

**Are communities and our moral character threatened by
globalization?**

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It is right to formulate straight from the beginning the answer which we have in mind: if and only if globalization is an economic fundamentalism¹, the communities and our moral character are threatened by it.

1. Rules for using the terms

After Wittgenstein's later philosophy it became a common thing that the meaning of terms is given by their rule of usage; we know what a term means when we know how to use it in a context; this thing is learned by activating and speaking in the respective context.

We have to state the rules for the usage of terms with which we work "character", "communities" and "globalization".

How didactic and plain may this path appear, it will be seen useful for formulating our answer.

In the specialized works, the term "character" appears most frequently in relation with psychology and ethics; it describes the way in which it is made the switch from faculties, phenomena, psychical behaviors to virtues and moral acts.

¹ Every time we refer to economy in this essay without any other determination, we bear in mind the capitalist developed one, free enterprise; this one being globalized.

But, we speak also about characters from a theater play or from a movie. It seems a far usage from the previous one; still a “wool thread can be woven”; from Aeschylus to Shakespeare, each character is usually built on the basis of a virtue.

The third way of using the term “character” interest us, namely the ethical one; for that reason we use the phrase “moral character”.

Moral character is the moral and durable habitus, it is a certain attitudinal and behavioral skill which is determined not only by psychological factors, but also by educational ones. It assures the moral continuity of the individual. It holds together the virtues of a person; it is the essential part of the moral identity: “moral character is largely an interconnected set of traits...which...are largely deep-seated dispositions to do certain things...it is like a state of being”².

The term “communities” is used to designate a vast and differentiate set of groups of individuals, from the smallest, but the most important, the family, until the biggest one, the international community.

Some individuals are persons like the members of families, neighborhoods and churches. Others, like members of the international community, are national states, non-governmental organizations and transnational corporations. Of course, we can also speak about the world community made out of humankind’s individuals.

There is also other use of the term “communities”, when we name through it the intermediary bodies between the individual and the state; for instance the community of

² Robert Audi, *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p.188

businessmen, the village communities or those brotherhoods from the Middle Ages. It is a suggestive usage for our topic, because in the modern period, the national state pretends to take over as much as possible intermediary bodies. So, it reappears the risk of a situation described by Hegel, for the Roman period, as the individual in front of the state. The person faces the abstract institutions and laws.

The usage of the term “communities” which interests us is that for the family, for neighborhoods, for churches, meaning for those groups of people which incorporate traditions, values, behavioral models without which the person cannot constitute.

The state claims that it knows what is proper for the education of each of us, “<<proper>> never really did get a thorough explanation”³. In reality the person has chances to realize its individuality only in the mentioned communities.

The term “globalization” entered into usage only in the last decades. It concerns nowadays in first place the economic globalization closely followed by the cultural, technological ones.

The term is new but no one stopped historians, sociologists, anthropologists to use it referring to previous situations, for example the globalization realized through the great geographical discoveries during the XVth - XVIth centuries, or the globalization done at the end of the XIXth century in the so called imperial period.

³ Wendy Welch, *The Learning Center*, in *The Healing Heart-Communities*, ed. Allison M. Cox, David H. Albert, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, 2005, p.190

We deal with the economy globalization. An important literature was created to describe and evaluate it: “for many, globalization has been an economic godsend; for others it has been an unmitigated bane”⁴.

Our answer suppose an evaluation: if globalization is an economic fundamentalism, then its negative effects are overtaking the positive ones, so the communities and the moral character are endangered.

2. Setting the Stage

After the previous terminological definitions we see that the theme implies three features or fields: a moral one, the character, a communitarian one, the family, the neighborhoods, the churches, and an economic one, the globalization.

To each characteristic is associated a dimension. When we are speaking about morality, we have into account the morality of the person, individually, somebody’s character. When we speak about the communitarian aspect, we speak about communities, about the particular, about smaller or bigger groups of people like the family, church and neighborhoods. Finally, to the economic, to globalization it is associated an universal dimension as it is showed by the term itself, the economic capitalist mechanism became universal.

This setting of the study’s problematic permits us to see two things.

The first one refers to the necessity to work with all these terms. This needs to take into account the moral, the communitarian and the economic aspects.

⁴ Albino Barrera, *Globalization and Economic Ethics*, Palgrave McMillan, New York,2007 p.1

Important is to have the capacity to distinguish which is the optimal equilibrium of their functioning and if and in what measure we are able to influence the establishing of this equilibrium. As Popper would say, it is a problem of knowledge and of piecemeal technology.

The second refers exactly to the real relationships between fields.

Although, in the specialized literature, especially after Kant, it tends to make out of morality a characteristic of the person (the moral subject is named “person” because it is rational and it has value in itself), and the person confronts directly with the universality of morality, of the categorical imperative, in reality, in moral education, things are more complicated. In the absence of a community which would educate the person, in the absence of the family which defends and transmits values, norms, which does this not only on a rational manner, but also through the force of the example, of model, it is hard to believe that someone would truly be a responsible moral character.

An analog thing may be said about Christianity. The command given by Christ to love God and those of our kind, it may generate:” a deep disagreement about who <<our own kind>> are”⁵. No matter how many remarkable theologians would have supported that “our kind” means all people, without the effort done by churches, families and without a moral education along hundreds and thousands of years, this thing would not have been recognized by increasingly more people.

Moral character and communities are threatened not by the extensional character of globalization; the imperialism of economic values, the intensional character of globalization, is

⁵Peter Singer, *One World. The Ethics of Globalization*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002, p.153.

the thread. This imperialism risks to dislocate values, local norms, created in a centennial tradition that have given not only the specific of communities and persons, but their own opening towards universal. The parish priest and the family father are our particular models to moral universality.

3. Distinguer pour unir.

We permitted ourselves to borrow the title of an epistemological treaty which belongs to Jacques Maritain in our attempt to highlight two aspects.

The first one refers to the motivation of our questioning: in which conditions exists the problem described in the title?

The second one refers to the “logic” proper to the functioning of each of the domains mentioned in the previous paragraph: moral, communitarian and economical.

For the first one: if we would consider for example globalization lacking completely value, a pure negative phenomenon, then there is a big probability that a sum of individual communitarian, governmental forces will fight against it. As we shall see in the following paragraph, this is not the case.

Of course, if the moral character would be missing completely, indifferent of the context, then, be it good or bad the globalization, the subject would not have relevance. It is no wrong if it is threatened.

Finally, if communities, families, churches, neighborhoods would not have a role in shaping the moral character, then we shouldn't care about the threat addressed to them. If they would have a role in regards to knowledge, description of facts, probably it would be possible to be substituted by the state through the school or other institutions. It is clear that things are not like this and communities are full of relevance in the relation with the moral persons and with globalization. Communities contribute in an essential manner to the education of moral persons while confronting with the values, norms and behaviors induced by globalization.

In what concerns me, in general not only for this essay, I consider that values and norms inspired by them are essential for mankind. Are at least the same, if not more important, than knowledge, the simple description of facts.

I can only regret that historical development of mankind lead, besides admirable things, to circumstances such as the mystification of education; its standardization and nationalization are centered on facts and not on values.

In the conditions in which the same economical development imposed a model in which parents work much more and children do not enjoy family education it would be necessary the increase in moral, axiological education in school. I doubt the fact that the school would be able to substitute to the family. I believe more in the relation of axiological and normative communion from the core of the family, than in delivering of knowledge from the school. But, the development of the performative field within schools would have meant something. At the same time, I ask myself what values would the state promote and what would have been the impact at the personal level.

The second aspect which interests me in this paragraph is exactly the axiological one.

We can think that each among the moral, communitarian and economical domains are built around certain values.

In what concerns morality, it is not only the case about those values which have been standardized and legalized in international documents. We are not talking only about the human rights such as property, liberty, life, rights which are usually labeled as negative. It is about those positive aspects such as solidarity, honesty, respect and help.

At the judicial level, through law it would stipulate at most that these rights should not be breached. Paradoxically, such a provision makes impossible another, for example the obligation of being solidary. Being solidary means in last instance to do something positive, concrete for others or for this you cannot be obliged.

The domain of morality, that of the living, active one cannot be overtaken by the state, by the law. It must be administered by persons; it depends on the moral character of each of us. But it is not genetically transmittable (even if it is possible that some temperamental data to be innate).

For the shaping of the moral character, the communities and, in first instance the family, are essential.

As I stated, we have in mind these three types of communities: the family, the church and neighborhoods. If we take a look closely at the life of some traditional communities from the United States or from Romania, we shall notice that neighborhoods as well as churches are built

around the family. Neighbors have family relations among themselves. At the church, people go at celebrations with the family. We have family friends, and the church and the neighborhood can be looked up such as bigger families.

Such affirmations are not reductionist. Of course, communities have their own rules, for example for defending the neighborhood or for commemorating important dates. More than that, churches have in the first place a sacred function. But these are theandric realities and the human part is represented first of all by the family.

Shortly, also in the interior of the communitarian domain it must be applied the phrase “distinguer pour unir”. The family, neighborhoods and churches have their own values and rules. But, they are very united through that the family and its values are the fundamental parts of the other two.

Nowhere else more than in the family it can be applied the principle to love those of our kind. Those parts of the family are in the first place our kind and you learn to bring them together. Then, also from the family we extend ourselves towards neighborhoods and integrated ourselves into the church. The latter two, together with the family, help us better understand why each man is our kind as Christ said.

In a nutshell, the common value, that of the family, neighborhood and church is this moral love of mankind. Of course, here we learn what is good and what is wrong and these become common moral characters in time.

In what concerns economic globalization, the core value on which it is built, its defining intensional aspect is usually considered to be profit; intended most often as an amount of money resulted from an economical process. But we should not forget that profit is the result of free trade market. Free trade market, that is voluntary, non-violent satisfies a demand, generates incomes for a labor force, through competition produces development. All these are positive factors.

No matter how shabby it may seem at first sight the central value of a capitalist economy it is in fact only a symbol for the free enterprise, for the market and competition, for the well being brought by them.

We have to think about each of these three domains, moral, communitarian and economical, in the first place as distinct domains developed each of them according to their own values and rules. Morality will pretend at the limit absolute solidarity, equal love for all. Communities will teach us solidarity, but also the need to adapt it contextually. Economy shows us how to produce prosperity.

We enumerated previously the positive aspects; precisely for them we shall continue to cultivate these three domains. In the following paragraph we shall see the risk of an unhappy union between domains and the chance of a good union.

Once again, each domain has its own values and generates benefits for humans. Though, it is not always the case.

I understand through fundamentalism the treatment of any domain of reality after the values, norms and the logic of a domain considered fundamental or excellent. As the treatment of reality is done through theories at most of the time, the same procedure it is met at their level. The examples are in abundance.

Today, the most known fundamentalism is the religious one, the Islamic. But it shouldn't be forgotten that fundamentalism was launched at the end of the XIXth century in the Catholic environments; from the Aeterni Patris Encyclical until the Neo-scholastic of cardinal Mercier it wasn't proposed nothing else than a sort of fundamentalism. The interdiction extended many centuries in medieval times to lend money with interest is also such an example.

In my opinion, despite some concurrent interpretations (from instance Michael Novak stating that Christ proposes free enterprise, and Hugo Chavez saying that Christ is the first communist) of an economical type, Jesus didn't say anything about economy (the famous parable of the rich man which cannot enter heaven, it doesn't blame richness itself, but the attachment to earthly things- where your treasure is, there is your soul). However, a moral character educated in a Christian manner must confront itself with the economical values.

Or simply said, man as a whole, manifests himself in different domains, moral, communitarian, political, economical etc. His acts must take into account the specific criteria of each domain so that man has to produce a hierarchy among criteria from different areas.

The temptation is to say that he has some meta-criteria; but if you introduce those you risk an infinite regression: how can you order these?

The correct solution lies in the moral character of the individual, he has rational dispositions, frames of mind, axiology, relatively stable in time, which offer him a moral identity.

This moral identity is formed in the first place through education, relation of communion with the family, church and neighborhood.

Such an education doesn't avoid risks. As we have seen, morality, economy, each has its own logic and each of them have an imperialistic temptation. Not only economy wants to judge everything from profit point of view and to avoid other reasons such as solidarity. Morality wants us to help everyone without discriminating someone; but if goodwill concerns everyone, the beneficence for all is impossible. We can try to help some people without hurting others.

Realizing this equilibrium, this balance between moral character and globalized economy, eliminating the fundamentalist risk is the duty of communities. The advantage in states such as the United States is that the economical development was accompanied by checks and balances on behalf of the communities. In countries like Romania, "some real risks associated with the rapid and headlong race of countries towards market economics"⁶ are due to the lack of communities actions. In countries like mine, after the crash of communism, communities are reinvented gradually.

To avoid the economic fundamentalism of globalization, the essential role lies within communities and educated individuals. If we succeed this thing, we can gather both the outcomes of moral character and those of globalization.

⁶ HRH The Prince of Wales, *Forward*, in *Making Globalization Good*, ed. John H. Dunning, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p.VII.

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