

Joshua P. Hochschild

## Globalization: Ancient and Modern

The first problem of globalization is its resistance to criticism. It is not just that globalization is sometimes described as inevitable, nor that it involves such a complex of factors—economic, political, legal, technological, cultural—that no one could master them all. Rather, the very notion of globalization seems to defy definition. The term is intended to name a process of *change*, but note that this change is without any definite *terminus a quo* or *terminus ad quem*. The very grammatical structure of the name “globalization”—an adjective, converted into a barbaric verb, then forced into service as a still more barbaric noun—conveys the sense of an incoherent stasis-of-change. Will there be a time when we will all be entirely globalized? Or will we all, always, be globalizing? No wonder it is so difficult to say precisely what “globalization” is; it has more the character of unintelligible Heraclitean flux than of a discrete Aristotelian *trans-form*-ation.

This sense that globalization eludes precise definition intensifies when we notice the variety of candidates which are proposed as its agent. On the one hand, globalization is sometimes said to be the product of certain powerful bodies—state authorities, perhaps working in concert with, or under pressure from, multinational corporations. On this hypothesis, globaliza-

tion, whatever else it is, is an orchestrated and intentional historical development: either a wise plan for a new political order, or a conspiracy of selfish interests. On the other hand, globalization is sometimes described as the product of the innumerable choices of individuals. On this hypothesis, globalization is not so much an intentional end as the incidental epiphenomenon of the actions of citizen-consumers, whose free pursuit of happiness at once facilitates and is facilitated by vast cultural and technological changes.

Although taken in their pure forms these two theories of the agency behind globalization are incompatible, they are often taken together as elements in an explanation of globalization. As it happens, what we call globalization is the product of cooperating agents, both individual and corporate; and there is some truth in both proposals. But note that, even supposing globalization were primarily a conspiracy of government and commercial interests, it would be in the interest of the conspirators to advance the myth of the spontaneous,

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undirected, and natural emergence of the globalizing order. Likewise, if globalization in fact emerged unintentionally and naturally, citizen-consumers would have no cause to object should government or commercial interests anticipate and advance this process which individuals freely demand.

Taken separately or together, however, both of the proposals are strictly incompatible with a third hypothesis about the cause of globalization, according to which globalization is not a contingent historical development, but the fulfillment of an inevitable destiny. On this view, globalization has no agent at all; human beings, taken singly and corporately, are only the subjects of a change whose agent is History, or the march of Progress. Although rarely claimed so explicitly, this is the underlying assumption of the common rhetoric about the “inexorable” process of globalization. It alone justifies the stigma that attaches to critics of globalization: that they are in some sense standing against the tide of History.

Such stigma points to the phenomenon of *globalism*, the ideology or ideologies that support globalization. Indeed, for each theory of the cause of globalization we may discover a corresponding ideology to advocate and support it. This is easiest to see in the case of the last theory mentioned. According to it, globalization is good precisely because it is inevitable. This is the most portentous of globalisms. It is also the most clearly ideological, and the least coherent of the ideologies: it faces the same paradox of Marxism, arguing that something is both good (and therefore *should* be pursued) and a historical necessity (and so *cannot* be resisted).

More reasonable ideologies correspond to the other proposed agents of globalization. One variety of globalism is committed to the position that natural and unintended

consequences of free agents are desirable, and thus that individual freedom should not be restricted. This ideology sees globalization as at once a *confirmation of the good* of freedom, and a *reason to continue expanding* freedom. This version of globalism is most common among those of a libertarian bent, and among those who regard globalization as primarily an economic and technological phenomenon. Another variety of globalism argues that international peace—conceived as the mere absence of violence, or as the establishment of positive justice—requires a coordination of law and power. This variety is more common especially among those who recognize the political dimension of globalization, and who wish to support the use of government in advancing the process.

Like the theories of agency to which they correspond, these three globalisms are ideal types, rarely found in their pure forms. But the diversity of globalisms is sometimes enough to distract us from their common purpose. The fact that globalization is supported for different reasons can make it seem as if globalization is the subject of healthy debate, and even that it has critics. In fact, however, it is difficult to find any serious dissent from a roughly globalist point of view. Whatever “globalization” turns out to be, it is not clear that it faces any serious opposition. To take the most obvious example: globalization is occasionally criticized—sometimes from the Right, more often from the Left—for being an exercise in empire-building, and as such greedy, short-sighted, and hubristic. But especially in its leftist forms—most prominent as a protest movement directed against international trade organizations—this criticism is obviously not so much *anti-globalist* as *alternatively globalist*. If globalization involves the universalization of political order, such a critique is surely motivated by an ideal that is no less com-

mitted to globalization: it favors a certain kind of global political order, only one which is more multilateral in its procedures, more “progressive” in its economics, less militaristic, and more sensitive to the environment.

Such considerations help give us some idea of the kinds of phenomena that are supposed to be referred to under the label “globalization.” But this is only enough to make sense of established ideological positions, not to offer a genuinely critical philosophical perspective on what globalization is. Indeed, we have only compounded our original sense that globalization eludes definition. Lacking a clearly identifiable form, agent, origin, or end, globalization does not seem to be the kind of thing that has an intelligible *essence*.

What, then, accounts for the sense, shared by many, that globalization at once deserves but resists serious criticism? Let us approach this question by noting first that, even if it cannot be properly defined, globalization seems to be fairly characterized as a trend toward *increased economic and political interdependence*, which at once fosters and is fostered by *cultural homogenization*.

These two general aspects are sufficient to make sense of some of the common metaphors about globalization, chief among them that “the world is getting smaller.” Of course, strictly speaking, the planet is not getting any smaller, but the domain of one’s familiarity and facility is getting larger. The world is not changing size, but less and less of the world is “foreign” or inaccessible to us. Indeed, what globalization means is that one’s known world—the amount of the world at one’s disposal—is in fact expanding. Crudely put, one can stay in the same kind of hotel, eat the same food, and watch the same movies, anywhere in the world.

This not only makes it easier to travel, it makes it easier *not* to go home. Hence, a third aspect of globalization: interdependence and homogenization mean *fungibility*—the translatability of ideas, of technology, of capital, of employment, and of people. This is an aspect of globalization commonly defended as good, insofar as it can be understood as an increase in freedom. But such systemic mobility is experienced just as strongly as disorientation, displacement, and dislocation—that is, as *loss of freedom*. This should come as no surprise. Politically, interdependence is, quite clearly, *not* independence. And on the personal level, if mobility is the material mark of globalization, its spiritual mark seems to be, for lack of a better term, *secularity*, in the broadest sense—the weakening of tradition, the loss of individual and cultural memory, the fading of those forms by which transcendent order has heretofore been made incarnate in daily life.

While this may sound like a controversial criticism of globalization, I introduce it originally as a plain fact. It is, moreover, a state of affairs for which there is historical precedent. Conventional accounts of the Hellenistic era describe that period in terms of growing interdependence and homogenization, of the expansion and consolidation of Greek culture and politics in the eastern Mediterranean world. The Hellenistic age was ancient Greece’s era of globalization. And it should be a lesson to us that historians describe that period as one of *decline*, characterized by a *loss of freedom*. That loss is described not only politically, in terms of the transition from democracy to empire—surely significant in itself, and not irrelevant to our own day—but also in terms of a change in *ethos*. The expanding political horizon of the Greek world after Alexander was accompanied by a deeply felt sense of cultural, and personal, disorientation. It is just this change in *ethos*

that is sometimes taken to account for the eclipse of the theoretically more sophisticated philosophies of Plato and Aristotle by the more useful and obviously therapeutic “philosophical” *ars vitae* of the Hellenistic age.

Defenders of globalization do not try so much to deny its ethos of secularity as account it a justifiable cost. What is gained at the expense of spiritual disorientation is precisely the “freedom” which produced that disorientation. It is tempting simply to respond that the “negative” freedom of mobility is not enough to balance the “positive” freedom of spiritual orientation. If globalization promises increased freedom *from* all sorts of traditional and local restraints, it does not necessarily entail—and may preclude—the freedom *for* the opportunity to live within those traditional and local restraints. After all, the freedom of mobility is not necessarily the freedom to make a life near one’s extended family, to inherit a family farm or business, or even the freedom to raise a family on the income of a father’s work. If freedom in one sense accelerates change, one of the things that can change is the freedom to maintain and sustain those ways of life that earlier generations have deemed valuable.

Such an analysis in terms of negative and positive freedom is helpful, but incomplete. An economist might respond that if the goods of such positive freedoms *were* genuinely valued, then increased negative freedom would provide for their pursuit. The economist might present such a (presumably counterfactual) conditional not just as a historical claim, but as an implicit argument in favor of negative freedom: under the regime of maximal negative freedom, says the logic of classical liberalism, supply will always rise to meet demand. The problem with this argument is that the existence of actual “demand” in the economist’s sense assumes a *strongly felt*

sense of lack—in this case, a sense of the loss of positive freedoms. But apparently, in most cases, the loss of such positive freedoms is felt only just enough for it to be dismissed as romantic longing. The loss is not felt so acutely as to inspire families and nations to resist what is perceived to be an inexorable cultural tide. But the possibility that genuine loss is not felt strongly enough to register as an economic force does not mean that the loss is not real, nor that the gains fully compensate for the loss.

Why would a loss of freedoms not be felt more strongly—strongly enough to motivate individuals and nations to action? One reason has already been pointed to: *the loss of memory*. One manifestation of secularity is the fading of particular memories, and the atrophy of the very faculty of memory, once so determinative of whole modes of thought and practice. This is why those memories that do linger are flimsy enough to be disarmed by name-calling: the stigma of “nostalgia” is simply unendurable in an age of progress. And because of a failure of memory, even when social displacement has been strongly felt, its historical conditions have often been misunderstood. A prime example is the rise of feminism, which styled itself as a long-overdue rebellion against traditional family structures, but which, with the help of a more nuanced historical perspective, can be understood instead as a reaction to a new, untraditional, and disorienting Western liberal consumer society. In other words, the widespread appeal of feminism may have owed less to a very clear discovery than to a very vague memory—a memory of a time when women in traditional roles were integrated as functional and valued members of a meaningful social order.

Another reason that a loss of freedom might not be more strongly felt is the very *adaptability* of the globalizing world. Mobility and translatability mean that so-

ciety is capable of quickly reorganizing itself and accommodating felt needs, both particular and systemic. This flexibility and dynamism is supposed to be one of the benefits of the emerging global order, but this very strength may also be interpreted as a weakness. For it involves the *absorption* and *consolidation* of basic functions once thought to be assigned to proper orders of local society. The power and promise of the market's ability to meet demand is thus precisely why it poses a threat to forms of social order that once provided basic human goods through arrangements that cannot be reduced to market forces—not least of which are the once highly functional bonds of both the nuclear and the extended family.

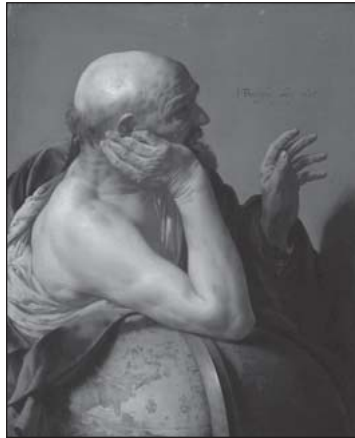
Just to take one example: for the greater part of human history, young children have been cared for by their parents, and aging parents have been cared for by their grown children. Today, market forces attract (and pressure) children to move away from their parents, as they attract (and pressure) wives and mothers to enter the labor force. Simultaneously, the market reduces the social cost of these changes by absorbing the social functions of the forms of life which have been abandoned; firms in the market, rather than the family, begin to care for elderly parents and young children. But the market absorbs these functions with institutional arrangements that are inherently less *personal* than the older arrangement of spontaneously formed, self-regulating, and intergenerational families. And while such families could be analyzed in terms of their purely economic function—as offering services now provided by day-care centers and

nursing homes—such an analysis flattens the reality of such families, which were a source of many other goods as well.

Naturally, modern changes in family structure are a controversial subject, and this analysis is not intended to assume that, for example, a mother entering the labor force is in itself an unqualified bad thing. Such an event has real social costs, however, costs which are often not admitted, at least in public. But the main point is a more fundamental one: the absorption of basic and local social functions requires the expansion, coordination, and consolidation of political and economic power. It is this phenomenon—which is a large part of what we mean by globalization—that I want to address.

First, we clearly have *practical* reasons to regard such consolidation of power with suspicion. The threat of tyranny looms any time power is concentrated and a people are deprived of the means for supplying their basic needs. When a people are dependent on large and distant forces for the provision of basic human goods, they are beholden to those forces, and can be manipulated by them. The very possibility of such manipulation, short of its actual exercise, should be enough to make us wary of social arrangements that diminish the relative autonomy of local communities.

Nor do we have reason to fear only overt tyranny, but also the subtle, indirect forms of cultural effacement which are the corollary of homogenization. If we value diversity of cultural forms and believe that healthy and natural associations will not fit a standardized model but admit of local distinctions, then the centralization and



Heracles

consolidation of political and economic power are direct threats to the vitality of social order. With this observation, the original, pragmatic suspicion of the consolidation of power begins to point to what could be framed as a more distinctly *moral* criticism. For it is not just that we want to make the chances of despotism remote, but that we respect genuine communities enough to want them to govern themselves, as much as possible, locally. The functions which are served by a community are integral to the character of that community, and for a distant power to absorb the functions of local communities is to place the integrity of those communities in jeopardy. This is true whether the distance of the usurping power is literal or figurative, and in the case of political and economic consolidation, it tends to be both: modern large-scale political organizations, with their cooperating economic forces, are necessarily geographically and causally removed from the interests of local communities.

If the moral obligation to respect the functional priority of local associations has only received a name in the last century, it is clear that the Catholic articulation of “the principle of subsidiarity” is an attempt to formalize what has been implicit in political thought and embodied in political practice since ancient Greece and before. Specific historic events—in particular, the upheavals of industrialization, and the accompanying ideologies of mass organization—prompted in reaction the explicit formulation of the principle of subsidiarity. It was only when a more or less natural state of affairs became threatened that our attention was directed not only to that state of affairs but to its moral status.

The principle of subsidiarity does not serve to determine the concrete details of political life *a priori*. Rather, it is flexible enough to accommodate a variety of situations, actual and potential. Yet, as a prin-

ciple, it must provide us with criteria to make judgments about those situations. And clearly, if the principle is to be intelligible as a principle, we must understand some types of associations—especially the most local of all, namely, the family—as having *natural* functions, the performance or nonperformance of which determines whether that association itself is of a natural or unnatural form.

The principle of subsidiarity depends, then, on the notion of the politically or socially *natural*. This notion fared far better in ancient political philosophy than it has in modern. Today the articulation of the notion of the politically natural is both a theoretical and a rhetorical challenge. The notion of the politically natural is intimately connected with lived experience and cannot be articulated if there is nothing that persuasive speech could call to an audience’s mind. At this point, we see that two of our observations about globalization—that it effaces memory, and that it violates the principle of subsidiarity—prove to be mutually reinforcing. For one of the reasons that globalization effaces memory is that it threatens the local political communities which sustain memory; but, in turn, the effacement of memory makes it more and more difficult to apprehend the naturalness of local political communities, and so to apprehend the intelligibility of the principle of subsidiarity.

This indicates the urgency of articulating and defending the notion of the politically natural. We should remember that for long periods of time the notion of natural political order carried much weight; the decline of that notion is an observable development in intellectual history. If the notion is difficult to articulate today, that does not necessarily indicate the incoherence of the notion in itself; it may instead indicate the weakness of the theoretical framework of contemporary political philoso-

phy. Pointing out the weakness of that framework, and articulating an alternative framework in which the notion of the politically natural is more at home, is again both a philosophical and a rhetorical challenge.

Thinkers who want to do justice to the notion of the politically natural will return to the classical notion of *teleology*. That simple word disguises a complex picture. Indeed, in politics, teleology necessarily implies a composite view, because it is a view about the composition of politics. It holds that political entities are genuine unities, which are made up of parts which are themselves genuine unities. To be more specific: we are used to hearing advanced as classical the view (a) that human beings have intrinsic ends. But political teleology also includes the thesis (b) that human associations have intrinsic ends, and further, and most importantly, the thesis (c) that the ends of individual human beings and the ends of associations in which those individuals find themselves are interdependent. Any definition of human beings may imply that man has a nature, and so entail the first thesis. But it is the other two theses that are captured by Aristotle's famous definition of man as *the political animal*. It is not just that man by nature finds himself in political associations, but that, insofar as an association is genuinely political, it is sufficiently unified to be understood as having a proper nature, determining a proper end, which proper end involves the fostering of the flourishing of the individual human beings who are members of the political association.

A reflection on political teleology allows us to find a genuine, as opposed to apparent, alternative to globalism. Each of the three varieties of globalism described above implies a different theory of the parts and wholes of politics, not one of which is compatible with a genuine political teleology.

One variety assumes that men are not organs in a natural body but cogs in the artificial machine of peace and security. Another assumes that individuals alone have ends, and it regards any suggestion of corporate purpose as an imposition on the realization of personal freedom. The third attributes teleology only to history, a history within which both men and their political associations are effectively passive material elements.

Each of these views manifests a different way of perverting the classical teleological view of man and politics; indeed, it is easy to correlate the three globalisms with three prominent alternatives to Aristotle: Hobbes, Hayek, and Hegel. But though they manifest it differently, it is the common fact of their perverting classical teleology that is most significant. Indeed, the underlying similarity of the globalist views is perhaps clearest when we see that in each there is something of the philosophy of the Stoics—the artificiality of politics, the decontextualized freedom of the unencumbered self, the ineluctable force of a cosmic destiny.

We have already practically identified globalization as the process that is, and renders all other things, resistant to definition. It is not insignificant that Stoic physics is primarily influenced by that same Heraclitus invoked at the beginning of our inquiry, he whose universe is no less materialistic, but all the more unintelligible, for its perpetual flux. Likewise, it is not insignificant that Stoic political views can be fairly characterized as “globalist.” It is not just that Stoic ethics seems to have been intended as a therapy for the spiritual ills of a globalizing age. More significantly, Stoic physics leads directly to a “political” notion: the primacy of “cosmopolitan” citizenship.

We can capture the outrageousness of Stoic political philosophy by comparing it with the supposedly utopian political phi-

losophy of Plato. Simply put, there is in Plato nothing so unrealistic as Stoic cosmopolitanism. The world-city, like the “global village,” is a metaphor stretched beyond sense. By contrast, Plato’s ideal city, whatever else may be said about it, is at least conceivable as a city. It has a particular place, and a manageable size. Indeed, it has historically believable origins in the association of households freely pursuing their common good—a story, we should remember, whose values are at once thoroughly agrarian and thoroughly libertarian.

Plato’s view of politics is teleological in the fullest classical sense, and his view of the relationship of parts to wholes is appropriately nuanced: sensitive at once to the integrity, and to the interdependence, of the natures of man and society. In other words, Plato’s political philosophy is *organicist*. The word implies literally an *organ*-ized body—a body with organs. A political entity, on this view, is a unified body whose purpose is to serve and to be served by parts—individual human beings—which have their own functions and ends: parts, that is, which in the context of the political body have the function of *organs*. On this account, political association is not to be understood merely as the effect of human will—either the incidental outgrowth of individual decisions, or the intentional effect of coordinated self-interest. Political associations are rather outgrowths of human nature: not just what human beings want and decide, but what they *are*.

Much could be said here about the anthropology implicit in such a political view, but to begin with, we note that from the point of view of politics, it is at least as important that human beings are *animals* as that they are *rational*. The early-modern social contract theorists—who effectively made politics artificial—did treat human beings as animals, whether that be as competing brutes or happy savages. But in

emphasizing the “animal” need for peace or security or freedom, the social contract theorists all tended to ignore these animals’ need for *each other*. Human beings, like other animals, come into the world by and through others of the same species. And, like many other animals—probably even moreso, and certainly in more ways than any other animal—human life and health depends on the sharing of a common life with other humans.

For this reason, as far as the prospects for a renovated political teleology is concerned, the current interest in the concept of “community” is a somewhat heartening trend. Even here there is danger, however. In practice, the word remains over-used and abused. (Carrying, as it does, the “objective” tone of social science, it is even a self-defeating word: a genuine community generally does not call itself a community, but something much more particular.) In any case, if it has a correct use, the word “community” should at least name something that is three-dimensional. Genuine community has geography and duration—a particular place, and persistence through time (and time which is significant in human terms—ideally, measured in generations). It also involves genuine obligations—that is, commitments, rights, and responsibilities that are not the product of, or terminable by, choice. On all these counts, the alleged new opportunities for “community” made possible by electronic communication are not very promising.

Can there be an *international* community? Clearly not, in the particular, local sense that properly belongs to genuine community. But here we must make a qualification. For while the notion of an “international community” may often be invoked as an ideological metaphor—meant to glorify modernity, or to justify war—the phrase can be used to imply nothing more than the

coordination of particular and national ends. This is not something to which the notion of the politically natural is necessarily opposed. Indeed, it is something which has been forcefully articulated by thoroughly organicist and teleological thinkers. For example, whatever his particular political motivations, Dante in *De Monarchia* offers an argument for the coordination of a global political authority, and does so by appealing solely to Aristotelian principles of ethics and politics.

More recently, conservative thinkers have actually exhibited a surprising ambivalence about world government. While there are good reasons to be suspicious of any actual prospects for global political order, such thinkers as Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, and Mortimer Adler—all influenced, like Dante, by Aristotle and Aquinas—have argued that world government should be an ultimate political goal. There is a shallow so-called “natural law” tradition which argues for world government on old Stoic, or on neo-Kantian, grounds. But there is also the genuine natural law tradition—which should be traced not to the Stoics, or to Kant, but to Aristotle and Plato—which underscores the principle of solidarity, the appropriateness of coordinating human ends. The difference is that this genuine and

conservative natural law tradition is able to hold together the principle of solidarity with the principle of subsidiarity; indeed, it is able to see that the two entail each other, and that any notion of political coordination which violates the priority and integrity of natural, local associations is not a form of solidarity but of tyranny.

Conservative “ambivalence” about the idea of global political coordination is thus not based on a failure to make distinctions, but on a willingness to make distinctions that others refuse to see: between authority and power, between republic and empire, between the natural and the unnatural. Theoretically, they are aware of alternative conceptions of political unity and order not available from contemporary ideologies. Practically, this translates into an appropriately reserved anticipation of what our increasingly globalized future holds. On the one hand, the process of globalization is mainly supported by globalists whose vision of healthy political order is not conservative. On the other hand, the age of the nation-state was hardly ideal for the thought and practice of truly organic community. Carefully observed, its passing may yet provide new opportunities for lasting, local communities—for natural political bodies of place and perdurance.