

# **Globalization's Elixir**

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“Can Character and Communities Survive in an Age of Globalization?”

With the dawning of an age of globalization, new burdens have been placed on political science. Though man's nature remains a constant in history, his historical situation changes. Political theory must adapt itself to these changes in historical context whilst preserving that which does not change. Globalization has shaped modern man's psyche, which was defined by Eric Voegelin as the substance of society<sup>1</sup>. Advocating for a return to times past is unrealizable, because time moves forwards. Globalization is upon us and, as a historical phenomenon, it has introduced many hostile factors to local communities and institutions, while at the same time expanding and extending valuable resources and wealth. It has succeeded in improving the circulation and promulgation of the wealth that may be harnessed to sustain community, but if the means by which sustenance is obtained threatens the well-being of that which it sustains, a reconciliation is required. Though man can acquire more wealth, travel to more places, and live more comfortably, he somehow seems more challenged to sustain healthy correspondence with his fellow men and women, live virtuously, or attain happiness. A synthesis must be made within political theory to preserve the advances made by globalization and neutralize the caustic effects that have threatened community and character; additionally, remedial action to the erosion that has already taken place is called for. This may be achieved by a return to an emphasis on the city, the family, and religion.

The paradox of globalization is that it has made man's life easier and more difficult, simpler and more complex--simultaneously. With globalization there is a shrinking and an expanding of the cosmos, and a corresponding advancement and decline of humanity. The advance is characterized mainly by advances in science and technology, following the intellectual program set forth by Francis Bacon, aimed at overcoming our limitations by developing a "race and line of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. III: Plato and Aristotle (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2000) 123.

miseries of humanity.”<sup>2</sup> The decline is characterized mainly by a shift in man’s understanding of himself away from his nature. Man has thus been alienated from the institutions that fulfill his nature and give him a sense of identity and purpose, because he has forgotten his nature amidst the distractions he has made for himself. The oeuvre of Voegelin, most notably *Anamnesis*, suggests that amnesia can infest a society, when a breach in the generational transmission of a society’s culture, mores, and virtues occurs. Amnesia is a major source of disorder within community, and a process of recovery becomes necessary for the reestablishment of order.<sup>3</sup> This entails returning to the annals of history, and engaging in the subsisting historical dialogue between vastly different ages, to uncover and reintegrate the lost sources of order back into society. One of the side-effects of globalization has been amnesia, and one of the gravest losses of the younger generation is an understanding of man’s nature. Thus, we must relearn what globalization has had us unlearn, namely that just as nature designates the fulfillment of the tree, and proper grounding in soil allows for its growth and fulfillment, so also man requires grounding in communal institutions which shape his character. Modern man, however, seems no longer content to operate within the span delegated by his nature, because this limits him. Rather, he displays a desire to will outside of the bounds of his nature.

Modern man is distracted and his tendency has been to see himself as unlimited. He can travel farther, faster, and can send messages instantly. For all his amenities, designed to extend his reach, increase his connectivity, and make his life simpler and easier, he has in fact become even more isolated from his neighbor. The promulgation of social cyber-networks, a generation of Ipods, iPhones and Ipads, and a widespread addiction to television and video games, have fortified the barriers between men, inhibiting their authentic participation in any real community. Virtual networking via video, text, or voice communication, isolated and self-customized entertainment, and the artificial stimulation of danger, combat, and role-playing in video games are the preferred mode of interaction nowadays, it seems, and pose as hostile factors to the survival of community. It is important to be truly present wherever you are, and technology seeks to make man present in many places at once, but only does so artificially, which is no replacement for the real presence of another. Our nature is designed such that we are able to be present in one place at one time, despite our phantasies to bi-locate. Sanity must be preserved by the proper use of the ‘time-saving’ devices with which technology has equipped us. Alas, time-saving-devices have become time-spending-devices. Indulging

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon, *Collected Works of Francis Bacon* (London: Routledge, 1996) 80.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2002).

them takes one's attention and presence away from your locale and alienates it from those around you. In our age of globalization, it is more possible than ever to be alone in a crowd of thousands of people or a world of billions.

When man's psyche begins to be shaped by the notion that he is a member of a global community, he may suffer from a feeling of insignificance. When Voyager 1 transmitted "Pale blue dot", a photograph of earth from the farthest, at the time, vantage-point, Carl Sagan commented,

All our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

Although globalization has shrunken the world and made it more interconnected, it has simultaneously shrunken man's size relative to his grounding. The context in which man participates in the world's infrastructure has diluted the potency of his actions, though extending their reverberations worldwide.

Before extrapolating the economics of globalization, the notion of community must be fully projected. Though community can be defined as a group of people living together in one place, this definition is insufficient and does not fully encapsulate its complete function. Victor Turner makes an important distinction between community and *communitas*. He understands *communitas* as a rite of passage, where the ritual subject passes through three marked phases: separation, liminal, and aggregation.

In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject. . . is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position. . . . I prefer the Latin term '*communitas*' to '*community*,' to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living. . . [and] this community is the repository of the whole gamut of the culture's values, norms, attitudes, sentiments, and relationships."<sup>5</sup>

Community is collective movement towards some commonly defined end through a series of character-shaping stages. Community shapes character by pitting man vis-a-vis some reference to a common good. Acting within a community is acting under scrutiny, because the community holds spoken and unspoken, written and unwritten codes and standards that must be acknowledged and respected. The dynamics of community are far more complicated than being defined simply in terms of proximity, and the power of the community to condemn or encourage creates openings for people to fill with their unique role.

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space* (New York: Random House, 1994) 7.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1969) 94-6.

Community does happen in one place and is limited by area as its definition (albeit incomplete) indicates, but globalization has spurred man to becoming more mobile than ever. The tension between stationary communities and people in constant flux puts strain on the permanence of communities. Businesses, growing ever larger, still conduct transactions face to face, despite having the technological ability for long-range communication, and this human preference unfortunately wastes much time in travel and detracts from time with family. Houses have become somewhat disposable and shelter various vagabond families. The diaspora of children to distant places has increased the notion that the family is a transient institution that can be escaped. Childhood, college, and workplace relationships are developed for a time and then abandoned, as people chase greener grass and more lucrative job opportunities. Movement, then, is another hostile factor to community.

Man, by nature, craves community. Within community, he finds fulfillment, but man, when he understands himself as a member of a global community, has overextended himself and places himself outside of the sphere of communal fulfillment. A community possesses certain needs and living in community requires some degree of leisure and abidingness which the mobility and flux of globalization is reluctant to permit. Josef Pieper, in *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, argues that out of leisure, culture arises; if globalization drives man out of leisure into perpetual tasks, culture will disintegrate, and no common thread will bind men together into community with each other.<sup>6</sup> In order to satisfy his craving for communal fulfillment, man ought to settle somewhere and leave himself ample time away from work for leisurely pursuits.

Size can be another hostile factor to community, especially when the principles of subsidiarity are lost. Plato, in *The Republic*, symbolized this size of perfect unity as 5,040, because it could be perfectly divided into parts that would fulfill every function the polis required. Aristotle says that obviously 5,000 is too large to be a workable model for the size of the polis.<sup>7</sup> So size does matter, and globalization has manifested the deficiencies of a structure that becomes too large to accommodate a human person. Man cannot be a member of a global community only, and hope to fulfill the part of his nature that craves for community, which first began to be challenged in Enlightenment thinking.

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<sup>6</sup>Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (London: Collins, 1965)

<sup>7</sup>Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. III: Plato and Aristotle (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2000) 347.

The Age of Reason popularized the misconception that the individual, as an independent and self-sufficient unit, was the fundamental building block of society. Individualism is integrated into our modern political system and the modern psyche. Our language is a reflection of our psyche, and political theory and street usage both prefer to use the term “individual” as opposed to “person” to describe the singular human unit. This shift in modernity’s usage of language parallels a corresponding shift from the ‘personal relationship’ to the ‘economic relationship’. This shift away from the person towards the individual can be traced back through the political thinking of the Enlightenment, especially in the development of the political theory of liberalism.

In Aristotle’s *Politics*, society does not start with the individual, nor is it contingent on free assent of individuals, rather, political community begins naturally with a relationship of rational and political, unequal and dependent persons. The following is an excerpt from his analysis of political partnership:

First, then, there must of necessity be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another: on the one hand, male and female, for the sake of reproduction (which occurs not from intentional choice but . . . from a natural striving to leave behind another that is like oneself); on the other, the naturally ruling and ruled, on account of preservation.<sup>8</sup>

Following this classical foundation for political science, society is understood as natural to man and built on a pre-existing conglomeration of relationships, beginning with family or household, then a group of households or village, and finally a group of villages which make a city, the first unit that can claim self-sufficiency. The city is all-important in politics, because it fulfills every aspect of human life, from education to employment, the marketplace to religion. Relationships, protected by institutions, define the city. Sex, when indulged outside of the marital bond, leaves love unprotected and vulnerable; freedom, when not held in check by law, is violated; education, when left to the whims of a boy, is lazily left unfinished; spiritual nourishment, outside of religion, is nonexistent--these institutions protect some concrete human good and operate on the local level within the city.

Globalization has overwhelmed communal institutions; it has broken down the ethereal wall that must preserve the character of each city, which is the provider for man’s needs. Lewis Mumford, in *The City in History*, argues that “in the very growth of the town the spiritual substance tended to disappear.”<sup>9</sup> The wall that protected the medieval city preserved the identity of a community within the city in two ways: 1.) it formed a protective barrier against invaders; and 2.) it was aesthetically a thing of beauty. The pride of a city is somehow captured in a wall,

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984) 36.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, 1961) 321.

and it preserved communal relationships within its shelter. Mumford continues by asking, “Must the wall be torn down? . . . [D]id civilization have the capacity to continue growth from its own center and so to arrive, without disintegration, at a wider synthesis?”<sup>10</sup> With the tearing down of even the broadest barriers through globalization, the process by which the medieval town was destroyed has been writ large.

Globalization essentially globalized economics, and economical advantage formed the basis for the incentives that motivated it. Adam Smith paved the way for it by advocating for free-trade and free-market, Karl Marx foretold of it as an inevitable effect of capitalism, and modern man achieved it by following the progressive program set forth by Francis Bacon. Globalization extended and expanded resources, and on the economic level, increased the standard of living. It claimed, to borrow Keynes’ articulation, a harmony of interests between private advantage and public good.<sup>11</sup> But what was the cost?

Francis Bacon was the first to recognize and articulate the cost of this kind of progress. The project of Francis Bacon was to solicit wholesale human effort in a total reconstruction of the sciences; in order to further progress in human knowledge, he funneled the scope of the inquiry into his own channel, dismissing and disregarding any peripheral efforts to his project. For Bacon, the promised achievements of the project would be appealing enough to motivate a global effort in pursuance of it.

That the state of knowledge is not prosperous nor greatly advancing and that a way must be opened for the human understanding entirely different from any hitherto known and other helps provided in order that the mind may exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to it.<sup>12</sup>

Nature, for Bacon, was not something to be understood and accepted, but rather, it was something to be dominated, conquered, subdued, overcome, etc.--in short, nature is our enemy and it is our moral duty to confront this oppressor. Bacon thought that the abandonment of all prior inquiries into knowledge was necessary to coalesce the energy needed for his radical project.

Bacon’s spin doctor was charity; however, charity as concern for neighbor was superseded by charity as concern for mankind’s condition. Hence his project aimed towards knowledge that is allegedly for “the betterment of all of mankind”. In short, his appeal to charity and selflessness was a shell game. Further condemning the value of the current state of knowledge, Bacon asserts:

And for its value and utility it must be plainly avowed that that wisdom which we have derived principally from the Greeks is but like the boyhood of knowledge, and has the characteristic property of boys: it can talk, but it cannot generate, for it is fruitful of controversies but barren of works.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mumford, 334.

<sup>11</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire ; The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (BN) 18.

<sup>12</sup> Francis Bacon, *Collected Works of Francis Bacon* (London: Routledge, 1996) 68.

<sup>13</sup> Bacon, 69.

Bacon saw present inquiries as inhibitors to progress in things that matter, namely, things that improve our hapless and unhappy condition. Happiness is univocal with wealth and comfort, and a “happy human condition” can only be achieved at the expense of giving up the ancient routes which lead nowhere except “manifold ignorance of things”. Bacon’s line of inquiry has delivered substantially on its promise by extending human life and making it easier in many ways, but it also seems to have disparaged of tradition. Man does not naturally fly, but he has developed an aid by which he can overcome this limitation and even walk on the moon. Man, by nature, feels pain, but by putting a particular composition in a pill, he can subdue this misery. Bacon’s major oversight, ultimately, was to give no consideration or apparent care for how man would use his achievements. He disparaged of any moral guide for the proper use of power and promulgated accelerated acquisition of it!

Karl Lowith argues that it is “too much good will” to see something as good and try to impose it on mankind universally.<sup>14</sup> Too much good will, in fact, shaped the ideologies that spawned the atrocities of the twentieth century. Apart from the destruction of the city, the breakdown of the family and other communal institutions, and the apostatic revolt of the Enlightenment, the culmination of globalization has been made even more menacing due to the doctrine of liberty subscribed to by the modern psyche. The tenants of liberalism and individualism exacerbates the hostile factors towards community.

How can we arrive at any unity of belief within community when we assume a plurality of individual beliefs? Pierre Manent argues that man’s desire to be free from the constraints of nature was taken up in modern philosophy by dismantling liberty from nature and setting it above it. The only way in which liberty can take precedence over nature is by depriving man of a *summum bonum*, in other words, by severing man from his end. Isaiah Berlin, a good summary author of the liberalist doctrine on liberty, asserts that man’s dignity is contingent on his being able to fend off all unnecessary coercion, including the coercion given by nature to dispose him towards a *summum bonum*. Manent contends that this “emancipation of the will, this liberation of liberty”, is diametrically opposed to the *raison d’être* of the city, which is “to make the citizens good and just”<sup>15</sup> The theory of liberalism, in as far as it assumes that man, in a state of nature, is independent and

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949).

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1280 b12

self-sufficient, and that “man is born free, but everywhere is in chains”<sup>16</sup>, logically leads to the Leviathan of Thomas Hobbes, because of its miscarriage of man’s nature.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, argues that political community is not possible unless a harmony of belief is attained with regard to conceptions of virtue. But any such acknowledgement of attaining a shared understanding for the sake of procuring a concrete human good falls outside of the theoretical analysis permitted by the tenants of liberalism, because it assumes that man is at full liberty to be at odds with everyone so long as everyone is equally free to be at odds with him.

For since a virtue is now generally understood as a disposition or sentiment which will produce in us obedience to certain rules, agreement on what the relevant rules are to be is always a prerequisite for agreement upon the nature and content of a particular virtue. But this prior agreement in rules is, as I have emphasized in the earlier part of this book, something which our individualist culture is unable to secure.<sup>17</sup>

The endemic flaw in liberalism is that a conception of justice cannot be agreed upon because as a political ideology, liberalism systematically denies the possibility of holding transcendent ethical standards which would infringe upon a person’s right to create his own ethical standards. MacIntyre states that “the identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them”<sup>18</sup>. The liberalist creed on liberty, from MacIntyre’s perspective, cuts off appeal to objective truth and forms a scenario where men have no appeal to common ground. He maintains that this ‘right’ to disagree on basic moral questions is built into the system in such a way as to prevent controversies from being dispelled rationally—a conflict of interests is irreconcilable because infringement upon anyone’s freedom to define their own good is theoretically untenable. The only way to quell irreconcilable conflicts is to appeal to a third party, in the case of politics, a central planning bureaucracy, which is diametrically opposed to the democratic ideals liberalism claims to purport.

If modern politics cannot be a process of ascertaining an ethical consensus that can be appealed to universally, then it has arrived at an impasse that prevents real politics from taking place, according to MacIntyre’s argument. Politics consists in discerning the good of the community, and securing this good by concrete means. In as much as this is able to take place within the framework of a liberal democratic structure is not attributable to the structure which rules it out, but rather to the nature of man, which is impervious to the reductions of a political ideology. Any ideology, because it denies pertinent sectors of reality from inclusion within its analytical structure, will not be able to

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<sup>16</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* (1920) 1.

<sup>17</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1981) 244.

<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre, 250.

account for parts of reality that it refuses to include. Much of modern political theory, therefore, has failed in its task of furnishing ideas to guide social forces, which is its role and responsibility as a branch of moral philosophy. Furthermore, liberal democracy as it currently exists has been hailed the greatest of human achievements and beyond criticism, by authors such as Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man*. Though the perfect society, as the Classicists admitted, is unattainable, the ideas latent in political theory can pit their authority against the prevailing disorder and act as an elixir. The political scientist, therefore, must carefully tend to the sickness without killing the patient, and his most pressing task is addressing globalization.

The task of the ruler is to infuse the truths latent within political theory into political power by means of pragmatically realizable legislation. Manent praises the protective function of political power in its ability to uphold character and community.

Thanks to political power, every good can exist, endure, and affirm itself in the human world, and at the same time communicate and “live together” with other goods. . .The true elements of the city are the goals [ends!] or motives of action of the individuals, that is, their goods.<sup>19</sup>

Political community, striving to secure the right order of the soul and of the commonwealth, must build from a correctly guided anthropology towards a common good. A proper understanding of man’s nature remains a prerequisite to grounding the importance of the family and religion in the city. Mumford defines the city as “an organ of love.” He then expounds with what this organ does for humanity.

[The city constitutes] that magnification of all the dimensions of life, through emotional communion, rational communication, technological mastery, and above all, dramatic representation, has been the supreme office of the city in history. And it remains the chief reason for the city’s continued existence.<sup>20</sup>

Human life is completed in the city, as the fitting container of all man’s needs, inclusive of family, churches, schools, etc. Has globalization, for all its progress, helped or hindered the over-all health of the city? Jane Jacobs uses the lung analogy, showing how you cannot hope to regulate oxygen to a multiplicity of subjects engaging in different activities, because they each need different amounts of oxygen. Economies not planned around the city, for Jacobs, will stagnate and decline.<sup>21</sup> The challenge will be reentering meaningful participation in community on local levels and at the same time, harnessing the advantages globalization has brought to our historical situation.

Ironically, man has tried to make himself bigger and found himself to be smaller when he attempts to create a world with man as the center, or advance society to a terrestrial paradise. Man is born into a complex matrix of interdependency. Man’s modern context has been characterized by vast leaps and advances in science and technology, which has made the world smaller and his burdens, lighter; but a

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<sup>19</sup> Pierre Manent, *The City of Man* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998) 168-169.

<sup>20</sup> Mumford, 576.

<sup>21</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Vintage, 1985).

simultaneous decline has occurred in his understanding of his nature, particularly as a spiritual and communal being--a person in need of family, religion, and culture. These three aspects of civilization have been bombarded from all fronts by the hostile factors introduced by globalization. In order to preserve the dignity of human life, a global reintegration of tradition, culture, and mores must counter the caustic effects of globalization. Community and character can survive, but only after a process of recovery.