

World Statehood and World Civil Society

-Theological-Ethical Perspectives for a Gradation of Responsibility

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The following reflection on world statehood and world civil society falls into six parts each of which is characterized by an epithet: full of suspense, international law, borderless, critical of utopia, poly-centric, sensitive to context. The first three parts sketch the history of the terminology, philosophical-theological and sociological foundations of the idea of a World Civil Society, the last three parts discuss a distinctive differentiation of the concept in the context of ethical debates about the relation of world statehood, international civil society and the new appreciation of culture-specific regional matters. The centre of attention focuses on the tension between globalisation and pluralisation which are understood as the relationship between two opposing but interdependent factors.

1. Full of Suspense: the Concurrence of Cosmopolitanism and Renationalisation

From a theological-ethical perspective, the concept of a World Civil Society somehow is something to be taken for granted: the Catholic Church is the oldest globally acting institution on our planet, the oldest 'global prayer' and 'global player'.

National categories are of no central importance to it. The basic terms of theological ethics, above all the unalienable dignity of the person as in God's image and solidarity especially dedicated to the poor are not bound by national categories. The belief in one God as the Creator and Redeemer of all mankind is an important point of reference for the evolution of global ethics. Putting this border-crossing demand into practice has turned into a learning process, also for the church and theology, a process taken up rather late.

The path from a Eurocentric and paternalistic universalism to a world civil society which accepts other cultures, religions and types of society and others as equals has been a far way to go.¹ With the first non-European pope in its two-thousand-year history, the Catholic Church presently finds

¹At least from the perspective of human rights and discourse ethics, the acceptance of the others as equals is the only acceptable foundation of global ethics. Simultaneously, it is the starting point for the acceptance of plurality. Thus the "hermeneutics of the alter ego" is the linking foundation of the two poles "globalisation" and "pluralisation" forming the centre of ethical reflections here expounded.

itself in a “global community of learners”² in a process of transition which places a demand on political ethics in a special way.

Decentralisation is an important motto of the Apostolic Missive which Pope Francis published on November 26, 2013, as a kind of “government statement”.³ I do not understand this as a contrast to the demand of global ethics, as it is expressed in the concepts of world civil society and world statehood, but as an element of differentiation to think ahead context-sensitively.

In the ethical-political debate, however, there is presently quite a radical putting in question the demand and possibilities of global ethics. Here is need of a critical examination of the very different patterns of argumentation and motives. Above all, the phenomenon of the concurrence of increasing cosmopolitanism and the partly rather sudden thrusts of renationalisation in our epoch are surprising and worth reflecting on. Nevertheless, perhaps also because of a continuously accelerating process of globalisation, one can presently observe an increasing need of being different in society, politics and religion. Chantal Mouffe reflects upon this in political-conceptual terms in her non-rational approach of radical democracy as well as in her critique of “cosmopolitical illusion”.⁴ Furthermore, the cosmopolitical ideal of the world civil society has been put in question fundamentally for some years, above all by so-called “neorealism”⁵. Only on the basis of a sober analysis of old and new lines of conflict and an enlightened self-interest can robust strategies of negotiation be developed.

Against this backdrop, the tradition of intellectual and discourse – ethical rationalism of enlightenment is looked upon by representatives of religion with scepticism. There is fear that this leads to a concept of world statehood which sees the factor cultural differences and with it the meaning of religious matters marginalized and pushed into the mere private sphere beyond public space. These days, in the UN-Human Rights Council, there is a group with strong backing of the religions which stand up for a cultural reservation towards human rights.⁶

² DBK 1999, pp.41-46

³ Cf. Francis 2013, No.32 (“exaggerated centralisation complicates the life of the Church and its missionary dynamics instead of helping.” Cf. Nos. 115-118 (“A People with Many Faces”).

⁴ Cf. Laclau/Mouffe, 1991, pp.207-261; Mouffe, 2007, Mouffe 2013.

⁵ Cf. Waltz, 1979, Waltz regards states as homogeneous and rational agents that at first strive for security and independence (high politics) and, secondly, unfold specific interests (low politics). For want of trust and a superior controlling authority, international politics d models of game theory of changing coalitions and respective structural pressures;cf. Siedschlag 2001.

⁶ Cf. Legutke 2013. Thereby the peace-yielding function of human rights as the basis of understanding and states would be undermined. Instead of cultural reservations, one should talk of cultural differentiation of human rights in respect to their argumentation and concrete implementation; Cf. Hilpert, 2013, 20-24. On the ambivalence of the role of religions in peace politics from a social-ethical point of view.

In view of the practical challenges for politics and society, one cannot overlook the fact that many problems of contemporary world society are of a global character. Their solution is shamefully blocked by a relapse into patterns of identity and politics of national egoism and, eventually, scepticism of reason, inaccessible to morals. The conference on climate in Warsaw in November, 2013, clearly showed the trap collective inability to act led the world community into when mentalities are marked by short-term national egoisms.

In reference to military conflict, Amartya Sen talks of “the identity trap of nationally or ethnically narrowed self-definition”.⁷ The ability for global solidarity in the world civil society has become a condition of survival in our civilization. It needs an act of transcendence of national identity constructs. Only this makes possible a “world’s home politics” in the sense of a transformation of international law from a law of co-existence to a law of cooperation.⁸

Against this background, rejecting the concept of a world civil society would be ethical negligence. However, there is need of a differentiation of the history of the term to circumvent the present polarisation of the positions and to develop a stronger concept of sound pluralism. From my point of view, this will not be constrained by human rights but rather made possible.⁹

2. International Law: from ius gentium to ius cosmopolitanum

Ideas of a universal border transgression were already laid down in the “ius gentium” of Roman law which came up next to the Civil Code for Roman citizens guaranteeing legal protection for people from other peoples. This gave rise to a social or “bourgeois” order for the first time which theoretically was open to every human being in the world.¹⁰ In the 17th century, Francisco Suarez took up this tradition. In his tome “De legibus” (1612), he names the *ius gentium* as a customary law to be found amongst almost all peoples. For supporting a world-wide social order he draws on the conception of natural law of humankind (“genus humanum”) as a collective notion beyond political systems of rule.

Even before the Christian tradition an enstrangement evolved from the national manner of understanding law, for example, in the talk about a Christian to whom the whole world was an exile

⁷ Sen 2007

⁸ Epiney 2007, 31-38. Meanwhile, in Christian peace ethics, too, the postulate of strengthening international law has taken up a central position, cf. Ecclesia Catholica 1993, Nos. 2307-2330.

⁹ In respect to an interpretation of human rights capable of pluralism, Christian social ethics must learn a lot more; cf. contributions by Ingeborg Gabriel, Hans-Joachim Sander, Rudolf Uertz and Arnd Küppers in Vogt 2013b, 229-326 as well as the issue 21, 2013, of the international journal for Christian Social Ethics Amosinternational 2/2013 giving full coverage on this topic

¹⁰ Cf. on this and the following Stichweh 2004, 487

but also, at the same time, a motherland. “The rejection of all specific and local social relationships and obligations turns into the starting point of the origin of cosmopolitanism.”¹¹

Especially through Kant did the notions “humankind” and “world citizen” become central mottos of the political philosophy of enlightenment. Kant formulates a *ius cosmopolitanicum* which regards citizens and states as members of a general state of people and takes the civic constitution as realizable only at a global level and, therefore, in need of being embedded in international law.¹² Correspondingly, he renders the ideal of the ideal of fraternity of the French Revolution an international meaning and links with it the right of everyman not to be treated as an enemy even when abroad. Politically, he hopes that this way “distant parts of the world will come to peaceful conditions with one another (...) and humankind finally closer to a civic world constitution”¹³. Kant draws on the idea of the League of Nations first formulated by Hugo Grotius which through different steps provided impetus for later peace movements in the 19th century up to the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920.

After the Second World War, for the first time, the idea of a global system of society took the form of a social movement: “ Against the backdrop of the experiences with war and the dropping of atomic bombs, the global order of society is again thought of as an order of world peace which can only be realised by by-passing states.”¹⁴

World Society has become the frame of reference of ethical-political reflection.¹⁵ In this context is set the only encyclical of peace of the Catholic Church *Pacem in terris* (1963). It is a reaction to the Cuban Crisis and drafts nothing of less importance than the vision of a fundamental overwhelming of the institution of war. In the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (Nos. 77-82), the Second Vatican Council draws on it and connects the vision of peace with the postulate of a “World Authority”, thus securing a global order in accordance with international law.¹⁶

3. Borderless: Transformation of the Concepts of Space

The concept of “World Civil Society” is a sociological and politico-scientific evolution of the notion “World Society” introduced by John Burton and Niklas Luhmann in the early 1970s.¹⁷ It

¹¹ Stichweh 2004, 487

¹² Kant 1795/2011, 203

¹³ Kant 1795/2011, 214

¹⁴ Stichweh 2004, 489

¹⁵ On the research-political categorising of the notion cf. Antweiler 2011, 15

¹⁶ For a précis of the development of Christian peace ethics cf. Vogt 2013a

¹⁷ Burton 1972, Luhmann, 1975, 71 ff.

strengthens its objective, i.e. its distancing from a state-centered mindset of international relations. “Today, in sociological thinking, World Society denotes the mindset of society as an all-encompassing social system which includes all relevant social structures and processes in the present condition of the world manifesting itself only once and, consequently, as a worldwide societal system. Such an idea requires changes of the notion “world” which loosen it from the traditional opposition to the notion God and confine the world to the sphere of human life. (...) It requires a new version of the concept of society which separates it from its bonding to the political organisation to things social and lets politics appear as a special case of societal relations.”¹⁸

The sociological conceptualization of world civil society rests upon a transformation of concepts of space¹⁹: the “container idea” of our society, which defines our identities and actions in local terms, dissolves. Economic territory, politics and culture less and less coincide with a confined territory. The sense of interdependent dependency in the “global village” determines the social well-being at the beginning of the third millennium.²⁰ Globalisation i.e. the worldwide consolidation of internationally acting networks and dependencies have marked especially the dynamics of the economic and media technological development since the 1990s. It shortens distances and produces a “forced closeness”²¹ in the form of interdependent dependency. It is closely linked with a deep transformation of concepts of space. From these dynamics arises “a new grammar of things social and political”²² which also brings change to the concepts of society as well as solidarity.²³ In the stead of the traditional societal description of self as one entity facing “strangers” or “barbarians”, steps the idea of society transcending space-politico and ethnic boundaries. World Society does not know “outside” in the sense of a foreign society but is, in principle, borderless.²⁴

The notion “World Civil Society” is a reaction to this changed concept of space. It has an analytical and a normative component:²⁵ Analytically, it claims the increasing global interdependence of the political and economic entities of society. Normatively, it yields the postulate of a mindset which

¹⁸ Cf. Stichweh 2004, 486, as well as Stichweh 2000

¹⁹ Schneider 2012, esp. pp.230-243. Schneider criticises the widely held view that the category of space has lost its importance because of global blurring of borders. Truth rests with the opposite: in an ever-increasing way, places of communication are constructed socially which involves diverse inclusions and exclusions (e.g. the Internet). Thus changes of space pose as a fundamental challenge to social ethics.

²⁰ Vogt 2000

²¹ Antweiler 2011, 7- 11; Beck 2004,8

²² Beck 2004, 54.

²³ Cf. I. Gabriel/L. Schwarz (ed.): *Politics of World Order in Crisis. Perspectives of International Justice*, Paderborn,2011.

²⁴ Antweiler 2011, 15

²⁵ Cf. on the following, Antweiler 2011. Esp. 7-25, Beck 2004 esp. 112-147

transgresses national categories as well as trading which makes possible a free cultural and economic exchange.

4. Critical of Utopia: from Cosmopolitanism to a World Civil Society at Risk

In the foreground of current debates about cosmopolitanism one does not find the idea of global peace and an international opening of the nationally codified political and cultural systems, but rather the concept of a civic public which organises itself with the help of the new media and critically observes the processes of economic and political globalisation.²⁶

Thus Ulrich Beck emphasises predominantly the transnational character of the specific risks of post-modern society and talks of a “World Society at Risk”.²⁷ Globalisation, dominated by technology and economics, is perceived in its ethical-social ambivalence. This moves the utopian momentum of the rhetoric of a World Society into the background.

The utopian content does not get lost in the decidedly critical analyses of World Civil Society and globalisation but is transformed terminologically. Thus Ulrich Beck talks of “methodological cosmopolitanism” as a means of overcoming thinking in merely national categories as well as a postulate of reflexive modernism which sees self-observation from the perspective of the others as the basic principle of development and mediating conflicts.²⁸ From this perspective, the World Civil Society is not merely a rational thought one can recommend or reject but an analytically justified answer to the signs of modern times and the altered conditions of space.

The concept of the critical global public is rendered an “epistemic role of revelation”²⁹. By means of modern media, it is at the same time highly effectively organised, stands up with the claim of “democratising democracy”³⁰ and can topple regimes – as was shown by the Arab Spring.

Also the Church and its political effectiveness, respectively its social ethics, is increasingly being placed in this area of civic society.³¹ In the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, on the level of papal-dogmatic teaching, one finds for the first time a systematic reflection on the concept of (World) Civil Society (esp. Nos.34-42) Pope Benedict XVI connects this with the concept of civil

²⁶ Cf. Stichweh 2004, 489

²⁷ Beck 2007

²⁸ Beck 2004, 76-111 and 116-122. In this normative sense, Beck coined the term “methodological cosmopolitanism”. To the observation of the self from the perspective of the other person as an ethical principle leading to universal ethics cf. also Habermas 1996

²⁹ Höffe 1993, 20-33

³⁰ Offe 2003

³¹ Gabriel 2001. On the Protestant side, the series “Public Theology”, published by the social ethicists and bishops Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Wolfgang Huber, is of great practical value for this new placing self-description.

economics and thus places emphasis on the economic and entrepreneurial accentuation in the response to the ambivalent experiences of globalisation which can be understood as pleading for strengthening World Civil Society as a basis of humane economics.

5. Polycentric: World Civil Society in the Light of Subsidiarity

The world civil society is not a community but a space of communication for many communities.³² Universal orientations must be mediated with the reference to the specific social context. As we cannot live in a global sphere, each of us needs a concrete place to make his/her home.³³ Without such a local rooting the idea of world civil society becomes abstract and elitarian. “Humankind need not build an integrated collective entity to guarantee a sustainable environment conducive to life and to secure the peaceful conduct among cultures. We can develop forms of worldwide social cohesion and cultural inclusion which necessitate less preconditions.”³⁴

The acknowledgement of pluralistic diversity and polycentric difference becomes the essential postulate of cosmopolitanism of reflexive modern times. Post-modern philosophy and sociology meet the dangers of the universalistic-totalitarian impact by a pronounced appreciation of things local and regional. Should this not lapse back to provincialism, the principle of subsidiarity can be helpful for social-ethical questions.³⁵ This is decisive for the step from a Euro-centric to a polycentric Christendom and from a mission frequently displacing local identities to one of specific inculturation of Christendom. This does not understand diversity of different cultural, social and political traditions as a threat but as gain because it does not interpret unity as a sum of identities but rather as a process of communication which is enlivened only by the variety of perspectives.

In this sense, the concept of inter-religious social ethics does not seek to resolve theological differences by models of unity but rather to regard them from the view on the specific problems of living together as a starting point of processes of dialogue and learning.³⁶

Thereby, the objective of a border-crossing humanism with in processes evolving universals, whose religious and ethical components are not irreconcilable in principle, remains indispensable.³⁷

Perhaps the church structures, which seek to connect the world church and local parishes, can serve as a role model for world statehood and world civil society which is structured from bottom up. In

³² Antweiler 2011,10

³³ Thus in connection to Heidegger’s “Anthropology of Home Living”: Schneider 2012, pp. 307-398.

³⁴ Antweiler 2011, 12.

³⁵ Cf. Vogt 2000, 28-36, Wilhelms, esp. 125-135

³⁶ Schmid 2013

³⁷ Cf. Küng 1997 as well as Antweiler 2011, 23-31 and 223ff

ethical terms, this concept corresponds to the principle of subsidiarity which in many aspects represents the primacy of things local aiming at a strategy of priority of smaller entities with the superior level responsible for the functioning of services and the ability to act for smaller groups and entities which are closer to personal relationships. Such a concept manifests itself in “interlaced multi-layered politics”³⁸ which balance multiple levels of actions and identities.

The normative guiding question of a world civil society sensitive to context can be described as a search for balancing opposing elements³⁹: How and to what extent must, should a world civil society be confined by local respectively national identities? When does the ideal tip over into the loss of concrete identities or run dry because differences and lines of conflict cannot be clearly defined and appropriately negotiated? What is the relationship between world civil society and world statehood like, i.e. processes of civil society and legal international structures? In a theological-ethical context arises the question as a debate about the rank of the project world ethos and the inter-religious dialogue in relation to the new attractiveness of old and new religious forming of profiles.⁴⁰ This weighing search should serve as a red thread for the following analysis of the pluralistic model of world civil society.

6. Sensitive to Context: Pleading for a Pluralistic World Civil Society

A structural parallel between the post-modern transformation of the concepts of world statehood and world civil society can be observed: in both stronger emphasis is placed on pluralism and the remaining importance of differences. The optimism of reason of the Enlightenment has given way to a sharper view on contexts and faults. There are good reasons for this awareness of differences as a test of endurance and limit of global ethics. At the same time, there is also in the shade of this debate quite a number of drafts which put in question the rationality of ethics as a whole. Coming to a conclusion, here is on this a short general philosophical-ethical reflection.

Against the backdrop of failure of many conferences for fighting poverty, protecting the climate or a policy for peace, there is a principal demand for the universal validity of Christian and humanistic norms. A radical criticism of humanism and its belief in the unity of practical reason as it is e.g. propounded by Peter Sloderdijk, Martin Walser or Hans Magnus Enzensberger in parts strongly resonates with the media.⁴¹ In this, Christian monotheism, too, becomes the target of crossfires as it

³⁸ Habermas 1998, 107; Vogt 2000, 33ff

³⁹ Luber 2011, 21ff.

⁴⁰ Küng 1997.

⁴¹ Thus in broad terms Enzensberger 1996. It is time, says Enzensberger in his provocative essay “Views on the Civil War”, to say farewell to the moral, omnipotent phantasies of universal ethics. Also Martin Walser’s essays and speeches in the volume “I trust. Cross-Country” (Walser 2000) are in the same vein. In a somewhat very individual reception of

is believed to be the ideological basis of universal ethics: the idea of universal human rights is the residue of theological metaphysics which has survived all secularizations which today would not pass a critical examination in practical nor theoretical terms.⁴²

From a Christian perspective these polemics can also be regarded as unhelped for confirmation that the human rights and their universal claim which in history were fought for against all sorts of obstacles, also within the church, possibly have got much more to do with the Christian faith and the image of Man than this was assumed even within theology.⁴³ The cross-cultural universal claim of the human rights is indispensable from the Christian perspective nor from the point of view of responsible political ethics for the 21st century.⁴⁴ This does not at all exclude the plea to link this universal demand more strongly with elements of pluralistic ethics. Universal ethics, too, must examine gradations of responsibility and does not categorically exclude a certain priority of commitments to closer persons and groups e.g. in respect to social aid.

In today's pluralistic world, universal ethics holds good because they do not override by global standards the context-related diversity of diverse traditions and forms of ethics but rather provide room for a coexistence and cooperation of the diversity of different cultures and systems of morality based on mutual understanding. This positive correlation between universalism and pluralism is valid also as viewed the other way round: only against the background of a binding but "lean" and formalized universalism does it become possible that a big difference and independency of local forms of ethics do not threaten global capability of acting but is experienced as enrichment and flourishing. Against this backdrop, global ethics do not aim at uniform standards but on the capability of dialogue and preparedness for cooperation.

To bring into congruence the intensity of particular ethics with the range of universal groundings, Michael Walzer has developed the model of an analogous universalism which can be understood as

Nietzsche, he criticises the universalistic concept of ethics as alienation from a morality which springs from concrete human beings with their vital interests and experiences of their own. Universal ethics is too much of a demand on humans that conceal constellations of conflict and tip its effect to the opposite. In the same vein, Peter Sloterdijk balances a fundamental failure of humanism in his "Rules for the Human Park" (Sloterdijk 2008). Cf. as being critical on this debate: Manemann 2003.

⁴² Cf. Walser, esp.9-21. He labels universalistic ethics as "democracy as styled monotheism" (op.cit.19). The Christian demystification of nature, which he understands as the manifestation of "things local" to the benefit of universal ethics centred on humans, is partly to be blamed for the destruction of the environment of modern times (op.cit.18ff). In global ethics is concealed "the poison of contempt for what is next". (op.cit.19 referring to Nietzsche).

⁴³ It depends squarely on the autonomy of reason and the relevance of faith not play them off which would be a gross misunderstanding of the nature and theological centre of Christian social ethics; cf. Vogt 2013b, 7-20 and 229-326.

⁴⁴ As to the argumentation Nuscheler 1997; Manemann 2003,3ff.; Gabriel/Schwarz 2011, esp. 9-30; Vogt 2013c,406-426

a third path in the universalism-particularism-debate.⁴⁵ Thereby he draws on the distinction between “thick” and “thin description” introduced by the ethnologist Clifford Geertz: Accordingly, “Thin Morality” is simply structured, beyond experience, general, minimalistic and deals with universal ethical questions and makes possible a broad alliance. “Thick Morality”, however, has got to do with challenges close to experience, concrete, and particular morals. These are complex and entail a multitude of singular terms.

Walzer emphasizes that concrete-vital maximum morality is the precondition for thin universal morality. Accordingly, universal principles are merely a kind of grammar or form of abstraction of lived morality, not its original substance but rather a deduced form which can only become effective by there standing a lived, concrete and particular morality behind it. Somebody who overlooks this falls victim to the idling conference rhetoric following the pattern: “Talk globally, think banally, act disastrously”. The substance of morality cannot be formulated in universal terms, but can only be sketched by general formulations which suffice to make possible the recognition of similar elements and thus inter-cultural understanding.⁴⁶ The concept could be characterised as “subsidiarian universalism”: the concrete morals of individuals in their cultures and habitats enjoy a certain priority, universal patterns of argumentation are ordered to mediate between the two and must not completely disengage from forms of implementation specific to context.

The diversity and plurality of diverse forms of ethics is not only a deficit but also riches. But only so if in the sense of “hermeneutics for fellow humans” they are capable of opening themselves up to the space of the particular realm. A concept of world civil society worthy of the future is based on universal ethics, which does not level poly-centric plurality but makes possible a dialogue between different perspectives, cultural regions and contexts.

⁴⁵ Walser 1996

⁴⁶ One might object that rather the particular would show in morality in the sense of lived ethos and less in ethics as the theory of reflections about morality. But I deem for ethics, too, that questions of application, in which particulars are always pronounced more strongly, do not enter secondarily but rather solidly belong to the core area of ethics. Cf. here Zichy/Grimm 2008, esp.17-116.

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