

THE GLOBAL DIMENSION OF ETHICAL LIFE

For those who have come of age during the cold war and are now trying to think their way through the convulsive changes reported almost daily in the press, many habitual categories of social and political thought have begun to unravel. The end of “the great contest” between two ideologies of the human condition has left the victorious camp with small sense of satisfaction. Inevitably, new catch phrases—some portending heavy philosophical baggage—have come and gone. In 1989 “the end of history” lasted for a few months. More recently “the age of globalization” has emerged as shorthand phrase to define the moment. The title of this paper may suggest that I am more sympathetic with Richard J. Barnet, author of the second phrase, than with Francis Fukuyama, author of the first. And that inference would be correct. But it seems to me that the very idea of defining the moment may be systematically misleading. The facts which elicit such “definitions” are certainly real and important. The end of the Soviet empire, the relinquishment of so-called “economic sovereignty” among European Community nations, and the accelerating globalization of capital and commodity exchange rightly command our attention. It is also salutary that some American politicians, journalists, and intellectuals are now more disposed to take an internationally comparative view when discussing problems of health care, legal services, education, and welfare.

What then is lacking? Is it a larger historical frame of reference, perhaps what Fernand Braudel and his associates have called the long term (“*la longue durée*”)? Or do we need a global reorientation, perhaps to what we might call a “systematic philosophy”?

What I would like to suggest in the following remarks is that the main structures of ethical life in the modern world are susceptible of a systematic account. Although the modern world antedated the cold war by many generations, that episode obscured the global dimension of ethical life by its perpetuation of the pre-modern conflation of the state—which is properly parochial—and civil society—which is inherently global. A semantic residue of cold war ideology is our continuing use of the term “third world” (e.g., “Third World Economies Shrink Again,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1992, D1). Today only a child would ask where the first and second worlds are. In fact, they are nowhere. Ideologically, the first world was “bourgeois society” (the province of self-seeking, exploitative capitalists), the second world was “communism” (the province of self-seeking, exploitative party hacks), and the third world, as announced at the Asia-Africa Conference at Bandung in 1955, was to mobilize the world’s spiritual resources for a pacification of the antagonism between the first two worlds. Practically, cold war ideology enabled the United States and the Soviet Union each to speak in the name of global ethical life and it tended to reduce all others to moralizing discourse. In the aftermath of the cold war, the United States has not yet shed its imperial speech habits and moralizing discourse persists but an occasion has arisen for grasping that there is a dimension of life on this planet which is inherently universal and not administered by any government (including any potential world government), a dimension to which we belong *qua* human beings. This is the global dimension of ethical life. Hegel called it “civil society.” I shall spend the remainder of my time in an effort to show how the social dimension has assumed a distinctive shape in the modern world and how it differs from the political and private dimensions of ethical life and how our discourse about ethical life, in each of its main structures, can be distinguished from legal and moral discourse.

I shall begin with (1) a brief review of a powerful, if oversimplified conception of the social dimension as a division of labor and indicate how the social in this sense has come to be contrasted with the political and the cultural spheres, thus facilitating an introduction to the topic of society as global. I shall then (2) present a conversational account of a theory of *justice* as three-dimensional in order to identify ethical life as the institutional dimension of justice and to indicate that *ethical life* also has three dimensions, one of which is global. In conclusion I shall try to show (3) why the social dimension can only be grasped as a sphere of ethical life if it is grasped as an institution—indeed as *the* ethical institution—whose irreducible domain, dictated by the determinate character of the individuals and actions it sustains, can be nothing less than the entire globe.

I. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION AS A DIVISION OF LABOR

Systematic thinking about *the political* came to light when the idea of a social division of labor was first exploited to articulate the unity of a political association, the *polis*. That was the accomplishment of Plato. The systematic organization of *the social* emerged when the practice of a single division of labor was extended beyond the realms of: a household, a culture, and a political state. It matters little to systematic philosophy just when or how a single division of labor got extended beyond domestic, cultural, or political bounds. Polanyi has called it “the great transformation.” Braudel associates the birth of the first world-economy, the European, with the invention of monetary and financial techniques in 13th-century Italy,¹ Wallerstein with the 16th-century agricultural revolution in northwest Europe. Hegel, Marx, and many others have tended to see it emerge in connection with the 18th-century industrial revolution. Important as such questions of emergence may be to historians such as Braudel, they are, for systematic philosophy, strictly secondary. It is the mark of a great historian to narrate the transformation to the modern world system with some insight into that system. It is the mark of systematic philosophy to think that system and to regard historical questions as theoretical heuristics.

We may recall that the “city in speech” of Plato’s interlocutors in the *Republic* was said to be one because it had a single division of labor among a plurality of individuals, each with a plurality of needs and a comparative advantage in laboring to produce for a given need, and all bound together in a system of trade within a determinate geographical area. None of the interlocutors—especially Glaucon—was completely happy with the notion of deriving justice, or the constitutive unity of a *polis*, from an economic division of labor, but this derivation was never abandoned during the course of the dialogue and justice, before and after a mighty digression, was taken to be “minding one’s business” in a division of labor. And what a powerful notion it has been. Once grasped, one can conceive the economic sphere as separate from the political, as a division of labor within and between households, and then reshape one’s conception of the political as an institution defined by *paideia*, that is, education to a certain culture or ethical way of life. Such bi-modal thought was of course Aristotle’s contribution, whose *Politics* begins with the denial of Plato’s equation of a large *oikos* and a small *polis*. But just as it was possible to separate the division of labor from the political, so too is it possible to conceive the political system as a mode of authority independent of any given cultural system. With these three admittedly over-simple systemic conceptions—the economic, the cultural, and the political—we have the conceptual resources for a

¹ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), vol. III, 57 and 91.

minimalist notion of a world-system. Like Plato's "city in speech," it is a systemic unity because it has a single division of labor. But it is a "world" system because the division of labor interpenetrates a plurality of cultures.

Such a world-system has two possible forms: one with and one without a common system of political authority. It is characteristic of the former that the products of its division of labor are not, as a rule, exchanged within what Polanyi has called a "self-regulating market," an exchange system in which prices are determined in the market itself by higgeling and haggling participants. Instead, the political authority imposes a redistributive order of pricing upon the division of labor and may, at its discretion, exact from certain sectors the payment of "tribute" for the costs of protection. Such a system may be called a "world empire." If the world-system, united by a single division of labor, involves a plurality of political regimes as well as a plurality of cultures, its market will tend to be "self-regulating" and it may be called "the modern world economic system."

In an effort to "define the moment" it is tempting to regard the former Soviet Union and its system of satellites as the last "world-empire," whose newly political national components are now attempting to integrate themselves into the modern world economic system. And indeed there are some remarkable similarities. Given Marx's analysis of the oriental mode of production in the *Grundrisse* together with Karl Wittfogel's development of his argument in *Oriental Despotism*, it is tempting to regard Gosplan as a politically imposed redistribution system and Comecon as a means for exacting tribute. But there is a significant difference between world-empires established in the pre-modern world by China, Egypt, and Rome on the one hand and a 19th-century colonial system like the British established in the midst of the modern world system on the other. The chief function of British colonization was not to insulate an empire-system from the world economy but rather to facilitate the extension of the world economy toward its natural geographical limit, the globe.² In retrospect it may well prove astonishing to consider that a combination of ideology and terror enabled the Soviet system even to approximate a pre-modern empire for more than half of the 20th-century. On the other hand, it may also prove illuminating to consider the Soviet system as an extreme example of what might be called "the mercantilist moment" in the modern world system, the strategy of erecting national barriers as a defense against fields of world production in which a political entity perceives its own sector of the global division of labor to be at a disadvantage.

It is arguable that the Keynes who premised *The General Theory* upon an acknowledgement of "the element of scientific truth in mercantilist doctrine,"³ together with the Galbraith of *The New Industrial State*, will naturally appear in future conversations about the modern world as moderate examples of the conflation of the political and the social which the Soviet system drove to the point of absurdity. I shall now adumbrate such a conversation on the topic of justice in the modern world in order to situate the global dimension of ethical life.

² Hegel stresses this point in his recently published lectures on the philosophy of right.

³ John M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), 335.

II. THE DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Let us begin with a survey of common sense—gathering together elements from conversations on justice that many of us have had at one point or another since we began to wonder about the modern world. In one way or another we do, of course, talk about justice all the time and, spurred by wonder, some of these conversations concern the basic structures of the social practice we share today, a systematic whole that is not, I shall argue, an aggregation of elements but whose main structures are discernable. Moreover, these conversations do not attempt to articulate a whole in terms of beliefs, rules, or other epistemic notions; they show that we can be, at least in non-reflective discourse, *attentive* to wholes without attempting to construct wholes out of parts. There is, in short, a correlation between the way we ordinarily talk about justice in the modern world and a systematically philosophical account of modern society. I now propose to test this conjecture by presenting a conversational account of justice in modern society. It will be evident that the conversation borrows unashamedly from Hegel without mentioning him. This is because I take a systematic discourse to be systematically *different* from an interpretation of an historical thinker. So please do not take me to be talking *about* Hegel. One of the marks of a systematic philosopher is that his thought is better *used* than *mentioned*.

The implicit theme of the conversation is that justice in the modern world, and in no other, is theoretically intelligible and, more particularly, that ethical life is only susceptible of discourse that is systematic (*vernünftig*) insofar as it differentiates itself into *dimensions*. No one achieves ethical individuality unless he is a three-fold member of: (1) a family, (2) civil society, and (3) a state.⁴

When we consider the global dimension of ethical life in light of the foregoing remarks, it becomes clear that the word “ethical life” indicates a process or an activity. But here the process or activity is conceived as systematic and non-historical, one that takes place *within* an overarching whole, the tri-modal system of modern ethical life. It follows that the process in question does not concern the emergence of global society but rather the articulation of that global structure in such a way that we can grasp how it fits within the main patterns of justice in the modern world.

If, then, global society is to be a critical dimension in a conversation on justice as poly-dimensional, we will have to arrive at some preliminary understanding of the concept of “global society.” I shall propose what I take to be the simplest possible definition: “global society” is the condition of existing on this earth in association, company, or interaction with others of the same species.

Of course it is clear that no questions of justice are directly raised by this simple definition. One might well protest, as Glaucon did to Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*, that such a definition would pertain just as much to a “city of pigs” as to a city of human beings. And it is true that the given definition of global society does no more than specify a condition of plurality and interaction among one or another of the candidate species who live in this world. The rationale for such a species-indifferent definition is to call attention to

⁴ “Das Sittliche ist nur vernünftig, insofern es sich in sich unterscheidet, insofern es seinen Begriff auslegt.... Es ist so ganz richtig, daß der Mensch seine Bestimmung nicht erreicht, wenn er nur Familienvater, nur Mitglied der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft pp. ist; allein einmal ist jede dieser Sphären in sich selbst Totalität, und sodann ist das Wahre nur durch jene Unterschiede.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), 127-8.

the fact that the act of picking out others of our species constitutes the most elementary dimension of justice in the modern world. In deference to Glaucon, however, we must acknowledge that the “others” thus picked out, let us call them persons, constitute a pre-ethical dimension of justice.

A. Persons

Many senses of the term justice are readily intelligible on the basis of our common sense understanding of legitimacy. Consider for a moment one of the oldest senses of the word. One used to speak of legitimate and illegitimate children and also of the process by which the illegitimates (or bastards) could be made legitimate. Hence, legitimation with respect to family membership. It was also once common to speak of naturalizing an alien in a state as a process of legitimation. Now if we *abstract* this notion of an act of legitimizing membership in a family or a state to the act of recognizing the right to participate in the sphere of interaction per se, we will have a clue to the most basic dimension of legitimation in the modern world. And lest this seem trivial, consider that distinctions between slave and free or between civilized and barbarian have excluded participation in the most elementary structure of just interaction. People who draw such distinctions today are, we might say, conversation-stoppers.

The elementary act of acknowledgement in a sphere of just interaction may be called the act of recognizing others as *persons*. “Person” is the word we ordinarily use to talk about one who has the basic right to engage in elementary interaction. And one becomes a person not by the mere fact of birth but through the act, and the repeated act, of being recognized. Thus the first dimension of justice in the modern world is the sphere of recognized persons. (Please note that, although a dimension of justice, the legal sphere of recognized persons is not a dimension of ethical life. Hence the legality of corporate persons.)

If one is to be recognized in this world by others, and in principle by all others, there must be some means by which one is recognizable; one must be sensibly present to others if one is to be recognized by them. And if one has a right to recognition, a right to abstract justice, one must have a right to the means by which such recognition is possible. At the very least this entails that one must be recognizable in one’s body, that one have a right to one’s body; one’s body must not be the property of another. (In light of this abstract notion of justice, to have one’s body recognized as the property of *another* is the very formula of slavery.)

The abstractness of this structure is both its strength and its weakness. In the process of recognition, personhood alone counts. A “person” *cannot* be identified on the basis of race, sex, or inherited status. In short, our concept of elementary justice is established when persons are recognized *as* persons and shown an elementary respect for this reason alone.

Americans are accustomed to indicate this most elementary pattern of justice with the expression “due process.” For Americans it is a truism that the due process clause written into the 5th and 14th amendments to their constitution is designed to guarantee that all persons be accorded respect and protected from arbitrary invasion by the state or any other entity.

A person is accorded justice simply by being recognized. One does not earn the right to be a person by performing any good works; in the modern world one has the *de jure* right to recognition simply by

virtue of *de facto* recognition—there are no “grounds” for recognition, no right to be recognized. Only persons have the right to be recognized and recognition is what constitutes personhood. In receiving recognition and being persons we are, strictly speaking, passive recipients of what might be called a purely secular “grace.”

Action, on the other hand, is something we do; it is a performance. And if it is to be just it will require a legitimation of a different kind.

B. Agents

We say that a self is admitted to the realm of justice by the act of recognition, by the acknowledgment of personality. To be a person is therefore to be dependent upon the action of others and, in principle, of all others. When we consider a recognized self as acting, on the other hand, the question of justice is radically different. For it is self-understood in any modern conversation about justice *that every recognized self has the right to act autonomously*. This is a notion which is exhibited at the earliest stages of our conversational life. Think of the child who accidentally tips his glass at table and says: “But Mommy, I didn’t *mean* to spill the milk.” The child is spontaneously claiming the right to determine what is to be regarded as his own action. And this is a right that we all continue to assert throughout our adult lives. We acknowledge that we are responsible for our own actions but we claim the right to distinguish between what we do “on purpose” and what we happen to do, what we do inadvertently.

If this familiar distinction is legitimate, then the question arises as to who is to draw it. But if the distinction turns upon the purpose of the agent, then it is clear why we say that the agent himself must, in the first instance, draw the distinction between what part of his deeds did, and what did not, follow from his purposes. Thus we assert for ourselves and acknowledge in others the right to determine the ownership of actions by reference to purpose.

When we grant that an act was done on purpose and was therefore the legitimate act of an agent, we still insist that the agent acting on purpose have “good intentions.” But here again we say that it is only the agent who can *give an account* of his intentions and explain how they fit into his conception of the good. We accordingly require of ourselves as agents that we have some conception of the good. And we can also ask how this is determined.

But insofar as the concept of just agents only requires that I determine my own actions and be prepared to give an account of my reasons, it would be a violation of justice to say that I am obliged to have any specific conception of the good. We must leave such matters up to the particular agent. Talk about moral justice allows every agent the right to determine, as best he can, the basic framework in terms of which he seeks to do the good. For isn’t this what we mean when we say that we have a “conscience”?

But if we acknowledge that the particular agent, in the privacy of his own conscience, is to arbitrate even the question of the good, then how can we speak of any objectivity? What is the difference between the justice and injustice of action if the ultimate principles for adjudication are left up to the “conscience” of each and every agent? Isn’t this the very formula for anarchism? Can any dimension of justice be founded upon arbitrary choice?

I am sure that we are all familiar with one or another version of this critique of moral agency. And it has some conversational impact because it appeals to our most elementary intuition that there must be—or at least that there ought to be—an objective difference between “good” and “evil” and that this distinction, if left to the free and autonomous choice of particular agents, is open to the basest and most self-serving forms of manipulation.

In one word, *if* our talk about the justice of action in the modern world requires that we talk about autonomous agents—and it does—*then* we must ask whether our ordinary speech commits us to the notion that this autonomy must be unqualified, or absolute. But here we must be reminded that a systematic theory of justice is faithful to the “*qua*-functions” that guide intelligent conversation, naturally recognizing plurality in the dimensions of justice. Uncontentious conversation does not absolutize. To paraphrase a great philosopher, “Justice is spoken of in many ways.” *Qua* moral agent, I dwell in one dimension of justice. But if I press that dimension to a totality, an aporia will emerge. Analogously, there is a certain dimension of justice that can only be captured by conceiving the self *qua* person. But if totalized, that dimension of justice becomes a quandary.

It is most common for intellectuals contentiously to absolutize the dimension of moral agency and accordingly try to minimize the legitimacy of any *institutions* that might inhibit an autonomous agent. Hence the ideology of anarchism.⁵ But I think that we do quite normally talk about certain *institutional* structures within which we *realize* our autonomous *ideals* of the good, rather than confront an alien impediment to our freedom.

C. Institutions

In our survey of the dimensions of justice the only non-voluntary structure which has come to light so far is the structure of reciprocal recognition which constitutes a world of selves as persons. This structure *does* impose important constraints—which I illustrated by our notion of “due process”—but insofar as persons must be conceived abstractly, that is, merely as the recipients of recognition, it is hard to see how persons could be protected from actions which derive from merely subjective or discretionary autonomy.

The question, then, is whether there are *any* institutional structures in the modern world in which all persons and agents participate, not as a matter of choice, but simply *as* members of the modern world. When the question is posed in this way, it seems plausible to say that we normally identify at least three non-voluntary institutional structures in our everyday conversations. Each no doubt has vulnerabilities, but I think we can say that the structures we identify are truly universal, even though only one is global.

It is the mark of an ethical institution that it shape the habits of its members. Whereas legal persons are justly treated when they are accorded the rights of reciprocity and moral subjects are just when they act conscientiously, an ethical individual exhibits justice when he behaves in accordance with habits acquired in an ethical institution. *Qua* ethical, an individual can be no better than the institution in which he has been habituated. Punishment can correct legal injustices; exhortation can address moral

⁵ For a spirited argument that autonomy and authority are incompatible, see Robert P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

shortcomings; but only institutional change can touch upon unethical behavior. Every human being has the right to be habituated within a healthy family, society, and state. When such habituation has been available and the individual falls short, legal and moral remedies are appropriate. But when the respective family, society, or state are unhealthy, resort to legality or morality is systematically misleading.

1. The Family

The first of the ethical institutions is the family. Although there has been some tendency to talk about the family as a voluntary association, and despite the fact that we do sometimes speak of marriage as a voluntary contract, these phenomena still appear as exceptions to our general sense that the solidarity of love and sentiment is *as* essential to our common life as the recognition of persons and the autonomy of agents. In our ordinary conversations we do not acknowledge the justice of family-dissolution-on-demand and, despite contentious forms of liberationist rhetoric, family membership has not, and I would say—admittedly without adequate argument—cannot, become like a voluntary club. [We have all required, and all future generations will continue to require, a long period of growth in the bosom of the family before we are able to step out and be recognized as persons on our own.]

The family itself is like a person, but it is a “concrete person,” unlike the legal person, it has determinate content. [Aside: marriage as relinquishment of personhood by spouses—establishment of a new space, a private space.] It is recognized as the principal domain of privacy, and because of this we will, I believe, continue to talk about the family as one of the invariant patterns of life on earth in the modern world.

2. Civil Society

The second non-voluntary structure to which we all belong as members of the modern world is indicated by the fact that we talk about one another as having legitimate *interests*. Normal conversation partners in the modern world recognize that all of us have certain vital interests—interest in our material livelihood, interest in pursuing a vocation according to our talents, interest in a marketplace for commerce with other men, interest in the protection of our market-rights, and interest in protection from the vicissitudes of the legal and health care systems. Since this basic structure was first identified in the 19th-century and given the name “*civil or bourgeois society*,” it too, like the family, has come under repeated attack. But even in those parts of the world where civil society has been mistakenly identified with capitalism and even where efforts are made to suppress it, the conditions of modern secular life have again and again shown civil society to be an irrepressible structure. In the 20th-century we have come to talk about it as a *global* structure, a planetary institution designed to secure the just pursuit of human interests. [To this global dimension we will return in part III.]

3. The State

The third and final non-voluntary institution which has become a universal in our conversations about man in the modern world is *the constitutional state*. Along with the family and civil society, it has been subject to intensive criticism, and particular states have been the instruments of awful destruction. But as states have become more and more secular, we have also come to discover that their legitimation is not of a traditional, divine or nationalistic, kind. Especially in the years since World War II and the

proclamation of the rights of man (not by a single nation, like the French in 1789, but by the United Nations), states have come more and more to articulate *their* sense of legitimacy in their *constitutions* and other states are ever more inclined only to recognize constitutional states. What this means is that a modern state is said to be legitimate when it gives constitutional protection for the other spheres of justice: persons, agents, family privacy, and civil society. These are admittedly not the functions of the traditional state. They are rather functions that we have gradually come to assign the modern state. No doubt they have added to the complexity of government and many have lamented this development. But note, too, that each of these functions is, strictly speaking, a limitation of the power of the state through the protection of other independent *spheres* in the whole context of justice. It is not the state which has created these spheres, and, as spheres of justice, they cannot be permanently abolished by the willful action of any particular state (e.g., the erstwhile Soviet Union).⁶ For these dimensions of justice have achieved the status of being virtually *invariant structures* in our highly variable world.

III. THE GLOBAL DIMENSION OF ETHICAL LIFE: CIVIL SOCIETY

Motto: "Ethical life is an unmoved mover that moves."⁷

The principal issue for ethical philosophy is whether we can distinguish among the dimensions of ethical life which endure in the world and in our acquired dispositions. Many, no doubt, are local or culturally specific and most of these generate no ethical conflicts. But there are also some that form the main structures⁸ of ethical life.

Some of the culturally specific aspects of ethical life do produce conflicts with the main structure. When they do, we sometimes invoke moral arguments to buttress our ethical dispositions. If ethical life involved no objective dimensions living in our habits, desires, and dispositions, and in the ethical worlds where we acquire them and live by them, then an objective account of ethical conflict would require either reference to trans-human norms—that is, moral discourse—or acquiescence in the brave new world of ironic nihilism—for example, a Rortean discourse which presupposes the need of ethical solidarity while denying its objective validity. Is it true (as the ironic nihilist leads us to suppose) that all talk about objectivity is destructive of the solidarities that ethically sustain us?

It is the mark of a systematic philosopher to *say* what we all *show* in our everyday lives: that we are, at any time we act or speak, *already* ethical individuals, that we are participants in all of the main structures of ethical life.

It is of course true that Hegel attempted to integrate the self-regulating market—first discovered by Adam Smith—into his account of modern ethical life. If, as an ethical philosopher in the modern world, his principles were, as some have alleged, "derived" from Aristotle and thereby dependent upon the antique ethical world, then, given Aristotle's critique of "chrematistike," clearly this feature in his account

⁶ The world's reaction to the treatment of blacks under the South African system of apartheid or of Palestinians under Israeli occupation may be taken as cases in point.

⁷ Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, 127.

⁸ The notion that ethical life has some "main structures" is forcefully argued by Bernard Williams in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985).

of “civil society” was a mistake. Like Aristotle’s, Hegel’s ethical philosophy attempts to elucidate the main structures of actual ethical life. The several recently published sets of lectures on *Rechtsphilosophie* (1817/18, 1818/19, and 1819/20) add further evidence that Hegel tried to show how participation in the actual life of civil society, including its market dimension, contributed to the habit-formation of the distinctively modern ethical individual.

I think we can recognize that justice involves, as sketched in the second part of this paper, a plurality of dimensions in the modern world. We can also see that Hegel tried—however successfully—to integrate persons, moral agents, and all three modes of ethical individuality into his philosophy of the modern world.

Whereas the availability of a complete ethical life in Aristotle was limited to those who could participate fully in the *two* particular institutions of house and city—and these were only male heads of households and citizens in a polity—habituation in the ordinary ethical life of the modern world is three-dimensional and it is mediated by the *three* universal institutions of family, civil society, and state. For whatever reason, we moderns all know by habit that complete ethical individuality is only had by living in *each* of these three spheres, that such participation is open to all, and that those who lack familial, societal, or political life are, as we say, “deprived.” These happen to be just the dimensions of ordinary ethical life that Hegel described in his philosophy of objective spirit. Whatever the deficiencies of his account, that account is descriptive of the main structures of ordinary ethical life, it is universal to the human species not because it invokes trans-human norms but because it articulates the elementary structures of interaction that have become “second nature” to any member of the modern world.

It is one peculiarity of the modern ethical world that all members of our species happen to be habituated to participate in each of the main institutions mediating and sustaining the life of modern ethical individuals. Another peculiarity is that one of these, civil society, is a singular global institution and not, like families and states, actual in a plurality of instances. In Hegel’s time the actual extent of civil society, as an effective medium of habitation and habituation, was quite limited, even though the British were acknowledged to have put, for the first time, “the whole world”⁹ into a universal structure of market relations. In the meanwhile, and especially since the last world war, civil society has been realizing its global nature at an astonishing pace. The role of colonialism as a means of its spread, has been significantly reduced. If, as seems likely, this development (see *Rph*, §246) continues, then the economic sphere of ethical life, long dissociated from the *oikos*, will also become more and more dissociated from the state and will actualize its theoretically graspable potential to be an integral sphere of ethical life.

If we must find a phrase to “define the moment,” let us call it a phase of acceleration in the centuries-long transition toward the full realization of civil society as a global dimension of human solidarity. In this transitional phase, with civil society still partially determined by the incursions of particular states, the ideological discourse most widely used to articulate the market dimension of civil society is still *moral* and *political*. Let me illustrate. Until recently the problem of world poverty was discussed, for example by Gunnar Myrdal, as a moral “challenge,” as an “ought-to-be” making a claim upon the good will of men

⁹ Hegel: “die ganze Welt,” *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, 201.

and nations. But we are coming to realize, what Hegel soberly spelled out long ago, that moral generosity cannot help, and can even hinder, the global struggle to participate in the life of civil society.

As all readers of the daily press must now know, two of the most serious barriers to a further globalization of civil society today are (1) the state-sponsored program of subsidies to farmers in advanced industrial lands and (2) the “Multi-Fiber Arrangement” which, together with other protectionist legislation, makes world trade in textiles and clothing the most restrictive of all fields of trade in manufactured products. The plain fact is that trade in agricultural and textile commodities represents the area of greatest opportunity for economic betterment by most of those living under conditions of poverty. In a mature and global civil society, the regulation of such trade will come, more and more, to be in the hands of civil (e.g., GATT) rather than political (e.g., bilateral-political) institutions. And there is today growing pressure in this direction, based upon the reciprocity of interest, not moral argument, to relinquish this vestige of so-called “economic sovereignty.”

Of course the sanctity of such unjust sovereignty, which conflates the social and political dimensions of ethical life in the modern world, will only dissipate over a long period of time. But we can all recall when the South African system of apartheid was similarly justified on the basis of political sovereignty. To take just one further example among many, the question of basic health care is structurally a civil and global, not a national and political, matter. It pertains to us as human beings, not as Australians or Pakistanis. When the globe was exposed, last year, to the graphic suffering of Kurds in Iraq, Iraqi sovereignty was violated, not on grounds of war, but from a powerful sense of global humanity. This “right to interfere” in the face of suffering had long been advocated by such global organizations as the French-based *Doctors of the World*. But until last year the political principle of non-interference and sovereignty had taken precedence over the civilian dimension of a global humanity. Such developments are, I submit, consonant with Hegel’s three-dimensional theory of ethical life in the modern world. It is simply false to assert—as many students of Hegel still do—that civil society is a sphere of conflict and strife which can only be ameliorated by (Keynesian or “Marxist”) state intervention. As in all dimensions of ethical life, there are sources of tension and dissent in civil society. But when we come to realize that civil society is more than a *laissez-faire* market place, that the market is embedded in a larger social order, then we can see that civil society is also the locus in which to find the resources to address the problems that arise within it. It is in this sense that we can come to grasp civil society as a global dimension of ethical life.

Since Hegel wrote at a relatively early phase of the development I have illustrated—even though his formulation of the main structures has been borne out—it would seem to be one of the tasks of systematic philosophy at the end of the 20th-century to consider the implications of the tri-modal structure of ethical life as its realization approaches its natural limit on our planet.

K. R. Dove

SUNY Purchase