

SERGUEI AVERINTSEV\*

Thank you. I shall try to be as brief as possible. First of all I see a great merit in the analysis proposed by Prof. Archer, given the absence of any optimistic or pessimistic rhetoric, although the words optimism and pessimism were used – but in a very non-rhetorical way. To be sure, it is not easy to see clearly desirable possibilities in nascent globality and thus to find consolation, but neither should we be pathetically pessimistic. I am no specialist in sociology and so my comments will be very marginal.

When we are talking about the crisis, for example, of the traditional idea of the nation state, nationality and so on, it is not simply a sociological or juridical or economic problem, it is an anthropological problem. The fact is that right now we are experiencing a decisive period for the very survival of *homo sapiens*, because we are living in the first epoch when war becomes both impossible and intolerable, without ceasing to be unavoidable. I presume that some real psychological change (in what is taken to be a stable human nature) concerning war did not begin abruptly in the last decades.

However, the matters that were discussed and that seem to be coming into being of themselves, do not come about of themselves. As for the crisis of traditional ideas about the nation and about the state – about the nation state – I cannot help thinking about the fate of what in previous times could be termed ‘higher culture’. The authority of thinkers and poets and so on and the moral authority of higher culture have passed away; nobody can now say ‘higher culture’ without sounding funny. Well,

\* Editors’ note. As he relaxed after this strong declaration, our colleague was hit by a serious heart attack and stroke. Participants all shared the emotion here expressed by Michel Schooyans on page 195.

the co-existence of higher culture with the nation states at their height was very far from being peaceful, but even the conflicts between the systemic and the social in this area, even the fact that the poets and philosophers became marchers (for example in Russia, for our history is very typical), even this fact shows how earnestly the moral authority of literature and of philosophy, of the culture, of *logos* was taken.

Being myself, God forbid, neither an *étatiste* nor a nationalist, I cannot deny that the idea, not so much the reality but the idea, of states and especially of nation states created conditions for the great prestige of the hierarchically structured higher culture. That prestige together with the idea of the state and the idea of culture, represented alternatives to the prestige of money and of consumption. Such material things have existed at all times and one cannot help thinking that the symbol of the Athenian democracy was the agora, the marketplace. Yet, there were, in any epoch some alternatives: yes, you are very rich but there is a saint, there is a genius, there is a patriot. A systematic, and consequently critical position towards material phenomena was possible, a criticism that did not of necessity lead to something like communism or egalitarianism.

There was a time when, for example, in my land, in Russia, in the Soviet Russia of that epoch, educated people were greatly impressed by the fact that some genius like Fellini or Bergman had created a film that was a masterpiece of art. Nowadays people are impressed by the sum of money used to create this or that Hollywood film and by the technical effects produced. Some sort of natural, or what seemed to be natural, respect for creativity as such is gone. Its passing away is somehow connected with the crisis of social organisms like the nation and so forth. Even the Bolsheviks, who took sadistic joy in destroying churches, even they could not deny that the icons were something intrinsically worthwhile, that the old Russian icons belonged to the national pride of the Russians and so it was not possible, even in the communist epoch, to expel the icons from the museums...