

WHY DOES THE WEST FAIL TO UNDERSTAND REALITY?

"We are moving from the Age of the Merchant, with bankocracy rampant, to the Age of the People. Finally democracy?"

Johan Galtung

1



Some basic observations:

- Economic power: the West is being overtaken by the Rest, with growth rates for the USA, Euro zone and Japan being respectively 0.1, -0.9, -0.2 (Italy -2.8), against Brazil 1.4, Russia 2.9, India 4.5, China 7.9.^[i] BRIC.
- Military power: the West is being defeated by the Rest, now paying dearly for the missing peace treaty and normalization with North Korea; with the Viêt Nam, Afghanistan and Iraq anti-terror wars lost, and Libya and Mali, Syria and Iran immune to “military solutions”;
- Political power: the West remains a minority in the UN General Assembly which rejected 138 to 9 with 41 abstentions the US veto approach to Israel;
- Cultural power: non-Western models of development like the Buddhist and Muslim, Japanese and Chinese ones are gaining prominence in addition to the predominant “Western universalism”;
- Social power: the West is seeing an increase of social indignation focused on domestic power and increasing social inequalities, Occupy and Arab Spring, now focused on the ratio between CEO and average worker income: getting income inequality down to at most 10, from the current ratio of 500 to 1 should be a matter of course. See the Swiss referenda¹.

2

We are already far into a world economically dominated by BRIC, with S added for South Africa to make the message clear: South-South-South cooperation against not even a billion living in the NorthWest+Japan triad; militarily with only a question of time before the first drones hit the USA, as follow-up to 9/11, and whoever engages in extrajudicial executions.

Key decisions are taken by BRICS (CELAC for Latin America), one day possibly making a counter-UN without veto; culturally seeing their diversity as a major asset, drawing on all cultures. They may also draw on the two major economic systems, not like Pope John Paul II being anti-communist and anti-capitalist, but in favor of both, an antidote, down there, an antipode to the Pope: China's capi-communism.

From the Age of the Merchant, with bankocracy rampant, to the Age of the People - are we approaching true democracy? There would be much good for the world in this, but not for a West clinging to everything they had to the point of maybe losing it all.

We live accelerated history these years, with slow beginnings gaining momentum, and then quantum jumps. And yet all of the above was easily foreseen; also such events as economic crashes, the 1989 fall of the Soviet Empire from the Berlin Wall on, 9/11 2001; before that the 1973 oil crisis, the 1978 Iran revolution, Tiananmen 1989.

Has the west become a victim of its own success? Is it the Ostrich burying the head in the sand? Incapable of taking bad news? Addicted to economic growth and military superiority, and to quasi-intellectuals addicted to political power and economic dominance? Letting

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-21647937>

economists and other branches of policy advisors survive despite their flagrant analytical mistakes?

All of the above. There is a missing factor in the deep culture Western science. Based on

Descartes *Discours de la Méthode* from 1637, western intellectualism is based on methodologies, which emanate from four rules: (a) nothing is true unless proven to be, (b) divide problems into many distinct parts, (c) move from the simple to the complex and (d) ensure that nothing has been omitted. Additionally, from a line of thought rooted in aristotelianism, western theories allow a reproduction of the basic propositions by deduction from axioms, freezing reality between empirical data and deductive theories.

What emerges from such approaches are detailed descriptions connected by theories. What is missing is an understanding of the totality that has been subdivided, and dynamism which occurs through time. [\[iii\]](#) These are rules for understanding a static world.

Daoism, holism and dialectics, is age-old and foreign to western thought. The Western defenses: holism smacks of New Age, dialectics of Marxism, both of China. Yet that is precisely where the west could find what it is missing: Holism implies a richer description including many variables like global economic, military, political, cultural *and* social variables, not only one of them into the analysis. Dialectics implies the observation of dynamics of forces and counter-forces within each holon observed. A push within a society generates a counter-push. These two push and counter-push forces, may find an (often uneasy) balance, but typically in human society the counter-push generates a counter-counterpush, and so on.

A holon changes, not linearly, but in waves, or more clearly, in spirals.

Take the economy: low real economy growth may cause high growth in the finance economy upsetting any balance between the two: *crash*. Look at the current Dow Jones growth relative to GDP growth for a prediction.

Take the economy from a global developmental perspective: MDCs relate to LDCs, not just as “more developed”; we are dealing with an interconnected holon. If dynamics from one pushes into the other, do not be surprised if there is a counter-push.

Take the military: an attack generates counter-force in the various shapes of resistance, guerrilla, and terrorism of the non-uniformed variant and at times in the more preferable shape of nonviolence. There could be a balance or a turn-around with the first attacker resisting. We are not there, yet.

Take the political: deciding over “others” leads to forces emanating from the “others” desire to decide over themselves: freedom, autonomy, independence, communities; one day deciding over the former “deciders” (*to quote George W. Bush*). Not there, yet.

Take the cultural: imprinting on others, even cloning self in others, generates strong counter-forces, the search for identity in old or new cultures, balance; or turn-around. We are not there, yet.

Take the social: “turn-around” is revolution, the *Knecht is Herr*. There is a balance point closer to equality. Like a maximum ratio of 5:1 instead of 500:1.

Push on one, and the counterpush may also be in the others.

From the perspective described above, the West is programmed for three mistakes:

1. Failure to understand a “relation”, beyond observing “difference”.
2. Failure to predict counter-forces, seeing pushing as blessing the attacked with Western=universal values; without asking.
3. When the counter-forces grow stronger trying to beat them for a *status quo ante*, not searching for acceptable *balance points*.

Solutions? Surprisingly simple: search for the *balance points* and stabilize them in order to avoid exploitation, oppression and violence in its structural, cultural and direct forms.

How are these *balance points* to be found?

- **Economically:** by controlling finance economy speculation, and by meeting emerging economies with exchange for mutual *and equal* benefit in mind.
- **Militarily:** by solving economic-political-cultural conflicts with nonviolence and dialogues based on empathy.
- **Politically:** by meeting other parties as equals, co-deciding, co-creating.
- **Socially:** by reaping the benefits of more egalitarian societies.

4

Leave the static world-view which depicts the West as cause and the Rest as effect. Others tried that in history. They are no longer with us.

NOTES:

[\[i\]](#). IHT, 25-03-2013.

[\[ii\]](#). Change came in physics, Leibniz, Newton. But in human-social affairs, the West lives by Newton’s First and Second laws– things stay as they are or change with the push—not the Third law about a *reactio* to any *actio*.