

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY AND THE IDEA OF JUSTICE

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Globalisation is the beginning of the self-socialising of all-humanity. As typical social phenomena accumulate at the global level, the perennial question of the nature of the 'good life' arises yet again, in an unprecedented form. Post-European civilisation, dominated by democracy and capitalism, does not offer an adequate model of the good life in an emerging international society whose only form of stability is an equilibrium of evils. The three established forms of universalising thought – religion, philosophy and natural science – must be re-imagined if they are to play their part in the search for international society's highest values, including the ideal of all ideals whose traditional name is 'justice'. Justice is the social expression of a spiritual dimension. All those whose personal life contains a spiritual dimension have an exceptional revolutionary responsibility.

I feel honoured to be here today but I must say that I also feel alien, an outsider, a visitor from another world – a sort of saner version of Nietzsche. I have dedicated my intellectual life to the idea that the old ways of speaking about the human world are exhausted – the serious but sterile mode of the *social sciences*, the well-meaning but hypocritical *social democratic* mode (*americane*, the *liberal* mode) and, I must say, the good-hearted *Catholic social-teaching* mode.

The human world is now too full of chaos, evil and danger – and too full of wonderful unused possibilities of human self-transforming, human self-perfecting. We who think for a living must re-imagine our task. Intellectuals must learn to speak with a new voice.

A. Globalisation is the beginning of the self-socialising of all-humanity

We are privileged to be living at one of the great moments of humanity's self-transforming, a high point in the self-evolving of the human

species. The invention of language. The invention of tools. The invention of the family. The invention of the tribe. The invention of inter-tribal conflictual and co-operative co-existence. The invention of law. The invention of art and the arts. The invention of religion and religions. The invention of agriculture. The invention of money. The invention of urbanism. The invention of mathematics. The invention of philosophy and philosophies. The invention of the modern state. The invention of printing. The first scientific revolution. The industrial revolution. The second scientific revolution. The technological revolution. And now what I persist in calling the international revolution. *Homo faber* ceaselessly self-fabricating. The human being – created by God, but constantly self-re-creating.

2. Travel, trade, war and empire-building taught human consciousness about the remarkable *diversity* of the human world. Religions and philosophies and the natural sciences taught human consciousness about humanity's *possible unity*. Humanity discovered the dialectic of the Self and the Other as it discovered the dialectic of the Many and the One.

3. Human society is the privileged scene of the drama of the interaction of the dialectics of the Self and the Other and the Many and the One. The history of each particular human society – Self and One – is a particular story of that dialectical interaction. The drama of human self-socialising has three crucial focuses – the *ideas* that a society invents to form its continuing idea of its unifying identity; the *institutional structures and systems*, including its legal system, which a society invents to carry its substance through time; and the *economy*, that is to say, the social integration of human energy and human creativity.

4. So-called globalisation is the manifestation at the level of *all-humanity* of the three crucial focuses of society-making – the emergence of *ideas* necessary for the unified identity of humanity itself; the emergence of global social *structures and systems*, including a global legal system; and the emergence of a global *economy* integrating all human energy and human creativity everywhere.

5. *Conflictual* co-existence of the tribes began with spears and has not ended with nuclear weapons. *Co-operative* human co-existence began with the family and has not ended with the co-existence of nation-states. The long-awaited *international society* – the *humana universitas* (Dante), the 'universal society' (Suárez), the 'great and natural community' of mankind (Locke), the *civitas maxima* (Wolff), the 'great city of the human race' (Vico), the 'general society of the human race' (Rousseau), a 'perfect civil union of mankind' (Kant), the 'international society of all human beings,

the society of all societies' (Allott) – is the natural next step in the story of human self-transforming, the self-evolving of the human species.

B. As typical social phenomena accumulate at the global level, the perennial question of the nature of the 'good life' arises yet again, in an unprecedented form

6. A delightful historical puzzle about *social philosophy* is the question of which comes first – significant social transformations or significant developments of social philosophy? Does the owl of Minerva also fly at dawn?

7. A striking feature of all human societies is the energy that they devote to the imagining and re-imagining of their ideas of themselves – what in my work I call a society's *theory*. In the words of Émile Durkheim: 'a society, above all, is the idea that it forms of itself' (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*).

8. You don't have to be a Marxian *pur et dur* – or even *impur et doux* – to believe that significant *economic* transformations *accompany* significant *philosophical* developments and – avoiding, for the moment, the question of causation – *vice versa*. At least, it seems as if the production, distribution and exchange of ideas is an integral part of a society's economy – 'mental production', in the excellent formula of the *Communist Manifesto* and *The German Ideology* (K. Marx & F. Engels).

9. In a tradition inherited from ancient Greece, we refer to the central focus of such society-imagining activity as the collective search for *ideas* about the *good life*. We have also inherited from the Greek tradition – above all from a single book: Plato's *Republic* – the idea that the question of the idea of the good life in society may be seen as inseparable from questions about ideas that *transcend* society – questions about a supra-societal natural or supernatural order, and about values that are not merely values generated internally in a given society. We have also inherited a possible corollary – that the life of the *polis* is good if it is good both politically *and* morally.

10. A given society may choose to ignore society-transcending ideas. A given society may choose to see society-transcending ideas as social and pragmatic and internal – Chinese Confucianism, as a possible example, or American exceptionalism. A society may also reverse the perspective, seeing ideas about the good life as necessary *deductions* from an *a priori* transcendental order, especially a religious order of ideas and values.

11. Societies have what I call, in my own writing, a *public mind* (like Durkheim's *conscience collective*) which contains *inter alia* a process of collective thinking that we have come to call *politics*, in the broadest sense of

that word – a mechanism for collectively identifying, and constantly re-identifying, the *substance* of a society's collective values, and for collectively determining, and constantly re-determining, the practical day-to-day *application and enforcement* of its collective values – whether those values are seen by the society as ultimately religious or philosophical or pragmatic.

12. Without the risk of exaggeration, we are bound to say that the imagining of the philosophy and politics of the good life in the *public mind* of *all-humanity* poses an unprecedented intellectual and practical challenge – a challenge that may prove too great even for humanity's amazing self-imagining and self-socialising capacity.

C. Post-European civilisation, dominated by democracy and capitalism, does not offer an adequate model of the good life in an emerging international society whose only form of stability is an equilibrium of evils

13. We may be inclined, as a personal *a priori*, to agree with Aristotle's opinion – 'Hence it is evident that the same life is best for each individual, and for states, and for mankind collectively' (*Politics*, VII.3.10). Whether or not we accept Platonic-Aristotelian holism or some sort of historicist determinism, it is obvious that the experience gained by humanity in the management of subordinate societies provides an inspiring source of material as we try to imagine the good life at the level of all-humanity.

14. However, an aspect of the present state of the human world requires us to take account of a quite specific, albeit contingent, way in which humanity has chosen to imagine its self-socialising. For well-known historical reasons, the effects of the self-imagining and self-socialising of a particular region – Europe – have been felt on every other continent and are now influencing the social development of all human societies everywhere.

15. This is not to say that there are not other worldviews – philosophical or religious – that have a claim to be universal or universalisable. It is merely to acknowledge the fact that post-European civilisation – no longer dominated or determined merely by the European mind or by reference to European experience – seems to be, at the present time, an exceptionally exportable commodity.

16. This in itself gives rise to two serious problems. In the first place, democracy and capitalism – those not-so-heavenly twins which are central features of post-European civilisation – are intrinsically *dehumanising*. Democracy-capitalism is an extreme form of *totalitarianism* in which soci-

ety takes over every human being – body and mind – so that human beings become little more than component parts of vast impersonal machines. Private life and the private mind become *residual phenomena*. Society's values and high values are internalised and instrumentalised within naturalistic, self-explaining and self-justifying social processes. Society determines the meaning of what we suppose to be our *freedom*. We *desire* what society desires us to desire (Frankfurt School).

17. The second problem is that when democracy-capitalism is exported and, especially, when it floats in the *philosophical void* of the existing international system, it takes on a *deracinated* form – in which even the values and high values of a given society evaporate in the face of incompatible values in the importing societies, and in the value-free wasteland of the existing international system.

18. Democracy-capitalism has an intrinsic tendency to degenerate into the management of forms of *evil* – greed, corruption, immorality, crime, injustice – the after-life of the Hobbesian jungle. The existing international system, the international *unsociety*, which is even closer to the Hobbesian jungle, is an arena in which human self-wounding and self-destroying flourish, in which the characteristic form of self-ordering is a random and protean balancing of forms of evil, an *equilibrium of evils* – to borrow a phrase from Friedrich Schiller (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*) – the wasteland people call peace (Tacitus, *Agricola*: quoting the words of a British leader speaking before a battle with the Romans, c. 80AD).

19. The common good of humanity will not be found in the grandiose and pious declarations of governments – rhetoric masquerading as action. The painstaking process of finding the common good, organically and functionally, has already begun in the growing legislative, executive and judicial activity of the emerging international constitutional system, as it struggles with real-world social situations that can only be dealt with internationally.

20. Social progress at the national level required the making of new forms of politics, new forms of law, new forms of social responsibility and public accountability. To construct a new form of international politics, a new form of international law, a new form of international social responsibility and public accountability is an unprecedented intellectual and practical challenge – a challenge that may prove too great even for humanity's remarkable self-ordering and self-perfecting capacity.

D. *The three established forms of universalising thought – religion, philosophy and natural science – must be re-imagined if they are to play their part in the search for international society’s highest values, including the ideal of all ideals whose traditional name is ‘justice’*

21. When biological evolution by natural selection gave way to the unnatural self-evolving of a species that biology had created – the human species –, we found that biology had very kindly bequeathed to us some amazingly powerful capacities of the human brain. The power of *universalising thought* has enabled the human species to create a world of its own, a second habitat, the *human world*, a metaphysical world existing only in the human mind. It is the ‘construction of universality’ by which ‘the individual becomes universal’ (H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* – discussing Hegel).

22. *Religion* is a metaphysics of human existence. *Philosophy* is a metaphysics of the human mind. *Natural science* is a metaphysics of the natural world. However, these amazing self-created human mind-systems are as equivocal as everything else human. They can produce *evil* as readily as they can produce *good*. There is not religion; there are religions. There is not philosophy; there are philosophies. There is not natural science; there are natural sciences. There can be bad religion, bad philosophy, and the abuse of natural science.

23. Philosophy may claim priority over the other two forms of universalising thought, given that they are themselves mental phenomena with which philosophy must, in principle, occupy itself. Needless to say, a *religion* whose primary source of validity is *belief* may not be willing to concede priority to philosophy. And *natural science*, whose provisional truths are ‘true’ so long as they correspond to physical phenomena, may function successfully without seeing any need for assistance from philosophy.

24. However – remarkably – philosophy may *disable itself*, may repudiate its own transcendental potentiality. And this is what happened, within European and post-European civilisation, in the 20th century. Philosophy proved philosophically its own impossibility (Aristotle said that denying philosophy is itself philosophy). A philosophy of *unphilosophy* marginalised the capacity of the human mind to regulate its own activity, leaving the *human mind* in a state of sulphurous anarchy, leaving the *human world* in the uncertain embrace of ideologised philosophies, religions good and bad, and the inherent hegemonic tendency of the natural sciences. The end of philosophy (Heidegger) was the end of a human potentiality.

25. An inevitable victim of the catastrophe was one of philosophy’s greatest achievements – the idea of the *ideal* – the idea that the human mind

can order its activity and judge its activity in conformity with the permanent possibility of *self-perfecting*.

26. The ideal is the goal we aim at but never reach – to speak truly, to create beautifully, to behave goodly – because truth, beauty and goodness are manifestations of the order of all order, the ideal of all ideals which, in a particular Western philosophical tradition, we call ‘justice’. In a Taoist formulation: ‘*Tao* never does, yet through it all things are done’ (*Lao tzu*, ch. 37). The ideal is the place where *will* and *idea* (Schopenhauer) are one.

27. The rediscovering by the *public mind* of *all-humanity* of the full potentiality of the *ideal* self-ordering of the human mind is an unprecedented intellectual and practical challenge – a challenge that may prove too great even for the amazing self-transcending power of human self-contemplating.

E. Justice is the social expression of a spiritual dimension. All those whose personal life contains a spiritual dimension have an exceptional revolutionary responsibility

28. Justice manifests itself in countless subordinate forms – social justice, the justice embodied in positive law, the justice of the application and enforcement of the law... But the ultimate validity of *the law* does not rest on the will of the sovereign, the general will of the people, custom, the *mores maiorum*, Hobbesian obedience, Lockeian consent or, still less, on the violence of the state (Ihering or Weber), but on the paradigm of order present in the human mind. ‘Before laws were made, there were relations of possible justice’ (Montesquieu, in the much disputed first chapter of *The Spirit of the Laws*). The same will be true of the emerging international law of the emerging international society.

29. In the *spiritual* dimension, we live in a *third world* – beyond the natural world and the human world. It is a dimension akin to Kant’s ‘*a priori* forms of intuition’ (space and time), (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Aesthetic). In the spiritual dimension we see the world in a different light. And the spiritual dimension has *two axes* – the horizontal axis: each human being’s relationship to all other human beings; and the vertical axis: the relationship between human existence and the mysterious existence of all-that-is, in and beyond the knowable universe.

30. And now, finally, I have to say something harsh about the Roman Church. I hesitate to say it in this forum and in this city. But I can do no other – as one might say, if one were a turbulent German monk: *ich kann*

nicht anders. The Roman Church is the bearer of a *revolutionary inheritance*, the permanent possibility of a fundamental transformation of human existence in both axes of the spiritual dimension. But – to use a crude modern formula – Catholic Christianity is an *under-used asset*.

31. The Church has been an agent of the ideals of *speaking truly* at the highest intellectual levels, and of *creating beautifully* in the highest forms of art and architecture and music and liturgy. But somewhere and somehow the Church lost its way in the face of the modern world – perhaps in the 16th century, or else in the 19th century, or else in the 20th century. It is difficult to say exactly when and how. At some point the Church began to fail in the exercise of its *revolutionary spiritual responsibility* – its mission to transform human beings and human societies into instruments of *behaving goodly*, instruments of human self-perfecting. The Church has seemed to aspire only to be another voice in the internal debate of the public mind, another meeting-place for a self-selected good-seeking few.

32. And yet – daunting and inspiring fact – the Church is an active presence in the minds of more than a billion human beings. Surely the time has come for the Church to take up again its *revolutionary mission*. Surely the Church could learn to sing a new version of its oldest song, could find within itself a new kind of theology – a *transformation theology* – to make a new kind of human being, a new kind of human society – a global *metanoia*. Without a better kind of human being we cannot make a better kind of human world.

33. I cannot say how the Church might re-imagine itself to meet the terrible challenges of the human world of the 21st century. I can only speak as a sort of intellectual refugee, a survivor from the formerly *influential few* (Bentham), the long-suffering *clerisy* (Coleridge, Benda), the despondent *universal class* (Hegel), the anguished *remnant* (Matthew Arnold), the derelict *commonwealth of mind* (Pater) – trying to live in a despiritualised and despiritualising world.

34. Those of us who belong to those beleaguered classes but are still able to recognise the spiritual dimension of human existence, those of us who are still able to look at humanity's unfulfilled potentiality with joy and hope, those of us who are still able to *think beyond*, we surely have a special *revolutionary responsibility* – to make a revolution in humanity's self-imagining – *a revolution in the mind, not in the streets*.