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World into Globe III: Global History and the West's Universalizing Process

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Abstract: This contribution to World into Globe seeks to explicate how Western civilization came to be focused on the working-out of an inherent universality and equality among all humans toward the creation of a common humanity. Initially, there are the original deposits of universalization by Christianity and Classical culture that matured with empire. The medieval papacy extends natural law to the Mongols. The further extension after the sixteenth century in the mechanism of European sea power will make the world a single village – the human community. Despite the violent impact of peoples upon peoples in the empire building, colonialism, imperialism, and even racism of the nineteenth century, the fact of mankind emerges; the word is coming to connote the firm inclusion of women in all respects. No other civilization but the Western thinks and works beyond itself.

 $\textbf{Keywords:} \ civility, civilization, globalization, humanity, mankind, natural law, universalization$

- The horrors of the past century, as much a product of Western nations, hardly serve to advance any appreciation for the virtues of Western civilization. Indeed during the past several decades the criticism of the West has mounted despite its engagement of peoples of the earth in the idea and reality of a common humanity. The effort to smother any sense of the West's uniqueness and to endow all other societies with the West's liberal philosophy and practices, such an effort toward equalization may prove politically profitable and serve to promote acceptance among the peoples of the earth. But is it true? Does it not dodge, even deliberately fail, the purpose of educating our youth in the peculiar features of their own civilization—its very establishment of the idea of a common humanity, of human rights, and the legitimacy of dissent and diversity? The present study addresses that uniqueness and how it plays out among other peoples and civilizations, and the necessity of incorporating a more accurate understanding of our civilization's role into our educational system.
- While the present effort comes later to suggest the flaw in the program of multiculturalism, its principal task is to establish the uniqueness and universality of the West. For this reason it seeks at its outset the framework of civilization rather than that of the nation-state, and it proceeds to argue for the Western uniqueness present from the very beginnings but becoming more evident and aggressive in the development of a secular, this-worldly context. The political features of Western uniqueness have been earlier analyzed as moving to create, first, the shape of a common humanity with its attendance of human rights, and secondly, the legitimacy of political dissent and consequent diversity. With the definition and appreciation of humanity no longer simply a subjective personal attribute but now more frequently referring to the universal collective of all peoples and societies, this global reality has been defined as emerging clearly after World War II. Nevertheless it has long roots going far back into the Christian past, to be advanced more recently and more secularly by the concept of natural law. But wedded to this perception of the universality of the human is a further major political principle coming prior to recent modern events-namely, the legitimacy of political dissent leading to diversity. In the present work I go beyond the expressly political inheritance prior to the twentieth, even the nineteenth, century to appreciate the further advance and development of Western civilization in terms of secularization, that is, the generous exploration of the

saeculum, which will free the inherent expansiveness of the West—what I call the universalizing process—from the tentacles of religion and religious culture and allow the West to extend its influence more readily to other civilizations and peoples. In short, the first and principal task of this paper is to establish the otherness, uniqueness, and universality of the West for the rest of the globe.

- I want to pursue here a sort of macrohistory that seeks to redefine Western civilization, elucidate its positive features, and situate it in the immense global processes that have come to envelop our lives. Indeed, the numerous attacks upon our civilization for its apparently oppressive and unjust actions warrant such reconsideration. The present enterprise affords an opportunity for contending with the origins, development, and permutations in the perception of the global as bearing upon the idea of a common humanity, with the attendant issue of human rights. Let me begin by presenting four propositions that will provide the themes of this essay.
- (1) Globalization—that comprehensive process that moves toward the unification of the world's cultures and peoples—comes into being through the agency and initiative of the West. From its beginning in the Adamic inheritance, Western civilization, defined by Augustine, seems to be uniquely committed to the mobilization of its institutions, practices, ideas, and efforts to the creation of a single common humanity. It can be argued that the landfall of Columbus's party and the Portuguese breakthrough into the Indian Ocean, both in the 1490s, constitute a momentous change from the hemispheric to the global. Such attainments in America and Asia would be equaled in subsequent centuries by the distinctive development of European sea power. The engagement of the peoples of the earth had begun.
- (2) The cultural period that makes possible this immense engagement of the world's peoples and civilization is the Italian and subsequently the European Renaissance. Globalization begins thus not back five thousand years ago, nor following the Second World War, but in the period 1500 to 1625 as a product of the Renaissance, both intellectually and technologically. Although the expressly material and technical developments do not concern us here, cartographic advances—maps and mapping—provide the essential link with specifically Renaissance currents. The reasoning of Ptolemy's Geography and the subsequent scientific and technological advances of the West constituted what has been referred to as "a culture-transcending knowledge,"[1] a knowledge culturally neutral that will be readily appropriated by the rest of the world
- (3) The intellectual momentum for this comprehensive engagement is, however, much more deep-seated and must be taken back almost two thousand years to the formation of a most fateful melding of Classical culture, especially in the form of Stoicism, with the new religion of Christianity; whether in terms of one's unique rational endowment or the unique soul of the individual person, both Stoicism and Christianity occupied some ground in common, and both adumbrated an all-inclusive order for a world citizenry. Each from its own premises sought to include all the peoples of the earth in a single community, a single humanity. Thus came to be early posited the West's intrinsic commitment to a global context. Only Islam itself suggests a comparable universality; nevertheless, such universality is immediately lost by dividing the world and humankind between the House of Islam (dar al-Islam) and the House of War (dar al-Harb), thereby inviting an initial violence.
- (4) Beyond the unitary focus and expansion of the West to all humankind, its Renaissance promotion, and the scientific development, there emerges a secularizing current that will serve to define and peculiarly advance the acceptance and reception of the West throughout the globe. Let us call this force that includes and builds upon the others the "universalizing process," which benefits from the relative absence of the religious and the expulsion of the transcendental sense from its operation and influence. Secularization constitutes an essential ingredient in what we call here the universalizing process. Such universality or the effort to engage all peoples and societies is made possible by the West presenting itself in a non-religious guise throughout the globe and thus not immediately challenging other cultures and peoples, who are often strongly defined by a specific religion and its institutions. Most immediately, secularization inevitably means the aggrandizement of the political sphere, the emergence of the state, and the occupation of public spaces hitherto held and functions pursued by the religious. Nevertheless, secularity and secularization refer to a much larger process affecting not only the context of the individual's existence, but also one's perception of it. For the present practical purpose of an operating definition, the secular and secularization posit a distinct realm of human creation that avoids and essentially denies any resorting to the transcendental. Secularization perceived as the exploration of the saeculum amounts to a historicizing of the human's understanding of self, the effecting of a transition from mythic patterns of thought, emphasizing humanity's unity with nature, to historic patterns emphasizing human responsibility for the world.
- 8 To sum up: While the universalizing process is peculiarly shaped inwardly by its decisive secular character, secularization does not exhaust its basic features and

influence that operate in the understanding of the sciences, in the rendering of the Adamic inheritance into a program of human rights, and in currents that stem out of the Italian Renaissance. What, then, is global, and how is it to be measured?

- We begin in 300 BCE, Before the Common Era, following Alexander the Great's overrunning of the Persian Empire and the establishment of the Greek presence in western Asia up to the Indus River. A new philosophy is needed that transcends the parochial clutter of tiny city-states and speaks now to a welter of diverse peoples in an extended, imperial context. The new prevailing philosophy of Stoicism identifies God with Reason (logos), and this Reason is immanent in every human being. The whole universe is conceived as a single intelligible unity pervaded by reason; Reason, God, and Nature become synonymous. Along with this principle of universality as something common to all human beings, Stoicism introduces the principle of interiority. Both principles will work as corrosive to polytheism.[2] Thus a universal human commonwealth is posited by appealing to a shared human rationality. The Stoic is not a citizen of the city-state but of the cosmos, the cosmopolis, the world community, or more immediately its emerging earthly counterpart in the Roman Empire. Christianity will shortly build upon this universality, raising it to a new religious and emotional level. One thinks of Paul's letter to the Galatians 3:28: neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, but all one in Christ Jesus. Thus, at the inception of our civilization, a thrilling statement of universality and human community.
- Nevertheless, despite substantial ground for agreement, Stoicism and Christianity did not constitute a perfect fit. Which is the more important? For the next thousand years or so, the religious, specifically Christian element, better able to institutionalize itself, prevails; but after 1500, the secular, classical element will increasingly come to the fore.
- If Stoicism had remained a philosophy in books, it would have disappeared from public sight and consideration. But it was avidly appropriated by the Roman aristocracy, the administrators of the new empire, and incorporated into that empire's greatest achievement, Roman law. Here we encounter jus naturale, natural law, as a sort of divine reason immanent in the universe and associated with jus gentium. Roman law survived in the eastern part of the fractured Roman Empire, awaiting a recovery in the western part. In the twelfth century, the most creative and constructive period of a new Christian civilization (and to my mind the most creative and constructive century in the entire Western development), that fateful recovery occurred. The first common law, the canon law of the medieval church, now created a most important distinction. Its twelfth-century practitioners, known as canonists, began to be sensitive not simply to the just thing in itself, conceived as some sort of superior, supreme law, but to what is justly due to someone. In other words, they began to understand jus less as an objective, general, superior law and more as a subjective reality, an individual property—a faculty, power, force, ability, property—inhering in individual humans. For why should that religion that emphasizes the individual soul, so precious to God, not also now endow it with unique rights?
- There would in the next century develop a panoply of such rights, among them the right to own property and the capacity of individuals to form their own government. In keeping with the universalizing thrust, this unique medieval Catholic construction in the law did not limit itself to members of the club, the medieval Catholic Church, but extended its claims to all peoples. For in 1250, in his negotiations with the Mongols, Pope Innocent IV extended these rights to infidels and Christians alike. In the course of the century the number of rights increased. The right to liberty, the right to self-defense, and the right of the poor to be safeguarded from hunger—all these came to be defined.[3] This is momentous, forming a rich tradition in Scholasticism down through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but lacking a reconstruction of the larger political framework in which these rights might function.
- Now that this account of the philosophical and legal development has provided a basis for consideration, let us turn to the advent of the Renaissance and an effort to make good on the second proposition. Here our argument pertains to the late Renaissance, 1500–1625, as experiencing a new vision of the globe and geography. Parenthetically, let me observe that if the Renaissance as a historical period in the academic curriculum is to survive, not only must the Age of Discovery be welded more effectively to what is largely elucidated as a literary and cultural revival, but more specifically, the well-known exploiting of linear perspective by the Renaissance artists need to be carried over into the mathematical uses of perspective in cartography. Indeed maps in the period were referred to as pitture-pictures.[4] For what makes all this sailing about possible is a transformed cartography (mapping and envisioning of the earth) and a new outlook regarding the surrounding oceans, which are perceived no longer as a confinement but rather, given corresponding improvements in navigation and ship building, as an inviting highway.[5] Furthermore, the very expectable uniformity of the earth's surface and its accessibility invite systematic claims to political expansion and control.

- What specifically identifies this transformation with the cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance derives from the fact that if the recovery of Classical texts is both the engine and the hallmark of the Renaissance, then developments in the field of geography and subsequent cartography emphatically qualify. The recovered text in question is not literary or philosophical in nature, but rather scientific-namely the Geographia of Claudius Ptolemy.[6] In his third projection, Ptolemy, who worked at Alexandria, Egypt, in the second century CE, provides us with a view of the then-known world better than that available to the gods on Mount Olympus. The most immediately salient feature of this view is the total encompassing of and perspective upon the habitable world from a single projection. But even more important is the creation of a grid or graticule placed over the entirety so that any place on the earth can be located in terms of its latitude and longitude. The basic assumption here is that the terraqueous surface of the globe is essentially uniform and thus subject to mathematization and control. Translated from the Greek into Latin in 1406, Ptolemy's Geographia first circulates in manuscript editions and then begins to be printed in 1475. The Geographia will serve to transform European cartography and Europe's understanding of itself with respect to the rest of the world. From Florence, Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli will write to the court of the king of Portugal, explaining the world by means of a linear diagram marked off in uniform spaces created by coordinates of parallels and meridians, each space representing 250 leagues; once the appropriate latitude was determined, simply by sailing westward through twenty-six of these spaces one would arrive in China—of course, barring any surprises. A copy of the letter will later come to the attention of Columbus, serving to encourage him.[7] Mathematics takes all of the drama and romance out of a bold and dangerous venture.
- At the time, probably more important than Columbus's landfall is the Portuguese breaking into the Indian Ocean, with the highly developed commerce carried on by the many surrounding superior cultures and peoples. Here the Europeans came as barbarians upon civilizations more sophisticated; down to the mid-eighteenth century the European presence would be on sufferance in the form of a number of toeholds for trade. To the west, in the recently discovered new hemisphere, the Europeans' superior organization and technology established a prompt dominance. It will be sea power, the armed warship, that makes this global dominance possible—first the Iberians (Portugal and Spain); then the Dutch, English, and French, in competition with one another; and then, after 1763, the British.
- The idea of the world as a single village can be said to date from the late Renaissance: from the last third of the sixteenth century we encounter a number of voices among the French humanists speaking of the world as a single village or human community -le monde comme une ville.[8] Nor is this experience of global unity simply a trick of the mind. By 1571, with the Spanish institution of the regular Manila Galleon, moving from Acapulco, Mexico, to the just-discovered Philippines, comes that vital contact with the Chinese, who had in that same year gone from a paper to a silver currency. Ming China now becomes the great sink of American silver, delivered from both directions, European and the Pacific Ocean-the beginning of a truly worldwide global community, rather than just hemispheric. [9] With its discovery and engagement of peoples new to itself, Renaissance Europe stumbles upon the challenge of a common humanity and an abruptly enlarged mankind. Michele de Montaigne, though supremely sensitive and wonderfully alert to the diversity of humankind, can nevertheless assert a common human pattern (commun humain).[10] And against a rising tide of colonial exploitation and abuse, the papal pronouncements in the Sublimis Deus of 1537 that the Amerindians are true men, true humans, present themselves as a clarifying ideal, howsoever ignored at the time.[11] The most significant protest against Spanish colonization and imperialism comes from the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas in his affirmation that the Amerindians are our brothers and that Christ died for them.[12] Not an entirely fruitless declaration, for his influence served to promote within the central government of imperial Castile efforts to control and moderate the violence and depredations of the Spanish settlers.
- 17 With the decline of the feudal practices of post-medieval Europe and the centralizing, equalizing, and leveling efforts of the new territorial state, the time had come to make good on those rights that had already been adumbrated five hundred years earlier in canon law and medieval Scholasticism, but now in a more secular rendering.
- Beginning with Hugo Grotius, the much-vaunted school of natural law, which comes to dominate the political scene of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, actually proceeds on a new track of its own making, namely that of natural rights. Given the ambivalence of the Latin term *jus naturale* and all its continental equivalents—for example, the French *droit naturel*—as meaning both some sort of immanent, superior natural law and also a right, natural in its inherence in every human, and given also the twin drives at this time toward ultimate equality and universality, the ground appeared prepared for a radical shift of debate from that of natural law, no matter how immanent, to that of natural right or rights, placing its philosophical and legal exposition on a new trajectory. Historians of natural law such as Otto Gierke and Michael Crowe are apparently so offended by this shift that insofar

as they recognize it at all, they consider it "piracy" or the changed face of natural law. The shift begins with Grotius, who, besides positing the natural right and duty of selfpreservation, prescribes the task of natural law as the extended elucidation of the generic nature of man: "the very nature of man is the mother of the law of nature."[13] In short, natural law would now be rewritten explicitly in terms of the very nature of the human animal. Within man, within all members of the human species, Grotius posits a potential equality based upon a minimal sociability. At crucial moments, this awakening creed is supported by the application of Stoicism in successive doses. The shift of debate onto a new track is completed by Thomas Hobbes in his recognition and affirmation of a single natural right—the basic human right to self-preservation.[14] England's experiment with republicanism in the 1650s will indeed advance not just a natural right but natural rights, as evinced by the Levellers, the Diggers, and the Putney Debates. Thus prepared, John Locke announces in 1683 the natural rights enjoyed by all men to life, liberty, and estate. [15] Each person is bound to preserve not only himself but also the rest of mankind. The last decades of the eighteenth century see the harvest of the school's thought in the American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. For all its faults and high-sounding claims, the school of natural law, for a long time now that of natural rights, promotes a shared recognition of what the law means: the fact of being human. The logic of an inhering universality and equality has a certain inexorability, which, once enunciated, as in 300 BCE or 29 CE, will slowly work itself out in more effective statements and practical realizations. Thomas Jefferson, a slaveholder, can claim that all men are created equal, thus leaving us with a terrible anomaly. Nevertheless, before a century has passed, down the road there will come someone who both actually believes in this basic human equality and will have the power to put it into legal effect-Abraham Lincoln. In an earlier statement, while the Dred Scott case was being argued, Lincoln had said that the realization of equality must await favorable circumstances but would occur in due time. The Founders "meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit."[16] There is no need here to linger over Jeremy Bentham's scorn for natural rights, nor the influence of the German school of historical laws that displaced the interest in natural law and human rights during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights presented a statement of human equality and universality at one brief moment. It is unenforceable and non-binding for the most part, unless a particular national foreign policy wishes to enforce it. For the hold of nationalism and national sovereignty persists more strongly than ever. Nevertheless, the Declaration is more than just an ideal in books, for it has the capacity to invoke world opinion and moral judgment. In its definition of human rights for which we can all work, it is a statement of world citizenship. It provides, in the all too many places where its tenets are unobserved, even flouted, a language of challenge. It transcends all arguments of cultural specificity. If there is one overriding meaning to the West, it is here, in its bold search for a universal, all-inclusive human community. Here the French drafter of the Universal Declaration, René Cassin, struggled tirelessly to hold that universality uppermost: "the affirmation of one common human nature and the fundamental unity of mankind."[17] Or again, as Daniel S. Lev remarked at the Vienna Human Rights Conference in 1992: "the argument of cultural specificity cannot override the reality that we all share the most basic attributes in common."[18]

In conclusion, let me return to the title, "Global History and the West's Universalizing Process." Over time, the realization of a single moral community has been an effort not as much against external opponents, although these have been present, but rather against demons within the universalizing process that would make a mockery of all attempts to realize a justice that is equal and appropriately fair. No other civilization has committed itself so unremittingly to the universal process of realizing a common humanity: no matter what the lapses, the incongruities, the moral distortions, the dreadful stumbling. Western civilization from its beginning posited a notion of universal equality, which has its own inexorable, implacable logic—howsoever dependent upon favorable circumstances—operating upon the human conscience, as well as reason, death-transcending, an immortal spur.

Yet the realization of a single humanity and its needs possibly conceals other aspects of globalization and the nature of the universalizing process here associated with the history of the West. In this process itself, even more important than the overcoming of the social divide in the realization of a single humanity is the problem of the effective incorporation of women into a condition representing all the rights and features enjoyed by men. In this respect the possible abstraction of a realized common humanity becomes now a present, ongoing political battle not just in the USA but more formidably throughout the world—a conflict that pertains to nothing less than the full incorporation of the other half of humankind in programs of human rights. To its supreme credit this issue has been raised by our civilization, whatever our own failures to achieve such a just settlement at home within ourselves. All other civilizations live with one arm tied behind their backs. Its success on a global scale is by no means certain, although the seeds are everywhere bearing fruit. Indeed, it

would seem, and we can hazard, that the very human issue involved in the realization of a single humanity far surpasses in importance the apparent ready acceptance of Western science and technology throughout the world. The latter is relatively easy to accept. The human dimension to the former issue poses an immense social and political problem especially for Muslims and throughout the world in general. Much depends upon the secularization of the religious through the secularizing effects of the universalizing process released by the West. While the extent of the success of the women's cause is by no means certain, it has the merit of being right, just, and appropriate. The very fact that the West can operate fully in the incorporation of the female and male in the undivided use of the human argues massively for the future success and ultimate triumph of this process in the new modern civilization coming into being.

[PDF]

Notes

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