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GLOBALIZATION THEORY AND CIVILIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

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In this brief statement I wish to respond to Vytautas Kavolis's constructive comments on the globalization theory with which I have become associated and to situate that perspective in the context of Kavolis's cogent and illuminating comparison of the history of consciousness and civilizational-analytic perspectives (Kavolis, 1987).[1] In the former respect my strategy will consist, on the one hand, in correcting what I regard as inadequate interpretations of globalization theory on Kavolis's part and, on the other, in indicating its development and implications. With respect to the relationship between globalization theory and Kavolis's comparison of the history of consciousness and the civilizational-analytic perspectives, my main concern will be with emphasizing the closeness of globalization theory to civilizational analysis. Indeed, I will claim that globalization theory is an elaboration of civilizational analysis. Unfortunately, I cannot deal here with the contrast between globalization theory and the history of consciousness perspective as such.

Reading Globalization Theory

Kavolis's major reservation about globalization theory appears to be that it drifts in the direction of being a version of an objectionable "universal social science." While it has the advantage, from his point of view, of *not* conceiving of the world unethically and, indeed, *having* a concern with values, it "postulates a Durkheimian inevitability of moving, sooner or later, toward a universal value hierarchy in which the idea of humanity as a whole subsumes . . . locally differentiated responses." In contrast, Kavolis's own leading commitment is, apparently, to the idea that civilizations are distinctive and that, moreover, the distinctiveness of each civilization ought to be protected—indeed, celebrated—by the analyst. "If we do not pay primary attention to [civilizational distinctiveness] we slip from 'civilization studies' into some version of a

'universal social science'." I believe that that comes dangerously close to being a *non sequitur*, since there can surely be such a thing as a "universalistic" account of particularism. In other words, does the idea of having a general theory which applies to the world as a whole automatically lead to the diminution of civilizational (or, for that matter, societal) distinctiveness? I believe that the temptation to respond in the affirmative to that question issues from equating theoretical generality with empirical homogeneity. But, more important in the immediate context, I want to state that globalization theory partly rests on a pretheoretical commitment to global heterogeneity and that, in any case, the theory itself leads, via its empirical investigations, to an emphasis upon civilizational and societal variety. The pretheoretical commitment arises from the view that a vastly homogenized world would have little vitality (other, perhaps, than in the form of the perception of extra-terrestrial heterogeneity), while the theory itself argues that the globalization process itself—the rendering of the world as what I call a single place—constrains civilizations and societies (including oppressed national-ethnic solidarities) to be increasingly explicit about what might be called their *global callings* (their unique geocultural or geomoral contributions to world history). In a nutshell, globalization involves the universalization of particularism, not just the particularization of universalism.

While the latter process does indeed involve the thematization of the issue of universal (i.e., global) "truth," the former involves *the global valorization* of particular identities. In that connection it is crucial to recognize that the contemporary concern with civilizational and societal (as well as ethnic) uniqueness—as expressed via such motifs as identity, tradition, and indigenization—largely rests on *globally diffused* ideas. Identity, tradition and the demand for indigenization only make sense *con*textually. Moreover, uniqueness cannot be regarded simply as a thing-in-itself. It largely depends both upon the thematization and diffusion of "universal" ideas concerning *the appropriateness* of being unique *in a context*, which is an *empirical* matter, and the employment of criteria on the part of scholarly observers, which is an *analytical* issue. If either or both of these constitute(s) a form of "universal social science," so be it. But I do not say that defiantly. I say it, firstly, because I do not see how Kavolis's attempt to compare civilizations in terms of their "specific range of theory-practice relationships" (an approach which I find very attractive, particularly in the light of Sahlins' recent work)[2] is less than an exercise in "universal social science"; and, secondly, because he appears

to believe (although he isn't very clear about this) that globalization theory leans dangerously in the direction of the "semiotic universalism" of the postmodernists. In the latter respect I would claim that globalization theory contains the seed of *an account as to why* there are current intellectual fashions of deconstruction, on the one hand, and postmodernist views concerning the "confluence of everything with everything else," on the other. In brief, globalization—as a form of "compression" of the contemporary world *and* the basis of a new hermeneutic for world history—relativizes and "equalizes" all sociocultural formations. This has tempted many of our more fashionable colleagues into a celebration of Nietzschean arbitrariness; when, in fact, an understanding of the empirical grounding of "the transvaluation of values" should lead precisely in the general direction that Kavolis favors—namely, registration of the increasing salience of civilizational and societal distinctiveness. But, I argue, that cannot now be done without our becoming, in a special sense, "universalist." Universalism is needed to grasp particularism itself (while, more empirically—as the case of Japan, over many centuries, shows—under certain circumstances particularism can be a path to a kind of universalism).

It may well be that with the respect to the two essays which Kavolis cites (Robertson and Chirico, 1985; Robertson and Lechner, 1985) the reader could justifiably claim that globalization theory "underplays . . . the continuing vitality of the five living civilizations—the East Asian, the Southeast Asian Buddhist, the Indian, the Islamic, and the Western" (although I think that even that would be a harsh judgment). However, Kavolis concedes that "no one knows how much necessity" is involved in that alleged underplaying—and I have to assure him that there is no theoretical necessity whatsoever. I have been emphatic on a number of occasions in saying that in an increasingly globalized world—characterized by historically exceptional degrees of civilizational, societal and other modes of interdependence and widespread consciousness thereof—there is an *exacerbation* of civilizational, societal and ethnic self-consciousness. Moreover, my emphasis in that regard has not been simply a matter of rhetorical claim. On the contrary, the insistence on heterogeneity and variety in an increasingly globalized world is, as I have said, integral to globalization theory. Yet the latter resists the attempt by some "civilizationists" to cultivate at all analytical costs the "purity" of civilizational and societal traditions. It does not decline to produce (at least a sketch of) a theory of the world as a whole for fear that

generalizing across the world flattens humanity into a homogenous and potentially harmonious whole.

Kavolis also suggests that globalization theory conceives of "individuals and societies as standing in an immediate relationship to global humanity." This, I believe, is a misleading rather than an inaccurate observation. It is misleading, first, because—not without some ambiguity—I have tended in my most recent writing to speak conceptually of the global circumstance as *the global-human condition* and to *include* individuals, societies, relations between societies and (in the generic sense) mankind as the major contemporary "components" or dimensions of that condition. Indeed, I have *defined* the global-human in those terms. Thus to state pejoratively that I conceive of individuals and societies as standing in an immediate relationship to global humanity is off the mark insofar as the latter has already been defined as partly *consisting in* individuals and societies. In that Kavolis worries about the conception of an "immediate relationship" he should surely give reasons as to why global humanity should not be conceptualized so as to include those components. In so doing I hope that he would fully recognize that I have—again with some ambiguity—specified conceptually that I do not equate mankind with humanity. In my terminology mankind/womankind has to do with the "communal-species" aspect of the global-human condition, while the latter refers to the overall condition or circumstance of the world as a whole. It is important in that respect to note that even though I have, from time to time, used the term "world system," I have recently elected to use the slightly cumbersome term "global-human" as a way of rejecting the functionalistic and deterministic—as well as the narrow, economistic—thrust of self-proclaimed world-system theorists. In my general conception at this point what world system theorists almost exclusively focus upon—along implausibly narrow and mechanistic lines—is the relations-between-societies *aspect* of the global-human condition. In any case, in *the ideal-typical form* of my conception of the global-human condition it is possible for there to be an equal emphasis upon societal uniqueness, on the one hand, and the commonality of mankind, on the other.

A more clearly empirical problem arises in connection with Kavolis's objection to the idea of individuals and societies being in a direct relationship to "global humanity." The latter is Kavolis's term and I am not quite sure of his usage. All I can say is that I have, indeed, argued that *globality*—defined as consciousness of the (problem of) the world as a

single place—appears increasingly to permeate the affairs of all societies and multitudes of people across the world (Robertson, 1982; Robertson, forthcoming). This is not simply a matter of a heightening awareness of the challenge of other cultures but also of what is *very misleadingly* called the "global village." In other words, it is not merely the rapid increase in "knowledge" of global variety, ways of coping with the attendant threat of relativization of individual and collective identities, and clearly increasing concern with and controversy about "international education" (sometimes called "global education") that is at issue. What we also have to acknowledge is that there is clear evidence of an even more direct concern with the theme of globality. Debates are occurring in a number of societies with respect to the extent to which societies should be or become "global," and the degree to which they should modify their cultures and traditions so as to make the global "system" work more adequately (most clearly to be seen at the present time in the econocultural confrontation between Japan and the U.S.A.). In more microscopic terms we have witnessed the growth of *explicit* "anti-globalism" and rejection of "one worldism" in a number of North American communities. (I don't have the clear evidence, but I am sure parallel tendencies are to be found in other societies.) In one way or another, civilizations and, more tangibly, societies (even individuals) are being constrained to frame their *particular* modes, negative or positive, of global involvement.

Whether concern with what I call globality (and the problem thereof) constitutes evidence against Kavolis's apparent claim that individuals and societies do *not* stand in a direct relationship to global humanity I cannot estimate. I suggest that, in any case, the enhanced concern with globality is in and of itself of considerable significance and that, on the other hand, it constitutes little threat to the idea of civilizational distinctiveness. It can, I believe, be shown that each distinct civilization possesses as part of its symbolic heritage a conception of the world as a whole. Under conditions of acute concern with the latter—when interest in the world as a whole has been globally thematized—civilizational images of global order come even more sharply into view. I would argue, moreover, that a central *Problemstellung* of contemporary civilizational analysis (as well as of so-called area studies) should be the comparison of civilizations with respect precisely to the histories of conceptions of the world as a whole and of civilizational and societal modes of global participation. In that regard it might be said that globalization theory turns world-system theory nearly on its head—by focusing, first, on *cultural* aspects of the world "system" and, second, by systematic study of *internal* civiliza-

tional and societal attributes which shape orientations to the world as a whole and forms of participation of civilizations and societies in the global-human circumstance (Robertson, 1987).

It is possible that in using the term "global humanity" Kavolis has in mind what I mean when I use the term mankind—in reference to what I have called the communal-species aspect of the global-human condition. If so, it would then be also misleading to say that I think of individuals and societies as having an immediate relationship to global humanity, although I would nonetheless insist that in the contemporary world there is a perceptible shift in that direction.[3] From one angle we may surely consider the thematization of the idea of human rights—in fact, the global institutionalization of *the idea* of the latter—as a move along such a trajectory. More generally, invocation of "the best interests of humanity at large" has become a common theme of international discourse. From a different angle concern with human life *per se* has arisen in connection with two major species-threatening phenomena—namely, nuclear annihilation and AIDS (both of which are truly global-human problems). From yet another angle, questions concerning the beginning and end of individual human lives have been globally diffused in terms of controversies about abortion, on the one hand, and the prolongation of life by medical technology, on the other. However, nothing that I have said should be construed, in spite of these specifications of shifts in the direction of immediate relationships between individuals or societies and global humanity, as suggesting that the world should now be seen as a homogenized collectivity. All I am saying is that the mankind aspect of the global-human condition has been concretely thematized in modern times on a more-or-less global basis. Nevertheless—and this is a crucial point—there are movements and schools of thought which do actually subscribe to the idea of the world as a human *Gemeinschaft*; one of the most conspicuous of those being that strand of the loosely confederated world peace movement which thinks of the world as evolving into a kind of loosely patterned "village."

Finally, as far as direct replies to Kavolis are concerned, I turn to the charge that even though I (and my collaborators) allow for "a range of clearly differentiated responses to the sense of world-wide humanity having become the common framework for both social action and interpretation of experience," I envisage the idea of humanity as a whole subsuming those responses. It is said that my scheme is "completely neutral to the particularity of the cultural tradition" within which the responses occur. ("Each of them, in accordance with the presuppositions

of a universalistic social science, could occur anywhere.") It is also charged that while "the logic of globalization theory" allows for four major sets of responses it actually *requires* one of them—namely, what Kovalis designates as "a Durkheimian religion-of-humanity attempt to resolve global cultural conflict and remake the world." Here again I have difficulty in following his line of reasoning. Specifically, I simply fail to see in what way a strong consciousness of the world as whole must rest upon or logically entails such an orientation; although I would say that given a direct concern with the world as a whole it seems almost inevitable in an empirical sense that an orientation of that kind would arise. What I emphatically dispute is that one can *equate* that orientation with a consciousness of increasing interdependence across the entire world, the penetration of local life by globally diffused ideas, and so on.

As I try at some length to show in a thorough revision of Robertson and Lechner (1985), if one grants that it is plausible to think of societies, individuals, relations between societies (the international system of societies) and mankind as the most tangible "touchstones" of the contemporary global-human circumstance, it is reasonable to suggest that each one of these may be, so to say, chosen as being empirically definitive of the world as a whole—as an image of actual or potential world order (Robertson, forthcoming). Thus, to take some examples, it is surely the case that some groups, movements, societies, or whatever, consider the world primarily in the form its being constituted mainly by international relations; other sociocultural entities or individuals see it primarily as a series of relatively closed communities of individuals; others see it in the form of a set of state-run societies; yet others see it—as I have said before—as a single community. Each of these images can be combined with one or more of the others—but it is unnecessary to go into full analytical detail in the present context. The basic point is that there is, surely, an interesting variety of images of world order (and disorder)—and that a number of them have long civilizational histories. But, to repeat, having such an image does not necessarily involve what Kavolis calls a religion-of-humanity conception—although that is certainly one possible image, empirically speaking.

Kavolis makes a good point, I believe, when he raises the question as to whether the responses of which I have been speaking are culturally neutral—although I reject the idea that one can tell that they are neutral simply by reading Robertson and Lechner (1985). In the latter all that Lechner and I were trying to do was to raise some general alternatives to the Wallersteinian, world-system conception of world order (and the

possibility of global socialism). At that stage I had only begun to embark upon my attempt to be more empirically specific about which kinds of "response" are more likely than others to arise in particular sociocultural settings. My main point, then, is that nothing in globalization theory involves a commitment to a particular response and that there is nothing in its logic nor in the minds of its adherents which would lead to responses having to be considered as socioculturally rootless, as occurring anywhere in time or space. Indeed, I agree fully with Kavolis when he says that relating the type of response (in the sense that he and I are using that term) "most likely to be made by a particular people to globalization to either the enduring qualities of their civilizations or to the trajectories of their national history" is the *most* pressing issue "in any theory of contemporary culture." Work which I am currently doing on East Asian societies has been cast along precisely those lines.[4]

Civilizations in Context

I suspect that one of the reasons for Kavolis's tendency to distinguish so emphatically between globalization theory and civilizational analysis is that (thus far) the former has said relatively little about the concept of civilization *per se*. Before coming directly to this apparent—but misleading—lacuna it is necessary, however, to talk briefly about the general thrust of globalization theory; noting again that I distance myself as a proponent of the latter from world-system and related economic-historical perspectives on the world as a whole. It has also to be stressed that in speaking of globalization, in its most general sense as the process whereby the world becomes a single place, I do not mean that globalization involves in and of itself the crystallization of a cohesive system. On the other hand, I do maintain that globalization involves the development of something like a global culture—not as normatively binding, but rather in the sense of a general mode of discourse about the world as a whole *and* its variety.

My own conception of globalization theory has its deep roots in work which I did with Nettl in the mid-1960s (Nettl and Robertson, 1966; Nettl and Robertson, 1968). Our collaboration arose out of a shared opposition to conventional theories of societal modernization—in particular, their West-centeredness and their lack of positive interest in civilizational and societal distinctiveness. Utilizing, to some degree, developing ideas about the stratification of "the international system," we offered a perspective on societal modernization which rendered the latter as a very

open-ended process and, in particular, a process of change that involved societies in balancing their perceptions of their traditional identities and sociocultural characteristics against the global constraint to change in globally suggested directions. The cases of Peter the Great of Russia's attempt to copy and Meiji Japan's "successful" borrowing from the West were used as crucial historical benchmarks. Subsequently, and partly in response to the growing presence of world-system theory during the 1970s, I became involved in a series of efforts to deal simultaneously with the relationships between internal-societal attributes and the globalization process (i.e. the making of the world into a single place); with particular attention to globally diffused ideas concerning what seemed to be the major dimensions of the global-human condition—namely, societies, individuals, the system of intersocietal relations, and mankind. While "civilizational analysis" has not been explicitly prominent in this work until recently, it has nonetheless constituted a very significant and continuous part of my thinking—in ways which I will now briefly indicate via some comments on Kavolis's characterization of that perspective.

Each of the major representatives of civilizational analysis selected by Kavolis appears to have pivoted his work on a particular feature of Western (usually European) civilization. This may be less clear in connection with Eisenstadt's writings than it is with those of Max Weber, Elias, Dumont and Nelson—but, generally speaking, the East-West cleavage is evident (although only implicitly in the work of Elias). The point I seek to make in that connection is that, by and large, a feature or set of features of the modern West has been adopted as a basic hermeneutic for these analysts, even though Dumont has provided a kind of critique of the West from an Eastern (more accurately South Asian) standpoint, Eisenstadt is attempting to produce something like a general theory of civilizational patterning and change, and Nelson tried to soften the West-centeredness of Weber's writings. Moreover, of these important contributors to civilizational analysis only Dumont (1979; 1980) has endeavored to contextualize civilizations, in the sense of addressing directly the problem of *the coexistence* of different civilizational forms and the actual or potential contributions of different civilizations (and societies) to an overall human circumstance.[5]

What *I* have been attempting is to move beyond the Western-centeredness of classic civilizational analysis—an endeavor which, I am sure, Kavolis supports in principle. Where, however, Kavolis and I seem to diverge is over the question as to what the new basis and focus of

civilizational analysis should be. In Kavolis's view globalization theory appears to share some of the limitations of Eisenstadt's alleged quest for a universal, general theory of civilizations—a program driven only, according to Kavolis, by an analytical desire for cross-civilizational generalization which omits both cultural critique and celebration of civilizational distinctiveness. But in what way can an interest in the latter be *grounded*? How can one provide a solid *raison d'être* for such a focus, other than that the systematic display, in diachronic and synchronic terms, of global heterogeneity is intrinsically intriguing?

My own view on this pressing matter is that we must now seek an *empirical* basis for a form of civilizational analysis which will transcend and subsume the older West-centered mode of discourse. That grounding of the *new* civilizational analysis must, I insist, center on what I call the problem of globality. What Nelson called intercivilizational encounters have now come to constitute an almost globally institutionalized and thematized phenomenon. Such encounters set civilizations within the context of the world as a single place (*not* a community, or even a society) and it is in those terms that we may now "bring civilizations back in" to the social science and humanities. In other words, my own strategy—if not often explicit—has been to map the context in which civilizations (and subcivilizations) assert themselves and, in turn, the general basis upon which they can and should be analyzed. That, I suggest, gives a much more solid basis for our endeavors than other extant approaches. At the same time it complements—indeed, provides a rationale for—the kind of approach advocated by Kavolis (centered on the relationship between civilizational theory and civilizational practice). It also helps us to delineate civilizations and subcivilizations better than before—since in terms of my approach we "allow" civilizations to *identify themselves* both historically and contemporaneously, in relation to their extracivilizational contexts. Along these lines the genuine study of world history can be combined with civilizational analysis.

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NOTES

1. All of my quotations from and my paraphrasings of Kovalis derive from Kavolis (1987). I have, however, also kept Kavolis (1986) carefully in mind.

2. See in particular, Sahlins (1985).

3. I cannot here explore a complex but, I believe, vital aspect of this question—namely, the degree to which there is an experiental-symbolic sub-

stratum that is common to human life as a whole. This Jungian theme must, surely, become a part of the research agenda of globalization theory.

4. See Robertson (1987) for a preliminary attempt to account for Japan's mode of participation in the global-human circumstance. Additional papers on Japan, Korea and East Asia generally are soon to be published in Korea and Japan. See also Robertson (forthcoming), which lists some, but by no means all, of my contributions to globalization theory.

5. On the other hand, I tend to think that Elias's ideas about the *process* of civilization are generalizable in such a way as to make that process an important dynamic of the overall process of globalization.

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