim of life, or what is the sense of our earthly sojourning
- (3) the nature of good and evil--what is good or evil and who is determining it
- (4) the relationship between human beings--family, nuclear or extended, friendship, community and society, and so forth.

"Ultimate concerns" refers, in sum, to the phenomenon of liminality in human societies. Liminality stands, in the present context, for undetermined, ambiguous, shadowy areas of human existence which cannot be inserted in the usual, natural or cultural, categories of a civilization. Because the answer to ultimate concerns, situated in the liminality of human existence, is only offered by a religion; therefore most of such answers border on the absurd. This is the meaning of such famous statements as "it is certain since it is impossible" (*certum est, quia impossibile*, Tertullian, the Church Father), or "I believe because it is absurd" (*credo, quia absurdum est*, St. Thomas). A transcendental authority, accepted in faith prior to any belief or act, makes possible the elimination of liminal areas of earthly life and becomes the source of beliefs which answer ultimate concerns.

The ultimate concern of human beings is closely linked to their ability to transcend themselves and the world. It is self-transcendence, best illustrated by humankind's consciousness of death, which leads to questions in search of those solutions for which religion represents the world-transcending answer. The basic ontological structure (according to the Greek philosopher, Parmenides), that is, the basic structure of being is the unity of being--what is--and of the word, the *logos*--how being sees the world. Man knows the world, to which he belongs, through an immanent as well as transcendent experience, hence the complex dialectical relationship in the ontological structure of our existence. It is in this dialectical perspective that one can understand that the unity of being and *logos*, of being and reason, is always "situated" in space and time, although religious faiths and their claims on man are, without exception, universal.<sup>14</sup> Ultimate concerns as well as the questions they raise in the human mind and the answers given to them by a higher authority, are universal; but how the concerns are formulated, how the questions are raised, and how the answers are spelled out always reflect the conditions of a particular world and represent a particular example of self-transcendence of individuals and communities. As a consequence, between a religious belief-system and moral values, on the one hand, and the assumed structure of reality, on the other, there always appears to be a simple and fundamental congruence such that they complete one another and lend one another meaning. Looking in this way at the meaning-creating function of religion, it is easy to understand that in so many cultures the rites of passage, that is, the ceremonies by which members of the young generation were admitted into an essential and genuine human bond forming the basis of society, was a religious ritual.

Religion, which is meaning-giving precisely because it responds to ultimate concerns, is expressed in a set of symbolic forms and acts, like rituals, which relate human beings to the fundamental conditions of their existence. The historic evolution of civilizations and of the divergent and religiously based cultures co-

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<sup>14</sup> "He who, dwelling in the earth," as expressed by Yajnavalkya, "is other than the earth, whom the earth knows not, whose body the earth is, who inwardly rules the earth, is thy Self [Atman], the Inward Ruler, the deathless. He who, dwelling in all beings, whom all beings know not, whose body all beings are, who inwardly rules all beings, is thy Self, the Inward Ruler, the deathless. He who, dwelling in the mind, is other than the mind, whom the mind knows not, whose body the mind is, who inwardly rules the mind, is thy Self, the Inward Ruler, the deathless. He, unseen, sees; unheard, hears; unthought, thinks; uncomprehended, comprehends. There is no other than he who sees, hears, thinks comprehends. He is thy Self, the Inward Ruler, the deathless. All else is fraught with sorrow" (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, III, vii).

existing in space and time does not mean that either religious beliefs or the feeling of human beings' immanent insecurity and ultimate religious concerns evolve, only that their respective religious symbol-systems, expressing those beliefs and concerns, change in time.

Through giving meaning to physical and human phenomena, culture offers to those belonging to the civilization's orbit either a transcendental/cosmic or an immanent/human-centered explanation of the world. All civilizations other than the Western were built on religious foundations, on the basic tension between the sacred/transcendental and the mundane/immanent orders. Their respective cultural core thus reflects a transcendental/cosmic foundation assuming a long temporal perspective; traditions are transmitted from generation to generation which all modify, in some sense, their cultural heritage. Even the Confucian or Buddhist civilizations fall into this category because they are pegged to a vertical--transcendental -- dimension. The Chinese, for example, do not have a creation myth as most civilizations have, because they considered the world uncreated, a spontaneous, self-generating entity. Thus, in Chinese cosmology--the conceptualization of what the cosmos is--all parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole. The components of the whole interact in a unique organismic process, excluding all forms of mechanistic, teleological, and theistic conceptualizations of the cosmos. This characteristic of Chinese cosmology barred all institutionalizing tendencies from Chinese culture. The existence of spiritual beings is explained in a naturalistic way because they are different from normal human phenomena but have the same qualities and are subject to the same processes as all other aspects of nature. The concept of *t'ien*, meaning "heaven" or "nature," first represented a deified ancestor who lived eons ago, but became, in the course of later developments, an abstract conception.

Only our own civilization in the West built its culture on immanent and human-centered foundations, emphasizing the temporal present, which always represents an abandonment of the past but already includes in itself the future as something new. Contemporary Western civilization is secular (in Max Weber word, "disenchanted") seeking to escape its sacred roots through a scientific worldview and mechanistic theories of the material world. Late modernity also gave up, paradoxically, the belief in progress, its heritage from the classical modernity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This basic difference between co-existing civilizations constitutes an unrefutable proof of civilizational pluralism at the end of the second millennium, and it also underlines the imperative need to strive toward a civilizational dialogue.

Secularism, in the contemporary Western world a doctrine, an ideology, became itself sacralized. Having a paradigmatic status for part of the Western population, mainly intellectuals, belief in the unavoidable necessity of secularization has been sustained by a deep and abiding antagonism to religious belief and to various expressions of organized religion. Fundamentalist movements are one of the responses, in whichever form and in whatever part of the world, to secularization ideology and politics. They have to be seen in a global framework as part of the opposition between co-existing civilizations or, within the Western civilization only, as a reversal of the historic trend since the seventeenth century. It is, however, evident that even if the phenomenon of globalization expresses some sense of shared fate by all humans, this feeling, mainly disseminated by the media, rests upon strictly material aspects of a rapidly increasing interdependence. The globalization drive does not have any meaning-creating contents, it is not able to give any answers to questions of ultimate concern, and it reduces the dimensions of human existence to this immanent world exclusively, annihilating the transcendent perspective offered by religions. For this reason, the only ideology on which globalization is based is the ideology of scientifically and technologically inspired secularism, carrying with it all aspects of the late modern Western credo from belief in the free market and in democratic political processes to other fashionable ideas which dominate our existence. Concerning inter-civilizational dialogue, it has to be understood that the nature and degree of secularization involve matters relating not so much to religion per se as to the nature and feasibility of ways of life, morality, artistic expression, the quality and resilience of forms of communal and/or societal order, economic and political institutions, all exposed to the onslaught of globalization and modernization. This cannot be otherwise because religion is the foundation of all aspects of a non-Western civilization.

Religious fundamentalisms in regions of the world dominated by non-Western civilizations do not stand for a simple return to old ways of life, but even use many aspects of the modernizing and globalizing discourse, to reinforce their own message. They, in fact, represent an alternative reasoning pattern, an alternative morality, and the perspective of a resolutely different way of life in their confrontation with secular, materialistic Western concepts and lifestyles. If they are against the globalizing market forces of deregulation, they cannot be condemned as irrational but must be considered as representing a different rationality from the market-oriented logic of action. For example, if market-type rationality is subordinated to the promotion of freedom of choice and thrives on the uncertainty implied by such a choice, the

fundamentalist worldview puts security and certainty first in the interest of the community; it condemns anything that undermines that certainty--the vagaries of individual choices first and foremost.

From the point of view of a wide-scale civilizational dialogue, therefore, the most important question to be clarified is whether other civilizations, eager to adopt Western science and technology, must also adopt, as part of the globalization drive, the ideological tenets attached to Western-type development--in the first place the secularization of public life?

## **Symbolism**

Symbolism as expression of transcendental as well mundane realities plays an extremely important role in human life. *Symbolism is founded on common properties of realities and things symbolized and of the symbols themselves, on the condition that these properties are recognized by a cultural community as fundamental.* For example, symbolism is frequently based on numerical equality, which opens up an infinite perspective of ideal series of relationships, though they amount to nothing more than arithmetical jugglery. Symbolism is a basic function of the human mind and consciousness, and through establishing a connection between two ideas, two things, that is, two realities, it reflects a comprehensive conception of the world. Cultures therefore are defined as ordered symbolic systems or as an ensemble of symbolically mediated patterns of beliefs and values because every symbolism is linked to a worldview and an *ethos* as representation of reality, and it is, thus, thoroughly intertwined with culture. Many resemblances between symbolic expressions of different civilizations can be found because there is a paucity of symbolic forms in terms of which human predicaments, or references to man's ultimate concerns, can be expressed. Symbolism is extremely rigorous, distinguished by a perfect structure based on a hierarchical differentiation and ranking of each symbol in an all-embracing whole. *The essential nature of symbolic thought and order is that it permits an infinity of relations between realities--ideas or things--through linking them to a meaning-structure.* Thus, symbolism has a claim to universality within a civilization, and it is part of inherited tradition. For this reason, it is always in danger of becoming a mechanical exercise or a ritual performance.

Symbolic orders in all civilizations, except the Western, are vertically constructed, corresponding to the transcendently based meaning-structures, whereas in the modernity of the West the symbol structure is constructed horizontally as it corresponds to meaning ensembles derived exclusively from the immanent world's realities. Symbols as well as meanings are in both intersubjective, constituted by shared beliefs and attitudes and by commonly accepted institutions and practices.

In accordance with the distinction drawn by Charles Peirce, the great American semiologist, there are iconic or qualitative as well as indexical signs, on the one hand, and symbolic signs which are conceived within a living context, beyond the relational world, on the other hand. Iconic signs convey essences or the qualities of objects within the social processes of interpretation, whereas indexical signs refer to physical or existing entities. Iconic signs are not reducible to conventional signification. Conventional significations are symbolic expressions vital for culture and civilization and they, in turn, cannot be reduced to iconic or lexical signs. Signs and symbols belong to two different universes of discourse; signs belong to the physical or social worlds, whereas symbols belong to the world of meanings. Signs always have a sort of physical or substantial being, but symbols have simply a functional value. Signs, thus, are proxies for their objects which they announce to subjects and, for this reason, they create a triadic relation: object--sign--subject; symbols, on the other hand, are vehicles for conceptions of objects. Besides being an ordered pattern of symbols, culture is a process of semiosis or sign-action, intrinsically involving the qualities of the human body for memory, communication, and imaginative projection in spatial and temporal settings.

A thought that is based on clearly established relations between real and possible phenomena and things in the world cannot arise without a complex system of symbols, even if one is aware of such relations. This is so because reference is not just a matter of causal connections, it is also a matter of interpretation. Recognizing the role of interpretation leads to problems concerning descriptions of the world, as phenomena and things can have something in common in one description of the world and not in another; these differences depend, of course, on the concrete physical and social environment. Therefore, descriptions and interpretations are interactional within the orbit of a civilization. In varying descriptions there may be several



relationships between a word or a symbol and the thing or reality referred to. Thus, descriptions related to meaning-ensembles cannot but be holistic because human beings construct through them a symbolic representation of their environment, of the world that is their world.

From the point of view of societal interaction, symbols have a very practical function to fulfill, namely, to make possible communication between human beings. They express and communicate what a person may expect from another in a given situation, thus eliminating contingency and uncertainty from common actions and shared expectations of intended outcomes. This function of symbols, therefore, is nothing else but the communication of meanings with a view to coordinating intended human interactions, and their correct functioning is possible only because there is, within a culture, a shared order of symbolic meanings. To this function of symbols belongs what one calls "symbolic generalization," a process by which symbols can be generated, transformed as well as learned intersubjectively, transgenerationally, and beyond concrete, contextual determination.

If signs and symbols are conventional it is because they stand for human spontaneity, creativity, and inner freedom, though they are always considered as referring to indubitable reality. Conventionality means, in this case, creativity and spontaneity transforming chaos into order through the ability of humans to transcend empirical facts. Therefore, even if symbols in the arts or in mythic worlds appear to be the product of whim or chance, they reflect the attempts of humans--their intention--to give sense to the world and to experience. Such symbols obey their own rules inscribed into them by human creativity.

John Thompson, who considered symbolic forms as representing the internal structure of culture, classified them under five headings:<sup>15</sup>

- (1) *Intentional*, that is, symbolic meanings are intentionally produced, though they do not obligatorily express the intended content.
- (2) *Conventional*, that is, symbolic forms are created or interpreted in accordance with rules, conventions, or codes.
- (3) *Structural*, that is, they display an "articulated structure".
- (4) *Referential*, that is, all symbols refer to something and, according to my construal of symbolism, explain the involvement of symbols with the whole symbolic universe.
- (5) *Contextual*, that is, symbolic forms are always embedded in particular historical and social contexts and processes, in concrete spatio-temporal settings.

The best example of symbolism is language, which is the vehicle of human communication. Language formation is based on sensory qualities, perceptions and immediate impressions designated by signs or symbols which constitute the language and, at the same time, transform and newly articulate our view of the world.<sup>16</sup> If the meaning of a sign cannot be observed or induced from examining the signified or objective referents, then it is possible to establish it by its relation to other signifiers. A language always "encompasses" the world of those who speak it because we grow up in the world described by it. Learning to speak that language means to acquire the familiarity and acquaintance with the world itself, how it confronts us and how we have to confront it. A language, therefore, expresses a certain correspondence between the human mind placed in an environmental context, and the material world surrounding us. For this reason, language, though one of the most important symbolic systems, is also the sustaining medium of all aspects of culture such as religion and art.

Human languages, genetically conditioned but acquired by learning, are characterized by:

- (1) *Duality of patterning*, which means that separate significant sounds, the phonemes, are by themselves meaningless but acquire meanings when functioning as constituents of words

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<sup>15</sup> John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 137-153.

<sup>16</sup> According to Ernst Cassirer, the great philosopher of symbolism, "The synthesis by which the consciousness combines a series of tones into the unity of a melody, would seem to be totally different from the synthesis by which a number of syllables is articulated into the unity of a 'sentence.' But they have one thing in common, that in both cases the sensory particulars do not stand by themselves; they are articulated into a conscious *whole*, from which they take their qualitative meaning" (Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, *Language* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1955], 94) (italics in original).

- (2) *Productivity*, that refers to the ability to compose new but nevertheless understandable utterances from words which occur in other communications--that is, a finite number of words can express an infinite number of ideas or concepts
- (3) *Conventionality*, according to which meanings are agreed upon between people belonging to a cultural community and, therefore, are not deducible from the component sounds
- (4) *Interchangeability*, enabling a speaker to say anything that he can understand when someone else says it
- (5) *Perspectivity*, which denotes the fact that we can speak of objects and acts regardless of their distance in space and in time.

The dependence of a language on meaning-structures and referents in the cultural world concerned, a sign of linguistic relativism, does not mean that understanding languages which are not one's own is impossible. When statements are made in a foreign language, one can establish what they refer to through their inference patterns. If it were the case that every statement in a language received its meaning solely through expressions used in the vocabulary of that language, each language would be self-enclosed and no equivalence of meanings between statements in any two languages could be established. The recognition of human intentionality inherent in the use of all languages breaks this vicious circle even if interpreting reality means projecting different worlds of reference corresponding to different forms of life or, in other words, even if it means giving different, selective interpretations of describable facts within the same framework of references.<sup>17</sup> Human intentionality makes it possible

- (1) To proceed with ostensive definitions of the meanings of many words, phrases, and sentences occurring in various languages
- (2) To understand not only what is said but also what is hidden through silence.

Establishing a dialogue is a demonstration of what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "the fusion of horizons," an understanding each other. Translation and interpretation represent, in this sense, a cultural mediation between different patterns of socialization in different civilizational worlds, establishing a "bridge" between different Wittgensteinian "language games."

Another type of symbolism is the symbolism of art. Linguistic symbolism is all-encompassing, understanding languages belonging to different "families of languages," and translating and interpreting them, is possible. In comparison the symbolism of art is more complicated and more difficult to comprehend, not only between different civilizations, but even within one specific culture. The reason for this is that whereas languages reflect a specific civilizational world, artistic creation reflects not only the meaning-structures of the culture to which the artist belongs but also the meanings of the physical and human environments--cosmos, culture, and society--as he understands them as an individual. Art is, thus, a true discovery which intuitively realizes, with the classical formula, the "unity of the manifold." Through grasping this "unity of the manifold," art establishes a communicative link between the immanent and the transcendent worlds--reflecting and creating meaning through the combination of human capabilities and earthly perspectives.

Artistic symbolism can profoundly change in the course of a culture's evolution because the community's worldview and way of life are gradually modified. It can be differently formulated, at any moment of time and in any given context, because of the individual artist's perception of the world and of the events he wants to express through modifying symbolic forms--modifying in comparison with the dominant artistic symbolism of his own epoch. Artistic symbolism can, therefore, be extremely varied, especially in the ages of great innovations and creative tensions. It is an "intuitive symbolism" which makes the feeling of reality more

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<sup>17</sup> "It is true that those who are brought up in a particular linguistic and cultural tradition see the world in a different way from those who belong to other traditions. It is true that the historical 'worlds' that succeed one another in the course of history are different from one another and from the world of today; but it is always, in whatever tradition we consider it, a human, i.e. a linguistically constituted world that presents itself to us. Every such world, as linguistically constituted, is always open, of itself, to every possible insight and hence for every expansion of its own world-picture, and accordingly available to others... Language is a record of finitude, not because the structure of human language is multifarious, but because every language is constantly being formed and developed, the more it expresses its experience of the world. It is finite not because it is not at once all other languages, but simply because it is language" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, [New York: Crossroads, 1985], 405 and 415).

intense. To grasp the sense of an artistic creation, the audience has to understand these intuitive symbols -- colors, shapes, spatial forms and patterns, harmony and melody--otherwise it just looks at, or listens to, a piece of work without even being conscious that that work is a particular representation of reality, in accordance with the artist's perception and imagination.

Various forms of symbolism, especially language and art, evidence a unique, fundamental characteristic of man's nature. They indicate that the human species is able to adopt or imagine more than one approach to reality and is able to see, create and re-create that reality in multiple ways. This is the essential meaning which is conveyed by saying that humans live in multiple worlds. Without a profound knowledge of the symbolism of one's own culture, civilizational dialogue is impossible because it consists in grasping the content of multiple worlds, among them one's own, and building bridges between them. To understand artistic expressions from another culture it is, however, indispensable to know the physical and cultural contexts in which the artistic work in question was born. As I wrote elsewhere, "If somebody never becomes familiar with the endless deserts of the Middle East and Africa and never heard the appeals of the muezzin when the sun rises or disappears from the horizon, [he] will never appreciate Arab music like the people whose entire existence was linked to these regions. If somebody does not penetrate the magical and historical world of the peoples of Africa, he will not be able to enjoy their different artistic creations, especially the beautiful statues made by their craftsmen".<sup>18</sup>

## ***Myth, Ritual, and Magic***

### **Myth**

In dealing with myth in human cultures, it is important to remember what the Roman historian, Sallustius, said about them long ago. He considered myths as "things which never happened but always are," expressing the dialectical nature of all human mythology. In a sense, myths do not concern reality, as against meanings and symbols, but they deal with incompatibilities in human existence, with insoluble problems, conflicts, and disorders. Myths, thus, represent a certain mode of perception of reality which enables them to interpret the world in a particular, all-encompassing way. Their implied reality is, however, assorted with disparate modes of certainty. The principal function of myths, therefore, is to eliminate arbitrariness from the world in which unknown powers hold sway about people and things, and to establish a cosmic order understandable by those who believe in the myth through the separation of powers, the legalization of relationships, or the codification of competences of the mythical personages.

Those who condemn mythical view and thought as irrational, opposed to our rationally dogmatic view of the world, do not grasp its essence and ignore the fundamental facts of mythical experience. Myths have their own rationality as well as a rich emotional content. They are not incoherent, as modernism would have it in respect of the so-called "primitive" myths; their coherence is not based on logical or scientific rules, classification and systematization but on a specific, meaningful, and synthetic worldview and *ethos*, interpreted in a symbolic perspective. In mythical terms, the cosmos represents a nontemporal continuum, without any interruption, on which the mythical worldview places all beings and all events of the past, present, and future. In all myths, there is a transcendental-ontological structure of the universe, one could even say that in all myths there is a specific "ontological imagination" at work. The empirical differences of things are not ignored, but the emphasis is put on their intertwined existence, on a cosmic solidarity that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of the universe. As a consequence, there is no difference between specific realms of life, and everything can be turned into everything through metamorphosis. Mythologies presuppose a complete interdependence of all forms of life and do not assign a particular place to man in the cosmos. Every life, every existence, possesses the same dignity in its humblest and highest forms. Man is seen as part of the natural world and of the cosmic unity of the universe. In mythical worlds, therefore, death

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<sup>18</sup> Victor Segesvary, *Existence and Transcendence: An Anti-Faustian Study in Philosophical Anthropology*, (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 118.

has an entirely different meaning from that in the world based on human rationality; it is a return from where man came from. Death, thus, is not a real occurrence, and immortality, which presupposes death as an end, is not envisaged in mythic religions.

Myths are narratives distinguished by a high degree of consistency and constancy in their core and by a capacity for marginal variation. As a result of these two characteristics myths can be rationalized as well as transmitted by tradition. An example of rationalization of myths is when names, given by followers of a mythical worldview to entities and events in the universe, become attributes of divinities; this process is a natural one for mythical thought because the gods, personifying those entities and events that are part of the myth, have to be appealed to by name when their benevolent intervention is called for through ritual or magical acts. The concrete linkage of a myth to reality occurs in the naming of the entities or events it refers to. Myths are incapable of constituting an abstract system of dogma that does not take into account social and temporal peculiarities; they are, therefore, always contextual.

Myths are rarely localized in space, and they are never integrated in a temporal dimension, in history. Besides beginnings and ending myth makes free use of simultaneity and prefiguration, imitative execution and the recurrence of the same. The exaggeration of the unique quality of a given event which is supposed to be taken as representing an aggregate of events and actions is the way to mysticize it. The repetition of the same thus has to be justified by the particular quality of the unique event. The idea of eternal recurrence brings, nevertheless, the mythical pattern back into history, because it is expected to assign meaning to history itself, though, in a dialectical reversal, no mythical thought ever accepts the irreversibility of time. In consequence, myths do not paralyze human initiative but open up new perspectives for human intentionality and action because a myth shows to human beings that what they intend to do has already been done and in this way helps them to overcome doubts about their undertakings.

Myths are the most effective means of awakening and maintaining consciousness of another world, a beyond, whether it be a divine world or the world of the ancestors. This "other world" is transcendent because the experience of the sacred--an encounter with a reality transcending immanent life--gives birth to the idea that there are absolute, that is, transhuman, realities. Hence, there also are absolute values capable of guiding people and giving a meaning to human existence. Being born out of the experience of the sacred, myths must periodically be reconfirmed by rituals. Recollection and re-enactment of the primordial act reinforces the belief that there must be something fixed and enduring in the eternal flux of historic events. The existence of a transhuman and transmundane world reaffirms the role of the sacred, and the experience of this transcendent reality can be ritually repeated, becoming an integral part of human life.

## **Ritual and Ritualization**

Rituals are intensely collective, emotional actions that focus on sacred realities and symbols, and reaffirm the solidarity of the group belonging to a given cultural world. *Rituals, therefore, are a set of specific symbolic acts, communicating an ensemble of meanings, rather than being performed for purely practical and instrumental purposes.* In terms of performance, ritual is one type of social communication which evidences many features that have little to do with the transmission of new information; instead it concerns interpersonal dialogue and understanding as well as cultural continuity and social integration. In contemporary terminology, one can define rituals as communication processes having effects, simultaneously, in the vertical and in the horizontal dimensions. A ritual reproduces in its repeated enactments certain invariant but patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed by multiple means such as formulas chanted, rules of etiquette followed, and so on. Only an outside observer sees rituals as seemingly eternal repetitions of the same, however, because contrary to the outsider's view, no one performance of a rite, though rigidly prescribed, is exactly the same as another performance: it is affected by peculiar processes such as the mode of recitation, or variable features related to circumstances of the actors, aside from purely contingent and unpredicted events. In addition, rituals have implicit and explicit codes, characterized by varying degrees of formality, conventionality, rigidity, or redundancy. In consequence, bearers of mythical and symbolic thought partake, through ritual action, in the fervor of an encounter with transcendental forces.

Symbolically interpreted ritual exercises enact and incarnate mythico-cosmological conceptions of the world. Cosmology consists of classifying phenomena composing the universe as an ordered whole, as well

as norms and processes that govern it. As the symbolic environment provides the context in which the meaningfulness of any particular ritual is legitimated, it is evident that the meaningfulness of a particular ritual act is likely to be greater in situations where dramatic uncertainty exists. In such cases, the sheer level of certainty or uncertainty is crucial, especially when external factors introduce new contingencies in a community's life. Rituals, therefore, always aim to maintain the constancy of a mythical and symbolic pattern, because departure from the pattern implies a loss, or at least a variation, of cultural identity. Thus, the second important feature of rituals in addition to immediate communication, is expression--in fact, the two components are the two faces of the same act. What is surprising is that although rituals distance participants from everyday reality through involving them in a sacred, transcendental world, they simultaneously express a worldview and the identity related to it, in the framework of a communal solidarity.

One of the most studied forms of rituals are the "rites of passage".<sup>19</sup> "Rites of passage" are generally perceived as changes in social status taken as the *raison d'être* of this ritual itself, instead of following Van Gennep's view that these rites are intended to ritualize a change in the state of being. An interesting recent study shows that some rituals in African cultures, like the *Kita* ritual of the Suku population in the southern part of the Congolese republic are rather like sacraments in the Western culture.<sup>20</sup> In this ritual, whose essence is not structural but existential, the passage is effectively from one being to another. One is or one is not *kita* as one is or one is not a baptized Christian--a change in being carrying with it, however, social consequences. Linked to the concept of rites of passage as a change in being is, of course, the metaphoric death-and-resurrection aspect of many rituals all over the world--as rites of passage always mean transition of human beings between two worlds.

The foregoing shows that in social interaction it is impossible to separate meaning from the act; no meaning has relevance and effectiveness if detached from the act that is performed in accordance with the meaning involved, and no act has relevance and effectiveness if detached from the meaning which assures the congruence of the cultural and the social. In this case, relevance concerns not only the actual context but the effect of social action outside its immediate context as well. In the same vein, it is not possible to detach meaning from intentionality, because intentionality does not make sense without meaning--the essence of what one intends or what one wills.

Besides rituals, social practices also include ritualization as a way of formalized interaction. There are, in fact, two types of ritualization: the first, in the usual sense of the term, designates ritualization as an expressive act of affirmation and reinforcement of shared intentions and purposes; the second stands for what is ritualistic in life, invariant events linked to completely formalistic attitudes. Ritualization may accomplish particular functions in a society's life:

- (1) Ritualization frequently establishes communication by virtue of its formal rather than symbolic and expressive features, sometimes even with respect to important matters in everyday life. However, ritualization is always circular, postponing solutions to emerging problems through deferred schemes, that is, through endless deferral of meaning and purpose.
- (2) Ritualization also plays an important role in social control, as ritual forms of behavior may constitute instruments to define and model social relations, especially in the field of communication.
- (3) Ritualized attitudes and actions many times serve, within any particular culture, to differentiate oneself or one's group from other ways of behaving and acting. Ritualization, then, is a form of differentiation which aims at establishing a privileged contrast in social status, differentiating oneself or one's group as more powerful or more rich than the rest of the population. Ritualized differentiation paradoxically may lead to expressing unity and totality through an implicit hierarchy because, in this perspective, hierarchization means integration in and through division. Hierarchy therefore is an indispensable complement to the processes of differentiation of groups; differentiation and hierarchization are, by

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<sup>19</sup> The classical work on the subject still is Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, [1909] 1960).

<sup>20</sup> Igor Kopytoff, "Revitalization and the Genesis of Cults in Pragmatic Religion: The Kita Rite of Passage Among the Suku," in Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird, eds., *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 183-212.

their nature, inseparable.<sup>21</sup> Ritualization falling in this third category is always contingent, provisional, and defined by difference.

## Magic

In the contemporary civilization of the West, actions performed in non-Western civilizations to influence events in the cosmic and human worlds are called magic, as opposed to our technologies, called scientific. It is not even admitted that both signify the same fundamental orientation in man's conduct but with a basic difference in thinking about the causal relationships found in the universe, a product of different styles of reasoning. However, both magical and scientific thinking represent analogical modes of thought and action. Magic, a distinctive form of ritual, carries out performative acts by which properties or qualities are mandatorily transferred, on an analogical basis, to recipient objects or persons. Whereas science's use of analogy is intertwined with the inductive approach leading to empirical verification and prediction, magic practiced by "primitive" people is based on mental attitudes aiming at an extension of meanings, and on evaluative approaches expressed in terms of validity, correctness, or legitimacy of the ceremony performed. The English anthropologist, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, went so far that he considered that the Zande witchcraft, aimed at solving socially relevant problems, reflected, at least partially, empirical knowledge of causal relations. Through such magical acts a meaning was imposed on the world, the past rationalized with a view to present needs, the future anticipated, and practical effects achieved.<sup>22</sup>

Lucien Lévy-Brühl first attributed the difference between irrational magic and rational science to man's growing distancing from the objects of his investigations (what we call man's transcendence), a cognitive precondition, coupled with the personification of supranatural entities. He changed his opinion later and believed that all human beings possess a primitive mentality conducive to irrational thoughts; that is, in all periods of history there coexisted two types of mentalities, the mystical and the rational-logical. Lévy-Brühl affirmed that these coexistent mentalities belong to the very nature of man. Therefore, people who practice magic and carry out other pre-logical acts

- (1) Have relations of participation with objects and things in a form of consubstantiality
- (2) Consider cause and effect as immediately effective
- (3) Fuse into one mystic unity what for Westerners are logically distinct aspects of reality
- (4) Possess a holistic worldview through the inner coherence of their thought processes--a view of the world so much different from the scientific approach that for those living in a scientific world it became impossible to understand them.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A good example of this mutual dependence of differentiation and hierarchization is given by the Chinese social system. Chinese rituals were codified during the T'ang dynasty. "According to the T'ang code of rites, which was compiled for imperial and official use," writes Cathrine Bell, "the lowest level of official administration and official ritual was the village. The code stipulated that the headman and community of each village should perform an offering to the gods of soil and grain under a sacred tree. At the same time of the year, a more elaborate version of the same offerings were made on the imperial level. A number of other rituals were also repeated down the social hierarchy that was becoming a ritually constituted hierarchy." Therefore, Bell concludes, "It has been suggested that the unity of Chinese culture has lain less in the content than in the form of its cultural practices. While the hierarchies of official and local religions differed, the principle of hierarchy itself, common to all the variant systems, facilitated practices of cultural integration" (Cathrine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 128-129).

<sup>22</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

<sup>23</sup> Lucien Lévy-Brühl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, with a Preface by M. Leenhardt, trans. P. Rivière (New York, Harper & Row, 1975).

## Contemporary Western Myths, Rituals, and Magic

Mythical thinking, ritual action, and magical acts (the latter in the form, for example, of nuclear physics, clinical neurology, or gene research, understandable to few people) are, despite all refutations, very much present in our society. Our pride in Western science and all other achievements of modernity does not willingly accept this fact, though in recent years many studies have shed a new light on today's manifestations of myths and rituals.<sup>24</sup>

Contemporary mythical thinking concerns convictions, worldviews, or principles that do not describe, or are not relevant to, everyday experience but appear to transcend it--because realities of the mythical order cannot explain, and cannot be derived from, the realities of this experience. Today's myths, in most cases ideologies, are manifold. It is a myth of modernity, based on the "magic" of science, that man is the highest point reached not only in biological evolution but in overall evolution as well. It is also a myth that democratic political institutions or the market economy are the best-ever solutions to society's problems invented by men in the course of history. It is even possible to consider that the universe of values is a mythical reality, since we believe that it is above experienced reality, that is, that it transcends this reality. Rites, designs, patterns, symbolic works of whatever nature, are all charged with a mystical significance. We have to remember, for example, what symbolic, quasi-mystical significance is vested in big construction works, like dams, in poor countries which have an immediate and direct meaning and demand an emotionally charged behavior from a community or a population.

What are the reasons for the astonishing recurrence of mythical thinking and ritual acting in the age of the most advanced and powerful science man ever produced? What are the needs that necessitate recourse to ritual action when we live in a disenchanted society which unconditionally believes in man's limitless capabilities and professes a belief in every individual's infinite capacities for rational action?

A first answer to these questions is that human beings, having been "liberated" from transcendental constraints through the forces of secularization, need to find other means to restore a coherent worldview by means of an integrated world picture, an all-encompassing meaning-ensemble which can be offered by the late-modern forms of myths and reaffirmed in corresponding rituals. Myths, and even magical beliefs in the infinite possibilities of our technologies, appear to facilitate the understanding of empirical realities, to grasp as intelligible the world of experience. This endeavor, the re-establishment of a quasi-transcendental teleological perspective, is, of course, impossible. No meaningful reality can be built within the framework of the immanent world. The purposeful order of the world cannot be deduced from what may be regarded as the experimental results of scientific thought and technique; in consequence, it cannot be used to form a valid hypothesis to explain the data of experience. Another tentative answer is either to ignore these ultimate concerns, or to consciously accept that we live in a world of absurdity. *The transcendental dimension of existence capable of creating a meaningful cosmic framework cannot be reached by means of technical instrumentalities, except when vested in the garb of one or another of the available myths, whose function is to relativize the transcendental dimension into an aspect of the immanent lifeworld.* The formulation and development of the doctrine and politics of human rights as well as the liberal democratic ideology, besides their value as overall guidelines in society's practice, constitute such myths. They aim at giving contemporary man a meaningful world by superposing the same man, as representing the highest value in the universe, on this world. The myth, thus, reflects a circular worldview, explaining the meaningfulness of man's world by man himself.

However, modern myths have a second role; these not only give meaning to the immanent world but also they ensure that the world, as we know it, manifests a certain continuity, even if there are in it many evidences of recurrent discontinuities. A myth in this respect is the belief in the human capacity to change

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<sup>24</sup> Neil Postman writes, in his excellent study of our scientific/technical age, that George Bernard Shaw said about fifty years ago, that "the average person today is about as credulous as was the average person in the Middle Ages." And he adds, "In the Middle Ages, people believed in the authority of their religion, no matter what. Today, we believe in the authority of our science, no matter what... the world we live in is very nearly incomprehensible to most of us. There is almost no fact, whether actual or imagined, that will surprise us for very long, since we have no comprehensive and consistent picture of the world that would make the fact appear as an unacceptable contradiction. We believe because there is no reason not to believe" (Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* [New York: Vintage Books, 1993], 57-58).

and shape the world at will. This myth in human omnipotence, based on scientific and technological successes, is itself a feature of human transcendence because it assures people that the continuity desired is due to conscious choices, thus depending on humans and not on any other cosmic forces.

Another type of modern myth is the myth of Reason. This myth signifies that Reason became reified and sacralized, used in every argument in every possible sense. It does not concern everyday, meaningful rationality ("having reasons to act in such and such a way"); it means to be in agreement with, and act according to, some outstanding features of modernity, as laid down during the centuries since the Enlightenment. Such are the approval of the democratic and free market ideologies, or the creed recognizing only scientific rationality complemented by the dispositions of logic. These *par excellence* modern myths are endowed with a corresponding ritual in the sense that it is enough to evoke in a debate the "democratic myth" or the "myth of the market"--proper dogmas of enlightened Reason--and the debate is settled, there are no more arguments to be advanced against these obvious tenets of Reason.

A complementary motivation for creating manifold myths in our contemporary world is the necessity for humankind to justify the permanence of human values. Individual values, created by individual members of an atomized society, ultimately disappear when their bearers disappear, because no human group, no cultural tradition, can save and transmit them to the next generation. It is, nevertheless, believed that a person's survival can be assured only through the permanence of some values he cherished. Such myths are, again, reinforced by rituals. The importance given to the presidency of anyone holding that office in the United States has become, since World War II, a myth in this sense, and the ritual attached to it is the unavoidable necessity to create a library, or even a research institution, to safeguard the memories of the supposed achievements and brilliance of that presidency, even if current and later historical thinking assesses the era of the president concerned as insignificant for the country.

Rituals are an ever-present practice in human societies, and our society is not an exception. They express shared beliefs and myths and reaffirm the adhesion of those participating in the ritual to these beliefs, worldviews, and myths. It is possible to say that in rituals the world as lived and the world as imagined fuse in the mind of the executors of ritual ceremonies, and thus the two worlds become one. This means that the rituals ensure the congruence of cultural patterns with societal structures and institutions, if not in reality then at least in appearance. This function of rituals is of great importance today because disjunction instead of congruence most often characterizes relationships between fundamental aspects of culture and society. Such rituals, therefore, affect social realities and the perception of those realities, and always define, regulate, and mediate social relations. They do so by

- (1) Sharpening the boundaries between social statuses governed by different relations and expectations like holding of a high school or university diploma
- (2) Reminding people of the values and beliefs as well as the particular relations they share; for example, collective ceremonies, like veterans' commemorations
- (3) Simply sending signals concerning the definition of positions and relations in currently prevailing circumstances like etiquette, protocol, and so on; for example, attitude and behavior in companies or organizations befitting officers of certain ranks.

Rituals evoke even moral responsibility to act in view of the bond existing between individuals, or between individuals and their community, precisely because they constitute responses to uncertainties and crises which have morally disastrous effect. A ritual act, then, reaffirms the existing bond and shared experiences and revives deep feelings of solidarity. Demonstrations of strikers who fight for jobs and better living conditions certainly fall in this category. Thus, rituals related to society's moral problems dramatize the link between symbolic events and collective values, and they reinforce individuals' feelings of belonging to the community or confirm their participation in social movements to support a common cause.



## ***Temporal Dimension and Tradition***

### **Dimensions of Time**

Symbolic orderings of space and time provide a framework for man's experience. The relation between universal world time and the partial times of particular worlds is interpreted as the analogy of the relation between infinite space and finite spatial positions and measures. Temporal forms or spatial locations structure, in human societies, not only the group's representation of the world but the group itself; these symbolic orderings are constitutive of every community's life. People attribute meanings to space and time congruent with the overall worldview of their community.<sup>25</sup>

Space as an integrating and organizing factor is especially important within particular civilizations--for example, from the point of view of symbolic actions, ritual manifestations, or regional and urban settlements--whereas temporality is of equal importance for the perspectival integration and organization within as well as between civilizations. All the more so when one considers that human temporality is a category of finitude--being finite means being temporal.

In the Kantian perspective, visions of space and time are not qualities of the world we perceive but attributes of the human faculty, of the perceiving mind. This does not mean that the mind comprehends spatial and temporal dimensions irrespective, and even before, any experience; it is simply the only way the mind is able to register aspects of the world surrounding us. Experiences of space and time thus are subjective, and not inherent in the natural cosmos. These experiences include the possibility of potential simultaneity, which means in the everyday context that two events happen at the same point of space at the same moment. There is a "world time," the horizon of which covers our planetary environment. There is "world time" because there is a world meaning that world time exists independently of our existence. World time is not a human construct but a reality independent of man's faculties and will. "Other worlds," which we cannot perceive and understand, ordered in accordance with characteristics other than the spatial and the temporal may possibly exist.

Time's infinite dimension contains inexplicable contingencies. This led some philosophers, like Henri Bergson, to consider existence as constant change in time, from moment to moment, transforming human existence into an endless flow of momentary situations. This aspect of the Bergsonian *Creative Evolution* envisioning real duration in time but in a fragmentary manner, is very similar to the Buddhist belief in the doctrine of "Universal Momentariness." This Buddhist view looks at every duration in time as constituted by determined instants, arising in continuity and simultaneously, and motion is nothing but these instantaneous points in time arising in contiguity and succession. For the Buddhists, all ideas of universal time or universal space are imagined, intellectual constructions; their doctrine of "Universal Momentariness," on the contrary, places ultimate reality in a transcendental perspective, beyond our time and space.

A very different conception of time dominates in many African cultures. The Tallensi in Northern Ghana, for example, do not link temporal dimension to cumulative changes in their lifeworld, but see it as an expression of the cyclical rhythm of natural time or as the eternal recurrence of seasons and events in the cosmos.<sup>26</sup> Time-reckoning for the Nuer of the Sudan, in contrast, is determined not only by natural changes but by the rhythm of social activities as well. The passage of time is, thus, the succession of daily activities and, in the long run, the succession of particularly important activities like weeding or the seasonal

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<sup>25</sup> "The social calendar tends to secure integration by compounding the *synchronization* of identical practices with the *orchestration* of different but structurally homologous practices (such as ploughing and weaving). All the divisions of the group are projected at every moment into the spatial-temporal organization which assigns each category its place and time: it is here that the fuzzy logic of practice works wonders in enabling the group to achieve as much *social and logical* integration as is compatible with the diversity imposed by the division of labour between the sexes, the ages, and the 'occupations' (smith, butcher). Synchronization, in the case of rites or tasks, is that much more associated with spatial grouping the more there is collectively at stake" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. transl. R. Nice [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 163) (italics in original).

<sup>26</sup> M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), x.

movements of men and their herds. In consequence, temporality for the Nuer does not have the same value in various seasons of the year, and different groups reckon time in accordance with their own rhythm of life, except events of outstanding significance which mark the temporal dimension they all share.<sup>27</sup> African systems of time-reckoning, therefore, represent narrative time, collectively constructed, in which reality can be translated from calendar to calendar (in a figurative sense). In a completely different vein, Chinese cosmology uses a dual conception of time. First is the cyclic or cosmic time, without beginning and without end, which represents a process in which all relationships are simultaneously present. Second is the linear time of history; evidencing all past events and the cumulative cultural achievements of man which it reveals a vaguely felt finitude. The nature of time in Hindu thought is completely different from the temporal vision of all other civilizations; in Hinduism time is practically eliminated, since both cause and effect are regarded as cosmic in origin and are co-present in the human mind. This can be seen from the manner in which causal relations are expressed in Sanskrit: the causal relation between two notions is indicated by a compound which suggests that it is natural to begin with the effect and then determine the cause of it. Any sequence of causally related phenomena is therefore considered as a complete relatedness--time, in consequence, was replaced by an extended concept of simultaneity. Finally, in contrast to the Chinese and Hindu temporal conceptions, the Zoroastrian religion affirmed that the only non-created aspect of the world is time. Time is eternal, does not have any beginning and does not have an end; time is the creator of the world.<sup>28</sup>

Human, historical time expressed as "before and after" is construed in the West as a cause and effect relation, the distinction resting entirely on the idea that the effect cannot precede the cause. In our existence, therefore, time's arrow is irreversible. Our destiny carries us toward death in the irreversible dimension of time; we live according to the rhythm of our bodies, with the passing away of the life of the organism. Nobody can interrupt the temporal continuum. Daily life is a flow, but its duration appears to be constituted mainly by repetition. The time factor in human existence is also expressed by the twin phenomena of experience and expectation, which are, at the same time, person-specific and interpersonal. In terms of temporal dimension, experience is present past, whereas expectation is future made present. Experience comprises rational behavior and action, instinctive moves and attitudes of which one is not aware and influences of the experience of others, perceived in a face-to-face relationship or learned through channels of communication; experiences overlap and mutually enrich each other. The eternal recurrence of the same does not really reproduce the same. Expectation, with its concern of the not yet happened, is partly independent of experience, partly determined by it; the temporal horizon of expectation is creative of new experience. Experience harks back to the past and as a totality becomes memory and tradition; expectation anticipates the future, opens up a new time sequence and a new space of experience, but finds that its absolute limit is that it cannot refer, with any certainty, to past experience.

In modernity, the differentiation of society has engendered an increasing dissociation between past and future, and the difference between experience and expectation has become greater and greater because expectations have become more and more distanced from past experience. Such a coexisting plurality of times is, however, accompanied by an increasing discontinuity which inevitably shortens time perspectives in the sense that the remote past and future become increasingly irrelevant. Time has become not only scarce but the paramount dimension of social life as well; the future is imposed as the predominant horizon. In a technological society such as ours, the future made present is a string of anticipated presents constituted through envisaging causal or contingent links between future events in order to incorporate them into the present. Thus, a sequential pattern or a chain of interconnected events is impressed on people's consciences, and complexity is "dissolved" in the sequences of interfering processes made more and more abstract.

As a result, a particular model of extensive temporal integration was conceived in the idea of progress. This fundamental belief of modernity has been made potentially realizable through anticipated future events, as a profane version of the Christian eschatological belief. However, progress promoted in this way does not make much sense, unless it is believed to be its own engine and teleological compass in historical time, and sources of disruption of its own triumphant march forward are intentionally excluded. Thus, belief in progress has imposed a re-ordaining of historical temporality from a simple process of never-ceasing change to a series of consecutive developmental stages. The model of temporality was reconstructed by eliminating the

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<sup>27</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 103-104. [This book combines the author's *Social Anthropology and Essays in Social Anthropology*].

<sup>28</sup> R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 410.

possibility of a concrete and ultimate order in the human world, in favor of a process-generated, provisional, and transitory structure in which the appearance of continuity is maintained through the infinite nature of the historical process itself.

*We can define time as a culturally determined aspect of reality with respect to the difference between past and future viewed from the present's meaningful reality.* This definition neglects chronological relations and the measuring, in an abstract manner, of time-distances between historical events; but it safeguards the indispensable necessity of interrelating past and future through the nexus of the present. As against the so-called chronological conception of temporal dimension, which presupposes the simple identity and continuity of time and acknowledges differentiation only in respect of chronological dates, the approach adopted here recognizes the fact that meanings and meaning-ensembles always tend to preserve their self-identity. Consequently, temporal modalities must be relativized to different points in time. Past and future become "temporal horizons" of the present, that is, time is past/present/future together, or, in other words, time stands for the present along with its past and future horizons, thus assuring the unity of existential and historical time. Temporal horizons have a particular importance for human beings because only on the assumption that modalities of past and future move along with each present moment can events be individualized in history. These horizons contain in themselves, however, certain limitations in relating the temporal dimension of the present to actual reality, and reveal a set of constraints on the temporal integration of the future and the past.

Processes of communication between contemporaneous civilizations may provide a prospect of sequential, shared presents that may constitute new futures for humanity. However, these shared futures will always remain presents, in an interplay of temporal modalities, because they require a simultaneous integration of the perspectives of participants in a dialogue.

## **Time and Traditions**

Past and future belong together through the present. It is, therefore, correct to say that the past is meaningful if it binds the future or, inversely, if our anticipation of future conditions determines the meaning of the past. In this way an authentic present constitutes the locus of tradition, transmitted from generation to generation, as well as of an ever-continuing innovation in the uninterrupted destiny of generations belonging to the same community. Whereas biologically and ecologically determined uniformities are general, traditions are differentiated and reflect cultural pluralism. As persistent meaning-ensembles, traditions represent one of the most important components of culture because they guide the life of individuals and groups within the limits set by genetic endowment and ecological circumstances.

Tradition, created by human interaction in space and time, is the reservoir of a cultural community's experiences during its history and, at the same time, it is the most enduring element in the collective memory of peoples. Traditions represent the way a society formulates and comes to terms with the basic problems of human existence, life and death, under all its aspects. For this reason, though they are bound up with the ever-shifting present, they constitute a stabilizing force in every society. Traditions include a culture's cognitive, symbolic, ethical, aesthetic, mythical, and ritual aspects as well as everyday customs and the social, political, economic, and other practices of a civilization surviving in narratives, histories, and memories. In every tradition there is a cluster of these intertwined elements, though each tradition emphasizes some particular aspects. For example, the Confucian tradition puts a high value on social harmony, a moral aspect of the community's life, whereas in the classical Greek tradition the cognitive element was dominant. Most frequently traditions contain conflicting ideals and rules for human behavior, which, though creating tension within the culture, nevertheless reinforce each other. This is illustrated by the interrelations between the Brahmanic ideal and that of the world renouncer in Hindu culture, or between the active engagement of the church in the world and the monastic ideal in Christianity. Japanese culture is characterized by a high degree of differentiation of social structures but a relatively small degree of differentiation in cultural symbolism, resulting in strong emphasis being placed on the given cultural and social order.

Traditions are received and modified. They change in the process of transmission as particular traditions are interpreted or added to or reformulated in accordance with the receiving generation's own experiences and expectations. Because they cannot reproduce themselves, they can only be reproduced by living human

beings enacting and re-enacting them. Thus, in the temporal perspective, tradition is a sequence of variations on received and inherited themes which are connected by common descent and the unifying influence of overarching, community-wide accepted contents.

Traditions can be classified under four headings: their interpretive (hermeneutic), normative, legitimation, and identity aspects:<sup>29</sup>

- (1) Traditions may be considered from the point of view of understanding the world, that is, a set of background assumptions taken for granted by members of a community in interpreting events and in the conduct of their everyday existence.
- (2) Traditions are normative when they serve as a guide for beliefs and actions in the present, when these beliefs and actions are grounded or justified by reference to tradition; in this case, traditionally grounded actions frequently represent routinized behavior.
- (3) The legitimizing aspect of traditions is highlighted when they are evoked as the source of authority or power.
- (4) Traditions have an extremely important identity-shaping role, in both individual and collective identities. Traditions, consisting of a set of beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior, provide meaningful explanations about the surrounding world, carry symbols and suggest rituals for expressing one's understandings and feelings about the cosmos and society -- both at the individual and at the collective levels. It is probably the most important function of traditions that the sense of oneself and the sense of belonging are both formed by the heritage transmitted from the past, to varying degrees of course, depending on the actual context.

The normative and legitimation aspects of tradition have gradually declined in the modern age, but the interpretive aspect of traditions and the role of traditions in identity formation and in the creation of a sense of belonging to a community retain their significance even now. The most profound change affecting traditions is, on the one hand, their "disembeddedness" from the limited, face-to-face world of the past, from social interactions in an environment in which beliefs, symbols, and values were locally shared. On the other hand, uprooted traditions are continuously re-embedded in new contexts and transplanted, with some modifications, into other circumstances, as many traditions are inevitably linked to practical aspects of human life. Thus, in general, traditions can be, simultaneously, de-ritualized and de-personalized and again re-ritualized and re-personalized. The media represent the major factor in uprooting traditions not for any other reason than their inevitable effect of space-and-time distancing, making of the world a single place and, at the same time, emphasizing the overall importance of each single place, of each particular circumstance.

Traditions which differ in the most radical way in regard to certain cultural forms and normative patterns may share beliefs, values, norms, or customs. Each tradition provides at every stage of its development a rational justification, in its own terms, of its central meaning-ensemble, but no independent standards of rational justification exist according to which issues between competing traditions in different civilizations can be settled. Relativism of civilizational traditions is a fact of life and can be surmounted only by a dialogic encounter between them. Traditions are nonrational adaptations to the environment or, as Friedrich Hayek said, "adaptations to the unknown".<sup>30</sup> Here lies the particularly important social integrative function of traditions. The cohesion of a group, community, or society is constituted through the links of its members already passed away, living in the present, or to be born in the future. This is all the more essential that through traditions the group, community, or society proceed with a selection among the inherited cultural contents in order to adapt to changed environments--in addition and even before to the selective choices of individuals.

Besides the revision of traditions in the dialectical interplay of collective and individual re-enactments, they also may change through a so-called syncretic synthesis, which indicates the emergence of a new, pervasive, and distinctive theme around which several traditions which have contributed to the formulation of this new meaning-structure fuse together and constitute a new tradition. Most of the great civilizational

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<sup>29</sup> John B. Thompson, "Tradition and Self in a Mediated World," in Paul Heelas, Scott Lash and Paul Morris, eds., *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 89-108.

<sup>30</sup> F. A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, in *The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek*, vol. I. ed. W. W. Bartley III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 76.

traditions of our world such as the Christian, Islamic, or Hindu are the results of such cultural fusions of older traditions.

In regard to social practices and institutions, traditions transmit patterns of actions and sequences of complex interactions which took place in the past together with the beliefs which justify the re-enactment of those patterns in similar circumstances. The beliefs attached to such patterns may even show that, under certain conditions, the actions and interactions surviving in collective memory were considered as constituting normative precedents for the future. Therefore, traditions are much more than a statistically established succession or recurrence of cultural contents and institutions because it is the normative character of the transmission which links the generation of the dead with the generation of the living. Traditions and other cultural constructs naturally center on specific institutions of a society which represent a civilization's structural-organizational dimension. Institutional expressions of dominant traditions can be varied and are not restricted to the historically developed institutional structure. However, since Edmund Burke, it has been considered that societal and political traditions, recognized as the accumulation of experiences tested during successive generations, contribute to the stability of social life in that they discourage experimenting with new forms of organizational and institutional structures. The temporal perspective of institutions is reversible in the course of a "supra-individual," long-term existence.

Traditions constituting the backbone of civilizations can perish for various reasons. One of the most fascinating problems of human history is the sudden death or the slow fading away of cultural worlds, known to having achieved brilliance and considerable intellectual and material results in their time, like the civilizations of the Indus Valley or, much nearer to us, the civilization of the Khmer people (of which impressive witnesses, such as the temples of Angkor Wat or Bayon, still exist). We do not know, in most cases, the reasons which led to the disappearance of a tradition or of a civilization. It is certain that many factors--genetic, ecological, political, economic, or, simply, the exhaustion of the creative patterns of the culture concerned--played a role in such events along the tumultuous history of humanity. Whenever some causes of the disappearance of civilizations are discovered--as the overuse of underground water resources in the Khmer empire about 800 years ago was recently pinpointed as one of the possible reasons of its collapse--they should send a chill down our spines, given the increasing importance the same problem may have in our own world.

I would like, finally, to deal here with another of the causes menacing a civilizational tradition's existence. This is the emergence of an atemporal vision in a society. Such an atemporality may be the result of two developments. The first form of atemporality, which may lead to insoluble conflicts with other civilizations, is the classical Hindu tradition, the *dharma*. The *dharma* represents an unbroken perspective in which the predetermined and immutable order of things remains immune to the changes in the outer world and in the immediate environment. It demands from believers not to act in response to any worldly cause or motivation. In this way, it creates the fundamental inner dilemma of Hindu culture: on the one hand, *dharma* is considered universal and as such it must take into account worldly concerns and interests; on the other hand, its atemporal character requires a total withdrawal from secular realities. The Hindu tradition, thus, is defined by the particular form in which it expresses the conflict between the reality of this world in which it exists and its transcendent aspiration to solve the fundamental problem of human existence. In fact, the Hindu concept of *dharma* expresses the rift between the sacred and mundane worlds, between transcendent and immanent realities. This rift also deprives the mundane order of its legitimacy and ultimate validity. Therefore, in accordance with the requirements of the transcendental order, the world renouncer turns its back to the here and now. Thus, in the Hindu tradition, the two cosmic spheres cannot be brought into harmony.

The second of the atemporal visions is that people, immersed in material abundance, are incited by the reigning cultural forces to forget their inherited culture and traditions. In Western civilization, atemporality has to be understood as the exclusive emphasis on the present shaped by the expectation of imagined outcomes in the future--in the perspective of the idea of progress and under the influence of the media. This atemporality represents a totally deformed historical vision, an atemporality which corresponds to ahistoricity. One of the main features of the imagined future is that our civilization, representing the achievement of the best life mankind could ever imagine, will conquer the globe and fuse in itself, in the form of a global culture, all other civilizations. This atemporal perspective is well illustrated by the ideological belief in the "end of history." Some contemporary Arab writers already have described the effects on the Islamic world of the overwhelming predominance of Western civilization, not only from the point of view of economic and military power but in regard to the cultural influence of the West as well. Muslim tradition is gradually abandoned as the Islamic community is broken apart under the impact of modernizing globalization,

represented as an "inner-worldly fulfilment of the history of mankind."<sup>31</sup> In consequence, Western cultural tenets and social customs take the place of traditional Muslim practices and institutions. This overwhelming predominance of the Western civilization, and the conviction of Westerners that the whole world has to follow our civilizational path, is the real obstacle to a civilizational dialogue in our age.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Individual and Community***

In culture as in society there is a constant interplay between individual and community. It is completely wrong to separate one from the other in the name of ideologies--individualism promoting the total independence of every individual from other individuals, and various sorts of collectivism which try to bury the individual in the name of collective projects and interests. The dilemma of individualism or collectivism is a false dilemma because no individual can exist without a community to which he belongs, and no community can exist without individuals, its members. *There are individuals but their existence is entirely interwoven with a community in a holistic, though not organic, way; communities, on the other hand, have their life sources in successive generations of individuals, who re-invent, renovate, and consequently, maintain them and their traditions.* Individuals and communities are in continuous interaction; one shapes the existence of the other in a fundamental, mutual relationship.

The contradiction between community and society, supposedly representing incompatible institutions as *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, is therefore artificially created. Both descriptions of the life of human groups--community and society--are legitimate because they represent the same entities though from different angles. Community, as the bearer of culture, is the basic element in a society's existence. If we consider society as a set of individuals with a given way of life, then the culture of the community stands for this way of life. Society emphasizes the aggregate of people and the relations between them; civilization encompasses the organizational, institutional, and material aspects of society's life, whereas culture, intertwined with the community linking members of a society, is the underlying foundation of societal life. Culture governs society's life through its meaning-structures and *ethos*, embracing the transcendental and immanent perspectives of existence in the context of inherited but constantly renovated traditions. A community of culture is the guiding light in a society's life.

The distinction between communities of descent and ascent is much more illuminating than the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Communities of descent always look back to the past from where they derive their origin. Thus they are inherently local and historically contextual, whereas ascent

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth it to quote here in full Friedrich Tenbruck's reasoning: "With the idea of progress, however, history acquires an inner-worldly goal and therefore also an end-point... Wherever the vision of an inner-worldly fulfilment of the history of mankind has become triumphant, there the existence of nations and national cultures disturbed the dream of secular ecumenicity. The vacuity (and limitations) of this vision become apparent in the almost total absence of any serious reflections concerning the fate of these historical givens in the developmental process... The ideology of development... makes us blind to the fact that history proceeds by the formation and dissolution of peoples, languages, cultures, nations, states, and will continue to do so more than ever in our era of global development... Yet what we presently perceive as a manifest increase in multi-cultural conjectures will historically prove a contest over the preservation, survival, domination, dissolution and extinction of cultures" (Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "The Dream of a Secular Ecumene: The Meaning and Limits of Policies of Development," in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* [London: SAGE Publ., 1990], 193-206).

<sup>32</sup> In the words of the great philosopher Karl Jaspers: "What is granted to everyone as his historicity, his recollection, his One, what stands before him at the boundary, is indeed inseparably linked with a common tradition. This tradition becomes more profound, alive and concentrated the more it incorporates into its own recollection a historicity broadened to include the plurality and incessant dynamism of all human possibilities and actualities. But this common tradition--viewed philosophically--must not be absolutized into the single absolute world historicity for all: first, because other historicities have their own rights by virtue of their own origins, and their spirit should not be destroyed but have a voice in the temporarily unending process of questioning and being questioned; secondly, because the irreplaceable historicity of the individual should not cause the immediacy and autonomy of its transcendent origin to be obliterated by being subsumed under the generality of a single world-historicity" (Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*, transl. and with an Intro. by R. F. Grabau. [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971], 86).

communities are intentionally created through persuasion, missionary activities, and so on, in order to lead people to assent to a body of shared truth and values.<sup>33</sup> Such communities of assent are voluntary associations continually engaged in the process of their own formation, heralding always something "new," oriented toward the future completion of their communion. In descent communities human relationships are real, whereas in communities of assent these relationships are metaphorical, based on the assent given by each member to the tenets of a creed or of an ideology. It is most important that assent communities have a "totalitarian" dimension as they suppress singularity because assent is given collectively to shared meanings and values, and the assent of new generations is taken for granted, whereas descent communities fully recognize individuals as members by birth with proper identities. In the same vein, descent communities are, as a rule, not hierarchical, whereas assent communities are very much so as the hierarchies of the community decide whether an assent is given according to the norms prescribed. Because self-understanding in descent communities is based on pre-social, pre-linguistic, pre-cultural connectedness, their members are not opposed to communities based on different lines of descent, whereas assent communities affirm unity even through coercion and, in most cases, their members are attached to the universality of their creed or ideology, and thus may be aggressive toward other communities.

To illustrate the intertwined nature of individual and community, I shall briefly refer here to the concept of "background," conditioning all human intentionality. Intentionality can be expressed in meanings, beliefs, desires, or experiences only if it is "embedded" in a network of such aspects of culture internalized in the course of life. This network constitutes the unconscious "background" of understandings or interpretations of the meanings, beliefs, desires, or experiences of others because understanding or interpretation must always go beyond evidently apparent contents. The background, constituted by the network of internalized meanings, beliefs, desires, or experiences, is thus a holistic concept referring to a particular community in which an individual being is inserted. Understanding of others, interpreting their views and actions, communicating with them, is possible only because the individual and the other individuals are members of the same cultural community which creates, through a shared, holistic background, the necessary conditions of such a communication.<sup>34</sup> Humaneness is linked to the completeness of relation between man and man, what Martin Buber called an interpersonal encounter in which there is a mutual engagement and a mutual self-transcendence of the ego.<sup>35</sup> Human solidarity must be the product of such interpersonal encounters.

The community represents the intersubjective world of the human being which determines his unconscious and which becomes conscious and relevant through experience and reflexivity. The temporal dimension of this intersubjective world of a community is simultaneity, or the immediate present. However, this time reckoning can be extended backward, in the past, through recollections of individual and collective memories, and forward, in the future, by individually formulated, or commonly shared expectations and hopes. In smaller communities spatial immediacy also plays an important role as bodily expressions become part of the communication process itself. These face-to-face relationships, reflected in mutual mental and physical expressions of community members, not only represent an aspect of common experiences of the outside world, but give as well a spontaneity to these relationships for all the participants in communication. In Alfred Schutz's famous phrase, "we grow older together."

However, the shared presence of members of a group is not possible in more extended communities, such as the community with predecessors or successors, or even with those with whom one belongs together in a cultural community because of the large distances separating members. In these situations potential relationships are transformed into actual ones only through an intentional move to establish more immediate connections, for example, through mediated communication channels. Nevertheless, even in such circumstances understanding is correlative to meaning as all understanding is directed toward that which has meaning. In reverse, only what is understood is, or becomes, meaningful.

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Morris, "Community Beyond Tradition," in Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris, eds., op. cit., 223-249.

<sup>34</sup> James Baldwin shows in a poetic text written almost a half a century ago the importance of belonging to a cultural community: "I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West: when I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. And this meant that in some subtle way, in a really profound way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres and to the Empire State Building a special attitude. These were not really my creations, they did not contain my history; I might search in vain forever for any reflection of myself. I was an interloper; this was not my heritage... I am in Africa, watching the conquerors arrive" (James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* [Boston, 1955], 6-7 and 165).

<sup>35</sup> Martin Buber, *Schriften über das dialogische Prinzip*. (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1954), 15 and 78.

Community alone engenders genuine human solidarity because it is based on shared meanings, shared traditions, and shared practices. Abstractly defined collective interests do not create feelings of solidarity. In a world where traditions and shared meanings are deconstructed, where values are declared to be irrelevant, there can be no genuine interpersonal understanding because only communities ensure for each of their members the recognition of others. And recognition precisely presupposes not just alterity but understanding created by a shared, intersubjective basis--the culture of the community.

Circumstances are entirely different in today's more and more numerous transnational relations or connections and, especially, in inter-civilizational encounters or inter-civilizational dialogue because in such situations contacts are established not within the orbit of one cultural community, even over large distances, but between different civilizations or between people brought up in different civilizational contexts. Difficulties inherent in such inter-civilizational encounters are shown by the misfortunes of those generations, belonging to non-Western civilizations, which tried to internalize some useful modern worldviews and corresponding ethical principles without giving up their traditional cultures in which they were born. Many of them did not realize that if there is no congruence between fundamental cultural grounding and imported concepts and methods, the transplantation cannot be successful. They were mistaken in thinking that Western concepts and methods can be absorbed by people of non-Western cultures without adopting the underlying worldview and values of the West--and this failure proved to be fatal for their inherited cultures and traditions. Modernization is a process which cannot simply be transferred into a completely different civilizational world.



## **THIRD PART**

### **Modernization and Civilizational Practices**

## ***Culture and Social Worlds***

### **Culture and Society**

The concepts of society and community are many times confused, it is therefore necessary to clearly delimit their domain to avoid any misunderstanding. Community is an autonomous, quasi-organic entity, members of which are integrated by commonly shared aspects of a given culture. There is no doubt that the existence of a community underlies the existence of all societies. However, a society is defined not only through shared, unwritten normative terms like a community, but also through institutional, legal, and organizational terms which were formulated and developed in the community during a long period of time.

A person is born into and brought up in a community, though not necessarily linked biologically to the majority of people of which the community consists. Frequently foreigners join a community but do not succeed in becoming a member of it because adherence is not enough; they and their successive generations of descendants must be assimilated into that community through completely adopting its beliefs, values, symbols, practices, and way of life. At the beginning of a society people become members by being part of the community which forms its basis; later, however, membership in the society is defined in terms of institutions and legal rules governing its development. Thus, for example, in empires and kingdoms of the past, people who were living within particular communities became subjects of emperors and kings through conquest by force, or declaration of loyalty to the rulers by the heads of their respective communities, and thus became members of the society within the territories of the emperor or king. Today, people--refugees or immigrants--become members of a society living in the framework of the modern nation-states by fulfilling the legal requirements and regulatory conditions established by states with a view to enabling foreigners to become their citizens. It is reasonable to say *that membership in communities is based on being born in them, whereas membership in a society is politically based, dependent on being accepted as a subject of the ruler or a citizen of the state.*

Membership in a society through becoming a citizen of a state represents, though, a rather special case because it was only invented with the establishment of the modern nation-state--in all other societies membership is based either on cultural belonging or on being a subject of a ruler. For this reason, nominal citizenship does not really make a person a member of a society outside the sphere of Western civilization. In India, for example, it is justified to speak of Indian society in regard to some effects of the country's modernization, for example, a weak functional differentiation of society, but otherwise who could say that there is an Indian society and not societies based on cultural communities. This view can be easily justified: the caste system in India is a culturally derived system of social segmentation based on the hierarchy of purity instead of the hierarchy of power. The hierarchy based on religious and ritual purity assigns to each individual and each group of the society its place with reference to the whole and integrates them in a system of hierarchical interdependence. From a societal point of view, the Indian caste structure is a model for ordering and formalizing informal and exclusive relationships reflecting status in a world of asymmetric relations. However, this system is parallel to the informal and inclusive structure of sharing brotherhood, the *jati*, a specific genealogical formula which enables those holding some rights of various nature to recombine those rights in order to eliminate the fractional tendency of holdings and social statuses. Indian social structures, therefore, devalorize society, societal power, and hierarchical interdependence in the service of a metaphysical ideal, the release of the individual from this world permitting him to break with social existence through the ethics of renunciation.<sup>36</sup>

Another example of the cultural relevance of society's membership is the widespread practice, in all parts of the world, of kinship systems. Such societal linkages reflect universal features of human existence: sex, procreation, and the rearing of offspring necessitate the creation of socially sanctioned, extended family environments, but the modalities of kinship as practiced in different societies certainly reflect, beyond these human universals, religious and cultural values and economic organization as well. In the holistic world of non-Western civilizations it is therefore natural that kinship structures also influence religious and moral

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<sup>36</sup> J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 180-192.

views, reflecting those cultures' meaning-ensembles and *ethos*, precisely because the world is holistically conceived.

Recently, social segmentation has been viewed more positively than it was some decades ago. It is recognized that segmentation--a form of preservation, stability, and the reduction of societal risks--counterbalances dialectically opposing forces of society by

- (1) Maintaining and increasing the variety of functionally equivalent structures possessing dissimilar patterns and thus limiting the tendency toward homogenization
- (2) Breaking down larger structures into smaller units and, at the same time, reducing the trend toward the accumulation of power in society
- (3) Creating a redundancy of similar social forms, which counters pressures toward complete integration.

Social stratification is a different matter because it introduces cleavages into the social whole. Stratification means increasing conflicts and rigid opposition between components of social interaction because material and power interests are dominating societal relations. Finally, functional differentiation breaks the congruence between cultural foundations and the realities of a society. Stratification leads to growing contradictions, but functional differentiation creates, through the imposition of so-called "functional imperatives," a maze of social confrontations into which society sinks inevitably. This is the most dramatic consequence of the Western model of social transformation: the loss of congruence between cultural aspects of social life of a particular civilization, on the one hand, and the extreme fragmentation of society due to the disappearance of integrative forces, on the other hand. Individualism, public opinion, or information society cannot substitute for this congruence.

Culture, sustained by a community, includes the institutional templates or models of society itself. These models define the framework of social interaction for actors that have a legitimate status and for patterns of activity related to the realization of individual and collective ends. Culture assigns ontological reality to social actors and societal action, and endows the same actors and actions with meaning, legitimacy, and valuable ends. Cultural beliefs and values govern all impersonally conceived, and apparently objective, behaviors and efforts, all rule-structures and organizational buildups, rendering illusory any tentative to liberate social interaction from cultural influences. Today this perspective opens up the possibility of a dialogue between civilizations--especially in our age of globalization.

## **Society and Modernization**

"Modernization," a term which designates the worldwide movement of "Westernization," nowadays called globalization, does not only concern the economic and political spheres but the entire field of human interaction. The basic problem of modernization is the effective congruence between culture patterns and social reality, or, in other words, *the possibility of innovatively adapting certain social, economic, and political aspects of the Western way of life to the entirely different cultural worlds of non-Western civilizations*. Modernization in this perspective stands for a worldwide cultural homogenization based on more and more accentuated power differences, especially in an era of world hegemonies.

The main differences between modern and nonmodern cultures are fourfold:

- (1) Secularization, that is, ignorance of the vertical transcendence or of the religious core of a culture which is determinant in all other civilizations than the Western. In the West science assumes the role of the sacred, endeavors to give a rationally transcendent dimension to the lifeworld, and is itself sacralized though it cannot do away with uncontrollable contingencies such as death, unforeseen risks created by scientific techniques for the human species, and the like.
- (2) Omnipotence of the state as a result of the formation of territorial nation-states and of concomitant technological developments endowing the state with the means necessary to affirm and extend its power, though it becomes more and more evident, in our late modern

age, that the state, as the institution governing public life, lost all its legitimacy in an era of transnational connections and movements.

- (3) The central role assigned to the economic sphere in all human activities. This does not mean that economic phenomena escape meaningful, symbolic determination but that the economic domain gives meaning to all other spheres of social life and that economic symbolism is structurally determining.
- (4) Individualism liberated from all cultural and social restraint, though the individual is subordinated to excessive political and economic powers as a citizen and as a consumer. In consequence, the omnipotent state which eliminated most communities composing civil society because they were intermediaries between the state and the individual, faces, in modernity, solely atomistic individuals who are entirely at its mercy.

Thus, differences between Western and non-Western civilizations correspond to the above-mentioned distinction between

- (a) A functionally differentiated society in which the differentiated spheres--economic, social, political, and ideological--are severally organized as special-purpose structures by particular kinds of social relations (market, state, political parties) which possess an internal rationality and enjoy a relative autonomy; and
- (b) A segmented society governed by a coherent meaning-ensemble and its corresponding symbolism, including vertically as well as horizontally transcendental aspects, in which all social activities are integrated by a particular cultural world.<sup>37</sup>

Most non-Western civilizations in which the orientation of social interaction was carried out according to a transcendental vision exclude the type of structural pluralism which developed in Europe in the Middle Ages, best characterized by the multiplicity of cultural centers and the prevalence of a multiplicity of autonomous elites. There is, however, a situation in *India* similar to the European one of the Middle Ages, though Brahmanism was based on the recognition of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders. The similarity with medieval Europe consisted in the political decentralization or multicentrism, which was combined not only with continuously changing boundaries and economic structures but with a dominant, although never fully unified, civilizational framework. Mundane activities, arranged in a ritual hierarchy based on their other-worldly significance, encompassed ascriptive and primordial social units, though the political realm was viewed in more secular terms than in other civilizations, emphasizing its distance from the sacred perspective. The relative independence of cultural traditions and symbols of identity from the seats of political power was paralleled by the relative autonomy of social groups--the complex whole of castes and villages--and the networks of communication. However, castes and their networks were not simple territorial-organizational units but represented more elaborated cultural constructions which raised fundamental attributes to a higher level of symbolization.

*Confucianism* is frequently called not a religion but a doctrine of social ethics because of the primary interest of all Confucian schools in social relationships. Their description of social interaction was based on their cosmic conception that all things in nature, humans included, stood in certain relationships to other things, and that rules inscribed in natural mechanisms governed these relationships. Consequently, the social order had three components:

- (1) A specific number of roles, or a collection of occupational positions.
- (2) A hierarchical relationship between these positions.

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<sup>37</sup> "The perspective of a civilization is shaped by its perceptions of self, time, and transcendence," writes Edith Wyschgorod. "Such an understanding of the relations between civilizations and transcendence may seem to beg the question: the civilizational perspective is alleged to be shaped by its comprehensions of transcendence, while at the same time no access can be gained to the theme of transcendence without bringing the civilizational perspective into view. But such circularity is only apparent since both are reciprocally constitutive. The transcendent is constituted through a *post hoc* act of civilizational understanding, while, conversely, this civilizational act is as it is in view of a civilization's grasp of transcendence" (Edith Wyschgorod, "The Civilizational Perspective in Comparative Studies of Transcendence," in Alan M. Olson, and Leroy S. Rouner, *Transcendence and the Sacred*, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion II [Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1981], 58-59).

- (3) A formalized code of conduct, tying together various hierarchical groups of society and ensuring that society's members behaved according to certain values or virtues of the collectivity. In this sense, one can also consider this code as a list of social virtues which can be lived up to through conformity to the norms.

Though according to the Confucian ethics men are "naturally" equal, the Chinese did not believe that all human beings were identical at birth. They rather affirmed that such natural differences affected in only a very small way the status and performance of humans in society, which depended, first of all, on their own actions. This concept of equality implied more a reciprocity in social relations, despite accepted social hierarchies, than an equality of rights and duties. Social and moral norms were closely interrelated; a member of society had to strictly conform in his actions to the functions of his position and not usurp the functions of others occupying other positions. This conception of society led to two kinds of public action: first, investigation of societal factors which cause differences in moral excellence among men, and, second, techniques of training and education capable of correcting bad habits and behavior.

If the universe is a moral universe and nature signals proper relationships and proper actions in any given situation, men had to be able to find out what the natural way of being and acting was. *Li* was the universally valid, cosmic principle which guided men in such matters.<sup>38</sup> In reality, *li* was internalized: man possessed a sense of duty commanded by his self (*i*) but had also to follow Heavenly injunctions (*ming*), and the two were correlated. Finally, man's uniqueness was indicated by his possession of *jen*, which means his innate human-heartedness. *Jen* designates in Confucian thought an ideal, the innate affection for kin manifested in filial conduct and in obedience to parents and elder brothers. Later it became, as part of the ethics of humanism, a generalized virtue, directing the same affection to all people and manifesting itself in acts of kindness. All men being brothers and sharing human attributes, it was natural that they should be able to satisfy their common interests. Thus, humankind is potentially able, unlike animals, to create a social organization based on a shared moral sense. Human beings form social organizations through establishing social distinctions or ranks, and social obligations are implemented as determined by people's moral sense. Moral rules are inscribed in the human mind (*hsing*), an innate endowment which, if people choose to act according to these rules, command their actions. The famous Confucian principle of "cultivation of the self," on which Chinese social ethics always laid a strong emphasis, meant that everyone has to make a conscious attempt to improve.

The primary cause of evil behavior was considered to be the environment, mainly economic deprivation. However, morally right attitude and action were not adopted for material benefits but because of the capacity of humans to discriminate between hierarchies found in nature, especially to distinguish between the morally right and the morally wrong. Human beings' discerning capacity was highly appreciated by Confucians because they realized that laws cannot cover all possible circumstances and, in consequence, impersonal legal dispositions cannot mechanically be implemented; thus, individual decisions made on a case-by-case basis, adhering to customary norms as guidelines, represent the only solutions possible in societal matters.

*Taoism's* views in regard to social organization were based on two fundamental principles: First, that the human species is not the center of the universe, it is part of nature. Second, that in nature as well as in the human world permanence amid change is the rule. This permanence was *Tao*, present in all things. In contrast, defining *Tao* as the principle of change makes it possible to see as constant the ways in which things changed in a universe without purpose. People must be aware of the laws of change and adapt their actions to them. Human freedom conceived in this manner meant the absence of external compulsion or restraint in following *Tao*; social structures and institutions are not required because they would obstruct people's spontaneity in pursuing their activities in accordance with their natures. Purposive activity (instrumental rationality in modernity) was rejected, the highest moral aim was not preeminence but understanding the world.

In contrast to the Chinese teachings concerning society and social interaction it is interesting to briefly examine the relevant *Japanese* conceptions. In the *Japanese* worldview there is no fundamental opposition

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<sup>38</sup> "*Li* is that whereby Heaven and Earth unite, whereby the sun and moon are bright, whereby the four seasons are ordered, whereby the stars move in the courses, whereby rivers flow, whereby all things prosper, whereby love and hatred are tempered, whereby joy and anger keep their proper place. It causes the lower orders to obey, and the upper orders to be illustrious; through a myriad changes it prevents going astray. But if one departs from it, he will be destroyed. Is not *li* the greatest of all principles?" (*The Works of Hsüntze*, transl. H. H. Dubs [London: Probsthaim, 1928], 223-224).

between the sacred and the mundane, gods and men, life and death, order and disorder, nature and culture, or good and evil. The lack of such contradictions was possible only in an immanentist-symbolic as well as particularistic framework of thought, derived from a conception of the cosmos in which autonomous generation of things resulted in synthesis and harmony. This view also entailed a certain sanctification of the phenomenal world, without completely abandoning the transcendental dimension framed by Shintoism and the worshipping of the emperor. This mutual interdependence of nature and culture did not imply, however, that reality was homogeneous because the environment and particular contexts were regarded as continuously changing. Such a view also meant that social life, embedded in a given reality, constituted a continuum with nature. Societal interaction was seen from two angles: first, a functional dimension determining the institutional or organizational context of the interaction and, second, the dimension of Japanese personhood composed of inner/outer, spontaneous/disciplined attitudes in given, particular contexts. Emphasis is laid on the expression "particular contexts" because the Japanese did not adhere to universalistic principles or the belief in individual autonomy but conducted their individual actions taking always into account the various social settings with a sort of particularistic goal achievement before their eyes. Individual motivation played, therefore, a lesser role than the effort to develop capacities enabling a person to fully satisfy the requirements of an assigned task. In this sense, intentions and actions had to correspond to each other to prove the sincerity of the attitude.

All this led to a situational morality, that is, a morality according to which behavior was regulated by norms intrinsic to a situation rather than by universal, formal norms transcending any given situation. This moral conception created a strong orientation toward conformity with group norms or situationally determined rules, accompanied by disorientation in abnormal or hitherto not experienced contexts. The tendency to conformity signalled that interpersonal relations were rooted in long-range mutual obligations valid in each particular context-- expressed regularly in a ritual exchange of gifts--which underlay extremely strong feelings of group loyalty.

If Japan's is the only non-Western civilization in which modernization succeeded, the reason for this success was that modernization did not necessitate a complete reversal of the cultural orientation but was embedded in the existing social and symbolic order. Japanese civilization assimilated foreign ideas, concepts, and values before the Meiji era in the nineteenth century when inserting, for example, into the original Japanese culture the Confucian value system. Assimilation did not mean a replacement of the old beliefs, ideas, and values by the new ones but the absorption of the latter into the existing cultural framework. This "synchronistic coexistence of various sediments of Japanese value traditions,"<sup>39</sup> an interlegitimation of various trends of thought and traditions, was made possible by a sort of stadial layering of one tradition on the other, in a way recalling Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons. In addition, it is also evident that group loyalty played an important role in the success of Japanese modernization. Particular loyalties were all subordinated to loyalty to the nation linked, through the person of the emperor, to a sort of transcendental dimension. Modernization, thus, took place in selected cultural aspects and in large-scale institutional and organizational forms, but the system of values and the structure of community life remained the same without noticeable modifications.

In the *Islamic* civilization, with its cultural core governed by a monotheistic religion, the congruence of cultural patterns and societal life is unavoidable. Religion and cultural meanings and symbols direct all human interaction. Society, consequently, cannot be separated from culture. All spheres of human activity are subordinated to the religious precepts and the human laws derived from them. On the one hand, the evolution of new forms out of existing indigenous culture patterns or the enrichment of these patterns can further, even accelerate, social change, but it cannot itself bring it about; on the other hand, a cultural "freeze" inescapably postpones or inhibits any social change. In this case, modernization, not only a social but, in the first place, a cultural change cannot be imposed from above as modernization efforts in all cases were. This would produce a situation in which the congruence between culture and society is eliminated, and a sort of cultural anomie takes its place. This is precisely what follows a secularization drive and the imposition of functional differentiation through governmental decrees or even independently introduced economic reforms. Modernization without building up an institutional and organizational structure and, especially, without the wholehearted participation of people, can only produce political decay and revolutionary radicalization of forces attached to the Muslim heritage.

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<sup>39</sup> David A. Dilworth, "Jitsugaku as an Ontological Conception: Continuities and Discontinuities in Early and Mid-Tokugawa Thought," in Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Principle and Practicality: Essays in Neo-Confucianism and Practical Learning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 471-514.

A true civilizational dialogue has to bring out all the differences in societal imagination and expectations between people in order to find points of agreement and disagreement in settling such problems of a transcivilizational (and not transnational) nature.

## ***Culture and Political Order***

All societies develop societal orders solidly anchored in their cultural foundations to reassure people against the uncertainties of human existence and feelings of ontological insecurity. These orders offer meaningful explanations and symbolic boundaries for personal and collective identities, including the definition of membership in communities and their sub-groups in regard to universal biological categories such as age, generation, and gender, and in regard to territorial attachment.

This, however, is not enough because social ordering has to be reproduced and protected against inside deviation and violent reversal and against outside attack or intervention, as any identity delimitation unavoidably produces contradiction with outsiders who are culturally and socially different. Hence the need of political organization in the form of appropriate institutions, including the use of force inside and outside the collectivity's borders, in order to carry out order-maintaining and order-transforming functions in such situations affecting societies in all civilizations. The appearance of a political-institutional order does not, however, mean functional differentiation, because in the course of history the conduct of politics was, in most cases, an attribute of those who were responsible for cultural transmission and societal ordering as well.

The political sphere in various civilizations is determined in harmony with their cultural foundations:

- (1) In monotheistic civilizations there is a strong tendency to achieve a reconstruction of the mundane world in accordance with the commands of an other-worldly authority.
- (2) In world-renouncing civilizations, based on the rejection of the immanent world as illusion, like the Hindu or the Buddhist, any hardship on earth only reinforces the conviction that one must escape from the here and now; political structuring, therefore, is not really a matter of concern.
- (3) In the Confucian civilization, which expresses a very strong affirmation of the immanent world as the only place for salvation, the reconstruction of the mundane social and political order is envisaged in a quasi-transcendental vision.<sup>40</sup>
- (4) In the Islamic civilization, there is a profound tension between the absolute requirement of the Muslim faith to realize the unity of all believers in the form of the *'umma*, and the division of the Islamic community, stretching over three continents, into territorially defined, sovereign nation-states, in contradiction to the commandments of the *Qur'an*.
- (5) In the secular civilization of the West, the requirement to improve conditions of existence in this world is the aim of the political system, not in accordance with the commands of any transcendental authority but in accordance with the doctrines of science and technology and the ideologically inspired vision of the material welfare of man.

Concrete problems concerning civilizational dialogue in the political sphere are, again, linked to the spread of Western political institutions--the modern state and liberal/participative democracy--which were imposed on all countries of the world, independently of their belonging to one or the other of the civilizational areas.

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<sup>40</sup> In ancient China, before the imperial government was bureaucratized, a pact tied together various parts of Chinese society, a link between the communal lifeworld and the imperial center. This was not a Hobbesian pact but a genuine instrument for maintaining social peace and harmony as the unique guarantee of the survival of the imperial dynasty. In this case, the political sphere was considered as almost entirely integrated into the public domain of society (Bertrand Badie, *L'Etat importé: L'occidentalisation de l'ordre politique* [Paris: Fayard, 1992], 77-78).

## The Territorially Based Modern Nation-State

In the orbits of other civilizational worlds, as in Europe before modernity, there were varying forms of political organization and political institutions. There were small-scale communities based on the patriarchal or matriarchal models, and tribal organizations which could cover wide territories in the form of tribal confederacies--both based on the kinship system; city-states; and, finally, empires, vast entities hanging loosely together and composed of various types of other forms of political organizations and of different cultural communities, all accepting the rule of the supreme, suzerain leader. While all other forms of political orderings were based on shared cultural heritage, common ethnic origin, or territorial possessions, the empire was perceived as a transcendental project, the divine design of the emperor which kept together various parts and different populations of the empire. Consequently, the empire was the only form of political organization which realized a unity in plurality, a plurality of people, cultures, societal institutions, and ways of life.

A concrete example of communities living together without violence, each maintaining its own cultural identity, was the co-existence, on their distinct territories, of the Hindu Tamil and Buddhist Singalese communities in Sri Lanka. The Tamils occupied the north and the east of the island, the Singalese the center and the west; the constant exchange of people between the two communities did not lead to conflicts because the immigrants were integrated, without difficulty, into the other society through the caste system. The co-existence of these two communities was brought to an end by the British colonial regime, which initiated a territorial reorganization of the island and thus created a situation of perpetual confrontation. In India, the Hindu world rarely had politically overarching institutions but constructed political relations most of the time at the level of limited communities; it was a pluralistic society built on many religious, social and political entities facing each other.

In Islam, there is no difference between the transcendental realm and the earthly realm of the rulers; earthly life is as much governed by the Revelation and the traditions left behind the Prophet as the world beyond death. There are contracts between God and the people, but these contracts are between the community, on the one hand, and God, on the other hand. The Muslim worldview implies that authority and power should be dissociated in order to ensure that human society will always be subject to God's laws; power is in the hands of the ruler, but the authority from which the ruler's power is derived remains forever with God.

The Western territorially based state ideally embraced a population of the same ethnic origin--a nation--but eliminated all communities which could be rivals of the state in competing for people's loyalty. The modern state's evolution had as a corollary the ideology of individualism. A state's population had to be composed of individuals forming a heterogenous collectivity, each separated from the other and without any deep communal or cultural ties between them, bound only by allegiance to the state. Thus, the citizen-state was born. The citizen-state is built on the notion of popular sovereignty and its institutionalization in citizenship rights, and, in turn, citizenship rights are based upon the universalism of rights but the particularism of identity. Citizenship status, whatever the precise criteria for inclusion in a state's population, is a prerequisite for participating in democratic rule. Thus, it is also possible to say that popular sovereignty is premised upon state sovereignty.

These characteristics of the modern state are complemented by two others, which in time became more and more pronounced. First, as the cultural foundations of the state were in great part destroyed and replaced by scientific and technological creeds, all social interaction had to be regulated and governed by laws. This was made necessary by the fact that inherited ethical principles were forgotten as their transcendental roots were eliminated, thus the only recourse in maintaining order and moral behavior in society remained legislation approved by people's representatives. Democratic legitimation of the new normative standards, supposed to have a universal validity, was important because it served to justify the abandonment of communal, legal traditions. However, it increased insecurity in social relations to a great extent because laws are manmade and men can change them whenever they intend to do so. The best example of such weaknesses of legalistic morals are the dictatorial and autocratic regimes of the twentieth century in which so-called "rubber-stamping" parliaments approved and legitimized any laws and regulations which the ruler in power wanted.

Such a legalism led to grave abuses against individuals and groups by the democratically elected state authorities; thus the situation required further protection of the citizens against the violence of their own state.



Therefore, in the second place, the universally valid doctrine of human rights was elaborated as a sort of new version of the old natural rights theses, because the present human rights doctrine is not promulgated by one state's legislature but is the fruit of humanistic considerations recognized by all humans living on the planet. The problem is, however, that the so-called "international community," which is supposedly promulgating the rights of every human being, does not exist, and human rights are today those which are recognized as such by a group of states led by the strongest military power of the moment. In this way, the human rights regime was transformed into a tool of hegemonic intentions and efforts, thus hiding the real importance of these rights. This situation indicates the extent to which, in the political order of late modernity, individuals and human groups are at the mercy of the omnipotent state.

Political organization in the form of the nation-state is a major requirement of the modernization drive for countries situated in the non-Western world. This is unavoidable in the contemporary interstate system--the famous Westphalian system of states--which attributes the quality of sovereign state to each newcomer through acceptance as a member of the United Nations Organization. Such an obligation to join the interstate system completely changed the nature of the de-colonization process through which the principle of self-determination, promulgated by President Woodrow Wilson at the end of the World War I, became reality. What changed the character of de-colonization was the intervention of the organs of the interstate system in this process (modeled after democratic procedures applied in individual countries) in the sense of imposing Western standards of political order.

The implantation of the sovereign, nation-state formula in regions belonging to non-Western civilizational orbits produced only quasi-states, that is, states

- (1) Whose existence does not correspond to any underlying cultural or social reality as, for example, the chance frontiers established in a remote past (frontlines at which "armies of two colonial powers met") which, for obvious reasons, could not be changed at the moment of independence.
- (2) Which are, in their majority, not economically viable. Their existence, therefore, depends on the international system of welfare, which, in turn, subjects them to a more subtle kind of political dependence. This situation, therefore, is in complete contrast to the overwhelming desire of people for self-determination in late modernity.

Finally, the existence of the nation-state is more and more contested at the end of the twentieth century because its universality and legitimacy, as well as its undeniable success in satisfying the functional requirements of the modern political order during the last two hundred years, were founded on its claim to guarantee the economic well-being, physical security, and cultural identity of its citizen-population. However, various aspects of economic globalization, for example, the worldwide financial market's escape of the state's control, and the resulting increase in the gap in income between various groups of the society, as much as the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the worldwide reach and power of the media undermine these claims and challenge the effectiveness of the nation-state as the most adequate political institution in the contemporary world. The growth of transnational movements show as well that the links between the nation-state and its citizens are weakening. Globalization, therefore, clearly requires that a new formula for the organization of the political sphere be invented as the planet becomes a discontinuous space in which multiple differences flourish in a multiplicity of places.

## **The Liberal, Participative Democracy**

With some few exceptions, all states within the orbit of Western civilization are constituted in conformity with the principles of liberal, participative democracy. This means that people, following seventeenth- and eighteenth-century contractual theories of writers like Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Locke, vest their sovereignty in their periodically elected representatives, who constitute the legislative organ, the parliament, and who designate those persons who govern during the period between two elections. Representative democracy is called liberal because it is deemed to reflect the freedom of the individual concurrently with a free market economic system, and it is called participative because it is deemed to enable people to participate in policy decisions. Representative democracy functions through the competition of political parties, interest groups, trade unions, professional associations, and other mass

organizations like women's movements and environmentalist groups. According to the dominant ideological credo, the democratic form of government is the only one which safeguards the rights of the individual, which ensures the proper functioning of the omnipotent state, and which creates the necessary conditions for a dignified human existence. In this sense, democratization and free market economic policies are strongly correlated, and it is believed that one cannot exist without the other.

Consequently, democratization is the second major tenet of modernization: any state attempting to align its policies on the Western model has to reform its political institutions and establish a representative, participatory democratic regime. This ideological requirement already lost a good part of its credibility in view of what happened after the collapse of communist totalitarianism in Eastern Europe, especially in Russia, and after de-colonization in most countries of Africa and Asia. Thus, the events of the last two decades suggest that the establishment of democracy presupposes the existence of certain conditions--social, political, economic--before it can function satisfactorily. It is even possible to raise the question whether representative and participatory democracy is the only possible form of political ordering in all parts of the world, in the coming century, defined as the Information Age and in a world of transnational connections and communication? This question is legitimate for several reasons:

- (1) Democratic political institutions are inextricably linked to the existence of the modern nation-state. A democracy cannot function without a delimited territory and an omnipotent state which carries out measures that cannot be achieved by the simple application of democratic principles. This, of course, does not mean that direct or representative and participatory democracies cannot function in geographically and demographically more limited areas -- for example, regions -- especially if one accepts the thesis that a decentralized societal and political order is the highest form of democracy.
- (2) Democracies presuppose a non-charismatic leadership of popular involvement in politics. In the West, the drive toward social and political equality made it impossible to have at the helm charismatic personalities; no such personalities have appeared in the orbit of Western civilization since the generation in power during World War II and its immediate aftermath. Politics without charisma is thus a precondition of democratic life as understood today. However, cultural foundations in non-Western civilizations endow charismatic personalities, mostly having some transcendent reference, with the highest qualities of leadership, above the qualities conferred by democratic legitimacy. This was made evident in many countries of Asia and Africa, where leaders were democratically elected in accordance with the pressures of the "international community," but who came really to power because of their charisma as understood within the cultural framework of the peoples and communities concerned.
- (3) The existence of a certain standard of living, if not economic modernization as understood today, is a *sine qua non* condition of representative and party democracy, especially from the point of view of people's participation in public affairs. When people are living in poverty, when they are at the mercy of anyone who is in power and who is ready to pay for their votes, no democratic process can function properly. Popular vote in these circumstances has no meaning, in particular if it is not embedded in cultural traditions and inherited legacies from the past.
- (4) Democracy is also conditioned by the state of education in a country. By education it is meant here not only formal education but even informal bringing up of children in families and communities, education which "socializes" young people into the ideology of democracy and popular participation through voting procedures. First, how can it be expected that people who do not share a certain cultural background on which democratic processes are based could be conscious participants in such processes? And, second, how can it be expected that people who do not have the necessary practical knowledge concerning public affairs--in the political, economic or social spheres--could reasonably judge electoral party programs or politicians' promises and accomplishments? It is astonishing that even in a country like the United States of America, the foremost champion in favor of imposing democracy all over the world, many people, and not only those who arrived with recent waves of immigration, do not have the knowledge of the most basic notions of economic phenomena, except if their own simple, limited interests are in question? If people vote according to their short-sighted personal expectations and desires and not in the interest of

their communities, of their nation, how can democratic states realize the greatest good for the greatest number?

Therefore, to expect that democratic processes function correctly in other civilizational contexts reflect an ideologically based misjudgement. Foundations for the imposed statal organization, the nation-states, do not exist in these societies; the role of charismatic leaders remains as important as ever in their public life; economic development, with the exception of a few countries, has not yet created the necessary conditions for the establishment of a democratic political order; and, finally, educational programs reproducing Western approaches to knowledge, science, and technology have not achieved substantial changes in basic cultural conceptions and attitudes. Can one believe that in a Buddhist society, whose culture promotes rejection of an illusory reality, democratic processes, which highly value life in the immanent world as well as man's capacity to find the best solutions for society's problems, could have the same success as in the Western cultural context? Or, in the Chinese world, strongly influenced by various trends of Confucianism, that democratic principles can be harmonized with strong, underlying authoritarian tendencies which survived despite the economic modernization process?

In Islam, adaptation of democratic principles and procedures to a particular context is possible. I shall review this theoretical possibility in some detail, especially as it offers an outstanding example of what civilizational analysis is. In today's Islamic world, the simultaneous presence of religious resurgence and processes of democratization represent complementary forces; in addition, they appear to people to involve popular empowerment and communal identity affirmation.

According to the Islamic doctrine, the earthly rulers' power is based on the authority of God, to whom they are responsible, and only God's laws can govern human society. How could one imagine, then, democratic political institutions in Islamic countries? Democracies elevate men and women, members of the society, to positions as lawgivers who, in turn, delegate, through periodic voting, their power to govern to those put in charge of public affairs. Islamic scholars have repudiated the principle of popular sovereignty, the late Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi most forcefully, and considered Islam's political vision as an antithesis of secular Western democracy, a political institution which, as Muhammad Iqbal wrote, lacks any ethical and spiritual concern. These Islamic thinkers, however, pointed out that, in accordance with the Qur'an, God is sovereign over the whole world and His viceregent (*Khilafah*) on earth is man. This interpretation of the khalifate as political institution means that the authority of God is bestowed not on one person but on the Muslim community as a whole, a community which obtained the dignity of representing God on earth through its strict adherence to the requirements of Islam spelled out by the Prophet. Thus, Islamic society as the community of believers who are all equal in this sense, enjoys the rights and powers of the khalifate, that is, self-governance.

This fundamental aspect of Islamic institutions is corroborated by a triad of prescriptions which correspond to the basic principles of Western participatory democracy. These are, first, the importance given to mutual consultation (*shurah*); second, the affirmation of the necessity of consensus (*'ijma*) in the community and, third, the fundamental role attributed to independent interpretive judgement (*'ijtihad*). The importance of the principle of consultation is logically derived from the role of khalifate of the community of believers, meaning that all adult Muslims who collectively assume the responsibility of viceregency on earth, delegate their authority to the ruler, whose opinion must be taken into consideration in public affairs.

The necessity of consultation explains also the requirement of the consensus of all, spelled out clearly by the Prophet, who said: "My Community will not agree upon an error." In fact, consensus has long been accepted as a formal validating concept in Islamic law, especially among Sunni Muslims. The principle of consensus provides the basis for, and legitimates at the same time, an acceptance of the majority rule as practiced in Western democracies, especially as the legitimacy of Muslim political institutions is not derived from Islamic holy texts.

The exercise of informed, independent judgment represents, in fact, the basis for the two foregoing principles, it is the key to the implementation of God's will in any given place and time. It is, thus, the major operational device in applying Islamic requirements in varying contexts. In later times, the capacity of this judgment was transferred from individuals to assemblies of believers. As a consequence, the three major elements of Muslim governance-- consultation, consensus, and informed, independent judgment--were united in the communities of believers at all levels, forming the basis of Islamic democratic processes.

A civilizational dialogue, therefore, has to take into account--without admitting any pretensions of superiority or any culturally hegemonic tendency by one or the other of the participants--all the various possibilities of political ordering, compatible with a civilization's cultural foundations as well as with objective

requirements of economic development. Whether it is worth it to transplant in other civilizational contexts such typically Western forms of political ordering as the modern, bureaucratic state organization and the establishment of representative, participatory democracies consisting of voting procedures, competition between ideologically motivated parties or between parties which simply represent group interests will inevitably be questioned. Would it not be possible to organize political activities in a way compatible with the cultural foundations of other civilizations?

These questions lead to the paradox of Western democracies: are they based on the requirements of individual autonomy or on those of collective self-determination? What is the difference between democracy and national self-determination? If they are in conflict which one should be privileged? Is it possible to say that the democratic process aims at implementing people's "general will," as Rousseau demanded, and if so, is it justified to establish as the main criterion of democracy the achievement of ends, culturally defined and socially institutionalized, shared by the mass of the people at the expense of the preeminence of individual interests? Is neutrality between culturally determined meanings and value systems possible solely on the basis of citizenship and the necessity of equal treatment within a democratic state? Does the liberal, participatory democracy lead to an imposition of uniformity in a global world where multiplicity and pluralism are, although in a global context, increasingly dominating the life of societies?

## ***Culture and Economic Activity***

Economic globalization, which supposedly eliminates geographical distances ("the end of geography") and extends to all parts of the world Western technologies, methods of economic management, and ways to organize productive activities and the exchange of goods and services, certainly represents the most successful aspect of the worldwide trend of globalization. For most people this phenomenon means worldwide extension of trade or the so-called worldwide integration of financial markets, and other similar economic activities.

The other side of economic globalization is constituted by its effects on the domestic economy of every country in the world. The globalizing trend in economic activities leads to

- (1) The disempowerment of national authorities to pursue policies corresponding to conditions in a given context because internationally mobile capital and volatile worldwide markets make it almost impossible to adopt the necessary regulation of economic activities at the state level
- (2) The encouragement of domestic conflicts as a result, especially, of the new international division of labor necessitated by flexible methods of production, flexible technologies, and flexible work organization worldwide, which gradually modify the composition of the labor force in individual countries.

It is for this reason that at the economic as much as at the cultural level globalization produces not integration or homogenization but fragmentation, dislocations, and heterogeneity, what can justifiably be called "structured inequality" based on differences in economic and political power. Economic globalization, therefore, leads to a crisis of legitimacy in democratic regimes because governments cannot be made democratically accountable for their policies in circumstances created within the global economy. However, as long as citizens believe that global policy interdependence can be confronted through international and intergovernmental agreements which leave nation-states with a veto, this challenge of legitimacy will not result in a crisis of legitimacy. But the fundamental question raised by a globalized planetary economy nevertheless remains, that such an economy unavoidably makes collective identities and, in particular, cultural and civilizational traditions problematical.

It is certainly true that in the economic sphere, like in the natural sciences, many activities are technical in nature and do not depend on any cultural presuppositions. Without suggesting that it would not be possible to invent other methods, more adapted and successful in different environmental contexts, in the field of certain economic activities, it can be stated, nevertheless, that production technologies of, for example, metallurgy or the construction of airplanes are invariable in whatever cultural context they take place. The

same cannot probably be said of the production of most consumer goods or of that of pharmaceutical products, and it certainly cannot be said of domains related to foodstuffs or, in general, tastes and habits.

This is one of the reasons that dealing with civilizational differences in the economic sphere is the most difficult. The main reason for doing so is to question the legitimacy of the worldwide application of Western economic concepts and methods. The latter were the most successful in securing for an ever-growing number of people the most satisfactory living standards in the course of human history and in working toward the elimination of starvation and the innumerable deaths caused by epidemics. (Notwithstanding that at the same time, other sources of human misery such as pollution, destruction of the quality of life, and toxic, chemical treatment of foodstuffs for preservation, among others, were created). But for people living in Africa, Asia, and South America who suffer from poverty, diseases, and natural catastrophes, the only important thing is to achieve the standard of living and quality of life enjoyed by populations in countries belonging to the civilization of the West, that is, to get out of a state of relative deprivation. This overwhelming desire makes it hard to discuss with them whether there might be different ways of organizing economic activities than those imported from the West, ways which would help them to avoid those difficulties in which populations of Western countries find themselves.

Such an adaptation would mean taking over indispensable technical and technological aspects of economic activities and fitting them in the civilizational framework--an endeavor in the reach only of somebody who internalized the beliefs, values, and way of life of the culture concerned. Similar adaptations have been attempted in a few cases, many times by incompetent persons and therefore success has remained elusive. However, there is no other way to "import" these Western methods than by making them conform to local custom and cultural givens; the lack of success of economic and social modernization efforts during the last half century is proof of the impossibility of wholesale transplantation of Western ways of economic development.<sup>41</sup>

It is evident from the unfortunate experiences of the last decades that neither geographical nor economic determinism can account for the cultural embeddedness of economic activities. A multiplicity of cultural factors are implicated in defining the framework for such activities like the size, density, and stability of settlements in a given area; the customs and regulations concerning tenure and transmission of land and other property; social stratification and relations; governmental institutions, the religious and ceremonial life, and so forth.<sup>42</sup> All these factors condition the complex interactions of an economic nature. Therefore, economic activity can be best examined by studying

- (a) The way in which the resources of a country are allocated to various domains of activity such as production, distribution, and exchange
- (b) The way independent decisions of individual economic units (enterprises and persons) are made
- (c) The way in which an interrelated network of markets operates.

Here are some concrete examples which show that the wholesale transplantation of Western economic concepts and methods is impossible:

- (1) The rule of maximization by all agents involved in economic interactions, a fundamental rule in the economies of the West, is entirely conditioned by cultural values and rational evaluations in accordance with the reasoning patterns available in a civilization. First, since economic values fluctuate in a situation such as a modernizing economy, what kind of

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<sup>41</sup> We have to remember Frank Cancian's clear-cut statement about the cultural embeddedness of economic modernization efforts: "I believe that once the cultural context of modern economic behavior is recognized, the essentially value-dominated nature of comparisons become strikingly apparent... Economic man always operates within a cultural framework that is logically prior to his existence as economic man, and the cultural framework defines the values in terms of which he economizes. This is a platitude to anthropologists and economists alike. It is a simple restatement of the idea that the 'given' institutional framework of the economic system may vary. However, it can be transformed in the conclusion that there are no economic men; i.e., there are no men whose economic activities are free of culture" (Frank Cancian, "Economic Man and Economic Development," in John J. Poggie, and Robert N. Lynch, *Rethinking Modernization: Anthropological Perspectives*, [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974], 145.

<sup>42</sup> On the multiplicity of factors involved consult Daryll C. Fortes, *Habitat, Economy and Society* (London: Methuen, 1949).

values--other than the satisfaction of basic needs--can then be maximized? Second, can one maximize economic gains if the context is not relevant?

- (2) The possibility of choice which may or may not exist in the economies of Western countries does not exist for the populations belonging to non-Western civilizational areas. Choice really depends on abundance, and where poverty reigns choice is the privilege of a limited group of people.
- (3) The search for equilibrium--partial or general--in economies of modernizing countries does not appear to be a realistic approach in general<sup>43</sup> and, especially, in conditions where nobody exactly knows what the optimum solution of an economic problem would be, or what the general equilibrium in the changed civilizational context could mean at all. The simple principle guiding decision makers and macroeconomic strategists states that an economy in a state of non-equilibrium always moves towards equilibrium. This, of course, is true--except when it isn't.
- (4) Along the path traced by Adam Smith, the free market economy is built on the belief in the workings of the "invisible hand." It was, however, shown long ago that the workings of the "invisible hand" cannot be counted upon because, even for Adam Smith, it was only operating in small, local (neighborhood) markets.
- (5) "Externalities," that is, the effects of economic actions on the decisions of other economic actors are also entirely different, it goes without saying, in different civilizational contexts.
- (6) The principle so frequently used in our economic theories, the *ceteris paribus* assumption, is completely misplaced if economic modernization in other civilizational orbits is envisaged. What can be the sense of referring to *ceteris paribus* in discussing investment or employment policies in countries like the United States of America, Germany, India, China, or Gabon in West Africa? The introduction of hypothetical clauses makes reality disappear altogether.
- (7) What experience indicates, contrary to many theorizing assertions, is that non-proportional development is the best way to modernize in most civilizational worlds. Non-proportionality means, in this sense, that priorities are given to the development of one producing sector or another, to one activity--infrastructure building or extension of distribution networks--or another, to one region or another.
- (8) Predictions are frequently used in economic policymaking, in regard of investments, yields, market developments, and so forth. However, on what empirical basis are these predictions made in circumstances which do not resemble at all those in which some, though not many, successful predictions were made? Is it possible to establish trends, patterns, or even temporary constancies in such different circumstances? For example, what is the value of extrapolation of historical trends if applied to such moving sands as the confused and constantly changing social and economic conditions in a modernizing economy?

All the above do not even touch upon another major problem related to economic modernization: the fact that in impoverished countries of non-Western cultural background, economic growth as an objective cannot be sustained; it has to be conceived as economic development, including improved social perspectives for the population.

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<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Kaldor, "The Irrelevance of Equilibrium Economics." *The Economic Journal*, vol. 82 [December 1982], 1237-1252.

## **FOURTH PART**

### **The Methodology of Civilizational Analysis**

## ***The Method of Dialogue: Understanding Others***

### **Understanding and Interpretation**

Understanding and interpreting the ways another human being, or another culturally conditioned group of human beings, is thinking and acting is possible only if an effort is made not in a context of observation but in an encounter involving mutual participation in the dialogue. This is an inescapable condition of any civilizational dialogue, a perspective which guided the present study. Observation is sufficient in the methodology of natural sciences, but it is totally inadequate in regard to matters concerning human beings and human society. To underline the importance of participation in the processes of understanding and interpretation, it is necessary to note that in the natural sciences, only objects are dealt with, whereas in the humanities and social sciences subjects embedded in cultural and historical traditions and their relationships are investigated. The basis of these subjects are people, who, in the routine course of their everyday lives, are constantly involved in understanding themselves and others, in producing meaningful actions and expressions, and in interpreting meaningful actions and expressions produced by others.

Participation, therefore, makes it possible to understand and interpret

- (1) The historicity of human experience, including all recoverable memories
- (2) The way an individual or a community understands its own meaning-structures from the standpoint of the social and cultural world in which they live.

The Gadamerian distinction between "situation"--a standpoint which limits the possibility of vision--and "horizon"--the range of vision comprising everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point, especially personal and collective memories--is extremely useful in this respect.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, "participation" means an unmediated understanding of the Other's meaning-endowing situation, whereas "interpretation" means embracing his meaningfully constituted horizon. Thus, they both represent the way towards a complete or partial fusion of horizons.

The method of understanding and interpretation is based on the Aristotelian vision of human life based on practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is a reflective attitude, a sort of distancing from the realities of everyday life in order to perceive the most important, deep-lying phenomena of existence. Participation and the dialogical-communicative approach transform the relationship between object and subject, the case of an observer, into a multifaceted relationship within a community and between people belonging to various civilizations. Thus, the typically Western concept of the subject/object dichotomy is eliminated. The replacement of such a relationship by a multiple and interdependent network of relations excludes the objectification of one observer's standpoint; dialogue and communication presuppose an intentionality on behalf of all participants. The approach of practical wisdom through participation in the Other's world promotes a unified vision of human life, action, and community placed in a cosmic and evolutionary perspective. The feeling of meaninglessness is dissipated when the regulative role of cosmic interdependence and civilizational pluralism, and the effective framework of evolutionary processes, is fully understood and accepted.

It appears, thus, that the only method which may produce results in civilizational analysis is the method of understanding and interpreting the "Other" through, if needed, a creative explication of his expressions, behavior, or acts. Understanding is the moment when meaning comes to light. The object of it is any meaningful expression--verbal or nonverbal utterances like gestures, an artistic work or an artifact of any kind, a written document, institutional or organizational arrangements, or any sort of communicative attitude or act. Understanding as such is correlative to meaning, for all understanding is directed toward that which has meaning, and, in reverse, only something understood is meaningful in the framework of a dialogue. In the same vein, interpreting lived experiences of other people is always done in terms of the interpreter's own, lived experiences. If one wants to penetrate a particular meaning expressed, both the meaning in question

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<sup>44</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 269.



and the meaning-structures in which it is embedded must be understood and interpreted. Understanding concerns the act of grasping a meaning, whereas interpretation requires a double effort:

- (1) To grasp the meaning in the specific context in which it is located, not only the physical and human environment but also the framework constituted by the interactional context has to be understood
- (2) To relate the meaning indicated by the Other to one's own meaning-ensemble applicable in the given context, the Other's meaning must fit into one's own understanding of the world.

The role of interpretation is very important from the point of view of a nascent dialogue which aims at the participants reaching a shared view and a common understanding of particular situations or of the general state of the world. Such an understanding can even lead to challenging one's own self-definitions and convictions on which one's interpretation is logically and historically dependent. Consequently, to reach a shared view of a commonly experienced universe of meaningful order, we may be obliged to adjust our own worldviews and self-definitions.

Understanding and interpretation do not signify that one can fully assimilate the worldview of others; incommensurability, if not incompatibility, remain in many respects unchanged in the course of a civilizational dialogue. If understanding meant identification with the views of the Other, then the accusations of cultural relativism would be right, but this is an impossibility because nobody can see the moon from the position of another or change at will the worldview in which he was brought up during childhood. Civilizational pluralism is a relativism based on diversity, which has always been present in our natural and social world. The acceptance and explanation of diversity also leads to the affirmation that there is no universal authority which can determine the proper way to see and understand reality, the right ends in man's life, or the right design for human society. Cultures are different frames of reference which do not admit, as it is frequently pretended in the West, that requirements of human nature and rationality have to produce convergence and uniformity across space and time.

Understanding and interpretation are also based on the signs and symbols used by the Other because both, besides designating something and representing something, are indicators of a certain view of the world, of a certain state of mind, or of certain intentions of the participants in a dialogue. In this sense, this type of understanding and interpretation is a kind of "double interpretation" because signs and symbols are themselves already interpretations of reality by the Other. A system of signs or symbols, therefore, represents a meaning-ensemble which is formulated by interpretive efforts. In a strict sense, meaning-ensembles do not link signs and symbols as such but instead link different meanings reflecting the experiences of people who establish, use, or interpret those signs and symbols. Specific meanings incorporated into these signs and symbols are understood only through their mediation.

The most important symbolic instrument at the disposal of participants in a dialogue is language which assumes three functions:

- (1) Reproducing a cultural world and keeping traditions alive
- (2) Integrating society through cultural expression of spiritual and material needs, and satisfying these needs within the conditions of the civilizational world in question
- (3) Coordinating the behavior and action of individuals and groups in the overall system of social interaction.

Each linguistic communication consists of all three functional elements mentioned above; therefore understanding a meaning against the holistic background of an intentional network is always indispensable. This implies that an assertion is understandable only when what is not said is understood along with what is said.

Understanding and interpretation in the above sense also include grasping, in addition to the meaning expressed, the pattern of reasoning involved.<sup>45</sup> Once the pattern of reasoning of the Other is understood and

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<sup>45</sup> Opposite to the method of understanding and interpretation--*hermeneutics*--is the method of formalization employed by the natural sciences. Formalization means the abstraction of logical relationships from any empirical content in the real world through a set of postulates and definitions derived from empirical processes, specifying the necessary or possible relations between them. Formalization therefore leads to the construction of systemic models. A set of correspondence

linked to one's own pattern of reasoning, it becomes much easier to appropriate the meaning-structure of another cultural world, because patterns of reasoning represent the cement which holds together individual parts of meaning-ensembles. At this point it becomes clear how important it is to realize that there are no universal standards of rationality according to which reasons and reasoning patterns can be evaluated; dialogue is possible only if it is accepted that any argument and any interpretation is rational if it respects the reasoning patterns involved in the cultural world concerned. This means that the faculty of comprehension of every human being is constantly at work in everyday life to relate meanings to the particular context and to the particular point in time. This is in contradiction to the field of natural sciences, where logical reflection establishes relations between propositions, or refers to empirical justification or falsification of scientific theorems.

## **Pattern Recognition and Analysis**

In civilizational analysis, understanding and the interpretation of another civilization proceeds through recognition and examination of significant patterns. Patterns indicate the relation of units in a determinate system, the interrelation of parts governed by dominant characteristics of the whole. From the point of view of civilizations, patterns designate constancies of specific cultural contents and forms, irrespective of wide variations in concrete details of actualization. Patterns, which can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, constitute identical or similar responses to biological, physical, environmental, and social occurrences, sometimes repeated over and over in different civilizations. Given certain points of reference among particular cultural patterns, it is possible to identify trends of selective preference, of permanent sequences, of particular emphases.

Every culture is structured by its meaning-ensembles. It is, thus, not a contingent collection of different, physically and socially possible, and functionally effective patterns of beliefs and values and ways of life but instead constitutes an interdependent whole of parts. These parts are segregated and arranged in a manner corresponding to the understanding of the world of those people who are the bearers of a particular culture. Culture patterns are linked together horizontally--concatenated--as well as locked into each other vertically--ranked--in a hierarchical way. They can be explained by taking into account the civilizational whole; they are explicit, though they do not explain each other. Holistic concepts, like patterns, are frequently dialectically related. This dialectical relationship means that when one pattern refers to another apparently opposed to it or implicitly denied or excluded by it, one has to understand that the second, opposite concept is presupposed by the first because its validity or applicability makes the existence of the opposite necessary.

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rules must be established to link the formalized model to reality--proceeding with presuppositions about necessary connections between abstract entities--in order to logically deduct lawlike statements or empirical generalizations.

# **ANNEX**

## **Tehran Declaration on Dialogue Among Civilizations**

*Islamic Symposium on Dialogue Among Civilizations*

Tehran, 3-5 May 1999

## THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

Praise be to Allah and peace and blessing be upon His prophet and kin and companions;

The representatives of Heads of State and Government of OIC member states participating in the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations, held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 3-5 May 1999,

*Recalling* relevant OIC resolutions and declarations, and in particular the relevant provisions of the Tehran Declaration adopted by the Eighth Islamic Summit,

*Recalling further* the United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/22, designating the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations,

*Guided* by the noble Islamic teachings and values on human dignity<sup>1/</sup> and equality<sup>2/</sup>, tolerance<sup>3/</sup>, peace<sup>4/</sup> and justice<sup>5/</sup> for humankind, and promotion of virtues and proscription of vice and evil<sup>6/</sup>,

*Drawing* upon the Islamic principles of celebration of human diversity<sup>7/</sup>, recognition of diversified sources of knowledge<sup>8/</sup>, promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding<sup>9/</sup>, genuine mutual respect in human interchanges<sup>10/</sup>, and encouragement of courteous and civilized discourse<sup>11/</sup> based on reason and logic<sup>12/</sup>,

*Reaffirming* the commitment of their Governments to promote dialogue and understanding among various cultures and civilizations, aimed at reaching a global consensus to build a new order for the next millennium founded in faith as well as common moral and ethical values of contemporary civilizations,

*Expressing* their profound appreciation for the initiative of President Khatami, the Chairman of the Eighth Islamic Summit, to proclaim the year 2001 as the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, as well as for convening the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations as a first step to coordinate the efforts of the OIC in launching dialogue with contemporary civilizations,

*Noting* with appreciation the efforts of the Secretary-General of the OIC in this regard, and *having reviewed* with satisfaction his report on the subject,

1. *Decide* to adopt the following guidelines for dialogue among civilizations;
2. *Request* the Secretary-General of the OIC to submit this declaration for endorsement to the Chairman of the Eighth Islamic Summit and to the 26th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers for appropriate action.

### **A. General principles of dialogue among civilizations**

1. Respect for the dignity and equality of all human beings without distinctions of any kind and of nations large and small;
2. Genuine acceptance of cultural diversity as a permanent feature of human society and a cherished asset for the advancement and welfare of humanity at large;
3. Mutual respect and tolerance for the views and values of various cultures and civilizations, as well as the right of members of all civilizations to preserve their cultural heritage and values, and rejection of desecration of moral, religious and cultural values, sanctities and sanctuaries;

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<sup>1/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 17:70; <sup>2/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 49:13; <sup>3/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 60:8; <sup>4/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 2:208, 8:61; <sup>5/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 4:58, 16:90; <sup>6/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 3:110; <sup>7/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 49:13; <sup>8/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 2:269; <sup>9/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 3:63; <sup>10/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 6:108; <sup>11/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 20:44; <sup>12/</sup> Holy Qur'an, 16:125

4. Recognition of diversified sources of knowledge throughout time and space, and the imperative of drawing upon the areas of strengths, richness and wisdom of each civilization in a genuine process of mutual enrichment;
5. Rejection of attempts for cultural domination and imposition as well as doctrines and practices promoting confrontation and clash between civilizations;
6. Search for common grounds between and within various civilizations in order to face common global challenges;
7. Acceptance of cooperation and search for understanding as the appropriate mechanism for the promotion of common universal values as well as for the suppression of global threats;
8. Commitment to participation of all peoples and nations, without any discrimination, in their own domestic as well as global decision-making and value distribution processes;
9. Compliance with principles of justice, equity, peace and solidarity as well as fundamental principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

#### **B. Areas of dialogue among civilizations**

1. Responding to the common longing of humanity for faith and ethics;
2. Enhancement of mutual understanding and knowledge about various civilizations;
3. Cooperation and mutual enrichment in various fields of human endeavor and achievement: scientific, technological, cultural, social, political, economic, security...
4. Promotion of the culture of tolerance and respect for diversity;
5. Cooperation to arrest threats to global peace, security and well-being: environmental degradation, conflicts, arms, drugs, terrorism...
6. Confidence-building at regional and global levels;
7. Promotion and protection of human rights and human responsibility, including the rights of minorities and migrants to maintain their cultural identity and observe their values and traditions;
8. Promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of women, safeguarding the institution of family, and protection of the vulnerable segments of the human population: the children, the youth and the elderly.

#### **C. Participants in dialogue**

1. Representatives of contemporary civilizations should be enabled to participate in the process of dialogue, mutual understanding and mutual enrichment;
2. Scholars, thinkers, intellectuals, scientists, economists, and people of arts and culture are the primary engines for the initiation and sustaining of dialogue;
3. Governments and their representatives should play the primary role in encouraging and facilitating dialogue among civilizations;
4. Representatives of civil society can play an instrumental role in promoting the culture of dialogue within various societies and should also participate in such dialogue;
5. International organizations, particularly the United Nations system, provides suitable frameworks for promotion, initiation and sustaining of dialogue;
6. The Organization of the Islamic Conference must play a leading role in promoting the culture of dialogue within the Islamic world and at the global level through adoption of innovative initiatives in this regard.

#### **D. Promotion of the culture of dialogue among civilizations**

1. Engagement of the governments and civil societies of member-states, non-governmental organizations inside and outside the Islamic world, educational and cultural bodies as well as the Secretariat of the OIC and affiliated and subsidiary bodies to promote dialogue and tolerance as the new paradigm of international relations, which must be applied both within the Islamic world as well as in the global scene at large;
2. Holding and sponsorship of conferences and symposia designed to encourage dialogue and promote mutual understanding and tolerance among contemporary civilizations;
3. Production, individually or jointly, of various cultural products, including books, articles, documentaries and audio-visual products, projecting the true message of Islam and depicting the numerous historical instances of constructive interaction between Islamic and other civilizations;
4. Encouraging civil society and non-governmental organizations to develop cultural and educational programs fostering understanding among civilizations;
5. Incorporating programs designed to enhance understanding and tolerance of various cultures and civilizations in the educational curricula, including the teaching of various languages;
6. Enhancing inter-cultural studies and exchanges at institutions of higher learning;
7. Utilizing the technology revolution, through audio, video, printed press and multimedia technology, to disseminate the message of dialogue and understanding throughout the globe;
8. Utilizing historical and cultural tourism as an instrument of dialogue and understanding among civilizations;
9. Conducting studies on ways and means of enhancing exchange, interaction, and understanding among various cultures.

#### **E. Application of dialogue among civilizations to critical areas of international relations**

1. Determination of various actors at the international scene to build a global order based on inclusion, dialogue, mutual understanding and respect instead of the outdated doctrines of exclusion, rivalry, power politics and selfish pursuit of narrow interests;
2. Non-resort to war and the threat or use of force in international relations, except in self-defense;
3. Global commitment to peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with principles of justice and international law;
4. The imperative of respect for justice and the rule of law in international relations and rejection of policies of discrimination and double standards;
5. Recognition of the right of peoples under alien domination or foreign occupation to self-determination;
6. The speedy withdrawal of Israel, in accordance with the relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and international law, from the occupied Palestine, Syrian and Lebanese territories, in particular Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and enabling the Palestinians to establish their independent states with its capital Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which has historically been and should once again become the cradle of dialogue and the epitome of tolerance, inclusion, and understanding;
7. Commitment to a world free from all weapons of mass destruction, through global cooperation to eradicate those weapons and prevent their proliferation without any discrimination between states;
8. Eradication of the global menaces of all forms and manifestations of terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking through serious, comprehensive, and non-discriminatory global cooperation;
9. Application of the principles of equity, transparency and democratic representation in various global institutions.

#### **F. Contribution of OIC Member-State to the programs of the UN Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations**

1. The OIC shall take the initiative in inviting other contemporary civilizations to join in a search for common moral and ethical values for a new global order based on dialogue, inclusion, and mutual enrichment;
2. A draft Universal Declaration of Dialogue Among Civilizations shall be prepared, incorporating such common moral and ethical values including those enumerated in this document. The draft shall be submitted after consultation with various interested states and international organizations to the 56th Session of the United Nations General assembly for adoption during the commemoration of the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001;
3. The declaration should be accompanied by a 10-year program of action to be followed at the national, regional, and global level in order to promote and institutionalize dialogue among civilizations and a new global order based on such a paradigm;
4. The member-states and the OIC Secretariat shall take initiatives in line with recommendations in section D above and report these activities undertaken in pursuit of promoting dialogue to the United Nations Secretary-General in accordance with paragraph 3 of the GA resolution 53/22;
5. This document shall be communicated to the United Nations and other international and regional organizations for circulation among their respective member states.

#### **G. Methodology, mechanisms, structures and financing of the dialogue**

1. The OIC shall be guided by fundamental Islamic precepts, including the principles enumerated above, in its quest to promote the culture of dialogue and to engage representatives of other contemporary civilizations in dialogue;
2. Member-States would be encouraged to establish permanent national committees to promote dialogue;
3. The Secretary-General of the OIC shall designate a focal point within the Secretariat to actively pursue dialogue among civilizations;
4. The OIC shall also draw upon the resources and potentials of existing national bodies dealing with this issue in various member-states through regular consultations and coordination of activities;
5. A high-level group of governmental experts shall be convened through consultations of the Chairman of the Eighth Summit with member-states and the Secretary-General of the Conference in order to prepare and negotiate the above documents in close cooperation with Permanent Representatives of OIC member-states at the UN headquarters in New York;
6. The work of the OIC on dialogue among civilizations shall be pursued in an open-ended and transparent fashion.

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Born in Hungary, country he left after the 1956 Revolution, Victor Segesvary worked during 25 years with the United Nations in the field of economic and social development. His experiences in Asia and Africa familiarized him with the existence of different human worlds and taught him the necessity of understanding and tolerance in human relations. He obtained a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from the Graduate School for International Studies, and a D.D. from the Faculty of Protestant Theology, both at the University of Geneva (Switzerland). His vast knowledge covers such diverse fields as political science, sociology, economics, history, and philosophy as well as the "new" science of comparative analysis of civilizations. He published many books and articles, among them *Inter-Civilizational Relations and the Destiny of the West : Dialogue or Confrontation?*, reflecting his lifelong experience in the interface of great civilizations; *From Illusion to Delusion : Globalization and the Contradictions of Late Modernity*, linking the phenomenon of globalization to the dialogue of civilizations; as well as *Existence and Transcendence: An Anti-Faustian Study in Philosophical Anthropology*, exploring the relationship between biological and cultural developments. Victor Segesvary is chronicled in Marquis' WHO IS WHO IN AMERICA and WHO IS WHO IN THE WORLD.