

International Studies—Crisis, Challenges, and Possibilities

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The fundamental challenge and possibility of international studies, as it is taught and learned at American universities today, is to solicit the wisdom, acquire the knowledge, and cultivate appropriate practices and competencies to live and work with others in today's constantly emerging, global community. This process of emergence and transformation can be viewed as a crisis. Indeed, the characterizations of our era are often seen in this light in consideration of political, environmental, economical, and spiritual breakdowns and challenges. At the same time, these so-called problems are not new and it is only their intensity, brought about by an accelerated understanding of time and practices of new technologies, that defines the challenge and the possibilities we live in at this time. Change and the resulting uncertainty are two of the catch phrases that have captured our attention. When I reflect on my own life and the time I was born into, shortly before World War II, I cannot help considering these tremendous changes as characteristic of their time and, to some degree, unprecedented. The age with similar characteristics, the 16th century, comes close and offers some comparisons. We can talk about the growth of

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science, a discovery of the means and the possibilities of communication technology in the design of printing and an intense spiritual transformation and crisis that split the Christian community.

The new millennium, with its emerging globalization, offers its challenge on the heels of what has been called the most murderous century in human history, and I sense a general assessment in the civilized world community that this is not where we want to go again in our future. The development of weapons technology alone has made it clear to rational thinkers that MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) is not a course that leads to a civilized way of coexistence. This suggests that peace is the preferred way of living, and given the current state of warfare around the planet, we are indeed looking at challenges and possibilities. Not that we have facile solutions for creating peace on a global scale overnight. It is too early for that, but we are at a threshold of a revolution of thinking which will transform the way we deal with the conflicts that are still emerging as a consequence of our historical situation.

Given this situation, we need to commit to a way of thinking that not only deals with the concerns of the immediate present, but also of concerns that lead us to the design of a global future on a long-term basis. What we can observe already is what could be called the possibility of cultural reconstruction, brought about by global networks in interaction. This may strike us as a unique challenge for the trajectories of historical civilizations which have come and gone over a long period of time on different continents and we no longer are willing to accept passively the concept and realities of self-destructive or dying civilizations and cultures. This holds particularly true for our civilization in North America, and the idea that we should vanish as a viable civilization seems anathema to many. On the other hand, Jared Diamond argues for the real possibility of an extreme downward trajectory in his book *Collapse*. Yet, the correction of courses, the warnings, and the pleas for changing our ways are also spoken to, unless we want to accelerate our SUVs on the road to environmental catastrophe.

We behold the possibility of cultural and environmental collapse on the accelerated path of historical change possible in our lifetime, but we do so with trepidations. The history of Germany in the 20th century is a good lesson to be considered. Hitler

submitted his design for a Reich that was to last a thousand years, but the practices carried out destroyed this nightmare in about 12 years. In fact, the destruction was as total as the total and eternal struggle which was to be the foundation of the Third Reich. The accelerated trajectory of German history with all its horror came as a real and frightening revelation to many observers of this phenomenon of modernity. The most frightening part was the realization that the phenomenon could be experienced by all, victors and vanquished. But in the aftermath of this cultural, political, and economic catastrophe, the process of reconstruction, as a real possibility for the reconstruction of a faltered civilization, began to take shape with equal velocity. What emerged out of the “economic miracle” of the early years of post-war history in Germany now seems to be a much more multicultural community that eventually embraced a united Europe as well as other ethnic groups. Although this process is still in various stages of conflict—as is the whole of the European community—it is an indication that the emerging globalization sets a new course for our trajectories of civilizations based on a design of transformation that brings about new and reconstructed identities of nations and their citizenry. Within an individual lifetime, we will be able to observe and experience change as a transformation of individual and cultural identities that are open to design. The interesting thing is how this process takes place in global networks. And this is the new possibility where the question of what it means to be human in our time is posed with innovative approaches. Of course, there is much skepticism for such assessments. We might consider that it is our scientific and technological arrogance that lies at the bottom of such optimism where fate and destiny, once understood to be permanent and accepted historical forces outside of our control, no longer have a strong hold on our imagination. This would also be an assault on our mythological base, leaving open the possibility that the notion of fate and destiny can be used for purposes of manipulation, thus becoming part of a cultural designing practice hidden in ideologies and other belief structures for the sake of the assumption of power over others. Hitler’s recourse to the semi-mythological origins of Germany’s Germanic past is a case in point.

What are the implications of these observations for our own

thinking and how are we going to invent practices of learning and teaching to facilitate a new interaction with our mutual history on this planet? One of the problems is that we cannot predict what the world of tomorrow is going to be like. We cannot teach and learn toward some kind of result according to the blueprint of a reality we cannot comprehend. But this problem is also our possibility, and there is much we can do to create the world of tomorrow together with other people. Besides, unpredictability is not absolute uncertainty, and the greatest accomplishments have always occurred when people took the step into an unknown space of possibilities.

We have been trained to believe that knowledge is power and we have built great institutions that have represented this idea for quite some time now. There is a connection between knowledge and power, but they are not the same! Information is a commonly understood manifestation of knowledge today and its massive presence causes us to lose focus and the certainty of what is important. Power, on the other hand, has to do with actions that we take and are competent and capable to perform. Therefore, the traditional assumption that knowledge equals power has been shaken and transformed in our time by the design of information technology, the creation of cyberspace, and advances in biotechnology. But it is also important to realize that the seeming preponderance of scientific distinctions and practices is somewhat modified by the insight that the technology of cyberspace is, in human terms, social space, and the power of language, in combination with computer technology, is slowly transforming the way we create realities. A former wisdom has now been modified and become a design practice. Learning is not only the acquisition of information-based knowledge, but has to produce practical competence to perform actions in specified areas of human concerns. Mere understanding is not enough; the capacity to perform is what counts. Whether the human concerns we address are located in such domains as money, career, work, education, medicine, family, or spirituality, the emphasis will be a renewed commitment to competence and performance beyond mere information for the sake of functioning relationships with others. Professional men and women become what have been called reflective practitioners.

One of the real problems is the cultural alignment of human concerns. Can we assume that our concerns are those of others in the world? And how can we align with others, separated by languages, traditions, and thinking? And what kind of common language are we going to invent together to speak and listen in such a way that working together in coexistence is a possibility? Certainly, we need to create the necessary standard practices in communication for a functional language of relationships. Therefore, the transformation of technology has an essential impact on different areas of our lives as it becomes a transformation of the self. If we practice cultural alignment through standard practices, we begin to see the challenge when growing fundamentalism in the world meets the irreconcilable counterpart of reason and tolerance in an effort to coordinate actions in political or other arenas. This situation suggests two houses on two different foundations, a basic historical proposition based on the theological conflict in the attitudes of either reason or faith. It is my opinion that this polarity, and the stands that have been taken in the past along those lines, are no longer workable in our time, although we are experiencing a rebirth of this juxtaposition especially after 9/11 with a general resurrection of God in politics. The author, Salman Rushdie, contemplating the importance of religion and its impact on the global political balance, maintains that religions have made a big comeback and that they behave like political bodies. He is afraid of the power of religion and thinks that religion is not able to respond to the problems of the world today. He calls for more subtle and flexible responses to the world since the changes we are experiencing have never been faster in our history.

Many thinkers, among them Freud, shared this doubt in religion as a force in thinking about our situation in history. For him, the human condition is irremediably distorted by the antagonism between what he calls the demands of instinct and the restrictions of civilization. Between two world wars he saw and foresaw man as *homo homini lupus*, i.e., man is a wolf to man, which was a prophetic, although not exactly an optimistic, assessment. Pope John Paul II, on the other hand, was a strong proponent of a “profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith.”¹ Whatever

authority we agree or disagree with, our inclinations or beloved prejudices no longer function without giving considerations to others, no matter how different their attitudes may strike us. In the global community, nobody lives in isolation.

This kind of thinking is not accepted in every corner of the world and the resulting violence is the attempt to produce historical change as protection with an accelerated scale of actions. The current word for dealing with conflicts in this manner is terrorism, and the bomb, the explosive device in all its manifestations, is both its symbol and reality. As warfare in the traditional sense, terrorism is the final failure of diplomacy and not an extension of the same. It is also the final declaration of bankruptcy in our endeavor to undo and re-create individual and cultural identities. We are no longer sure about the role that permanence plays in the maintenance of the human condition. Every day traditions are violated, environments are reshuffled and disturbed, and human lives cut from their moorings. Millions of refugees are marooned in alien cultures without a real chance of maintaining their traditional identity or building a new one in an environment that is supportive of this task with competent methods. And the breakdown is on all sides, and there is no easy solution in sight.

The question arises whether a professional discourse like International Studies can make a difference here. I think it can. Everything we do at the university today is international or interdisciplinary, but distinctions and re-orientations will have to be made. There is a difference between the traditional international world of the past and the emerging global community. While international relationships were and still are selective as friendly alliances or conflicting parties to the point of war, globalization is a sweeping, inevitable, historical phenomenon that changes how we think, act, and relate as human beings on an unprecedented scale. It is fair to say that globalization has shaken the world and its denizens to the core, and as human beings we need to be cognizant of this, and become different observers and designers of our lives by rethinking and challenging our fundamental assumptions of the traditional human condition. This is a change that has presented a challenge for every academic discipline and practicing profession and transforms our endeavors as students

and teachers. It is also very unsettling to many while others embrace the opportunity to create a new course for a new world. Yet, the enthusiasm and celebration of the idealistic potential of human beings so well-represented in Schiller's "Ode to Joy" and Beethoven's symphony, has faded, and the image of millions embracing each other was drastically contradicted by the practices of nationalistic leaders in the 19th and 20th centuries. But what does the transformation of human nature indicate? For a partial answer to this let us consider some fundamentals in terms of the biological, social, historical, linguistic, and spiritual aspects of human nature in the new paradigm of globalization. The temptation to compartmentalize human beings is great, but it must also be understood that the different aspects of being human are inextricably interconnected and cannot be discussed as independent entities of our holistic being.

It seems a common assertion that human beings are biological, but with the increasing awareness of the body in juxtaposition to the mind, the emphasis is shifting with advances in DNA and genetics in general. Mind, body, and soul are no longer looked at as separate entities but as a functioning unit best represented in the way we embody our lives as learners and teachers. The body itself contains our history as well as our memory and the very language we speak and listen to is a product of the body. Our whole current situation is testimony to an increasing concern with health and healthcare on a global scale. When we speak of the educational process we also speak of embodied knowledge, a new way of learning that emphasizes not only the refinement of the mind but also the modification of the body as the ability to perform new actions in work and leisure activities. Our age is characterized by this discovery of the body in our cultural identities as an unavoidable domain and major concern. The way we hold our body and present it in our lives is a major indicator of our competences and well-being. The new sensitivities that have arisen with the concerns that we have about our bodies have shaped considerations in the family, industries, national policies, and global strategies. Diseases are considered events with global impact, as are matters of nutrition and exercise. In a world that wants to feel and look good, a whole new aesthetic has emerged around the concerns for our biology as body. This, too, is part of a

general global awareness that the importance of the body shapes our commitment toward human suffering in the casualties of ongoing wars and famines in the world. The genetic scientist Craig Venter has issued the challenge of seizing our biological destiny, although it is not clear what lies ahead in this complex field of endeavors. Perhaps, we can indeed engineer biology to the degree that we reduce the key to human beings to a kind of genetic pixel count with the invention of synthetic chromosomes for living cells. But we don't even know what we don't know. And, as has often been the case with great breakthroughs in human biology, the ensuing mystery was part of any discovery.

It was Freud who maintained in his *Civilization and Discontent* that the three sources of human suffering are our own body, which is doomed to decay and experience pain; the external world with overwhelming forces of destruction; and, the most troublesome, our relationship with others. This does not bode well for our humanness as social beings. Indeed, Freud's concept of *homo homini lupus* presented ample proof of his idea that civilized society is continuously threatened by disintegration. As CNN-observers of world events we know that this process of disintegration can take place from the inside and from the external world. The world wars of the last century and the wars of our time are ample proof that both forces can be at work at the same time.

But what does this say about our situation and human beings as social beings? And who is the "Other" in our time of rapidly shifting perspectives and impermanent identities in the 21st century? How should we act toward "them" and with what attitude? There was a time when the Other was simply a representative of another culture with often difficult but definable characteristics. Today's world offers us a much more complex picture of a cultural identity which can easily be multiple and constantly shifting. In order to navigate the global community successfully, we must assume an identity that enables us to think and act globally on the one hand, and according to our own historical discourses on the other. Individual and communal stress, caused by this ontological condition, is often severe, and severe measures are taken to lessen the cultural upheaval. The practice of building walls, symbolically or real, for the purpose of separation and safety from the Other, seems outdated now after the fall of the

Berlin Wall or even the failure of the Mexican-American border. On the other hand, war could be declared if dialogue proved impossible. Humankind has always wavered between three choices when encountering the Other, says Ryszard Kapuscinski, the choice of war, building a wall, or entering into dialogue. One can only hope that we will opt for dialogue in the future and the discovery of common concerns. All of the technological advances in communication and the efforts in educational institutions lead us to believe that we are in a transition toward living in a planetary society. It seems irrational to assume, however, that we will be some kind of homogeneous planetary population soon. Human beings tend to be at home somewhere, a place of familiarity or origin where they speak a familiar language and can relate to a region and others with whom they establish intimate bonds and share a sense of belonging. We know that the anthropological distinction of the encounter with the Other is an important learning experience for all those who study or practice international studies. It means answering the challenge of the world of new possibilities where the Other is confronted and when dialogue begins. This is not a mere ideal, but has to be thought of as a constitutive practice that we can all learn and that can become part of a new ethic where personal concerns and the concerns of the Other are balanced in a self-evident manner. Too many face the choice of war with all its consequences.

One of the major challenges in a functional, ethical value system is the building of trust. In a period of great uncertainty like ours, distrust is rampant, and the competence of trusting and being trusted is absolutely essential in the personal and global transactions in life. Of course we can describe trust and establish an understanding of its strategic necessity, but we must go beyond this and consider our commitment to authentic trust with all the ups and downs of occasional disappointments and frustrations that challenge this commitment and tempt us into resignation. This is particularly critical in the global community where the complexities of intercultural relations impact the process of building trust. The necessary communication skills to overcome this problem have to be considered to be a part of all serious efforts in practicing international relations. In the end, trust helps build positive and productive relationships with the Other, and this can

be the primary goal, whether we deal with business, politics, or a personal relationship.

Although Francis Fukuyama has defined the “end of history,” human beings remain historical in a most fundamental way. We enter the stream of history, participate in it for a while, leave our mark and vanish, making room for the next generation. We understand history as the past and a concern for the present and the future, a construct of time where certain events took place and will take place. After the great struggle for the dominance of the ideologies of the 20th century, Marxism and fascism collapsed while democracy and its capitalistic practices remained standing. The troubling legacies of the defeated historical ideologies of the past have made room for the troubling tensions of democratization and the inequities of the free global markets. If, as T.S. Eliot suggests, “Time present and time past/ are both present in time future, / and time future contained in time past,”² the current drift of our history has to be carefully laid out in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past. And this has to be done with patience, i.e., a measured approach to change and not a surrender to the concept of accelerated change that leaves us breathless with broken values and identities. The time-deprivation of accelerated change is also a lesson that history teaches us, and for this reason it is essential that we become competent in the skill of analyzing history. We must all become historians in the widest sense. Specific icons and practices of accelerated change, such as war, must be re-examined whether they are still viable for the kind of historical design that brings about peaceful coexistence and eradicates hunger. The idea that traditional and historic cultures can be changed overnight is flawed. The death of traditions, the anthropologist Konrad Lorenz suggested, is one of the deadly sins of civilized humanity, and the assumption that we create viable cultures, like we do in a corporate environment, is underestimating the importance of non-rational cultural wisdom. Living systems, such as traditional cultures, are generally not predictable, but they have the infinite capability for adaptation if the necessary allowances are made for this process.

Civilizations have always come and gone and no golden age has lasted forever, but this is traditional history speaking, and it remains to be seen if this wisdom has validity for the global world of the future. We can choose to embrace history like we embrace

human possibilities or we can surrender to an interpretation of determinism and fate. As designers of human destinies, we can certainly align with the idea and practices to manage human suffering with compassion and respect for life. Our commitment to this civilized way of being includes the acceptance of history as a phenomenon that we are a part of. Let us, therefore, become cultural historians in our endeavors.

Human beings are linguistic beings. We speak and listen in our use of language in “conversations” with others and ourselves—we communicate. At present we live in a veritable revolution of communication due to the technological advances that have been made in computer technology. No other generation in human history has had so much information available for so many on a worldwide basis. Geographic space over continents, once conquered by telecommunication, has now become an intricate network of communication within which information is shared and distributed in almost incomprehensible amounts with lightening speed. Basic elements of speech acts, such as promises, requests, assertions, and declarations, are now compressed and effectively organized in terms of time and articulation unknown in our history. The possibilities seem endless and, at the same time, ethical and other complications are daunting the more innovations we introduce. In all the emphasis on information we have to realize that, fundamentally, communication has to do with community and the coordination of action for the sake of creating a good life in the community. There is then a difference between communication and information and the information revolution is in reality a social revolution since it has opened up new possibilities for the life we create together with other people. Nothing has contributed more to the global dimension of political, economic, and spiritual interaction than the growing power of language. Of course, this power was always present and has been used toward different ends. We can even speak of ethically questionable practices when we consider the commercial interests of advertising and the indoctrinating practices of political propaganda, but in the new paradigm language creates new worlds, and given the global concerns that we address, we hope that with heightened skills in speaking and listening we can design a story of humanity that deviates from the patterns of the 20th century. For

this we need to know the stories of the past that trapped our ancestors into illusions of power and the consequences of cultural catastrophe. We need to know the stories of our families and our nation well if we embark on the new endeavor of creating a new global community. We need to cultivate the wisdom necessary for this undertaking in order to know what works and what does not. Learning and teaching the skill of communication that builds identities by designing careers and relationships that can answer to the challenges of the global community is of the utmost importance. These are the tools with which we build trust, relationships, and a working ethic in the future.

I have already mentioned some aspects of the role of religion in our deliberations, but I want to address briefly the spiritual character of human beings. Any era of extreme secular emphasis and uncertainty always harbors a great need for spiritual solace and assurance. The problem is that intense eruptions of faith usually collide with human reason since each arises with a disdain for the other. Although John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* maintained that there is a “profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith,” the sweeping phenomenon of fundamentalism in our time seems to put this wisdom in jeopardy. The constitutional wisdom of the separation of church and state is also under siege, and in several ways the fundamentalist movement has begun to act like political bodies. How we handle the task of balancing the pluralistic, global, religious scene may prove to be the greatest challenge yet. We cannot exhaust this topic here, but we can state the problem and trust in the competence of the next generation to come to grips with an approach and a commitment to solve the puzzle of faith and reason for the sake of peace in the world.

At this point in time, much of the “clash of civilizations” that Samuel P. Huntington speaks of has its roots in religious conflicts. When we speak of confrontation on the cultural level, we are also clear that, in the multicivilizational world, the differences in faiths are a great obstacle to world peace. The challenge is to find a way to address the exclusive and absolute claim to truth in any given faith in such a way that ecumenical communication processes can be set in motion which open the way to solve problems on the level of common concerns. The 18th century had great hopes that

reason could be such a possibility, and much was accomplished, but the ensuing battle for the minds and hearts of people took on a kind of ersatz faith in the shape of nationalism, fascism, and patriotism where spiritual energies were used and manipulated for the sake of political power and conflict. The ideology of National Socialism in Germany was a typical example of a system of reverence and even faith toward political doctrines and leadership that was perverted for the purpose of believing in a system of power based on a heroic struggle and the belief in a special mission of the German people in history. In the end, this almost mythological struggle could only find expression in war, an exacting system of control over the people and correctional institutions of extreme human cruelty.

Today it is the confrontation between Muslims and Christians that drives the conflict in the Middle East and we can ask ourselves whether the spiritual challenge that has bred a difficult military and political situation for the United States can be solved. Of course, this is also a question for the whole world community and its global ambitions. A number of questions seem to suggest themselves: Can we achieve a neutral ground where religious differences do not play the decisive role in political conflicts? Could it be possible to create a global spiritual doctrine that bridges the gap between the major religions of the world? The solution may be to establish a practical spirituality where multiple religious orientations can establish a dialogue in which common concerns can be addressed. These common concerns are basic and fundamental concerns that human beings have always had in their religious orientation, the meaning of the sacred, and the fear of death.

In conclusion, let us return briefly to the question concerning the challenge and possibilities of international studies. We have looked briefly at the transformation that has taken a hold of human beings in the time we live in. Some of the problems are not new. We cannot escape the fundamental contradiction of human beings when it comes to good and evil, but we can be alerted to the new conditions which make this contradiction much more dangerous in our time. The specter of self-destruction is more present now than ever. Sixty years ago we overcame the greatest threat that mankind had ever known on a global scale. The trespasses against

the inherent dignity of human life on the part of a nation with a humanitarian and Christian tradition were almost incomprehensible. The end of the phenomenon of National Socialism in Germany came with blinding speed and the sobering thoroughness of a total cultural collapse. We often ask the questions, can it happen here and can it happen again? I think it can; and there is the real danger that the extent of such a catastrophe in the global age could have disastrous consequences. The aggressive nature of human beings is now endowed with newer and more powerful weaponry and the extent of military, political, and economic power that can be unleashed is enormous.

What can be done? We must again embark on a course of inquiry and actions to ban the specter of war and ask the question of what political mechanisms must be designed in order to avert a potentially destructive course in the future? Along with such a commitment we must create and mobilize an ethical force on a global scale to balance the powers of blind self-interest so that the political structures of sustainability gain an effective upper hand. Perhaps this sounds vague and abstract, but it can be done. Transformations, especially those bringing about world peace, always begin as an individual commitment. Granted, this is difficult, but, as the Dalai Lama has often said, it is the only way.

