



Social Evolution, Global Governance and a World Parliament*

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Abstract

This article describes the relevance of a world parliament in the context of long-term social evolution and the crisis of global governance. It is argued that due to the development of weapons of mass destruction and complex interdependency, war has ceased to be a driver of socio-evolutionary consolidation of power at the world-system level. At the same time, there is an increasingly urgent need for global governance in spheres such as climate change mitigation or economics and finances. The author looks at how the established and now dysfunctional pattern of evolutionary change can be overcome and identifies the institution of a world parliament as an important political and psychological aspect of the evolving collective.

Social evolution can be conceived as a continuous integration and disintegration of human communities. In a continuum between cooperation and competition human communities compete for areas of settlement, natural resources, food and political authority. In the course of technological development and population growth, these social units become more differentiated and their links with each other become ever more complex.

Within these communities rules develop, that organize communal life as peacefully as possible, even though primarily to the benefit of a ruling class that commands the exercise of force and the distribution of resources. Towards other units mistrust predominates. The preparedness to use force is high. War, oppression, slavery and assimilation were characteristics of this process. From a historical perspective, democracy, human rights and (humanitarian) international law are new developments.

In the course of history, the number of units has decreased. Their maximum size and degree of organization have grown. From hunter-gatherers, nomadic pastoralists and settled communities, different forms of political organization gradually developed such as city states, principalities, dynastic realms, continental empires or today's territorial states. At around 1,500 B.C. with an estimated world population of 50 million, maybe 600,000 political units existed.¹ Today, seven billion people are distributed amongst the 193 states in the world.

Regressions such as the breakup of the Roman Empire were followed by new processes of amalgamation. In his famous work *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias has described this development since the Middle Ages. According to Elias, states today are still engaged in

* This article was first published in German in *Tattva Viveka* (48): 64-69, August 2011.

a permanent competitive struggle that inherently implies the formation of ever larger power units with overarching monopoly on the use of force.²

Due to the existence and availability of nuclear weapons, the relational system between the leading states in the world has been subject to a fundamental change since the end of the Second World War. Because of the destructiveness of these weapons, up to almost complete annihilation, a direct armed conflict between the great powers as a means to solve disputes or for power expansion has become potentially suicidal. They are locked, to use the words of Wilhelm Wolfgang Schütz, in an “interdependency of perdition”.³

This means that a consolidation of the state system into one political unit as a result of violent conflict, one of the main drivers in the past, is not possible (and, of course, not desirable anyway). After a Third World War, it is reasonable to assume that not much would be left of human civilization as we know it today. This also means that until a global monopoly of the use of force has come about voluntarily, the system would remain in a dangerously instable condition. “Even if we assume that global Armageddon will not occur, it seems to be the unfortunate fate of humanity that it has to live in constant fear of this disaster,” wrote John H. Herz.⁴

The system is not only unstable from a perspective of peace and security, it also has no “capacity to govern”, an urgent problem that has already been addressed, for example, in a report by Yehezkel Dror to the Club of Rome in 1994.⁵ As yet, no improvement is in sight. Quite the contrary. The technological revolution in the course of the last two decades has resulted in an ever stronger global linkage of almost all spheres of life. Crucially important political questions and challenges have slipped out of the control of nation states. The activity of international institutions reflects the lowest common denominator of conflicting government interests. National governments, whether representative or autocratic, are keen to hold on to their traditional sovereignty, even if in reality this sovereignty no longer is in accordance with effective autonomy. This is the case, for example, with regard to the global economic and financial system, as the financial crisis since 2007 impressively shows, but above all in climate policy.

Meanwhile, there is a broad international consensus that global warming of more than two degrees Celsius in this century will have incalculable catastrophic consequences for humanity. A transformation towards a sustainable post-carbon world, however, “can only succeed if nation states put global cooperation mechanisms before their own short-term oriented interests,” as the German Advisory Council on Global Change pointed out recently.⁶

The non-existence of a governable political world community remains to be the most dangerous characteristic of today’s world system. Further evolution and long-term survival of human civilization make it necessary to develop a democratic world federation. The world will have to unite politically in order to prevent the impending disintegration of global civilization.

The core issue is not just one of power politics and structure. The challenge is much more of a cognitive and intellectual nature. According to Elias, there is an inextricable linkage between human sociogenesis and psychogenesis. The growing complexity of social relationships that is characteristic of the emergence of states and modernization, for example,

came along with stronger emotional self-control, rationality and a more developed sense of shame.

Georg W. Oesterdiekhoff has reconstructed that in human history it is possible to trace “a sequentially advancing, unilinear and growing differentiation and integration of social and psychic structures”.⁷ “As the cognitive development of the individual takes place under social conditions,” said Jürgen Habermas, “there is a circular process between societal and individual learning processes”.⁸ Accordingly, Ken Wilber for instance has related the cognitive levels of consciousness that he described with “geopolitical systems levels”.⁹

In the face of the logic inherent in human evolution until now, Richard Newbold Adams and others claim, based on Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, that global government is simply impossible as Earth is faced with no external enemy, no external social unit, that makes political integration at the planetary scale necessary or at least easier. “Identity is fundamentally the binary differentiation of some set of ‘we’ from some set of ‘other’,” says Adams.¹⁰

Overcoming this mode of forming collective identity is exactly the challenge of necessary transformation. Arash Abizadeh for example points out that collective global identity could also be formed in a temporal way instead of geographically by differentiating from the past and its values. “Humanity’s own past provides a rich and terrifying repository in contrast to which cosmopolitan identity could constitute its ‘difference’”.¹¹

As a matter of fact, more and more people conceive of themselves as world citizens and as such develop a sense of solidarity with each other. To a degree these people begin to outgrow the evolutionary logic that implies that identity can only be formed by differentiation from others. They concentrate on what all human beings have in common. They do not wish to carry on as before. They include future generations into their thinking. Their thinking is fundamentally different from that of the government executives who pursue particular interests.

“Nation states as institutions have proven reluctant to cooperate in ways that compromise their sovereignty or their freedom to pursue their maximal national interest. ... But it appears that individuals as a whole are more ready to cooperate in a global framework and are not as constrained by competitive national narratives,” explains Steven Kull in an analysis of international polls.¹²

The emerging view stems from what could be called a planetary consciousness. This consciousness is integral insofar as it does not suppress or deny other levels of identity and belonging but instead adds a holistic view to them that includes humanity and the planet as a whole. One of the most important pioneers of integral philosophy, Jean Gebser, has noted that such “mutations in consciousness” have always occurred in situations “when the prevalent structure of consciousness was no longer sufficient to cope with the world’s tasks.”¹³ Such a situation exists today. The political unification of the world will have to be the result of *an inner revolution*, a conscious evolutionary act carried out by humanity.

According to Steve McIntosh, global governance that is not based on integral consciousness is neither achievable nor desirable – “but with the rise of the integral worldview, a world federation becomes realistic and even inevitable”.¹⁴

The connection between sociogenesis and psychogenesis can also be found in McIntosh's reflections. He argues that "every new worldview has taken shape around a political issue, and the rise of the integral worldview will be no exception". The integral worldview, he says, needs a political platform "to produce lasting cultural evolution". The establishment of a world parliament is probably the most obvious and most promising project for this.

The first step into the direction of a world parliament would be the establishment of a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations.* This is a complex undertaking where it is easy to get lost in questions of detail. *Grasping the project from an evolutionary perspective is all that matters.* Because, as Habermas said, "It is possible to characterize every evolutionary boost through institutions that embody the structures of rationality of the next evolutionary stage".¹⁵

From this point of view it is of highest importance that the assembly would consist of democratically elected representatives of the world's population. As such the assembly would be *the first* political body in the history of humankind that establishes a direct connection between every single human being and the planet. Through its existence alone the assembly would contribute to the recognition of profound, one could say, revolutionary ideas, the first being the notion of the world as a community of individual world citizens. As a global voice of the world's citizens, the assembly would embody a planetary consciousness and at the same time facilitate its growth.

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The assembly and its members could become a focal point for a new, cooperative understanding of global politics. As a planetary consciousness takes root over time, the assembly could help to evolve the United Nations accordingly and push forward the political integration of the world.

* The proposal was introduced in the 2nd issue of Cadmus, see <http://cadmusjournal.org/article/issue-2/towards-global-democratic-revolution-global-parliament-and-transformation-world-order>.

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Notes

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