

THE CONCEPT OF “WESTERN CIVILIZATION” AS IDEOLOGICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL FACTOR

SALAHADDIN KHALILOV*

Western civilization is undertaking this duty in Modern Age. In short, the gist of this issue is that every advanced civilization, which holds the flag, contributes to the development of other civilizations. For the very reason, the civilization that we call Western is in the forefront of human civilization. It is crucial to determine the main factors that form the basis of universal civilization both in the West and East. Firstly, both words are used in different meanings. Thus, the East is accepted as a symbol of traditionalism and the West as a symbol of modernism. From this point of view, the features of science, culture, education, etc. are accepted both in the West and East as temporal rather than spatial. Secondly, although the West-East differentiation has been made on the basis of thinking styles, the use of these notions has gained validity in the same context. Thirdly, one of the main factors of the West-East differentiation is that to what extent this relation has been established. Thus, if the main goal in the Eastern thought is man's self-perfecting, in the Western thought, in turn, is to perfect society.

Differentiating civilizations as Western and Eastern is completely of relative character. In fact, there is only one universal civilization that all nations and regions have played a part in one or another stage of its formation and development and thus contributed to it. Nevertheless, the first stage of human development did not happen as a homogeneous and uninterrupted process. This process has come until today through different spatio-temporal progressions. Probably, it is possible to talk here about the fluid processes or, in other words, about the local civilizations that have been formed, at this or another stage of time, in accordance with different geo-political and regional criteria.

Arnold Toynbee, who looks at the history of humanity as a kind of the change of civilizations and who, in a sense, could be considered as the most important researcher of the history of civilizations, has categorized civilizations according to geographical, religious

* Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan abuturxan@hotmail.com

and even national-ethnic bases.¹ For him, the main point in this case is the formation, development and fall of huge communities. In this respect, he sees the development of humanity as related to the dynamic forms of the local processes of development. However, do these kinds of local processes, as he comprehends, complement one another with the attributes which contribute to the development of the whole humanity? Putting local civilizations on one another or matching them up with each other also brings forward a serious scientific-philosophical problem. Unfortunately scientific studies have not yet touched this problem. The analyses made on 'the clash of civilizations' draw attention to the confrontation of local civilizations and in particular to the differences between them. Their similarities however are not taken into account. This subject gained currency especially after Samuel Huntington's book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, had been published. However, we should mention that the expression 'the clash of civilizations' was firstly used by A. Toynbee. For the reason that in Huntington's and Toynbee's conceptualizations civilizations are associated with religions, the clashes and confrontations between civilizations are explained on the basis of the differences between religions. Huntington makes a special emphasis on the differences between Islam and Christianity. Thus, considering the higher growth rate of Muslim population, Huntington speaks of a kind of 'Islamic danger'.² On the other hand, he analyses the issues related to national identity and national/ethnic self-awareness in the context of civilizations.³

However, the processes peculiar to modern age tend to happen in the direction of the formation of a single civilization. In this respect, the notions 'universal civilization' and 'Western civilization' are used, consciously or not, as synonymous and in place of each other; and it is used despite the fact that the modern civilization incorporates the achievements of all the previous civilizations.

Arnold Toynbee is against the inevitable involvement and identification of other civilizations with Western civilization. On the bases of historical analysis, he brought forward the conception of the multiplicity of civilizations existed in the different stages of history. Toynbee also opposes the notion of 'universal civilization'. However, by criticizing the thesis of universal civilization, in fact, what Toynbee wants to do is to criticize the view which accepts

Western civilization as the main and only authentic civilization: 'This thesis of the unity of civilization is a misconception into which modern Western historians have been led by the influence of their social environment. The misleading feature is the fact that, in modern times, our own Western Civilization has cast the net of its economics system all round the World...'⁴

For Toynbee, what lies behind putting forward the notion of universal civilization is the tendency of ignoring others. We should note that these theses of Toynbee are sufficiently convincing and for us, his attitude is also understandable. Then, why should we insist on the conception of 'universal civilization' so much?

It is possible, of course, to talk about the multiplicity of civilizations. What is meant by the multiplicity of civilizations are the historical and local civilizations developed in different areas, but then, at the next stages of history, due to various reasons, ceased their development and gradually fell into decline. Thus we can also read Toynbee's view of history as the historical process based on the rise, development, and fall of civilizations. The main problem that occupied Toynbee's mind is the fact that, although there were many civilizations in his times, only one of them claimed the status of 'universal civilization'.

Trying not to be prejudiced, Toynbee calls the civilization, to which he also belongs, Western civilization and for being fair he attempts to protect the rights of other alternative civilizations as autonomous formations. However, we will attempt to prove a different view. It should be firstly noted that the notion of universal civilization means the sum of the achievements of all other civilizations within historical process.

Western civilization is undertaking this duty in Modern Age. In short, the gist of this issue is that every advanced civilization, which holds the flag, contributes to the development of other civilizations. For the very reason, the civilization that we call Western is in the forefront of human civilization. This situation is characterized by Ferdinand Braudel more convincingly. He differentiates between 'universal civilization' and local civilizations. It is like a general one related to a specific one. He writes with reference to R. Aron: 'Industrial technology, invented in the West, is exported everywhere and eagerly adopted. Will it unify the world by making everywhere look alike - the same ferro-concrete, steel and glass buildings, the same airports, the same railways with their stations and loudspeakers, the same vast cities that gradually engulf so much of the population? "We have reached a phase," wrote Raymond Aron, "where we are discovering both the limited validity of the concept of civilization and the need to transcend that concept... The phase of civilizations is coming to an end, and for

4 Arnold Toynbee, *Study of History*, op. cit., 36.

1 Arnold Toynbee. *A Study of History*, Vol. II. Abridgement of Volumes I-VI (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

2 Samuel Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 183.

3 Ibid, 20.

good or ill humanity is embarking on a new phase" — that of a *single* civilization which could become 'universal'.⁵

The study of local civilizations within their own specific structure is interesting only in historical background. Thus we can come to a conclusion that not all social processes have conscious and determinist essence. However, if we look at the abovementioned question from a thousand year perspective then we will see that as if it is a spontaneous process. If we see every previous stage of the unit process as one stage of civilization, then, on the basis of the present stage of development, we can draw a general picture of the civilizational process. By drawing such a picture we can get an accurate idea about the elements of the system and their roles and functions.

It is crucial to determine the main factors that form the basis of universal civilization both in the West and East. First of all, it should be emphasized that today both the terms 'West' and 'East' are used in different meanings and are taken out of the early use of their geographical meanings. Firstly, both words are used in different meanings. Thus, the East is accepted as a symbol of traditionalism and the West as a symbol of modernism. From this point of view, the features of science, culture, education, etc. are accepted both in the West and East as temporal rather than spatial.

Secondly, although the West-East differentiation has been made on the basis of thinking styles, the use of these notions has gained validity in the same context.

Thirdly, one of the main factors of the West-East differentiation is that to what extent this relation has been established. Thus, if the main goal in the Eastern thought is man's self-perfecting, in the Western thought, in turn, is to perfect society.

It is worth emphasizing once again that the East-West differentiation is temporal rather than spatial. The traditional here contradicts with the modern. 'The East' in our perception is related to the spiritual-ethical characteristics which are particular to the inner world of the human being and which reveal his existence. The West, on the contrary, is related to the intellectual and technological achievements of modern man. In this context, it is impossible to speak of any western civilization until modern time. Europe was a part of eastern civilization from the fall of Roman Empire until the Renaissance, or more precisely, was a provincial part of it.

Important historical events and the main processes that determined the geopolitical situation as well as the technological and cultural development unfolded exactly in the East. European countries contributed to this main process to the extent that they had relations with

the magnificent cultural centres of the East. In this respect, it should not be a coincidence that Spain, which was under the impact of the Medieval Islamic World, preceded the other countries of Europe in scientific-philosophical thought.

In modern time, in which migration processes have intensified as well as cultural and economic boundaries have been subjected to erosion, there arises a necessity for the redistribution of material and spiritual values according to new criteria. Although in former times every country possessed its own economic and cultural-spiritual 'fabric' and development mechanism, now this national 'fabric' is gradually falling down. It is impossible to conceive the geography of cultures by not considering the direction of extensive 'winds of change'.

Today, not only the world economy, but also the whole global social system is in crisis. Even many films are produced on the end of the world. It is true that the discussions on the decline and collapse of Europe are not new. Nowadays, this subject is being discussed by the philosophers who are aware of the ongoing processes. On the other hand, we cannot say that all European countries have clear vision about where the way they have chosen carries them. In the times, when big economic crises take place, usually the fears of ignorance and uncertainty intensify. It makes no sense to accuse anyone for such crises emerged in the depths of the globalized world. Ceaselessly intensified armament race, the spread of mass diseases and the increasing threat of ecological calamity take place in a global space where we are all in the same boat.

The changes in real life require the revision of theoretical approaches. Despite the fact that today the notion of 'globalization' is the most necessary and common term in political literature and discussions, the analysis shows that philosophically it is not noteworthy. Namely, although it is observed in recent periods that there is a tendency in the politico-geographical map of the world from bipolar to unipolar development, this does not mean any objective and necessary regularity but the formation of a concrete socio-political situation.

In the material world as well as in the socio-political life, philosophy investigates the necessary stages of man's attitude to the world, rather than a certain historical state. This need is related to the large-scale global-social processes which, from the earliest formation of human societies until the present day, included, at the beginning of man's practical activities, small social structures, then started to include bigger ones and at last included the whole humanity. In other words, in both the past and present time, individual activities have found their meaning in the context of social activity.

5 Fernand Braudel. *A History of Civilizations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 8.

In the above-mentioned approach, the history of globalization coincides with the history of humanity. In other words, every human being, who has struggled for his life as well as had a desire to get knowledge and tried to change the world and himself, has felt a necessity to collaborate with others and, as a result, this process has expanded up to include the whole humanity. Family, tribe, nation and nation-states were different stages of this development. However, no one has called it globalization, and this process has been accepted as a process originated from the social and individual essence of man.

Today, the processes, which are now called globalization, are in fact an absolutization of the unipolar world as well as gathering all nation-states under a single flag, and imposing a single language, a single political will and a single economic interest on others.

Immanuel Kant's theory of world government, Hegel's conceptualization on universal history, Karl Jaspers' axial age, etc., as an expression of the socially necessary trends of development, reveal the essence and regularity of the way leading from individual to nation and from nation to humanity. State, as one of the points of this way, has been accepted by a number of thinkers as a result of the social contract. People seek the optimum forms of the social contract in order to better manage society. A particular level of socio-political development coincides with the adequate level of management. If we follow this logic, we will be led to conclude that a single global system of management is a logical result of the social contract. UN or the international laws are the products of this thinking style. This process no doubt could be called globalization, but it did not happen. The tendency that is now called globalization does not take place within the logical continuum of human history to the sense that we understand. For this reason, it is necessary to differentiate between these two processes.

First of all, it is necessary to explain with in kind of terms is the way from individual to humanity in philosophical literature reflected. It is, of course, realized by the term civilization! As is seen from the etymology of the word, what is of concern here is the process of socialization, that is, it means the transition from individual level to social level. Namely, civilization acts here as a carrier of the new potential energies that provide individuals with common activities and thus unite them. In other words, social power precedes the total of individual powers. This new state, which is revealed by social power, is implemented in its interactions with nature and society. Teilhard de Chardin writes: 'What is expected from the unity of humanity is a huge power. The question here is to what extent this power can be controllable; this is a big question'.

The universal is in the very essence of civilization. Humanity, which has not yet managed to be unified, has reached a certain level of material comfort by means of the activities of separate individuals and social groups and developed science and technology. In other words, it has formed civilization. However, it is a reality that, in many cases, the unity in question, that is, the huge universal power, before reaching the level of including the whole world, remained at the local and regional level. However, in our personal opinion, their subject is not separate human communities but humanity itself.

Today, when humanity, which, by passing thousands of years, has become very close to self-awareness and to the logical results of its own processes, is faced with the serious threats of military-political catastrophes. What threatens the objectively necessary course of civilization is the ongoing process called civilization.

Our aim is not at all to oppose globalization. What we oppose is only the use of incorrect terminology in respect of the big globalization process that has played a role in the formation of the new and global civilization.

The growing scope of social processes makes it difficult to coherently explain them on the basis of any thought. It is relatively easy to set smaller-scale events in a particular ideological direction and to generalize the purposes of history considering its particular parts. What is difficult is to read the integrity of historical process in the context of civilization and to establish the intellectual and technological connections between creative process and historical events as well as to determine their ideological basis. Nevertheless, it is a very important issue. For understanding the future direction of history it is necessary to understand the common ideological bases on which humanity has been united.

The ongoing large-scale processes that include all local civilizations and, generally, the whole history of humanity could be called 'global civilization'. This process, whose author and performer is the whole humanity, has appeared for hundreds of years as a vector sum of the decisive effort of local groups, nations and states. Certainly, globalization in its modern sense also means the different directed processes that involve civilization. Unlike globalization, global civilization involves also global problems. The consideration of ecological problems not in the context of separate local problems, but in the context of humanity's history and human nature becomes possible only within the framework of global civilization.

The analysis of global civilization as an ideological embodiment of humanity makes a new turn in the main philosophical problems such as human nature and the meaning of life. The differences between spiritual and technological societies, which have been separated

from each other by the historical process, as well as between spiritual-cultural and material technological systems, between individual-spiritual experiences and socio-political systems, between ordinary human happiness and cosmopolitan civil liability lead or should lead at last to a single common denominator.

As in Ancient period- in humanity's infancy period-the human being lost himself in the rational world, in modern period also humanity has to re-establish its connection with macrocosm.