

***Toward a New World Order:
the Influence of Globalization on Democratic Theory***

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It is my deep satisfaction to be received in such a friendly way at this outstanding academic institution. May I thank the Board of Brown University and, in particular, President Ruth Simmons for the invitation to deliver the Ogden Lecture this year.

I would like to address a subject of immediate interest to us all, which is the question of democracy. Being more specific, I will share with you some thoughts about the influence of globalization on democratic theory. Let me start by stressing what Leibniz would call a *vérité du fait*.

Democracy has never enjoyed so many followers and so much prestige as it does today. In all continents democracy stands second to none as a standard for legitimate political authority. I am not saying that every American, European, African or Asian agrees on the decisive importance of the value of democracy.

What I am suggesting is that the prevailing assumption nowadays is that people, anywhere, have good reason to see democracy as valuable. While thirty years ago such an assumption did not sound plausible at all, the appeal of the democratic ideal currently seems all but on the wane. The shift in attitude has been dramatic.

Suffice it to recall the lengthy discussions Latin American intellectuals used to hold during the sixties about what countries in the region would be fit for democracy. Now the debate is centered on how to become fit through democracy. The nature of the debate has changed. And so has the political mindset of national communities long associated with authoritarian vices. Globalization is much to be credited for this new state of things.

Not in the sense that trade among nations has finally lived up to the civilizing role predicted by Montesquieu and other advocates of the *doux commerce*. But in the sense that new technological patterns have facilitated cross-border dissemination of democratic values and practices. One might speak of a technology-driven democratic synergy among nations.

In times of Internet, it is unlikely that any community can remain oblivious for long to what is thought and

discussed beyond its borders. Ideas now travel fast and can flourish wherever sensitive minds are available to pursue them. There is no doubt therefore that the information age has been conducive to the remarkable spreading of democracy over the last decades. But what matters most is not to trace down the roots of the democratic wave. Much more important is to ascertain how sustainable such a trend is.

On what grounds could one assume that democracy has a long life in its new and old settings? Are democracy and capitalism destined to thrive side by side as strange but loyal bedfellows? I am afraid no credible evidence bears such a sanguine conclusion.

History has not reached a happy end except for those determinist minds that take it as a libretto to be duly performed without variation. One might at best speak of a mutually beneficial but open-ended coexistence between the information economy and democracy. Hence the utmost importance of paving the ground for a continued expansion of public liberties. This implies anticipating and tackling potential challenges to the spreading of democracy. Some of these challenges are of a conceptual nature.

Let me call attention to a fallacy many analysts and public figures have lately incurred in. I refer to the presumption that what has won broad acceptance is not democracy as a value but concrete forms of representative government. Some people in the West have come to the point of producing road maps to guide newcomers in the realm of democracy.

Signs vary from one map to another, but they are customarily derived from the historical experience of a couple of mature Western democracies. It is as if democracy as a good is subject to intellectual property rights. Those who coined the currency first would be allowed to control any of its following issues. New democratic experiments would only amount to variations around a single and long established theme.

Such a view is not deprived of philosophical backing. It has recently been couched upon absolutist ethical viewpoints like those set by Leo Strauss. Back on the public agenda is the belief that it is worth striving for the good, rational and perfect society. To those gifted with a magic or metaphysical eye, it would be possible to know what the best polity is, if not the best life for us all. I need not stress the risks this belief entails.

Let me quote Sir Isaiah Berlin , who spent his entire life alerting against the damage the idea of an all-embracing solution to human problems is likely to inflict upon societies. If a ruler, a class, a party or a country is convinced that it holds the key to collective happiness, Berlin used to say, any price would be considered worth paying to see the redemptive mission duly accomplished.

To make the ideal omelette, there would be no limit to the number of eggs that should be broken. The twentieth century abounded with examples of how costly monist views are when acted out in the political scene. No effort should be spared to ensure that the twenty-first century fares better. It is true that there appears to be no ready-made prescription against fundamentalisms.

But it seems only sound to stress now and again the relevance of value pluralism. It is indeed high time

policy-makers were reminded that the world is increasingly less prone to absolute notions of good and evil. They simply do not fit the world as it is. The international community is too diverse and complex to be straitjacketed into Manichean schemes.

Why not recognizing that we live under conflicting but equally true values? Instead of ranking ultimate ends as right or wrong, we had better balance them in the most satisfactory and legitimate manner. After all, this is how our societies work. This is what democracy is all about.

Democratic rules are nothing but the provisional outcome of conflicts of values and interests, being liable to revision whenever the majority so wishes. Here lies the explanation for our democratic experiments being different from one another.

An institutional arrangement struck in Berlin on the question of social welfare, for instance, will hardly prove relevant or even possible to Canadians, Albanians or Australians, as it is meant to reflect power disputes, social expectations and traditions that are specific to the German people.

This does not mean that Germans value social justice and neglect individual autonomy, while Australians go the other way round. It only shows that nations, when self-governed, strike balances among values in line with their own set of priorities and resources. The corresponding results cannot but look unique.

What democratic experiences do have in common, let me insist, is the guarantee that decisions emanate from a rule-based deliberative process. If there is a feature that distinguishes decision-taking processes in democracies, it is indeed a permanent trade-off among the actors involved.

It comes thus as no surprise that contemporary thinkers, like Albert Hirschman, have suggested that modern democracies base their legitimacy on deliberation, rather than on a predetermined general will. A legitimate decision would represent the deliberation of all , and not the will of all.

One may be tempted to ask by now why nations that have grown so accustomed to the exercise of give-and-take continue to be so reluctant to abdicate from their sovereign rights when operating on the international scene. How come the significant increase in the number of democracies over the last decades has not been translated into a decisive drive to do away with the remnants of the Westphalia Order?

The usual answer has been that, pending the establishment of a legitimate supranational government, the exercise of power remains the sole means of preserving democratically-defined national interests. One could always replicate that democracy among nations can only be built through its very exercise, as it has been the case in the domestic dimension.

But we must recognize that some important steps have been taken under the aegis of the United Nations, insufficient though they are. Let me recall the series of sovereignty-limiting agreements in the fields of disarmament and the environment that were negotiated after the reactivation of the UN in the post-Cold War.

Even more promising was the creation of the International Criminal Court. The ICC has met the long sought-for goal of a supranational jurisdictional authority. If domestic remedies fail, the Court can, through mandatory decisions, hold individuals accountable for systematic violation of human rights.

What seems to be consolidated by developments like the ICC is the universal validity of human rights. These rights relate to individuals not in their capacity as citizens of a particular state, but for their human condition, deserving, therefore, supranational protection.

Is the ground somehow laid for the emergence of what Immanuel Kant termed as the cosmopolitan condition? It may be too early to tell. The absence of major powers in this process is not an encouraging factor. Neither is the political stalemate caused by the disagreement on the Iraq affair.

Some justifiably fear that the clock of history might run backward. The appalling threat of terrorism stands as a sword of Damocles over us all. As the international community has not succeeded so far in defining a common strategy to fight such a lethal though diffuse threat, unilateral responses seem to be in the vogue again.

But there are some countervailing trends to be reckoned with. The most meaningful one seems to be the emergence and gradual consolidation of an international civil society. I refer to the public space set by the widening and diversified network of non-state actors. It goes without saying that such a phenomenon would not be possible, at the least with the remarkable vigor it occurs, in the absence of the information revolution.

Not everything that emanates from this new arena sound progressive. Some topics of the anti-globalization movement have a clear counter-enlightenment flavor.

But, all in all, there is no doubt that we are witnessing to a process of huge importance to the expansion of citizenship. It is as if issues of universal validity have found their Alma Mater. Suffice it to bear in mind the crucial role played by civil society in the convening and development of the global conferences on questions of the environment, human rights, women, racial discrimination and climate change.

It is exactly on their activism, rather than on any external mandate, that rests the legitimacy of non-state actors. They are what they do. I only hope they think bigger and do bigger, moving beyond an issue-oriented approach and addressing questions like the deficit in global governance.

Instead of piecemeal claims against globalization, it is time we hear a consistent call for the renewal, not the destruction, of the Bretton Woods system. Economy is globalized, but politics is not. We continue to miss effective and representative mechanisms of political coordination for the supervision of trade and financial flows. They would be essential to curb the pressing problems of protectionism and speculative assaults.

I am perfectly aware that governments hold the primary responsibility of facing those challenges. But nothing prevents civil society from adding its plural and authoritative voice to causes of interest to the welfare of

millions. The closer the interaction of democratic states and civil society is, the better the chances of making an inclusive global order emerge are. To be sustainable, the new order should meet the interests of the widest number. This implies broad participation.

It is my firm belief that democracy is the key to social peace and stability. Not only within national borders, but in the world at large.

Thank you all and see you in September.