

THE CREATIVE SOCIETY AND THE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

ANNEX ON THE NEW GLOBAL HUMANISM

by Ron Gass

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A NEW GLOBAL HUMANISM

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1. The Issues Paper for the AIA/NAEC Seminar on The Creative Society and the New Technological Revolution concludes that "the idea of a new humanism is universal". It is the power of such human needs, not transhumanism, that will shape the future. The purpose of this Note is to spell that out.

I - The Enlightenment and Technico-Economic Progress

2. Ever since the era of the Enlightenment, the mastery of Nature through science and rational thought has fed the idea of progress. Immense gains in human well-being have resulted. It is essentially the story of Western civilization, and it has pervaded the world. Under the Chinese Presidency, the G20 Hangzhou Consensus (2016) pursues this path of innovation-driven growth, but it also recognizes the need to get the right balance between economic growth, social development and environmental protection. This leads to the reality that technico-economic progress is now to be seen as a means, not an end. What, then, is the "end"?

II - The Primacy of Human Progress - Today's Challenge!

3. In the global system that is emerging economic growth, and the technological advances that underpin it, will be geared to meet human ends. This is the sense of UN human development indicators, the OECD "Better Life" indicators, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to which the G20 Hangzhou Consensus refers.

4. Thereby, it is necessary to clarify the issue of human rights, and human needs, and in particular their universality. Thomas Paine (The Rights of Man, 1791) postulated that human rights originate in Nature and cannot be revoked by the action of the State. The human rights movement of today still draws on Paine, but it is now recognized that positive action by the State is needed so that people are "empowered" to exercise their rights (eg the feminist movement). Thus, human rights and socio-economic conditions are inextricably linked, as in the notion of "capability" forged by Amartya Sen, and further developed by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Moreover, the universality of human needs -- across national, sex, race and cultural boundaries -- is amply demonstrated by the OECD Development Centre's report on "Measuring Well-Being and Progress in Countries at Different Stages of Development" (Working Paper No. 325, 2014), which concludes that: "the empowerment and the need for autonomy and freedoms are profoundly related to the notion of capabilities that underpins the OECD well-being framework" (p.29).

5. Extending the notion of "capabilities" to "competencies", a recent OECD report on "Global Competency for an Inclusive World" (2016) explores how initial education and life-long learning can

help the rising generations not only to adapt to but also to shape a global society faced with profound challenges. In response to the question "What do children have to learn?", the response is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes/values which facilitate inter-cultural cooperation. Such an approach recognizes the value of cultural diversity, but also the need for young people to acquire the human competencies which overcome the danger that diversity means conflict.

III - The Three Pillars of a New Global Humanism

6. Thus, the new humanism stands on three pillars: A Common Humanity; Socio-Cultural Diversity; and the Deconcentration of Power.

A Common Humanity.

7. Governance calls for vision on the part of the political leadership (see the 2016 G20 Communiqué). It is difficult to see how the governance of an inter-connected world can make further progress without the principle of universal human rights and needs. From this point of view, the SDG's can be considered as a historic opportunity for human progress. However, the problems of identity, exclusion and inequalities that are involved point to a complex and arduous policy agenda in the years ahead (see Angus Deaton, "The Great Escape -- Health, Wealth and the Origins of Inequality", 2013).

Socio-Cultural Diversity.

8. Only a creative society, with a great capacity for policy learning, can rise to this Toynbee-like challenge. The great danger is that a mono-cultural global society, moulded by the new technologies, will lose its power to innovate. This is why respect for different socio-cultural systems and philosophies is an essential pillar of the new humanism. Indeed, the Western technico-economic debate is already influenced by visions of the future global society rooted in other cultures (see, for example, Matthieu Ricard, "Plaidoyer pour l'altruisme", 2013; and Jean François Billeter, "Esquisses", 2016).

9. The OECD is essentially a policy-learning institution. It is thereby destined to play a major role in what the Club of Rome has called "Learning our Way into a New Era" (The First Global Revolution, p. 183).

Deconcentration of Power.

10. The technologically innovative era proclaimed by the G20 2016 consensus cannot be realized without political, economic and social innovation. And the key to a heightened innovative capacity across society is the deconcentration of power: "Leadership" more than executive authority; and grass-roots initiative more than ant-like conformity.

11. The relationship of the individual to the State, the heart of democracy, is changing: the ballot-box is complemented by more direct forms of political participation, leading to the concept of active citizenship". The NGO's, an expression of such active citizenship, are part of the political scenery at all levels, from global to local. Cynthia Fleury ("Les Irremplaçables", 2015) argues that far from undermining the rule of law, individual autonomy and self-realization ("individuation") are its very foundation. This echoes the speculations of Cornelius Castoriadis (former Head of Division in ECO and philosopher in his private life) about the relevance today of the Athenian Model in Ancient Greece.

12. Public administration is also the scene of the deconcentration of power towards cities, regions and local communities. Policy coherence and creativity get easier the closer you get to the citizen, because participation is the ally of change. This might explain why cities are taking the lead in response to the challenge of climate, and may be the pioneers of the creative society (cf. the AIA/NAEC seminar on this subject).

IV - The "Good Economy" and the "Good Life" -- Cat and Dog?

13. Is there a trade-off or a synergy between the new humanism (as defined above) and an effective economy? If the good life is only to be found outside the work-place, then the answer is a trade-off. If, on the other hand, work satisfaction is the foundation of life satisfaction, the answer is a synergy. It is implicit in inclusive growth, the better-lives initiative and the SDG's that synergies are possible. But it is also clear that major policy innovation, involving complex problems of policy coherence, will be necessary.

14. The 2016 G20 Summit has set the stage by making innovation its leitmotif. Ministerial voices were heard in favour of "capitalism with a human face", "civilized capitalism", and "a just as well as free trading system" (Le Monde, 11/12 September 2016, p. 26). Edmund S. Phelps, 2006 Nobel Laureate in Economics has gone as far as to suggest that China should take the lead: "it must focus on workers and elevating the experience of their work, which economists from Adam Smith to Karl Marx and Alfred Marshall placed at the center of their concerns" (A Good Economy for China, 2016).

15. Be that as it may, the reality is that the international community is already embarked on the long march towards reconciling the economy, nature and society, and a new global humanism is taking shape. Humankind is seen as part of nature rather than its master. Geo-political muscle-flexing is constrained by people power based on universal human rights and needs. The reality that "it's all about people" is penetrating all domains of policy, not least macro-economic. And, perhaps most important of all, private capital is beginning to invest in activities which reduce social and environmental costs, justifying in my view the idea that we are entering a period of social capitalism.

16. But the bottom line if the good economy and the good life are to be reconciled is more and better jobs. Angel Gurría has pleaded for investment in the numeric economy, and especially to transform numerisation into an opportunity and not a menace for the workers (Le Monde, 04/05 September 2016, Interview prior to the G20 Summit). It will take a creative society based on an entrepreneurial culture to achieve that.