

G L O B A L I Z A T I O N
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a n d P H I L O S O P H Y

David Tabachnick and Toivo Koivukoski, editors

Globalization, Technology, and Philosophy

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Globalization, Technology, and Philosophy

Edited by

**David Tabachnick
and
Toivo Koivukoski**

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Introduction

David Tabachnick and Toivo Koivukoski

“We can hold in our minds the enormous benefits of technological society, but we cannot so easily hold the way it may have deprived us, because technique is ourselves.”

—George Grant, “A Platitude”

What is globalization? What is technology? We cannot fully understand these phenomena by accounting for their many manifestations, by listing the impacts of globalization or different technologies. Globalization is not simply world-wide markets and technology is not simply a set of neutral tools. They are expressions of our will to master our planet. To understand these related phenomena we must accept that something essential is at stake in them, something that changes the way we understand community and that touches us directly as human beings.

The authors in this collection make an effort to understand globalization and technology through the lens of philosophy. Conventional wisdom would have us believe that others are better suited to explain globalization and technology: economists, heads of state, bureaucrats, engineers, computer programmers, biochemists, or other technical experts. Philosophy, it might be argued, offers very little in the way of practical responses to the multiple challenges of the future. For those who would say this, philosophy is an interesting, albeit useless, academic subject.

Philosophers have long recognized this criticism. Consider the amusing story about the philosopher Thales that Aristotle recounts in Book I of the *Politics* [1258b15–1259a36]. As the story goes, Thales is reproached for living in poverty because he spent his whole life engaged in ‘useless’ philosophy. To prove his critics wrong, he used his observations of the stars to predict a bumper crop of olives, bought up all the olive presses at a low price, and later rented them out at a profit. This proves, Aristotle writes, “that it is easy for philosophers to become rich if they so desire, though it is not the business which they are really about.” Philosophy is not to be judged based upon its usefulness—its ability to solve particular problems, or in this case to make money—but based upon its capacity to understand and explain the whole, hard as this may be. For us, this means understanding globalization and technology. Fortunately, the authors of the following essays have taken the time to do just this.



In the opening essay of the collection, W. R. Newell argues that technology and a new global postmodernist paradigm are “slowly corroding” the character of political community and disintegrating civic virtue and obligation, so much so that democratic civilization as we know it is threatened with extinction. He argues we are now experiencing a renewal of the tension between our yearnings for a sense of community and individual rights, and suggests that, far from being a place of stability and boredom, a globalized world will be unsteady and incendiary. Newell’s concern extends to a description of a planetary technological transformation that does not simply include the rise of new global political and economic regimes but also a new, potentially illiberal conception of human being.

Darin Barney’s essay takes a specific look at the affect of the Internet and digital technology on community. He argues that on-line virtual community is deprived of the central tenet of liberal politics: moral obligation. The relationship between virtual and real community may even be antagonistic, since the growth of digital communication contributes to the decay of real community and civil life. As in Newell’s piece, this discussion leads to a central dilemma for contemporary peoples and nations: the acceleration of individual autonomy versus a basic human need for association with others. All of the good things about overcoming divisions of geography and social standing within the virtual sphere also allow an anonymous entrance and exit from relationships. Dissatisfactions are no longer met with calls for political, legislative or social reform but with a simple click of the mouse, that severs all ties and

obligations. The problem, Barney argues, is that we have mistaken communication for community.

Bernardo Attias remarks that “left-leaning rhetorics seem to be turning up in the strangest places.” He shows how the information revolution has co-opted the language of revolutionary politics, such that we may no longer be able to speak about pathways to alternative communities. This is an important theme of the book: our attempts at dissent are inculcated by technology and globalization.

In the same vein, Tom Darby argues that the old categories and metaphors that we used to understand our world—like Left and Right—no longer work. The disorientation that results is not an uncommon occurrence in the history of civilizations, but our crisis of understanding is unique in that our world—the sphere of our knowing and making—has no limits. Our world, which is the world of technology, is self-referential, relatively autonomous, progressively sovereign, and tends toward the systemization of nature both human and non-human. Thus defined, there is nothing outside of technology against which it could be judged. Rather, technology puts forward its own standard: efficiency. For Darby, this is the basis of the new planetary justice.

Don Ihde challenges many of the views put forward in these first essays. He asks “Which kind of globalization do we want and how do we go about getting it?” He argues that as technology shapes our planet we must become aware of its unpredictable consequences. For this reason, Ihde critiques both utopian and dystopian visions of globalization as unlikely if not ridiculous. Rather than either demons that must be exorcised or the saviours for our social ills, technology and globalization are processes that need to be managed through a new kind of civil involvement.

Andrew Feenberg’s essay is a bridge between Parts one and two: community and humanity. Like Ihde, he argues that a new politics directed towards democratization can arise from within a technological order, but again, this requires that we set aside both dystopian and utopian visions of technology. Both are visions of technology from the outside, either as destructive to our humanity or as a guarantor of our happiness and freedom. We do not stand outside of technology, but this does not mean that we are committed to a rationalized social order directed only by efficiency. Resistances “inevitably arise” out of the limitations of technological systems, and motivated by a search for meaning, these resistances can affect the “future design and configuration” of our world. These resistances form the basis for a new technological politics and a new technological human being.

Whereas Part I examines the changes that technology and globalization affect upon our communities, the essays in Part II ask, “By what

standard do we judge or even notice these changes? Does something of our humanity stand outside of technology and globalization?" These essays all give differing accounts of the status of the self within technology and globalization, and of the role of philosophy in the project of self-knowledge.

As a general introduction to the philosophy of technology, Arthur Melzer's essay is excellent. When his overview is coupled with his critique of the common approaches to technology, the urgency of the subject becomes apparent. He argues that the more we rail against technology, the more firmly we are held in its grip. Using examples from the Right, Left, and Center, he explains that critiques of technology are themselves technological. Realizing this, we must go behind these critiques and back to classical philosophy.

Trish Glazebrook's essay is an attempt to amend the silence of philosophers of technology on the topic of globalization. She calls upon Heidegger's teachings and extends them to ethical, political, and cross-cultural practices, showing how the logic of domination and control does not stop with the "things" of non-human nature, but includes human beings themselves.

Gilbert Germain puts forward that in threatening our given worldliness—our particular, spatial limits and our relation to objects not of our own making—technology and globalization threaten our humanity. Not only does this tendency remove the external limits that define our being, but as the outside world is brought within our immediate grasp, we cease to see technology as a mediating term: we disappear into our technology, our technology disappears into us, and both collapse into a world that we no longer see as external to ourselves.

Criticizing and reforming technology is no easy matter of recalling a humanist standard against which it can be judged. Ian Angus argues that this is so because the separation between the technical and the ethical upon which humanist evaluation rests is undercut by technology. The modern self sees the good as that which is within its power to procure, and according to this definition, the technical and the ethical are interwoven. To assert a truly humanist creed one must first understand human beings as limited beings within a given context. For us, this means understanding technology, since technology supplies the context for modern existence.

Horst Hutter calls upon Nietzsche as the thinker who most fully thought through the ambiguities and contradictions that define our technological age. Perhaps owing to this inheritance, the essay is jarring. Hutter writes that to master technology, we must first master ourselves; this means going behind the unity of the self to see what it masks—a

multiplicity of warring powers—and going forward toward the creation of a new human being.

According to Charlotte Thomas, philosophy is necessary for an adequate understanding of technology, but technology undercuts the basis for philosophical thought. In a world measured by efficiency and usefulness, philosophy seems to have no place. While she voices some hope, she sees the public currency of philosophy being devalued as we are ever more directed by the necessary and impressed by the specialist.

The book ends with a short essay by Donald Phillip Verene. For all of the talk of the self and the value of the individual, Verene argues that as functional members of technological society we are cut off from the possibility of self-knowledge. For us, the self is essentially undetermined and has a hollow core: there is nothing to know of the self, only an empty drive to mastery, and an empty standard of truth as certainty.

One of the cautions raised by many of our authors is that philosophical questions about globalization and technology are not only rare but also threatened. Philosophical thinking about the whole is crowded out to make way for specialized, instrumental rationality. Our thinking has become a tool directed toward solving the problems of the world. As a consequence, most studies of globalization and technology deal with specific problems concerning global society, economics, the environment, etc. This book aims to do something different: to understand what globalization and technology are in terms of how they affect our communities and our humanity. Though this may not directly solve the “problems” of technology or globalization, the openness to the whole that inspires these kinds of questions—the same wonder that caused Thales to contemplate the patterned changes in the heavens—may serve as a moderating influence on our mastery of the planet and ourselves, a program that would otherwise have only technological limits.

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Part One



Community

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Democracy in the Age of Globalization

Waller R. Newell

Throughout history, the human soul has always expressed its longings for freedom and its capacities for virtue and vice through a particular ordering of the political and social community. For the ancient Greeks, it was the small cohesive city state or *polis*. For medieval Europe, it was the respective claims of pope and emperor. For the last two hundred years, it has been liberal democracy. First promulgated as an ideal during the Enlightenment, actualized with varying degrees of success during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, until recently it formed the spiritual core of Western civilization. As we begin the new millennium, however, it looks increasingly as if this civilization may be coming to an end. Everywhere the Enlightenment project is in retreat or disrepute. More dangerously still for its survival, for many, the secular state with its representative institutions and procedural universalism has simply become boring. Liberal democracy often no longer engages people's primary loyalties, passions, or interests, which they are more and more likely to identify with their ethnic groups, issue groups, and a plethora of subcultures in which erotic and aesthetic proclivities can be freely indulged. Hence, while the non-Western world embraces its own premodern religious and cultural roots with renewed fervor and rejects the claim of liberal democracy to embody the single, universally valid

path to the future, and while a host of demographic and economic catastrophes press in upon the liberal democratic heartland of Europe and North America, a spiritual malaise of ennui and disaffection eats away at the Western ethos from within. In many ways, we are standing blindfolded on the precipice of an enormous political, cultural, and economic upheaval comparable to the fall of the Roman Empire. At the outset of the millennium, it is entirely conceivable that liberal democracy is doomed.

The sources of its doom are ripening in the form of a dual assault on democratic civilization from the Right and the Left. On the one hand, we face the relentless dynamism of global technology and its impatience for the inherited customs, bonds, and institutions of the nation-state (exemplified by management guru Peter Drucker's call for the "reinvention" of the American political system to correct what he sees as the flaws in its economic efficiency stretching back to Locke and the Founding Fathers, those inconvenient political and civil institutions that have retarded our total transformation into producers and consumers of commodities and nothing else).¹ This is the continuation of what Marx regarded as the revolutionary mission of the bourgeoisie, the most radical revolution in history. Now worshipped as the global economic paradigm, it continues to uproot and destroy whatever may remain of vestigial human loyalties and bondedness. Hence, so conspicuous a success both as a financier and a citizen as George Soros has recently warned that capitalism is in danger of severing its links with the virtues of character previously thought to be the common source of civil society and commercial prosperity.²

On the other hand, we witness the continuing unfolding of the postmodernist agenda—the fragmentation of the nation-state into a kaleidoscope of ethnic and cultural tribalisms, self-invented "communities" and client groups comprised of a single, narrow biological or ideological fixation that detracts from any sense of shared civic obligations stretching across our substantive duties as citizens and family members. More perplexingly still, and contrary to the conventional wisdom, the dynamics of economic globalization are converging with the dynamics of postmodernism. Far from being opposed to one another, postmodernist deconstructionism and the global economic paradigm are actually cooperating and reinforcing each other in ways that are detrimental to civil society—a bizarre alliance in which Bill Gates joins hands with Jacques Derrida to deconstruct every inherited relationship and established usage. Although one side does this to remove the few constraints which the nation-state still imposes on economic globalization, while the other does so in order to replace these same constitutional and civic institu-

tions with the primordial communities of gender and race, they cooperate to usher in a single goal—the disintegration of the nation-state into a multitude of idiosyncratic, self-absorbed tribalisms pursuing their illusory freedom within the gridlock of global technology.

We need to rethink the liberal tradition, including the bases of democratic civilization, civic virtue, and constitutional government, in light of the profound social, economic, and cultural transformations unfolding in the world today. In order to disentangle from these forces (what will preserve and nurture democratic civilization in contrast with what is harmful to it) we need to rethink the origins and character of modernity from the ground up. The place to begin is to reopen the debate over the meaning of history. Since the summer of 1989, it has been argued that we have reached the Hegelian “end of history.” According to this argument, only the liberal democratic paradigm remains—actualized with uneven success so far outside of North America and Europe, but bound to prevail now that Marxism-Leninism, the last serious contender as a paradigm for legitimacy, has departed the historical stage. But in the years since Francis Fukuyama’s formulation captured the public imagination, we have had ample reason to wonder whether any of this is really so. I would argue that the tensions Hegel diagnosed in 1806 continue in different forms, now that the particular variant of those tensions embodied in America’s long struggle with the Soviet empire has passed from the scene.³

For, despite the collapse of Marxism-Leninism, dissatisfaction with the liberal democratic route to modernity—indeed, with the whole ethos of the Enlightenment—is arguably increasing, rather than decreasing. This dissatisfaction, manifested in a number of postmodernist social movements, is still rooted in the Rousseauian protest against modernity from which Marxism itself originally issued. Borrowing from Hegel, I call this ongoing revolution against liberalism the revolution of Understanding and Love. It underlies Marxism and it underlies the global and economic revolutions emerging in the postcommunist era. In order to grasp the forces behind this revolution, we must look again at Hegel. But it is a very different Hegel from the one identified by Fukuyama with the “end of history” understood as the triumph of Lockean liberalism.

The main value of returning to Hegel in our own era is not to see how we are progressing toward the end of history and the final flowering of freedom and reason, but to consider, on the contrary, how the twentieth century has blown apart the synthesis that Hegel believed was imminent after the Jacobin Terror of 1793 when the worst horrors of modernization were supposedly past. Looking back to that first revolution for transcending liberalism, we can only see modernity in the twentieth

century as a series of sharp rifts and chasms, not as a lockstep progression of reason and freedom. All the contradictory forces that Hegel thought had been at least implicitly reconciled in 1806 blew apart in the twentieth century and persist or are even intensifying now: religious fanaticism, tribal rivalries and hatreds, uncontrolled technological might, fascism of the Left and Right, romantic narcissism versus arid proceduralism. Peace between the two modernist superpowers did not result in the dialectical supersession of the sources of modern alienation and hostility, but has been succeeded by the war against terrorism, genocide in the Balkans and Africa, and a host of burgeoning demographic and economic catastrophes in the developing world.⁴ The end of the cold war has not made the world smaller and more homogeneous—the essence of Fukuyama’s interpretation of Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel—but larger, more fragmented, and arguably more dangerous. The time has come to try to think through how we have arrived at this dangerous place; to think through exactly what has been happening on our sometimes wonderful, sometimes frightening modern journey since the French Revolution. The collapse of one particular outcome of the revolution of Science and Love—Marxism-Leninism—may allow us to trace other paths on the journey with greater retrospective clarity. Indeed, the full stakes and complexity of modernity may only now be dawning as we pass out of the twentieth century.

I

Hegel’s diagnosis of the modern age has as much to do with Solzhenitsyn’s kind of spiritual critique of modernity as it does with vindicating the Enlightenment and Lockean liberal democracy. Hegel thought the new age was synthesizing both dimensions, the spiritual and the liberal-democratic—the spheres of Love and Understanding, or, as political theorists might put it currently, the spheres of community and rights. But can we believe in this synthesis today? Our experience so far in the twentieth century has been of the increased polarization of secular modernization, on the one hand, and of a religious or sentimental yearning for wholeness on the other. We want autonomy and community; individual rights and “roots”; endlessly productive technological economies and “the earth”; the freedom to define our lives as individuals and “the goddess.” Hegel diagnosed this schism as the opposition between Understanding (by which he meant the analytical empiricism and contractual political right of the Enlightenment) and Love (the realm of immanent communal intersubjectivity).⁵ He believed that the near future would harmonize these contradictory yearnings for individualism and reconcili-

ation. What is truly relevant about Hegel today, I believe, is not the “end of history,” but his brilliance in penetrating this basic—and continuing—tension within modernity.

The revolution of Understanding and Love will not only not disappear, but may well intensify. For Marxism-Leninism was only one historical consequence of Hegel’s diagnosis of this characteristic modern dichotomy. Just because Marxism-Leninism has been discredited and, it would appear, removed from world history in no way means that the feeling of alienation from liberal modernity out of which Marxism-Leninism originally sprang will go away. Indeed, a new post-Hegelian, postmodernist paradigm is emerging for expressing a series of distinct but interlocking dissatisfactions with the still-dominant liberal paradigm. This new paradigm differs from past forms of radical opposition to liberalism because it lacks a focus and an agenda for revolutionary political action at the level of changing regimes. Instead, it will be more of a cultural revolution *within* the liberal-democratic world, slowly corroding its ethos from within. Now that the Soviet alternative to liberalism has vanished, we will return to the tension between Understanding and Love that Hegel originally diagnosed, not as a political assault on liberal democracy from without, but as a cultural revolution continuing to unfold from within.

This new paradigm can be evoked by a favorite nostrum of middle-class activism in North America, “think globally, act locally.” This slogan captures the dawning perception that, as the nation-state and its politics fade away, we experience only what is closest to us (work, family, neighborhood, advocacy group) and what is farthest from us (“I care about this planet”). One can group under it a series of lively and spreading social movements. Each of them begins by identifying liberal modernity as the source of its alienation and the impediment to its freedom and fulfilment. Each of them posits a golden age of the past free of alienation and oppression, a golden age of no limiting conditions on spontaneous happiness and self-expression. Each of them believes that one must combat the global paradigm of liberalism with its technological and capitalistic adjuncts in order to allow their particular local community to return to the unconditioned bliss of the origins. And yet, by returning to its own particular version of the golden age, each of these movements more or less consciously believes that the shattering of the predominant liberal paradigm will allow these different local groups to inaugurate a planet-wide blossoming of greater freedom and happiness.

Here are some examples: 1) The fascination with the age of “the goddess,” an age allegedly preceding the rise of male-dominated Olympian Greek culture when authority was matriarchal. 2) The belief of

“men’s rights” groups that there was also a prehistorical golden age when men were more in touch with nature and themselves, including the reenactment of allegedly genuine tribal and shamanistic rituals. 3) The popularization of “the age of mankind,” a prehistoric era prior to the emergence of civil and commercial culture which is a historical and anthropological fact, but also serves as a normative standard for urging people to return to a condition of greater harmony with the earth. 4) Environmentalism itself, which often dovetails with No.3 to suggest returning to or at least imitating the tacit wisdom of our primordial ancestors’ harmony with the environment. The atavistic project to recover this harmony points the way to the complete transformation of existing modernity. 5) The peace movement of the 1980s, according to which the entire course of Western civilization has been aimed at the pursuit of technological and nationalistic power, whose resulting nuclear terror may shock us into an advance into a peaceful postmodern future, which would at the same time be a return to premodern innocence. 6) The “black Athena” scholarship that locates the true origins of Western civilization with the peoples of Africa and Egypt, with the implication that Western civilization appropriated this heritage and perverted it to serve exploitative ends. 7) The emergence of an “aboriginal international” made up of premodern communities that regard themselves as autochthonous, each one possessing an irreducibly unique culture, yet linked with one another around the world to combat imperialistic nationalism and preserve the environment.

Despite the enormous diversity among and within these social movements, there is a common thread. They all maintain that human life was originally not characterized by alienation and oppression. The golden age is one of harmony with the environment, peace between the genders and among peoples, without bourgeois property relations or competition. In the more extreme ideological formulations, Western civilization is a compendium of oppressions—technological, racist, sexist. Using the golden age of the unconditioned as a guide, we can aim for a future in which we return to the past, throwing off the shackles of the present. As ideologues of the peace movement were fond of saying, we need to “reinvent politics,” “reinvent the world.” Consequently, even though global technology is usually perceived in these ideologies as the summation of Eurocentric, logocentric domination, these movements often envision using its power for their own projects of benign transformation. Technology may lead to disaster and oppression. But (as in Heidegger’s late philosophy) it may also be turned against itself to release “the earth.” Postmodernism is part of a cultural revolution for transforming liberal democracy from within, not a political revolution aimed at change at the

regime level. The danger it presents is accordingly much more modest than that of Marxism-Leninism, but nonetheless quite real. This is the danger that, instead of focusing on concrete remedies to injustice (such as equal pay for equal work regardless of gender), a new generation of social and behavioral engineers will aim at the deconstruction and reconstruction of the human personality through psychotherapy and propaganda.

II

The postmodernist project of deconstructing and reconstructing the human soul is not confined to the Left. As another best-selling management guru has written, we must be ready to change “every nanosecond” for the sake of the dynamic fluidity required by global competitiveness. Just as the bourgeoisie unwittingly brings about proletarian consciousness when it pursues the maximization of profit to the exclusion of every other understanding of the human good and at the cost of corroding every substantive national and local community (and in these observations Marx was surely accurate), so our new version of “capital,” the paradigm of global competitiveness, while preening itself on being the cutting edge of conservatism, unwittingly prepares the postmodernist nirvana when it seeks to subordinate and assimilate all other valid political and social concerns to its single imperative of dismantling the modern nation-state as an impediment to its revolutionary global mission.

The standoff at the 1997 Cairo conference on overpopulation may indicate how future struggles will unfold between what remains of liberalism and the Enlightenment, on the one hand, and religious and national tribalism on the other. On one side of the Cairo standoff was an emerging elite of international civil servants and social workers bent on curtailing the growth of the masses and inducing all peoples and cultures to accept liberalism’s victory at the end of history—the policy heirs, so to speak, of Robert Owen, the Physiocrats, and the Philosophical Radicals, bent on reforming the masses for their own good. On the other hand, as Conor Cruise O’Brien has observed, we also saw what was perhaps the beginning of a revanchist alliance of Islamic fundamentalism and Christian conservatives (the heirs of the Counter-Reformation and nineteenth-century Romantic folk-nationalism).⁶

Apart from these competing visions in international relations, seemingly politically neutral advances in medical technology are also bringing about a postmodernist nirvana. Recent psychotropic drugs such as Prozac are not only recommended, as is entirely reasonable and desirable, for people suffering from clinical depression and other psychological disorders, but proselytized among the healthy as the way to create a new

human being who is relentlessly upbeat, goal oriented, productive, well adjusted, and unerotic. In this vision of a medical utopia, one can do an end run around the virtues of character traditionally thought necessary to equip us to resist vice and to console us against failure and misfortune, because our chemistry can be fine-tuned to avoid the impulses that make these virtues necessary. A pill or syringe may deliver us to the golden age of the unconditioned more rapidly and more surely than earlier, cruder attempts to create utopias through revolutionary willpower such as Marxism. Why bother dismantling the positive, outward, and literal conditions of the political system when one can get to the heart of the matter and do what the Bolshevik and fascist regimes, despite ceaseless efforts at indoctrination and reeducation, never succeeded at doing: deconstructing and reconstructing the human soul? Such a chemically altered human being, if Prozac is anything to go by, will be the perfect embodiment of the postmodernist agenda—open, nonjudgmental, laid back, and non-hegemonic. But at the same time, and for the same reasons, such a person will be the perfect worker according to the global economic paradigm, easily adaptable to our ever more fluid, non-stratified “virtual” workplaces.

III

As I began by observing, ever since political philosophers began elaborating the concept of the common good, we have assumed that the civic association would be coextensive with a particular, autonomous polity, the nation-state being the locus for liberal democracy. But the slogan “think globally, act locally” is evocative of a profound change in the social, political, and economic reality of the late twentieth century that renders the very idea of the nation-state untenable. For today, capital is not merely multinational, but has no national basis at all. The archetypal American corporate executive of yesteryear, identifying what is good for America with what is good for his company, has been replaced by international money markets with no executive or even physical center. To paraphrase Foucault and Derrida, they are de-subjectivized networks of (financial) power, a free play of (financial) signifiers. The millions who contribute to them through pension funds, stocks, and bonds become the joint owners of thousands of enterprises from one hour to the next as their account managers search the world for a better point spread. Thus, as Robert Reich put it as the unprecedented global financial boom of the Clinton era got underway, the real question is not whether this global system is good for “us” in a given country. The real question now is, “who is ‘us’?”⁷

Old-fashioned accounts of the bourgeois virtues such as that of Adam Smith assumed that a talent for commerce could be placed at the service of the common good of one's country, and that the virtues of diligence, sobriety, and probity required by commerce were themselves best instilled through the character formation that comes from belonging to a distinct civic association. No major philosophical exponent of liberal democracy and free enterprise ever advocated a life of unbridled moneymaking and materialism. On the contrary, it was always held that an education in moral character was needed if individual liberties were not to degenerate into vice. Smith is famous for formulating the argument that what had traditionally been regarded as private vice—the pursuit of profit through commerce—engenders public virtue. But Smith's endorsement of free enterprise economics presupposes educating the "inner man" in the moral and intellectual virtues that prevent us from being totally absorbed in moneymaking. According to Smith, people will not treat each other in a decent and law-abiding manner in their commercial relations unless those relations are guided by a wider moral training of our capacities for reason and sympathy.⁸

But economic globalization appears to be snapping the perhaps always fragile link between civic character and capitalism. To the extent that it forsakes the nation-state, global capitalism severs its link with even the rather qualified Lockean and Jeffersonian adaptations of classical virtue to modern individualism. That "worldly asceticism" which R. H. Tawney identified as the characterological core of bourgeois civilization—its virtues of thrift, honesty, diligence, steadiness, and probity—is considered to be as square and retrograde by contemporary management gurus as it was by Sixties hippies.⁹ Global investment, technological R&D, the search for low-cost labor—the whole agenda of "competitiveness" that has summed up much of what is vital in parties that call themselves conservative today—are every bit as impatient of constraints by the old structures of the nation-state, and by the old structures of linear reasoning, as are deconstructionists or radical feminists. Capitalism has been transformed from a system of national elites of the managers of primary production into a global elite of information processors. Class divisions within nation-states are giving way to global class divisions between information processors, technicians, and laborers. This process unfolds in conjunction with a decentering of capital as it departs its traditional stewards in the nation-state and is dispersed into an endlessly fluid and mobile global environment. The same longing to burst the restraints of the old grammar and logic, the longing for the unconditioned, alike drives millenarian environmentalism, particle-laser weapons systems, and Disney World, where the

goal is (as Umberto Eco has observed) to create a simulation of anything that has ever happened or ever could happen.¹⁰ Laser technology, whether it serves Mickey Mouse or a missile defense system, is the ultimate realization of Derridean "*différance*," a free play of signifiers in which no traditional ethical or logical restraint can be allowed to interfere with technology's infinite plasticity and power of creation.

What I term the longing for the unconditioned characterizes a host of movements dissatisfied with the liberal status quo. These movements are also attracted to post-Hegelian (which is to say Heideggerian) ontology—the longing for non-reifying discourse, a desubjectivized life world, and Derridean "*différance*."¹¹ This drive to go behind the copular "is," behind the constraints of linear logic and causality, is what happens when you attempt to remove Hegelian Understanding from Love—when you attempt to liberate the longing for wholeness from any reliance on an analytically and politically stable conception of permanent duties and rights. And yet precisely this same drive for deconstruction and intersubjectivity—the dream of living in a world without alienation, obligation, or constraint—lies behind the most advanced processes of contemporary technology and the capitalism it serves. What better example is there of this than the widespread addiction of the educated elites to the World Wide Web? Here is the perfect postmodernist community, actualized by the most advanced modern communications technology, a communications system originally developed by the Pentagon as a fail-safe network in the event of nuclear war. It perfectly crystallizes the contemporary cant of community, communities made up of people who in truth share little in common except for some single biological or ideological trait abstracted from the welter of obligations and duties that make up the warp and woof of real people's lives. One can "communicate" on the Web in complete invisibility and anonymity, a furtive, onanistic projection of an empty self upon other empty selves, dispensing with the inconvenience of other bodies and the souls that inhabit them, and so dispensing with the age-old need to talk to others, to try to love or at least understand them, which presupposes developing one's own virtues so as to make oneself lovable or at least intelligible.

The new world dreamt of by both postmodernism and global capitalism is a world without vices or virtues, a world where nothing need ever constrain us, even the limitations of syntax and predicative reasoning. Indeed, the coming golden age can only be evoked by its indifference to the laws of logic and rational discourse. The irony of the West at the beginning of the new millennium is that technological capitalism itself is creating the desubjectivized life world longed for by postmodernism. Whether it be through postmodernist architecture,

chemical-based microprocessing, or the fantasies of cyberpunk, the straight line of Newtonian physics and its political correlation in the universal rights and institutions of the nation-state is everywhere giving way to the free happening of decentred Heideggerian Being. And as this global alliance of Left and Right unfolds, that great Victorian holdover and last haven of the old politics, the nation-state, appears increasingly unable to serve as a focus for retarding or limiting this process in the name of that autonomous rights-bearing subject that was the glory of the Enlightenment. This liberal subject—a blend of Puritan, Locke, Kant, and Hegel—sustained modernity for two hundred years with its independent-mindedness, godliness, and love of learning. But it now seems ever more peripheral to capitalism's most radical unfolding, as Bill Gates, today's Jay Gould in a pastel pullover, shows us "the way ahead." The question still emerging is how we can find new bearings for virtue and humanity as the world dissolves into interlocking processes of global technology and atavistic tribalism.

The moral and intellectual resources of the West are still strong and deep. Often they need only to be remembered. We need only try to articulate clearly for ourselves the way we already, for the most part, try to live. If we reject postmodernism's spurious invocation of premodern communitarianism and attempt to return intellectually to older teachings about politics and morality—always conscious of their limited applicability for the present—we find there much of the common sense that most people still live their lives by. All human beings (women, men, minorities) have the capacity to rise above their base impulses and cultivate the virtues of justice, generosity, friendship, gratitude, obligation, and citizenship. All human beings just as surely will at times give in to their vices and disgrace themselves or do harm to others—some only occasionally, others more frequently. The capacities for virtue and vice are distributed equally, on an individual basis, throughout the human species—both genders and all peoples. The art of politics is to encourage people to be good, while persuading—and, as a last resort, constraining—people to eschew vicious behavior. Human beings cannot be purged of their passions and prejudices, but those energies can be directed away from vice and toward virtue. Through education, we can try to sublimate aggressiveness and ambition into a sense of personal and civic honor that derives its self-esteem from being good and suffers pangs of shame and remorse over being bad.

Notes

1. Peter F. Drucker, "The Age of Social Transformation," *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1994.