

# ACCESSING SOCIAL THEORY THROUGH CIVILIZATION

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*The scientific modern Western pronouncement that everything has to be treated with objective impartiality requires the positing of our own culture as one among others, having no value claim to be privileged in its various pronouncements. The claim to scientific objectivity is an aspect of Western modern culture and belongs only to its interpretive context. Hence, the very claim to Western scientific superiority as having methods to access all phenomena objectively is a culture bound position that cannot be universal. After all, "objectively speaking" other cultures, as equal, have very different understandings that do not include such tandems as "objectivity" or for that matter "subjectivity." Culturally objectively speaking, we cannot deny them their different reading of cultural, and indeed all other, phenomena. To say that the others are wrong would be tantamount to saying that we have a criterion of the "right culture" which belongs only to our culture. But in this sense, one abolishes the treatment of other cultures as given objectively and equivalently. We then would posit our scientific culture as universal and require that all others interpret themselves in terms of our own requirements. If social theory is part of modern western culture, then it is limited by that culture and cannot claim universality.*

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## Introduction

The constant reappearance of a required awareness across all domains of methodological controversies, from language based interpretations of the world to complex life worlds, requires a more fundamental tracing of such awareness. As the conventional wisdom has it, civilizational awareness comprises the most pervasive and in turn the most concrete experience. While the latter is not thematically articulated, it is lived in every life world and its social expressions. That is why we regard this awareness to be relevant to methodological understanding of life worlds and societies.

Other methods for inner-social comprehension, for the most part, have led to charges that proponents of a given methodology either lack expertise in diverse disciplines or in complexities of other societies, or borrow a methodology from one discipline or one society and thus cannot grant universal validity to such a methodology.

No doubt, each positive and human science, and each culture in a specific life world, has a dream of its supremacy and all inclusiveness. Strictly speaking, such a dream is understandable; all modes of awareness have a generality that is prior to, and assumed by both, empirical generalizations and rationalist categorical univer-

salities. Yet it ought to be equally clear that each mode of awareness is restricted to the essential morphology of its content or subject matter. Resultantly, the methodological issue must face the question of essential incompatibility of diverse contents. Given this issue it may be contended that each subject matter may demand a specific methodology. This is most pertinent to contemporary Western scientific and scholarly disciplines and their radical fragmentation. As modern and postmodern writers suggest, there is no longer a master discourse. It seems, then, that given this context, any effort to proffer some encompassing methodology would end up in a peculiar and at times nonsensical aggregate of concepts borrowed from various discourses. The fault does not lie with individual scholars, but with modern assumptions which seek a unified method prior to testing the very notion of methodology. If the latter is regarded within the parameters of Western modern thought as something constructed and applied on, or used to access most diverse phenomena, then it may be doomed to failure a priori. Prior to construction, there is a required investigation into the assumed modes of awareness and the ways they correlate to diverse contents. In this sense, no methodology can be adequate if it is external to these correlate phenomena. The task for methodology is to discover concrete modes of awareness, their active engagements, and their correlate subject matters that are sufficiently broad and founding to cut across diverse disciplines and cultural phenomena.

But before we can take on this task, it is necessary to trace out the differences between major domains such as cultures and societies that belong to specific life worlds, and treat the latter as ways of ex-

plicating more encompassing awareness – civilizational. Hence our immediate task is to explicate, in principle, the notion of life world and whether there is one such world, common to all peoples, a world that at times is called “natural”. Tempting as this designation may be, any study of the conception of “nature” immediately forces us to recognize that variety of different claims fit this category, and each claim depends on different ontology. In this sense, the notion of life world has to be relativised to specific peoples ways of life which may be radically different from other peoples.

### **Common Daily World**

A cursory survey of works in a variety of disciplines show a trend that tends to use the phrase *life world* or *lived world* as a basis from which to critique such phenomena as culture, social structures, and positive sciences. It is common to treat a life world as every day world, taken for granted, prior to any cultural or scientific engagements. It would seem then that life world is distinct from various human activities, such as sciences, cultural creations and rituals, and that these are founded upon a life world. Thus, the forgetting of the basis in the life world lends various cultures, and the current language of culturalism, an unwarranted preeminence. In modern West, such preeminence is granted to sciences, as a cultural mode that wants to explain all life worlds. In order both to critique and limit such explanations, it is essential to show their basis in a specific life world. It is generally understood that a life world is an interconnection of meanings, where each thing is not only categorized, but also “means” other things. A cup, as an implement, points to other implements, points to

water, rain, rivers, clouds, places of pottery production, employment, wages, property rights and legal systems. Such “signitive” connections can be multilayered, with meanings “overlying” other meanings, forming not only horizontal connections, but also “vertical” obscurities. Thus a simple implement such as a cup has horizontal connections – as seen above – but can also have vertical overlays.

The material from which the cup is made can have scientific, chemical meanings, atomic and sub-atomic codes, each forming its own set of horizontal interconnections. We say “obscurities” because each overlay tends to intersect other layers and interpret them in ways that were not a part of the initial meaning of the level that is being interpreted from another level. For example, to speak in terms of physical sciences, one tends to use such language as “atoms” or “building blocks” and create a perception that everything is “atomic” and unrelated to anything else. In this sense we obtain a perception that a cup is simply one individual thing among others, or a human is an individual and society is a sum of “worldless” individuals, each having its own characteristics. Here we may, in fact, acquire two distinct modes of perception as to what a life world is: sum of individuals each with private interests – capitalism, and each individual, defined by social relationships – socialism. It would mean, then, that cultures, including sciences with their methods, would make sense and have meaningful interconnections proper to their life worlds. Indeed, limiting cases can be used to show the veracity of such relationship between a life world and culture. In Christian, Judaic, Marxian, fascist, Islamic life worlds, cultures that go counter

to the requirements of their life worlds are banned and the writers punished. In turn, that a modern Western life world has an overlay of scientific and, above all, technical cultures does not mean that stripping away such an overlay would disclose the ontologically “primordial” and “pure” life world as a ground of meaning and sense.

Indeed we cannot demonstrate that there is a life world apart from the one now being globalised by the sciences and the one that the sciences left behind as, for example, the Medieval life world. This is to say, the extension of technical sense by the scientific constructions and their overlay of the prior life world does not imply that the previous life world was and is the originary, while the scientific is an overlay over the originary. If this were the case, then one would have to show why the Medieval life world, that was there before scientific life world, is the ground, and the modern activities are an overlay over such a ground. If this position fails to reveal *the* life world, then we are left again with a multiplicity of such worlds. The problem can be phrased in other terms: is there a pure life-world that is not intertwined with layers of cultural sense? The Medieval peasant as well as the Taoist perform minimal rituals that are totally coextensive with the formation of their sense awareness.

We can state that neither science nor other cultural constitutions of sense would comprise an overlay of an originary life world. Given this possibility, one is barred from finding an access to some originary life world. Thus if the modern life world is scientifically and technologically laden, then the constitution of modern life world is the very sense embodiments that comprise scientific-technological praxis. This

is important in light of the possible claim that the embodied sense not only covers over the presumed originary life world, but that it has assumed a life of its own. This case is most obvious in modern Western scientific/technical creations, and, in other cases, in modes of comportment, rituals, all the way to “proper” emotional attitudes. All such givens are deemed to be “out there” requiring no legitimation; indeed, the very legitimation is deemed to be equally “out there” in the form of “higher beings” or scientific verities. That is why the question of social sciences that would be able to offer us a theory of all life worlds is suspect, since such a theory would tacitly assume a fundamental and all present life world prior to any overlay by specific discourse of a specific life world.

### **Cultural Hypothesis**

But we must also contend with the current assumption of the priority of “culture” over life worlds and a confusion between culture and civilization. The breakdown of modern Western thought into multiple theories and sub-theories, leading to separate and autonomous discourses with their power to make the world in accordance with their formal prescripts, has been extended by the postmodern writers into cultures as discursive systems, each different from and equivalent to others, and each having its own life world. In this sense, all understanding becomes cultural anthropology with all the attendant issues of theory and methodology. We shall note how methodological issues have been neglected leading to almost non-existent erudition in dealing with others and, in fact, with one’s own culture.

Such a methodological requirement shows up even among cultural theorists who claim that everyone is bound by one’s culture or more mystically, by “cultural unconscious.” Apart from the contradictions mentioned above, and the point that one could not even claim that the others are bound by their “culture”, since the very meaning of the term “culture” belongs to the writers own cultural context, extended to a claim that all views are culturally relative, there are more basic phenomena that appear in such contradictory claims. If such cultural anthropologists, including Foucault as a Durkheimian ethnographer, objectify their own culture in order to see its limitations, then they posit a methodology that seems to be independent from and impartial to the culture in which it originates. What a mysterious trick by some members of a culture, allotting themselves the privilege of being free from their own culture.

Given this methodological problematic, and yet given the current anthropological fact that most numerous modern and, indeed, postmodern writers are claiming cultural and social boundedness while transcendently showing that they are freed from such boundedness due to their demonstration of a difference of other cultures from their own, then either the cultural boundedness can be understood from a reflective transcendental position, or from another ground on which the cultures stand. If the former is the case, we could speak of cultural and social inter-reflexivity, such that each is recognized in its limitations by virtue of the others. In this case we would be faced with an awareness that reflects upon, and traces the limits of each with respect to others, without being bound by any. Such a transcendental reflection

could traverse various cultural formations without being committed to any. If the second option is taken, then we could speak of cultures as traces of civilizational awareness and thus understand them essentially within a much broader context. Thus cultures could be reflected from civilizations and be accommodated in their variety as mutually inter-reflexive and reflected from a specific civilizational awareness. We shall explore this inter-reflexivity of cultures as they are reflected by civilization and how civilization is reflected from another civilization, to the extent that such civilizational inter-reflexivity may support our methodological access to our own society and other social formations. While it might seem that both awarenesses – the transcendental and the civilizational – are the same, we shall attempt to show that different civilizations comprise specific rules of transcendental awareness and that some rules are not compatible with others. Here our efforts will focus on the most fundamental modes of awareness in order to note how such modes either deny or attempt to subsume the other modes, and how both attempts fail, leading to global confrontations.

Cultural theory and method has to contend with the following issues, specifically ones that require methodological access to cultural phenomena and their multiplicity, and the presumed objectivity which is required as a guarantee to truth claims by theorists of culture. This is to say, the scientific modern Western pronouncement that everything has to be treated with objective impartiality requires the positing of our own culture as one among others, having no value claim to be privileged in its various pronouncements. The claim to scientific objectivity is an aspect of West-

ern modern culture and belongs only to its interpretive context. Hence, the very claim to Western scientific superiority as having methods to access all phenomena objectively is a culture bound position that cannot be universal. After all, “objectively speaking” other cultures, as equal, have very different understandings that do not include such tandems as “objectivity” or for that matter “subjectivity.” Culturally objectively speaking, we cannot deny them their different reading of cultural, and indeed all other, phenomena. To say that the others are wrong would be tantamount to saying that we have a criterion of the “right culture” which belongs only to our culture. But in this sense, one abolishes the treatment of other cultures as given objectively and equivalently. We then would posit our scientific culture as universal and require that all others interpret themselves in terms of our own requirements. If social theory is part of modern western culture, then it is limited by that culture and cannot claim universality.

Yet, by the claim of treating all other cultures objectively and without prejudice, we have just offered a position that requires (1) the treatment of other cultures not as they are but as they are interpreted in terms of one culture’s requirements, or (2) of surrendering our cultural prejudice of objectivity, and allowing other cultures their modes of awareness that do not regard themselves as either objective or subjective. How can one claim to know the other “objectively” when one has imposed one’s own cultural component of “objectivity” on others and hence not only did not understand the other culture, but failed to escape one’s own culture. In this sense, the very claim to be able to treat one’s own culture objectively is to accept this very

culture without any “objectivity,” since one already lives and accepts the terms of one’s own culture. This issue is more pronounced when current critical cultural scholars make the above mentioned claim that cultural texts do not refer to anything and hence cannot be judged by some presumed external criteria. It is interesting, nonetheless, that various Western critical cultural movements posit implicit evaluative postures as criteria for judging their own and other cultures.

Given this state of affairs, perhaps it is possible to decipher a way of understanding of ourselves and others in terms of the currently unavoidable phenomena of much broader and more pervasive civilizational awareness. What has become obvious in cultural research is that cultures belong to civilizations. Indeed, a civilization may contain a great variety of cultures that in themselves may be at odds, may clash and reconcile, and yet remain only aspects of a civilization. After all, we speak of Western, Hindu, Mid Eastern, Mayan, Chinese civilizations, implying that various cultures may be framed by and reflected from a more fundamental awareness. In turn, cultures may offer a way of accessing civilizational awareness – our own and those of others. Due to global cultural intersections and their mutual interpretive transitions, it is possible to note how an imported or exported culture is reflected from and understood within the context of other civilizations. This also means that we are no longer in a position of being restricted to one civilization since we have already incorporated cultural means of others that may trace our and others civilizational awareness. The latter may be accessed reflectively from its own various cultures

and in turn reveal the way such cultures are constructed.

This way may be regarded as a fundamental architectonic or originary civilizational awareness without which no interpretation of culture would be adequate. By using cultures as traces of a given civilization’s architectonic, it is possible to avoid being completely immersed in a specific culture whether as a given method or a theory. A given culture, as a trace of a more pervasive civilizational awareness, breaks out of its own limitations by becoming open to other cultures either within its own or another civilization. While cultures belong to specific life worlds, in contemporary understanding the basic life world is the globalized, modern Western that has transgressed national and even continental boundaries; hence, our task is to decipher even this life world as an aspect of modern Western civilization and the ways that it has created acceptance and resistance by and from other civilizations and the cultures within them. Resultantly, it is most proper to use cultures as means to explicate specific civilizations and to note in what ways they are compatible or incompatible, comprise identities and differences.

It should be noted that cultures do not point to or signify civilizations, but are directly involved in constituting a trace of a more basic and pervasive “presence” that anyone “lives” as a civilizational awareness. This means that we shall not borrow a method from any civilization or from cultures within civilizations; the latter disclose themselves as modes of fundamental awareness at a level accessible to anyone. Thus, in the current global interconnections the cultures already trace their own and different civilizations – in transition.



Whether we do or do not accept theoretically our own inherence in a civilization, we are finding ourselves in an in-between domain. This means that the self constitution of awareness of current civilizations, even if not recognized positionally, is in-between, in transition. Whether one belongs to Mideastern Judaic-Christian-Islamic, Greco-Roman, Mayan, or Hindu civilizations, one has already recognized, at the cultural level, one's being in transition between them. This transition is currently the unavoidable methodological awareness. Any other way would revert back to the problematic articulated above and would be inadequate with respect to the phenomena of our current global encounters. If we take cultures as traces of civilizational awareness and thus understand them essentially from broader contexts in which cultures inhere, then cultures would be reflected from civilizations and be accommodated in their variety as either belonging to one or another civilization and, in many cases, revealing their essential and incompatible differences from one another.

### **Transitional Awareness**

Before we decipher the dominant modern Western civilization, comprising the major globalizing force, we must note a more fundamental global trend: cultural and discursive equivalence. All discourses are equivalent stories, since none of them access "the thing in itself" and hence such stories are aspects of a culture or depend on their maintenance by committed believers. Shall we follow scientific discourses or mythical stories, or are they equivalent simply because no specific culture can claim to be a representation of any real-

ity: each constructs its own "reality." Yet a fact remains that such cultural constructs have become globalized and pose a question concerning their interpretation from one ethnic group to another, from nation to nation, and from language to language. Can rap culture be the same in Lithuania as it is in African-American community? It seems that there is a transition from one to the other that never maintains an identity assumed by the creators of this culture. In such a transition there is no transmission of the original, but its reinterpretation in a different cultural setting. The transition and reinterpretation suggests a mixing of differences into a novel and unique result. Islamic music guardedly resonates with jazz, with American country music and even with hints of hard rock. While still Islamic, it is also in transition. Other cultures, such as political, are equally in flux due to their mutual encounters. It is fascinating to hear of contemporary efforts to establish an "Islamic republic" as if the latter were akin to the traditional Islamic mode of social rulership by a Khalifat. The call by purists, such as Sadr to fight for the reestablishment of global Khalifat and not an Islamic republic are signs that political culture is in transition and it is too late to return to some purity – if it ever existed. Such cultural transitions seem to avoid cultural contradictions. But this also implies that there is no clear understanding of the other's culture and indeed no clear comprehension what comprises the historical and current civilizational clashes. Before this question can be articulated, a more precise delimitation of the issues involved in cultural studies must be addressed.

While current civilizations, and the various cultures within them, are both in

confrontations and in transitions, some civilizations, by way of their cultures, attempt to master both the confrontations and the transitions in various ways. Some cultures are used to reclaim the past and other cultures trace the possibilities of constant transformations. Although it may seem that those two cultural modalities can live side by side, if we transform them as traces of civilizational consciousness, it might turn out that they will be in confrontation with each other. The task then is to investigate contemporary events at the global level as they confront the complex modern Western scientific and secular life world and how the latter is understood by others. For example, persons of scientific enlightenment and rationalism, although living in China, belong to Greco-Roman civilization while fundamentalist Christians, Israelites, and Muslims living in the West might belong to Mideastern civilization. In this sense, the civilizational phenomena, as basic ways of awareness, are neither derivable from nor reducible to particular nationality or geographical site.

It is the case that current globalization and, by extension, universalization of modern West provide a challenge and a power that are a threat and a call to resistance by other civilizations. The latter are also compelled to make claims to be universal civilizations. This is to say, the very basic level of awareness, which we call civilizational, seems to consist of phenomena that encompass everything. Greco-Roman materialism and rationalism, up to day, claims that all peoples must follow this mode of awareness in order to be realistic and open. To insist again, the same universality and encompassment is claimed by a Hindu: the founding text of our civilization, the Ma-

habharata, it is claimed, includes all humanity. In this sense, there appears to be no room for the other. Mideastern civilization, with its family variation of Judaism, Christianity and Islam claim to be the saving grace of all humanity, even if the salvation means a destruction of all life – at least human life. Each civilizational awareness will confront the other with an effort to subsume the other under its own logic. This is a moment of confrontation, since the other will be regarded as irrational, immoral, primitive, or mystical. Each civilization, as basic awareness, will interpret the Others and attempt to locate them within its own parameters as inferior, less than human, and even demonic. If the civilizational modes of awareness are irreconcilable, there arise confrontations that may lead to mutual destruction. We have holy wars and racial genocide, we exert efforts to reeducate the others, to make them sane, to convert them to true beliefs, and do so for the good, the salvation, the development and enlightenment of the others. Thus, if we bring them better material life, medicine, etc., we are doing them a favor, despite the fact that we are destroying their life world. In turn if we bring them faith and salvation even if they resist, we can baptize them and send them to heaven.

Resultantly, in order to understand our contemporary global confrontations, it is advisable to discover the broadest and, in turn, the most pervasive compositions that, as modes of awareness, are traceable in and through cultural symbolic designs and social relationships. Such compositions will comprise civilizational awareness to the extent that the latter cannot be denied without circularity; in its very denial, it will affirm itself. Such awareness, as will be seen, cannot be a generalization



from cultural or social parts, since these, in their multiplicities and even oppositions, cannot be understood in any sensible way within their own parameters. This is to say, they trace their sense from a more pervasive composition of modes of civilizational awareness. No doubt, there are symbolic deviations from a given mode, but precisely such deviations indicate its significance. Whether members of societies or cultures think of their civilizational awareness or not is irrelevant. They, nonetheless, adhere to their modes of awareness. We must note, at the outset, that fundamental “modes of awareness” at the most basic level are coextensive with “civilizational awareness”.

Our analyses, then, will attempt to trace through cultural symbolic designs the varieties of civilizational awarenesses in order to show their mutual understanding and, at the same time, their radical divergences. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that contemporary global encounters among cultures and societies may have incompatible civilizational modes of awareness. In this sense the confrontations, at least within some modes, might call for holy wars or battles to the death. Such calls have been echoed across continents and from seemingly diverse social and cultural groups. What interests us are the modes of awareness that rule such calls. The tracing of these modes will allow us to understand the current breakdown of nations and even ethnicities, the antagonisms among groups that once shared the same temples and family tables. It is precisely their common daily life that accepted each other’s civilization, but the catalyst for their confrontation is the presence of the modern West that allows each to accept and yet resist the

transition between them. In short they disclose transitional awareness that belongs to both civilizations. Once again we must emphasize that civilizational awareness is not an expression of either individual or intersubjective awareness. At the same time such awareness no longer belongs exclusively to a particular civilization but to their transition one across the other, requiring the recognition of their limits and at the same time transgression of limits in transition: transitional awareness. The latter, then, is the method accessible to all life worlds and cultures.

One approach to civilizational studies demands the inclusion of two broad conceptions. First, there is a requirement to discover the broadest and all inclusive modes of awareness that determine social and cultural parameters. This means that a social method or theory cannot be sought for in a specific society, but in the broadest social “entity” – civilization. If problems arise within social and cultural domains, the problems must be resolved at the level of civilization. Any interpretive questions arising at any level of cultural life worlds, such as aesthetic, commercial, metaphysical, ethical or legal life must be resolved at the level of this morphology. Second, in order to signify civilizations and not only to remain at cultural life worlds, one must attend to the symbolic designs of social systems which combine into broadest and most encompassing modes of awareness. It must be suggested that this comprehension of civilization does not seem to be adequate, since through social structures and symbolic designs appear phenomena that do not play a role as if they were a “broader morphology”, but the very way that cultures, also trace directly the civili-

zational phenomena. The latter are traced by varieties of texts, such as social systems, theories, myths, even symbolic designs as interpretive, but which are not composed of accumulation of interpretive texts. The method of accumulation of separate texts from which we would obtain a generalized morphology is a residuum of naïve positivism. If a given cultural text, such as a mythical story, does not disclose civilizational awareness, then no summation of texts could perform the task. The phenomena of civilizational awareness should not be considered as “deep structures”, as if they were some founding rules but are phenomena precisely because they are the very sense, background and foreground of the varieties of cultural texts. It may be the case that civilizational phenomena may be resisted by a particular cultural text, but the very resistance shows the significance of such phenomena.

Civilizational analyses have a task of tracing the characteristics of these phenomena, since the latter, as phenomena, comprise, in turn, an access to cultural texts. Any comparative analyses of cultures also provide a way of contrasting and correlating civilizational phenomena. Moreover, the latter must be more pervasive than any specific composition of cultural life world, despite the fact that they are not founding phenomena. Indeed, they are all pervasive because they are phenomena and not localizable as ontic reality. As we saw in our discussions of historical awareness and the issues of its access, we encountered such phenomena at the transcendental level as atemporal, non-localizable, nowhere and anywhere, and yet accessible and lived by anyone engaged in the study of historical events and their meaning. This was spe-

cifically relevant to the access of historical texts as interpretation of events of a particular period. This is also relevant as an access of cultural texts of others. But we must avoid the inadequacies of the very notion of hermeneutical or interpretive access, since interpretations belong to texts and cultural life worlds, but not to civilizational phenomena. The latter do not yield themselves to interpretation, but are required for interpretation of the sense of any text. Let us, then, look at one contemporary civilization and how it forces civilizational transitions and thus a novel methodology.

### **Civilizational Texts**

The various major critiques of Enlightenment, from Adorno through Heidegger, Habermas, Derrida, Levinas, to Deleuze fall within the parameters of one or another variant of Enlightenment, whether it is rationalism, psychologism, sociology, economism, or even biologism. Valuations that are available, such as utilitarianism, deontologism, and voluntarism are equally variants of enlightenment. Hence the task is to extricate the life world of enlightenment from such variants at its very limit in order to reveal its invariant structure. The *first* is the well known dualism of subject and object, the former is mind, the latter is matter. The subject is the unconditional source of all theories and values while the material world is an irrational and valueless sum of homogeneous matter to be constructed in terms of the subjects theories and values. *Second*, the subject is unconditionally autonomous source of all laws in both the social and material realms. Since there is no other criterion concerning the material and social worlds, then all subjects are equal

concerning the way that the material and social worlds are to be constructed. *Third*, construction is unconditional to the extent that no causes can be assigned to the structures and procedures by which the subject interprets and shapes itself, social relationships, and the material environment. In the language of Enlightenment, all are projections of human autonomy. Various terms have been used for projection: objectification, alienation, humanization, and even self-realization. It is important to note that the term “projection” is basic to political and scientific enlightenments.

It is now possible to turn to the essence of the life world of enlightenment: *it is a process of valuation*. Everything in the universe assumes a value to the extent that it serves our interests. Contrary to claims that the world has no value, the world constructed by Enlightenment is full of values: labor theory of value, values for sale, values produced and to be produced, values of stocks and bonds, values of education, family values, religious values, ideologically constructed values, the changing and the new values, value of life and even calculated death, and social values. Persons are judged as to their value in all of these settings. Indeed, the basic mode of awareness is valuative selectivity. It should be clear also that awareness and perception are no longer given in some pure empirical sense, but are selected on the grounds of valuation. In this sense, what is given as a plethora of empirical environment is, for the most part, ignored. What is perceived depends on its specific value. Indeed, there are social mechanisms that not only consist of values, but evaluation of values that select specific ones deemed relevant in terms of future value projects. While the process

of valuation of events in favour of human “needs” was briefly indicated, i.e. various reductionisms of the human to biochemistry, genetics, and mechanics, the lived awareness subtending this process intends an objectivity which is unique to Western civilization – *temporal possibility*. This means that human life is open to constant and permanent transformations, permanent progress – and fallibility. In principle, it is possible for us to be all that we will as valuable in time. This is Enlightenment’s *alpha and omega*: empty temporal possibility and its temporal fulfillment by all that we value as our mode of final being. Hence the fulfillment requires a constructive intentionality that can establish possible conditions for possible reality.

*The transcendental rule of enlightenment at this level is change as permanence enhancement*. Thus the political shift to dramatic conservatism. The latter is a promise, by whatever means, to guarantee our security, safety, protection, and continuity, as long as we surrender our freedoms to participate in the public domain and to engage in public dialogue. In other words, the public domain, as the condition for other democratic institutions, is no longer maintained, despite all the rhetoric about democracy and its “values”. We are closer to Hobbesian world than to that of Locke and, above all, Kant. The intentionality of enlightenment has worked itself out to reveal its truth two centuries later. Indeed, we are living this intentionality as an awareness of our life world in such a way that while speaking of democracy, rights, equality and freedoms, we intend such a world as a struggle for temporal and technical continuity. Thus all is valuable that enhances this continuity – and purely materially.

The increased submission of events under human controls to yield increasing power for increasing controls is the source of what comprises the modern notion of progress. Progress is an inverted process; instead of calculating and arranging material forces to yield results, we project and calculate the desired results and thus design the material conditions to yield such results. But the more results we project and the more material conditions we establish to yield the results, the more power we gain to establish more conditions to achieve more desired results. In this sense it is a progress of technical power over nature. This is to say, progress does not mean an acquisition of greater knowledge or wisdom, but a constant growth of technological means to achieve novel projected material results; the latter can also become technological means or a quantity of material force to yield further results, etc. The modern human is convinced that every technological application leads to new technological discoveries and applications without end. Every transformation, i.e., quantitatively arranged material process, every shaping of the material stuff through technology, offers more possibilities and power to shape more matter into desirable results. Moreover, the shaping of matter into new technologies opens, in turn, a demand for other technologies and discoveries. If a technological means makes material discoveries possible, the new discoveries will call for their technological implementation to suit our needs, and indeed production of new needs, ad infinitum. No achieved technical stage is adequate; every stage calls for new and improved technologies to yield new intrusions into the material domain to yield

new results. But this is the process which increments the human power to control all events, to shape them in accordance with human wants and hence to liberate the human from “natural” calamities, from his residua of inner infirmities.

Progress must be without regression, without death, and all formal systems and all transformations of the lived world into calculatively remade world are enhancements, maintenances of this permanent structure. What is peculiar about progress is that it has no “subject” that would progress. Its aim and its subject is itself and thus it is self-referential. Progress is its own destiny. When we build something, such as a house, we have a purpose which tells us when the progress of building is achieved. In brief, if we live in terms of purposes, we can understand progress in its limitation by reaching the purpose. But if we raise the question concerning the “purpose” of modern notion of progress, we shall find a quandary. As we have discussed above, we set possible future results as an empty purpose to be fulfilled by material constructs. Once this purpose is achieved it becomes means for other possible purposes, and once they are achieved, they too become means for other purposes without any end. All that is left is progress for the sake of progress – the purpose of progress is progress. It constitutes its own increasing formal refinements, efficiencies and “perfect abilities” without, of course, attaining perfection. No attained construction is left to itself as the final purpose, without possibilizing and hence improvement. In this sense one could say semiotically that the signifier and the signified are one. The purpose and its continuous achievement are not distinct. We could say

that it is a *sui generis* process wherein the human “evolves”.

The question that arises in this kind of progress, and as pointed out, its proliferation of increasing arbitrariness with respect to all phenomena, is the appearance of crisis. What is immediately notable is the disproportion between the sub-system called science and the rest of the culture. The efforts by the theoretically-methodologically designed systems to master the material nature has become exponential. There can be only one domain of progress, and this is the coded and formalized transmission of practices, techniques, or strategies. A culture can increase its mastery and practical control through the increase of formal differentiations and physical interventions in the environment, yet it cannot increase what the environment as a whole has to offer. There is no “progress” in nature. We cannot increase material resources, but only the efficiency of their uses. Only the latter can progress. And this is precisely the point of crisis: the sciences are entering human life on the basis of this “use”, i.e., making humans function in accordance with the very prescripts that are imposed on the presumed physical world.

What appears, in this context, is not only an interpretation of “nature” as a material stuff to be used as conditions for the attainment of desired results, but also the inclusion of the human processes and activities as both the conditions required for the attainment of results and as results of conditions. The language of conditions-results and results-conditions constitutes one of the most pervasive metaphors in various modern sciences and humanities. Sociology, economy, psychology, etc. claim that humans are “products” of so-

cial, economic, biological, genetic, chemical, and any other invented discipline, such as psychology with its conditions. If we can calculate and establish certain conditions, then we can predict the resultant human behaviour quantitatively. But conversely, it is possible to project a “desirable” human behaviour or, in fact, human “structure”, and to establish appropriate conditions for the attainment of the projected result. To note, there is no qualitative human essence, therefore the human is part of the combination of material parts that, given different conditions, could be made into a “new” human being. While various theoretical theses have recognized this state of affairs, such as behaviourism, Marxism, various economic schools, they transformed that recognition into a deterministic ontology such that human behavior, human thinking, the very human morphology, became a result of “material conditions.” Let us be clear on this; such theses are not some past historical residuum – they are the rage of all the technical disciplines of today. In short, what was deemed to be a “liberation” of man from nature and from natural and indeed essential humanity, turned around and made man a slave, a subject to his own “genius.” We sent ourselves on a mad and wild journey, and we now no longer know where we are headed. As the saying from the East goes, once you mount a tiger, you will not get off.

While modern western civilization seems to be one among others, it also comprises the shift of other civilizations to read their cultures in terms proposed by the West: suddenly there emerge Islamic “Republics” and “religious values”, fundamentalisms, women’s pride in wearing a specific attire, rejection of colonialist styles and yet transforming their own

aesthetic styles to be globally “exotic”. All this indicates an opening up of cross cultural accommodations and at the same time discloses civilizational parameters and differences. In this sense, it is possible to select the aspects of cultures that are mutually interrelating, and thus comprise a transition between them, and to note how such cultures, including social understanding, function in the parameters of their own civilizations. No doubt, a serious comparative studies requires cooperative scholarship which, in some cases, is difficult to establish, but a non cooperation is also a good sign what is culturally not acceptable; this very rejection discloses the specific culture’s basic civilizational awareness that makes this transitional awareness, as methodology, quite plausible. For example, number of years back, in Vilnius, Lithuania, there was a UNESCO conference addressing the issue of the “Dialogue between Civilizations”. While there was a scholarly amicable atmosphere, during one session, when the changing cultural attitudes in the West were discussed concerning homosexuality, the Islamic representatives announced that “as long as the West tolerates homosexuality, there will be no dialogue forthcoming from Islam”. The participants understood immediately that culturally, various forms of sexuality are available, and Islam allows a great variety, but at the level of civilization, there is an absolute demarcation, considering homosexuality as a negative value and as

an absolute disruption of the edicts present in an eminent text. Yet it is also notable that this strict demarcation is coextensive with the Mideastern civilization and the peoples who adhere to it, including Westerners, such as fundamentalist Jews, and Christians, who demand the prohibition of homosequality. At this level, the Mideastern civilization, that has in part colonized the West, also sets limits over what is culturally permitted and what is not.

### **Postscript**

While we are not proposing a universal social theory, we are attempting to access our own and other social systems, cultures, and life worlds from a methodology that depends on the awareness at civilizational level, specifically since due to globalization such levels are being disclosed by cultures in transformation. Research at this level is offered partially by comparative civilization scholars from various institutions around the globe; the leading institutions usually belong to major “empires” since the latter are interested to understand the “others” for strategic purposes. Fortunately, Lithuania has no hopes of becoming an empire and hence neither has such comparative scholars nor such institutions. This state of affairs allows Lithuanian scholars – having been subjected to monistic, homogeneous, Soviet Byzantine civilization, to first learn what is the Western civilization which they are attempting to enter.



## SOCIALINĖ TEORIJA CIVILIZACIJOS POŽIŪRIU

**Algis Mickūnas**

S u m m a r y

Moderni mokslinė Vakarų nuostata, kad viskas turi būti traktuojama objektyviai ir nešališkai, reikalauja mūsų pačių kultūrą priimti kaip vieną iš daugelio, nesuteikiant privilegijuoto statuso jokioms jos formoms. Mokslinio objektyvumo reikalavimas yra šiuolaikinės Vakarų kultūros bruožas ir priklauso tik jos interpretaciniam kontekstui. Taigi, pati Vakarų mokslo pretenzija į metodų, leidžiančių pažinti visus reiškinius objektyviai, monopolį yra kultūriškai sąlygota ir negali būti universalu. Kitoms kultūroms, kaip lygioms, būdingos visai kitokios nuostatos, kuriose nerasime Vakarams įprasto „objektyvumo“ ir „subjektyvumo“ tandemą. Kultūriškai objektyviai kalbant,

mes negalime paneigti kitokio jų kultūrinių ir kitokių fenomenų supratimo. Sakyti, kad kiti klysta, yra tas pat, kas teigti, jog turime teisingos kultūros kriterijų, kuris priklauso tik mūsų kultūrai. Taip būtų neigiamas kitų kultūrų traktavimas kaip objektyviai duotų ir lygiaverčių. Taip mes laikytume savo mokslinę kultūrą universalu ir reikalautume visas kultūras interpretuoti pagal mūsų kultūros standartus. Jei socialinė teorija yra modernios Vakarų kultūros dalis, ji turi išlikti toje kultūroje ir negali pretenduoti į universalumą.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** civilizacinis supratimas, kasdienis pasaulis, gyvenamasis pasaulis, pereinamasis supratimas.

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